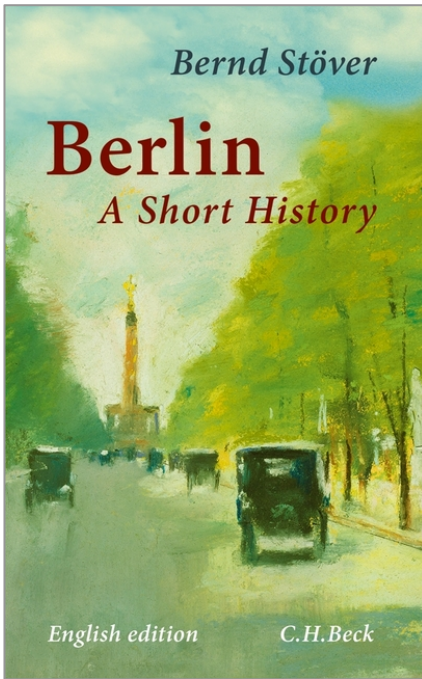


Unverkäufliche Leseprobe



Bernd Stöver
Berlin
A Short History

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1. Cölln and Berlin:
Beginnings and Rise of the City
1237–1688

A Twin City

In comparison to other German cities and especially to other European metropolises, Berlin has a short history. Traces of long-term human settlement on the Spree and Havel rivers go back all the way to the fourth century BCE, as discoveries in Schmöckwitz in the Berlin district of Treptow-Köpenick show. However, well into the Late Middle Ages, only a few scattered Germanic and then mainly Slavic settlements were to be found here. The Holy Roman Empire extended across this territory from the tenth century CE on.

The twin city Cölln-Berlin, to the right and left of the Spree, out of which today's Berlin emerged, was a German merchant establishment in an eastern region long dominated by the Slavs. Early on, it was far less important than Brandenburg an der Havel, the capital of the March of Brandenburg, established in 1157 by Albrecht I ("Albrecht the Bear"). Both parts of the later Berlin were probably market towns, founded on a river island (Cölln) and on the eastern banks (Berlin). The name *Berlin* can presumably be traced back to the Slavic term for a dry area within a marsh (*brlo*). The name *Cölln*, Berlin's more important sister city at that time, was probably borrowed from its model on the Rhine, but it may also have been merely a generic designation for a planned settlement (*colonia*). The fact that no foundational charters have been found for either Cölln or Berlin shows just how insignificant these

market towns were at first. Neighboring towns *did* have foundational charters. That of Spandau, west of the gates of Berlin and independent until 1920, dates from the year 1232. A Slavic castle stood here as early as the eighth century. Even Köpenick, also incorporated in 1920, is older. The main castle of the Slavic clan the Sprewanen stood here as early as the middle of the twelfth century – one hundred years before it was first mentioned in documents in 1210.

The first documented evidence of Cölln dates to the year 1237 and exists only because the priest there, Simeon, appeared as a witness in a tax dispute between the margrave and the bishop of Brandenburg. Seven years later, Berlin also appeared in the files, but just as casually – the abovementioned Simeon had become provost there. Another seven years later, Berlin was finally legally named as a city (*civitas*). How unjust written records can be is seen in the fact that the older and more important Cölln was first mentioned as a city only in 1261.

The development into an appreciable trading center had begun around the year 1240 under the Ascanian margrave brothers Johann the First (1220–66) and Otto the Third (1220–67), who ruled the area jointly. The city centers formed around the Church of St. Peter on the current Gertraudenstrasse in Cölln, the ruins of which were removed in 1964, and St. Nikolai (Nicholas) in Berlin, in today's Nikolaiviertel. The most recent excavations show, however, that the oldest remains of the medieval twin city are almost fifty years older than that. Their occupants came primarily from the other dominions of the Ascanians, northeast of the Harz region. But they also came from the Lower Rhine and from Flanders, from where they were either recruited or decided on their own initiative to move to Berlin or Cölln.

