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**'In der freisten Luft' (Goethe): Offenbach under the reign of Wolfgang Ernst II. Fürst von Isenburg'.**

Wolfgang Ernst II zu Isenburg und Buedingen was a truly enlightened ruler of the small principality Isenburg-Büdingen during his reign of 1754 to 1803.. He particularly shaped Offenbach, a provincial town near Frankfurt which was his second residence. Here he granted religious freedom to Catholic, Jews and the messianic Frankists (whom he sold his princely residence to in 1787). He dissolved serfdom in 1794 (years before Prussia) and actively supported the development of industry in Offenbach.

Offenbach had traditionally always attracted the citizens of Frankfurt as a popular summer and retirement resort. Prominent bourgeois and aristocratic Frankfurt families such as Goethe, Brentano, d'Orville and Bernard resided there and mingled there during Wolfgang Ernst's reign. Sophie von La Roche's literary salon ('Grillenhütte') in Offenbach hosted Katherina von Goethe, Juliane von Krüdener, Amalie Fürstin von Gallitzin and Mme de Stael. This article will explore how Offenbach functioned as a resonance chamber for modern social, political and mercantile ideas during the second half of the 18th century, which was cut short finally by Napoleon.



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“In der freisten Luft” (Goethe). Offenbach under the Reign of  
Wolfgang Ernst II Fürst von Isenburg

Under the umbrella theme of ‘Making Heimat. Germany, Arrival Country’, The German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2016 celebrated twenty-first century Offenbach as an exemplary ‘arrival city’ for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees and concluded that ‘Offenbach ist ganz okay’.<sup>1</sup> In the exhibition, Offenbach received praise for economic, cultural and social aid and networks that allow for self-integration and autonomous ‘making Heimat’. Historically, Offenbach has been a welcoming host to ethnic and religious minorities, religious tolerance, particularly since the seventeenth century under the auspices of the rule of the house of Isenburg.<sup>2</sup> In the memorial sermon of Prince Wolfgang Ernst II of 1803, the preacher Rödiger praised his hospitality towards migrants and refugees:

Wenn in anderen Ländern so viel Menschen auswandern, um sich einem unerträglichen Druck zu entziehen, um in entfernten Gegenden zu suchen, was sie in ihrem Vaterland nicht mehr finden konnten, so kamen die Fremden von allen Seiten hierher, um mit uns das Glück der Ysenburgischen Unterthanen zu theilen.<sup>3</sup>

It was first Graf Johann Philipp von Isenburg-Offenbach (1685-1718) of the

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Offenbach is really ok’. The exhibition was transferred to the Deutsches Architekturmuseum in 2017 with updates and supplementary documentation. The term ‘arrival city’ is borrowed from Doug Sanders, *Arrival City: How the Largest Migration in History is Reshaping Our World* (London: William Heinemann, 2010). See also Oliver Elser, *Making Heimat: Germany, Arrival Country* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> The history of the house of Isenburg is complicated and fractured, see Gustav Simon, *Die Geschichte des reichsständischen Hauses Ysenburg und Büdingen*, 2 vols (Frankfurt: Brönnner, 1865), I am particularly grateful to Klaus Peter Decker and his careful archival work. See Klaus Peter Decker, ‘Wolfgang Ernst II Fuerst von Isenburg- ein Regent im Zeitalter der Aufklärung. Erbauer des Birsteiner Schlosses und Förderer Offenbachs’, *Mitteilungsblatt der Heimatstelle Main-Kinzig*, ed. by *Kreisausschluss des Main-Kinzig-Kreises*, 18.3 (1993): pp. 94-224.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Decker, 217.

