

# The Counts and Dukes of Hessen

During the 11<sup>th</sup> century some major consolidations of lands occurred in Western Europe culminating among other in the establishment of [Hessen](#) as a large county, with [Henrich I. von Hessen \(1244-1308\)](#) [Wikipedia in German, 2018] becoming its first ruler in 1268. The lands he was able to combine came from various inheritances. Those actions affected the Wiederhold family.

Henrich I.'s father, Hendrik II. *the Brave* van Brabant (1207-1248) was married twice, initially to Maria von Staufen (1196-1235), daughter of the German King Philipp von Schwaben (1177-1208). They had 6 children, but only one son survived, Hendrik III. van Brabant (1231-1261). After the death of his first wife Hendrik II. married again, Sophie von Thüringen (1224-1275). She was the daughter of the wealthy and honored count Ludwig IV. of Thüringen and Sachsen, well-established states to the east of what became Hessen. Her father, Ludwig IV. died in 1227 on the way to Jerusalem during a crusade. Ludwig had also married twice. His second wife, Elisabeth of Hungary, was even sainted in 1235 by Pope Gregor IX. Ludwig's children from his first marriage, through inheritance and marriages, ruled Brabant, Burgundy, Artois, Flanders, and parts of Bavaria. Sophie, the daughter from Ludwig IV.'s marriage to Elisabeth of Hungary, received rights to lands that became part of northern Hessen. Hendrik II. and Sophie had two children, including a son Henrich I. (1244-1308), who was initially known as Hendrik het Kind van Brabant (the child of Brabant) being much younger, who later became Henrich I. von Hessen.\*

\* I use here the names as they appear in the Wiederhold genealogy. The German spelling for Hendrik, Heinrich, is easily confused with the name Henrich.

The elder son, Hendrik III. van Brabant (1231-1261) was to inherit the rich duchy of Brabant, comprising what is now much of Belgium and the south-eastern Netherlands. The younger Henrich I. was able to consolidate possessions from various inheritances and so became the founder of the Hessian dynasty.

At that time the lands in the Holy Roman Empire were quite splintered, as shown on the map on the next page. Many possessions are not contiguous, a result of trading and family pacts. Marriages were often motivated by land holdings. Inheritances could be split over multiple sons, creating smaller counties, as in 1567 Hessen-Kassel and Hessen-Darmstadt (not shown on this map) to the south. They could revert, when there were no male descendants into their past holding or merged through a marriage of a daughter. Reallocations were controlled by the kings and dukes, and loyalty to them was an important factor in keeping a reigning family in land and power. Land could also be given to bishops and abbots.

## Creating Hessen

The young and energetic second wife of Hendrik II. van Brabant (1207-1248), Sophie von Thüringen (1224-1275) was instrumental in assembling lands from her parents' various possessions for her favorite son. Henrich I. von Hessen (1244-1308) was recognized as Landgraf of Hessen around 1263. Henrich helped, my marrying twice, first to Adelheid von Braunschweig (1248-1274), a daughter of the Dukes of the area to the north-east of Hessen, and then to Mechtild van Kleef (1235-1309), daughter of the duke of an area between the Netherlands, Belgium, and the Rhine river, further increasing his holdings. He also traded rights to counties and smaller holdings with his half-brother in Brabant. Hendrik III. subsequently adding Giessen and other lands to his possessions. He reigned first out of Marburg, after 1277 from Kassel. His sister, Elisabeth, married Herzog Albrecht I. der Große von Braunschweig, the ruler of lands north of Hessen. A big gap remained, occupied by the Graf of Ziegenhain.

One small area Heinrich I. acquired from his half-brother was Felsberg , which became the base for the Felsberg (Gio's) Wiederhold branch. It had become a possession of the dukes of Brabant after Count Poppo von Reichenbach married the Fürstin Bertha von Felsberg around 1125, who had no children.



The Landgrafschaft Hessen (light-brown) and surrounding duchies and counties around 1400. Many lands are owned by various bishoprics (Bistum, B.m., Ebm., or Abtei)

On the map duchies (ruled by a duke) are labelled Herzogtum (HZGTM, Hzm) and counties (ruled by a count) are labelled Gft. or Lgft. Substantial lands, shown in blue-grey, belonged to the catholic church and its bishops [Bistum, Bm] or cloisters [Abtei]. Some bishops had rights that could be inherited [Erz-bistum, Ebm, Ebft]. Some rulers made donations to the church to gain favors or imposed as a penalty. They accumulated much wealth. The Archbishop of Mainz (an inheritable position), at the confluence of the Main and Rhine rivers to the south-west of Ober-Hessen, was also able to collect tolls from traffic on the Rhine river, wound up with lands to the north-east of Nieder-Hessen, the Eichsfeld region. It stayed catholic throughout the later thirty-years war, as did the many the Wiederholds living there, while Hessen turned protestant.