The twin city grew quickly thanks both to its strategic location and to the concerted efforts of the Ascanian margraves.

Its geographical significance had less to do with its waterways than with its highways, which led from both north to south, from Stettin in the direction of Leipzig, and from west to east, from Magdeburg to Frankfurt an der Oder. The Spree made further onward transport to Hamburg possible. Lucrative trade with the Hanseatic League, which dominated the Baltic Sea area, also profited the twin city. Berlin merchants grew rich on long-distance trade. Further technical advantages in the realm of transportation ensued. In the thirteenth century, the Mühlendamm was built, and with the now dammed Spree, boats were forced to reload their wares in Berlin from the Lower to the Upper Spree and vice versa. The so-called *Niederlagerecht* in Cölln-Berlin forced traders traveling into Berlin to either offer their wares in the city or pay a fee to avoid doing so.

Even the surroundings of Cölln-Berlin in Brandenburg, consisting, at that time, of thirty-two towns, was an important market and service area for the swiftly growing twin city. Farmers came regularly to the markets; Berlin had two, and Cölln one. The country folk who peddled their wares here were also subject to taxation. In addition to customs duty, they also paid a fee for, among other things, the milling of grain in the city. And herein lay perhaps the secret to its success: Cölln-Berlin brought in more money for the margraves than any other city in the march.

The money that flowed into the twin city also formed the basis for its first considerable expansion in the thirteenth century. Berlin and Cölln were now, like other medieval cities, outfitted with walls and city gates. This helped protect them against both invaders and tax evaders. One last piece of the medieval fortification, built of fieldstones, remains today on Waisenstrasse in Berlin's Mitte district. The city walls, continually rebuilt and expanded, hampered growth over the long term, but it wasn't until 1869 that they were largely

removed. The city's wealth benefited the municipal churches, but even the Franciscans and Dominicans who had settled in the city erected their own sacred buildings. The margraves, not to be left out, built their own meeting house in Berlin, the Hohe Haus. Though it was first mentioned in official documents in 1261, it was usually deserted, as the margraves continued to prefer to reside in Spandau. The Hohe Haus was demolished only in 1931 – a victim of the lack of preservation initiatives for historic buildings.

This success as a trading center, which involved not only merchants but also guilds, quickly made clear even in Berlin-Cölln the limits of the medieval city constitution. There were normally two *Schultheisse* (sherrifs) who served as legal representatives of the margraves of Brandenburg and who also led the lower municipal courts and the city council. The two councils voted for shared representatives as well as for the mayor of the twin city. In the eyes of the craft guilds, the fact that the council was dominated by the well-to-do merchants, who looked out mainly for their own interests, was a problem. Only in 1346 did the guilds, pressing for more political say, assert themselves, but they enjoyed only partial success. At the instigation of the margraves, they sent four representatives from Berlin and two from Cölln to the council, and from that point on a third of the seats belonged to them.

Berlin Becomes Berlin

In 1307, the Brandenburg margrave Herman the Tall drew up legal deeds for the union of Cölln and Berlin. A shared city hall was erected on the Long Bridge (today the City Hall Bridge) between the two cities. In the shared magistrate of the twin city, the Berlin side already had more votes. Although the two cities were still financially independent, defense and

foreign policy were developed jointly. A year later, a first federation was forged including other cities in the march. Gradually this federation was further expanded, with the aim of increasing prosperity.