lineage von Isenburg-Büdingen in Offenbach who invited Huguenots, Jews and Waldensians to his residence of Offenbach and to a newly founded colony, Neu-Isenburg.<sup>4</sup> The settlement was conducted in two phases; in 1699 and 1703. In the second phase, Johann Philipp encouraged particularly artisans and tradespeople to populate the area. A confessed Calvinist himself, Johann Phillip's 'Peuplierung' was however economically driven and founded Offenbach's future reputation as a vibrant trading city.<sup>5</sup> His relative from the Ysenburg-Büdingen line, Ernst Casimir (1687-1749), equally dispensed privileges to Huguenots and Waldensians to attract qualified workers and artisans to the provincial seat of Büdingen. The now famous Edict, 'PRIVILEGIA und Freyheiten' of 1712 expanded Johann Philipp's edict of 1705 by promising religious tolerance for all confessions, the abolition of serfdom and concrete social and political reforms.<sup>6</sup>

Wolfgang Ernst II (1735-1803), Johann Phillip's nephew, inherited his title and territory and continued the drive towards economic and cultural growth in the principality. Nevertheless, Offenbach maintained its rural aspects with gardens along the river Main and parks, frequented by visitors from the neighbouring city of Frankfurt who went to Offenbach for respite and retirement, as Goethe phrased it, 'Befreyung aus dem Zwang durch Landleben'.<sup>7</sup> The bankers and entrepreneurs

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<sup>4</sup> The branch of the Isenburg-Büdingen family with their seat in Offenbach died out with Johann Philipp's death and was carried on in the branch von Ysenburg und Büdingen with their seat in Birstein. On the settlement of Neu-Isenburg, see Friedrich Illert, *Geschichte der französischen Kolonie und Stadt Neu-Isenburg bei Frankfurt am Main* (Eigenverlag: Neu-Isenburg, 1899); Heidi Fogel, *Aus Liebe und Mitleiden gegen die Verfolgten. Beiträge zur Gründungsgeschichte Neu-Isenburgs*, ed. by Matthias Loesch (Neu-Isenburg: Momos, 1999)

<sup>5</sup> Decker, p. 195.

<sup>6</sup> Matthias Benad, 'Toleranz und Ökonomie. Das Patent des Grafen Ernst Casimir von 1712 und die Gründung der Büdinger Vorstadt', *Büdinger Geschichtsblätter* XI (1983): pp. 163–197; Matthias Benad, *Toleranz als Gebot christlicher Obrigkeit: Das Buedinger Patent von 1712* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1983).

<sup>7</sup> 'Liberation from constraints through rural life'. In the *Paralipomenon* to the 17<sup>th</sup> book of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, Goethe noted this remark in December 1816 and later on, famously wrote, 'Offenbach am Main zeigte schon damals bedeutende Anfänge einer Stadt, die sich in der Folge zu Bilden versprach. Schöne für die

Jean Georg d'Orville (1747–1811) and Jeanne Rahel Bernard (1751–1822), for instance, built impressive city mansions in Offenbach with adjacent prominent gardens and parks. The Frankfurt banker Friedrich Metzler redesigned these parks in 1798 and built an architectural folly, a bath and tea house; the 'Metzlersche Badetempel' or as it is now known, 'Lili-Tempel', from which visitors could take a bath in the adjacent river Main. The concurrence of the freest air, 'freiste Luft', and progressive elements such as manufactories and markets was a result of the careful management of Wolfgang Ernst II. His policies were motivated by his endeavour to follow the example of 'aufgeklärte und edel denkender anderer Reichstmitstände', including his own relatives, to reform his principality. Underpinning his policies were the principles of 'gute policey' as the creation of a harmonious order in society through reforms and policies underpinned by Pietism.<sup>8</sup>

After his elevation to Prince Wolfgang Ernst I of the Holy Roman Empire (Fürst zu Isenburg und Büdingen (Birsteiner branch)) in 1754, he invested in the

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damalige Zeit prächtige Gebäude hatten sich schon hervorgetan; Onkel Bernard, wie ich ihn gleich mit seinem Familientitel nennen will, bewohnte das größte; weitläufige Fabrikgebäude schlossen sich an, ...'. (Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Briefe. Historisch-kritische Ausgabe, Anfang 1773 – Ende Oktober 1775*, ed. Georg Kurscheidt, Norbert Oellers und Elke Richter, 2 vols (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2009), II.I, p. 432 (letter 207) ; Johann W. Goethe, *Aus Meinem Leben: Dichtung und Wahrheit: Erster Teil* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1967), p. 575.