### Effects on Wiederhold ancestors.

Since the earliest Wiederholds, then Wedderholds, lived in or just north of the region that in time became Hessen, understanding the changes that occurred helps greatly in understanding family relationships and movements. Not only did they live in the area, but they often worked for the counts and rulers of the smaller possessions. Roles as being bailiffs, judges, and tax collectors enabled them to grow their own possessions as rulers traded lands. Some are shown as representatives (Ministeralen) of the ruling bishops in Corvey, Paderborn, and even Cologne. They earned enough to send their sons to be educated. Many daughters were able to make favorable marriages.

After Johann VII. von Nassau-Siegen (1561-1623) established a military academy in Hessen, it was a destination for many younger Wiederhold sons. Several were officers in the troops provided by Count Friedrich II. of Hessen-Kassel (1720-1785) for King George III. of the United-Kingdom (1728-1780) to fight against the independence movement went to the United States.

## Merging and splitting Hessen

Count Henrich I. von Hessen (1244-1308) reigned first out of Marburg, after 1277 from Kassel, after ceding rights to Brabant to his older half-brother. His sister, Elisabeth, married Albrecht I. der Große von Braunschweig, the ruler of lands north of Hessen.

Henrich I.'s sons fought over their inheritance, splitting Hessen into Nieder-Hessen to the north, with Kassel as the major town and Ober-Hessen to the south, with Marburg as its capital. The two parts were separated by the counties of Waldeck and Ziegenhain. The bishop of Mainz, owned churches and cloisters with substantial lands throughout the area, including a large area, Eichsfeld, to the north-east of Nieder-Hessen. Many conflicts arose. Henrich I.'s grandson, Heinrich II. von Hessen, referred as *'der Eiserne'*, (the iron one), fought and negotiated with the bishop, increasing his control of Nieder-Hessen. In 1330 he established Kassel as his formal residency. Soon after, a Wiederhold ancestor, Wedderold IV Wedderhold (~1374) appeared to have moved to the area of Kassel, and his three known sons: Hen (~1413). Werner (~1415) and Nicolaus (~1419), were born there, and are shown to have land-holdings there.

After a battle on 23 July 1427 Count Johann II. von Ziegenhain und Nidda lost the rights to his lands to Landgraf Ludwig I. of Hessen. When Johann II. von Ziegenhain died in 1450 Hessen was unified and enlarged. Soon after, the Landgraf of Hessen, then Heinrich III, was referred to as *'der Reiche'* (the rich one).

## An early temporary linkage to the Netherlands

A significant neighbor of Hessen was the County of Nassau. The history of its [rulers](#) is complex. They had relationships with many other nobles. For instance, [William the Silent of Nassau-Dillenburg \(1533-1584\)](#) inherited in 1544 from a cousin lands in the Netherlands and the principality Orange in Southern France. As William of Orange he became the first ruler of the independent Netherlands. Through his 4 marriages he gained more possessions all over Europe.

In 1638 a Wiederhold mercenary officer, [Georg Reinhardt Wiederhold \(1599-1648\)](#) was recalled to the Netherlands to help in fighting the Spanish troops in Flanders. At an earlier stay Georg Reinhardt had married well, obtaining rights to productive lands (the Betuwe). His known children appear all over Europe, but none have known descendants in the Netherlands. He and his wife were buried in Delft.

In 1813 the principality of Corvey, in Southern Westfalen, was turned over to the house of Orange-Nassau. The official in charge was Georg Dietrich Reinhard von Porbeck (1766-1837), apparently a brother-in-law of Karoline Christine Wiederhold (~1762). In 1866, after the Napoleonic wars, the Nassau family lost their German lands to Prussia. Now most of that area is part of Hessen.

## Modern Hessen

After the second World War the Allied conquerors rearranged many of the borders. Modern Hessen was defined as being East of the Rhine and West of the zone controlled by Russian forces. Although Frankfurt is by far the largest city, Wiesbaden, about 40 km to the east, is its capital.