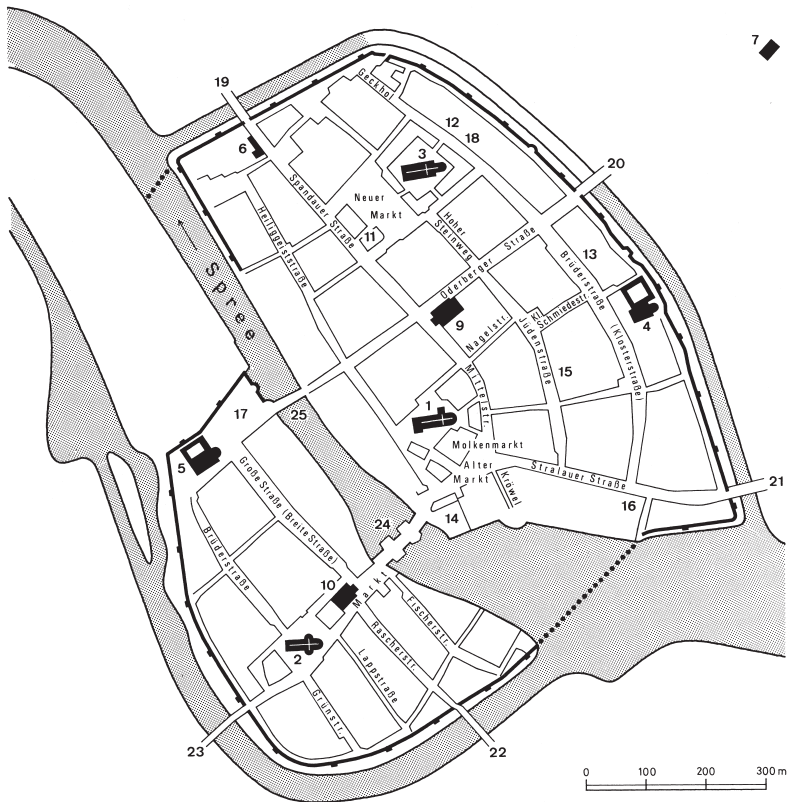
However, these peaceful times soon came to an end. In 1320, the last Ascanian, the minor Heinrich II (1319–20), died at the age of twelve. Three years later, the emperor Ludwig IV (“the Bavarian”) withdrew the fiefdom of the Brandenburg march in order to hand it over to his son Ludwig V (1323–51), who was eight at the time. For the next nearly ninety years, the march was primarily governed by margraves from the warring houses of the Wittelsbach (1323–73) and Luxemburg (1373–1415) families, who were also fighting over the German crown. Occasionally they went to war, as for example in the case of the notorious dispute over the “False Waldemar,” who appeared in 1348 and was presented by the Luxemburgs as the resurrected Ascanian margrave in a move against the Wittelsbachs. With this trick the Luxemburgs did manage to divide the march. Cölln-Berlin, along with the majority of the cities in the march, sided with the pretended Ascanian margrave. Only seven years later was the matter truly settled, when the Luxemburgs simply bought the Brandenburg march from the Wittelsbachs. Despite such embarrassing tricks, the Brandenburg margraves only grew more powerful politically. From 1356 they belonged to the elite circle of the seven German electors who formed the voting committee for the German king.

In the same year, when the decision to side with the fake Ascanian was already causing enough trouble, the Black Death reached the region. As we know today, this first wave was probably not the Plague, which was caused by bacteria, but rather a viral hemorrhagic fever that caused countless victims in the Brandenburg area to bleed to death internally. The helpless Cölln-Berliners responded to the inexplicable with

an anti-Semitic pogrom. Although within a few years a number of Jewish families had once again immigrated to the area, it was a long time before Jewish life recovered under what was an already widespread anti-Semitism. In addition to the Black Death and the pogroms, large fires in 1376 and 1380 adversely affected life in the city. Nevertheless, at the end of the fourteenth century, approximately 8,000 people were still living in unified Cölln-Berlin. In comparison with the large metropolises, that was a decidedly small number. Five times as many people were living in Cologne on the Rhine, the largest city in Germany in the Late Middle Ages.

Cölln-Berlin's situation continued to worsen when, at the end of the century, a transformation in warfare technology impoverished a considerable portion of the aristocratic knights in eastern Germany. One consequence of this was the advent of robber barons who seriously disrupted the trade routes for a time. In the march, the Cölln-Berliners suffered primarily from the Quitzow brothers. Cölln-Berlin's joint strategies on defense and foreign policy, undertaken with great optimism, were useless against the robber barons. The militia proved to be hopelessly outmatched by the professional warriors.