<sup>8</sup> I would however not want to suggest that Wolfgang Ernst II practiced Policey politics that strictly separate the government and the court; N. Lange, "Policey" and Environment as a Form of "Social Discipline" in Early Modern Hamburg', *The Silent Countdown*, ed. Peter Brimblecombe and Christian Pfister (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 1990), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-75159-2\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-75159-2_13). See also G. Oestreich, 'Strukturprobleme des europäischen Absolutismus', *Geist und Gestalt des frühmodernen Staates*, ed. by G. Oestreich (Berlin: Duncker und Humblot, 1969), pp 179–197; G. Oestreich, 'Policey and *Prudentia civiles* in der barocken Gesellschaft', *Stadt - Schule- Universität: Buchwesen und die deutsche Literatur im 17. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Albrecht Schöne (München: Beck, 1976), pp 10–20; Holenstein links the principle of 'gute policey' with Foucault's more encompassing 'governmentality'. André Holenstein, "Gute Policey' und lokale Gesellschaft: Erfahrung als Kategorie im Verwaltungshandeln des 18.

rebuilding and modernisation of Birstein castle.<sup>9</sup> Here, he hosted, in courtly fashion, learned societies, for instance the *Société des douzo mots* to learn and practice the French language (which seems to indicate that the court language was German) and the 'Grübler-Gesellschaft' which debated literature and philosophy in polite settings. Decker indicates that these societies were tightly structured and inspired by Wolfgang Ernst's mother-in-law, Hedwig Sofie von Anhalt-Bernburg-Schaumburg-Hoym (1717-1795), born Henckel von Donnersmarck, who was possibly well versed in aristocratic sociability.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, and motivated particularly by financial constraints of the principality, Wolfgang Ernst downsized the princely household and eventually dissolved it. Although Offenbach remained the seat of the princely government offices, Wolfgang Ernst did not long reside in Isenburg castle. He moved to his city residence in Offenbach in the Frankfurter Straße and let the Isenburg to the notorious Jakob Frank (1726 – 1791), 'the Baron of Offenbach' and his followers.<sup>11</sup> There Wolfgang Ernst reigned amidst tradesmen, artisans, and Offenbach's 'gebildete Stände' [educated ranks].

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Jahrhunderts," *Historische Zeitschrift*. Beihefte, 31 (2001): pp. 433–450.

<sup>9</sup> See Decker pp. 204-210; Friedrich Bleibaum, 'Die Wiederherstellung des Schlosses Birstein', *Hessische Heimat* 1 (1961): pp. 19–24; Gerhard Bott, 'Schlösser und öffentliche Bauten in der Grafschaft Hanau-Lichtenberg im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert', *Neues Magazin für Hanauische Geschichte* (2015): pp. 73-74; Karl Dielmann, 'Schloß Birstein. Bergfeste – Renaissanceschloß – Fürstensitz', *Büdingen Geschichtsblätter* 2 (1958): pp. 109–122; Prinzessin Margarete von Isenburg, 'Der Archivbau von Birstein. Eine Schöpfung des hanauischen Baudirektors Christian Ludwig Hermann', *Hanauer Geschichtsblätter* 18 (1962): pp. 249–252; Inge Wolf, 'Christian Ludwig Hermann. Baudirektor am Hanauer Hof', *Hanauer Geschichtsblätter* 30 (1988): pp. 445–555.

<sup>10</sup> The relevance of the 12 words is not clear but Noël A. Pluche suggested that the number 12 regulated all aspects of human life, creativity and states. *Histoire Du Ciel Considéré Selon Les Idées Des Poètes, Des Philosophes, Et De Moise* (The Hague: Paul Neaulme, 1740).