## Nobles linked directly to Wiederhold genealogy entries

Some entries from the Warburger Stammtafeln, the source for the early Wedderold and Wiederhold records, and their families and descendants are also related to nobles listed in Wikipedias -- primarily the German one.

- [Adelheid von Büren](#) (1181-1220) in Eichsfeld
- [Albert III., Graf von Everstein](#) (1170-1217), representative of the Bishop of Cologne
- [Otto II, Graf von Waldeck](#) (1307-1369), ruler of a bordering county
- [Heinrich III. der Reiche von Hessen](#) (1440-1483)

From such entries relationships can be established to most noble and royal families in Europe.

## Titles

There was a range of titles for rulers those days. Their meaning evolved over time and differed regionally. I provide here an informal classification, which will help in identifying roles in the genealogy. There are some [references] to abbreviations used in the map. I start at the top, with the German titles.

1. **Kaiser:** emperor, ruling, often indirectly, major segments of continents. The Holy Roman emperor (HRR) was an elected position from 911 up to 1806. The Holy Roman empire covered roughly the lands assembled by Charlesmagne (742-814) from the North Sea to the Adriatic. There were 7 to 10 electors, each with the title [Kurfürst](#). The original electors were the archbishops of Mainz, Cologne (Köln), and Trier, the King of Bohemia, the Pfalzgraf (count palatinate) bei Rhein, the duke of Sachsen, and the Markgraf of Brandenburg. In 1623 the King of Bavaria and in 1692 the Duke of Hanover (Braunschweig-Lüneburg) became electors as well. Later changes came through inheritances, but the role was less significant. Starting 1147 the elections took place [in Frankfurt am Main](#), shown for 1658 since it was a neutral city.



To the east of the Holy Roman empire was the empire of Byzantium, centered in what is now Turkey, but by the year 1000 covering lands as far north as Croatia and west as Calabria in what is now Italy. The lands that the crusaders were trying to wrest from the Muslims were symbolically governed by the Emperor of Constantinople. Later there was also an emperor (Czar) of Russia.

An emperor had the authority to appoint successors to Kings, dukes, etc. in regions where inherited positions were challenged.

2. **König:** King, a ruler over a major area, as Bavaria. In early days kings would be elected as well, but soon kings declared their positions based in God's will and achieved inheritance rights for their sons. There were several kingdoms within and bordering the Holy Roman Empire, as Hungary and Sicily.
3. **Herzog:** Duke, a ruler over a duchy [Hzgtm, Hzm], a substantial area, possibly within a kingdom, or distinct as Württemberg. an area between Bavaria and France.

4. **Landgraf:** a count ruling over a major area [Lgft] as Hessen, and reporting directly to the Holy Roman Emperor, without having a Duke as an intermediary. Some had titles specific to their region, as Pfalzgraf for the area (Pfalz) now between France and Germany and Markgraf for the area that became Prussia.
5. **Graf:** Count, the ruler of a county [Gft]. A county would be a manageable area, where every spot could be reached by a Ritter (knight or armed rider) within a day on horseback. A count would typically have right to tax the population, but would also be obliged to support rulers above him. To protect his rights a count would maintain a castle and a militia. One could be Graf of multiple counties at the same time, and so collect yet more tithing, and perhaps have divided loyalties.
6. **Prinz:** either a son of a king or a ruler of a principality, an independent region.
7. **Ministeriale:** Representative, often for a diocese (Bistum), exercising local authority over its worldly possessions. Often judicial authority is not included. Important for many early Wiederholds was [Bishopric of Paderborn](#), which included then the rich [Abbey of Corvey](#).
8. **Fürst:** ruler of a local area, perhaps a town. They may authorize the craftsmen's guilds
9. **Herr:** lord, ruler of a small area [Hft], often employing laborers to till the land.
10. **Vogt:** Overseer, similar scope as Herr, but of church possessions, which might be substantial. The term derives from the latin word *advocatus*, an assistant in law.
11. **Ritter:** knights existed at at various levels. If they worked for a high authority they might be members of the Deutscher Orden, under control of the current Holy Roman Emperor; others were recognized by the church because they went on the crusades. Locally appointed knights are authorized ride a horse, carry weapons, and would go out on patrols. They might help with collecting the tithings due from the populace.
12. **Knappe:** page. A young assistant in a noble house. Local rulers would appoint young men from important families in their courts or as officers in their castles (Burgmann). Subsequently they might be elevated to become knights (Ritter). There are many designations as Knappe and Ritter in the Warburg genealogy.

This information is compiled from many sources. Some inferences and conclusions were made by the author.

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