In this seemingly hopeless situation, the twin city received aid from an expert who ushered in a new era, one that would only end five hundred years later, in November 1918: the German king, who at that time was also the elector of Brandenburg, Sigismund von Luxemburg (1378–88 and 1411–15), sent his Nuremberg burgrave Friedrich VI von Hohenzollern as “administrator and leader” to Brandenburg to restore order. Under his expert leadership, in 1414 the towns in the march were able to rid themselves of the Quitzows, among others, and to defend themselves against the Pomeranians, who had invaded the march in the meantime. On October 18, 1415, at the Council of Constance, the hereditary title of margrave and



Berlin and Cölln around 1400

Ground plan on the basis of maps by Memhardt (ca. 1650) and Lindholz (ca. 1660) as well as excavations in the area of the former palace

- | | | |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| 1 Nikolaikirche | 11 Kramhaus | 19 Spandauer Tor |
| 2 Petrikirche | 12 Kalandshof | 20 Oderberger Tor
(Georgentor) |
| 3 Marienkirche | 13 Alter Hof | 21 Stralauer Tor |
| 4 Franziskaner-
kloster | 14 Mühlnhof | 22 Köpenicker Tor |
| 5 Dominikaner-
kloster | 15 Jüdenhof | 23 Teltower Tor
(Gertraudentor) |
| 6 Heiligeistspital | 16 Kloster Zinna
courtyard | 24 Mühlendamm |
| 7 Georgenspital | 17 Kloster Lehnin
courtyard | 25 Long Bridge
(with shared
city hall) |
| 8 Gertraudenspital | 18 Court
(bishop of
Brandenburg) | |
| 9 Berliner Rathaus | | |
| 10 Cöllner Rathaus | | |

elector was conferred on Friedrich VI by the king. Two years later, as Friedrich I, he was given the electoral march as a fiefdom as well as the associated title of arch-chamberlain of the Holy Roman Empire.

The Cölln-Berliners paid the price for this help when, in 1426, Friedrich I named his son Johann governor, and Johann expanded his reign at the twin city's cost. In order to defend themselves jointly against this attack, the twin cities finally merged for good in 1432. When Johann's younger brother, Friedrich II ("Irontooth"), who took over the post of Brandenburg margrave and elector in 1440, decided to build a castle in their city, a confrontation with the Berliners became inevitable. In fact, the Cölln-Berliners were so incensed that in 1448 they not only laid waste to the construction site for the elector's royal seat and the office of the sovereign, but also arrested the judge he had appointed. In the end, the insurrection was unsuccessful, like so much the Berliners attempted during this period. The iconography of the new city seal left no doubt as to who had ended up with the upper hand: the margraves' eagle, with outspread wings, straddled a sad-looking Berlin bear with its tongue lolling out.

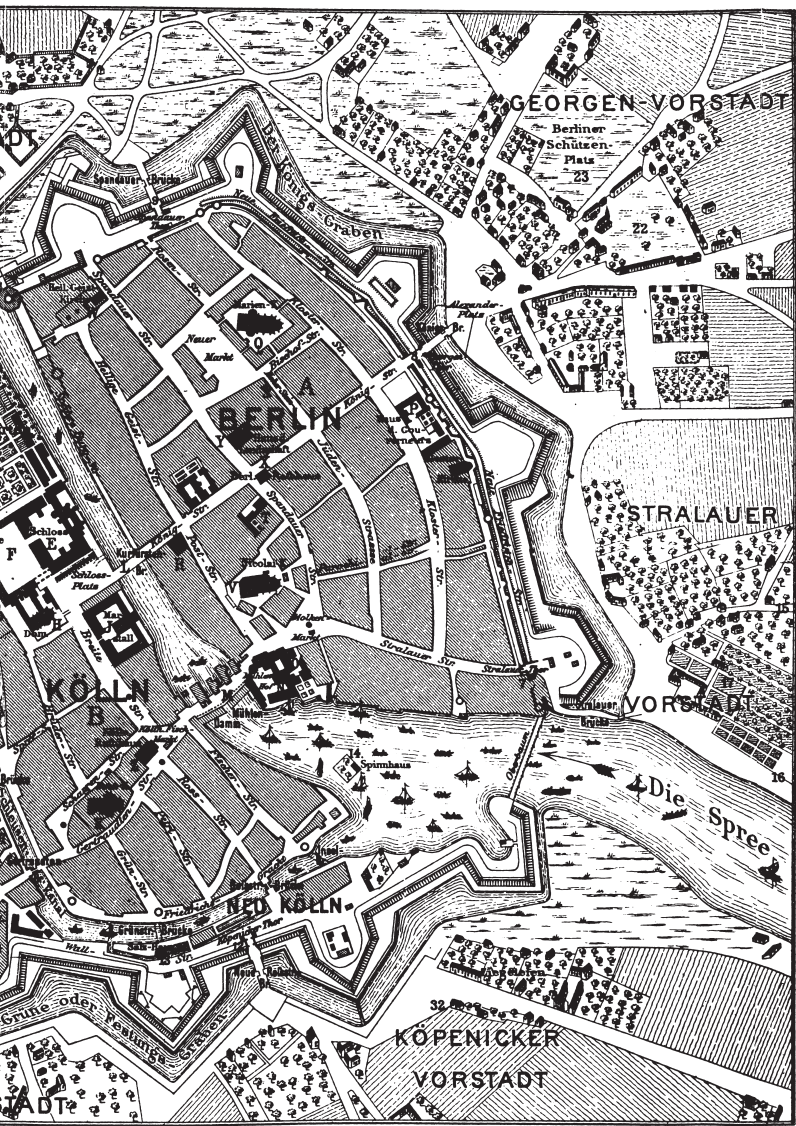
Despite the loss of the right to self-rule, the consequences of the defeat were not as catastrophic as had been feared, and in the long run they even turned out to be advantageous: Berlin became the royal seat of the margraves. The new castle, on the Berlin side of the twin city – the construction site for which had only recently been demolished – now became the seat of the government, and gradually the Hohenzollerns brought all of their central agencies, including the margravian estates, to the city. As a result, the old Cölln-Berlin council was reduced to merely following the orders of the electors. To make certain that it was clear to the Cölln-Berliners where they stood, in 1514 their shared city hall on the Long Bridge

was torn down. Two years later, they lost their membership in the Hanseatic League.

Not free to self-govern, but enjoying its improved status, Berlin – as the twin city was now routinely referred to – rose to new heights. In the march's metropolis, numerous prestige buildings were erected, their design reflecting the elector's tastes. A few years after he took office, Joachim II “Hector” (1535–71) had a road laid to the new Jagdschloss Grunewald, a hunting lodge outside the city. In the nineteenth century this road, the Kurfürstendamm, would become Berlin's main thoroughfare.

Largely unburdened from the unproductive confrontations of the past centuries, Berlin now enjoyed a population boom. The newcomers arrived from the surrounding areas but also from Thuringia and Saxony, as well as from Franconia, the ancestral homeland of the Brandenburg-Prussia line of the Hohenzollerns. This influx had social, cultural, political, economic, and urban-planning consequences. The main social and cultural change was that the new citizens from Franconia took up all the positions at court, and were granted many further privileges. Increased immigration of the poor turned into a serious problem; the Berlin municipal authorities tried to solve it with begging ordinances. The social tensions that resulted from the new situation were vented at the beginning of the sixteenth century in more anti-Jewish pogroms, which this time were so extreme that it would be 150 years before any notable Jewish community would once again settle in Berlin. In February 1510, the case of an alleged desecration of the host created a stir, and forty Brandenburg Jews were hung before the gates of Berlin. In a similar case in 1573, the Jewish financier of the late elector Joachim II, known not least for his “unconventional” ways of raising money, was sentenced to death.

The Reformation had less significant consequences for



Map of Berlin and environs from La Vigne, 1685
(with neighborhoods named later)

Berlin than it did for other regions in the Holy Roman Empire. In 1539, Joachim II had given in to the pressure of the estates and approved the taking of communion according to Lutheran rites. A conflict with Calvinism in 1613, which led to riots, was settled in Berlin and Brandenburg with the utmost pragmatism: the usual practice since the 1555 Peace of Augsburg, in which the sovereign selected the denomination in the provinces he controlled, was done away with. More than a hundred years later, Friedrich II was to sum it up in a nutshell: "Let every man seek heaven in his own fashion." This tolerance turned into a huge point in the city's favor.

Berlin did not emerge from the Thirty Years' War, which began in 1618, unscathed, not least because even the city's own troops behaved as though they had been given the green light to plunder the city. And then the Plague struck, again and again, five times between 1626 and 1638. The elector Georg Wilhelm (1619–40) was forced to retreat to distant Königsberg. By the end of the war, the population had been halved, to 6,000. When the elector died in 1640, he was succeeded by the twenty-year-old Friedrich Wilhelm, the "Great Elector" (1640–88), as he was called following his victory over the Swedes in 1675. Politically ambitious, he managed to exploit the chaos of the end of the Thirty Years' War to expand Brandenburg's territory. With new acquisitions on the Baltic Sea coast added to expansions under Johann Sigismund (1608–19) – who had acquired parts of the duchy of Cleves and the counties Ravensberg and Mark in the far west of the Holy Roman Empire, and in 1618 the heirless deserted duchy of Prussia, in the far east – Brandenburg was now larger than it had ever been. Brandenburg and Prussia were now being governed in a personal union. A small fleet of ships and a rebuilding of Berlin influenced by Dutch ideas rounded out Friedrich Wilhelm's plans.

In Berlin, the wall with Cölln was torn down, and Dutch-

style drawbridges were erected on the Kupfergraben, on the northern side of the left branch of the Spree. In addition, new neighborhoods were built, including Dorotheenstadt and Spandauer Vorstadt. Friedrichstadt, begun just before the Great Elector's death, was only finished by his successor, Elector Friedrich III, who also crowned himself the first Prussian king. Through the construction of the boulevard Unter den Linden and the Lustgarten park, Friedrich Wilhelm also created central reference points within the city. Between 1669 and 1671, the waterways were developed, including the Oder-Spree Canal; as a result, Berlin became a hub between Silesia and the North Sea. In the 1740s under Friedrich II, the Plaue-Parey and Finow canals were added. And from 1685, Berlin was the junction of a stagecoach network.

Under the Great Elector, who is best remembered for his 1685 edict of religious tolerance, the city was systematically modernized. With the Scheunenviertel, or "barn quarter," which was erected not far from the elector's palace, a special area for hazardous goods was created; straw roofs and clay chimneys were forbidden. Public transportation was developed along with a traffic ordinance that forbade driving too fast through the city; street lights were installed and hygienic conditions improved. Sewage flowed through underground canals, the streets were paved with cobblestones, and pigsties were outlawed.

His son, Friedrich III (1688–1713), raised Berlin's status in the world when he decided that he would hold the title not only of elector, but also king. His promise to the Hapsburgs to fight on Vienna's side in the War of the Spanish Succession earned him the emperor's consent. In 1701 the dream of Friedrich III (whom Berliners called "the crooked Fritz" because of his physical handicaps) to become King Friedrich I was fulfilled. Two cloudy spots remained: he became only king *in* Prussia, and he had to crown himself, in the Königsberg cathe-

dral. Only his grandson Friedrich II (1740–86), whom his contemporaries already called “the Great,” could in 1772 call himself king *of Prussia*, after the division of Poland had added West Prussia to the realm.

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