<sup>11</sup> Praeludium, ed., *Perle der Renaissance: Das Isenburger Schloss in Offenbach am Main* (Regensburg: Schnell & Schneider, 2006). The Frankfurter Straße was part of a general town-planning reform which Wolfgang Ernst pushed through to accommodate the new arrivals and businesses.

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What were the particular targets for the 'gute policey'? When Wolfgang Ernst inherited the title and responsibility for the principality, he very quickly became aware that it was heavily indebted because of the financial obligations during and the aftermath of the Seven-Year's War. He ordered a 'downsizing' of the courtly household expenses, and was effective in regulating his debts through austerity, so much so that he was ordered to act as debt commissary for Gustav Friedrich of Büdingen and the Prince of Anhalt-Schaumburg.<sup>12</sup> More progressively, he followed his uncle's policy to populate his territory by granting special privileges and tax relief to new settlers and tradesmen in Offenbach in 1766 which resulted in a rapid expansion of the city. Already in 1702, Johann Phillip initiated the building of the market square and three main roads, the Große Marktstraße, Großer Biergrund und Frankfurter Straße. In 1768, the 'new market' and an extension of the Frankfurter Straße created a new neighbourhood where Wolfgang Ernst chose to reside.<sup>13</sup>

The expansion of the city was necessary to the growing businesses and number of inhabitants who moved to Offenbach sometimes from Frankfurt. Offenbach's tradesmen in general successfully competed with their Frankfurt colleagues - since 1716, Offenbach fishermen brought their wares to Frankfurt by boat against the violent protests of the Frankfurters.<sup>14</sup> Offenbach's guilds were less regulated than their Frankfurt counterparts and attracted increasingly

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<sup>12</sup> Decker pp. 199-204; see also Jürgen Ackermann, *Verschuldung, Reichsdebitverwaltung, Mediatisierung: Eine Studie zu den Finanzproblemen der mindermächtigen Stände im Alten Reich : das Beispiel der Grafschaft Ysenburg-Büdingen, 1687-1806* (Marburg : Hessisches Landesamt für Geschichtliche Landeskunde, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> The residence was expanded to the Frankfurter Straße 32 which was bought by Wolfgang Ernst II in 1794. <https://www.offenbach.de/kultur-und-tourismus/stadtgeschichte/geschichte-offenbach/18-jahrhundert/geschichten-um-den-aliceplatz.php>; <http://denkxweb.denkmalpflege-hessen.de/78171/>; Decker, p. 213.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.offenbach.de/kultur-und-tourismus/stadtgeschichte/geschichte->

manufactories producing textiles, tobacco, leather and soap.<sup>15</sup> In 1733, the Huguenot Johann Nicolaus Bernard was given the privilege to build a snuff manufactory, the 'Fürstlich Isenburgsche privilegierte Schnupftabakfabrik', which he ran with his brother Johann Heinrich Bernard. In 1768, the brothers invited the Frankfurt banker Jean Georg d'Orville to be a partner in the company, a move which also resulted in a personal union of the families.<sup>16</sup> The Bernard and d'Orville family increasingly influenced the economic and cultural life of Offenbach. The Huguenot Family André founded a music printing and publishing house in 1774 in Offenbach. Their business flourished when Johann Anton André bought the rights to a lithographic printing method developed by Alois Senefelder and when, in 1799, he acquired the entire musical manuscript collection of Mozart.<sup>17</sup>

Another tradition that Wolfgang Ernst adopted from his uncle and Ernst Casimir was to grant religious freedom and privileges to refugees and minority groups. In addition to welcoming Huguenots refugees, Jewish families were granted the right to settle in Offenbach under the protection of Johann Phillip in 1665 with another migration wave in 1711 when the Frankfurt Judengasse burnt down.<sup>18</sup> In 1707 the Jewish congregation was formally founded. Under the reign of Wolfgang Ernst, Jewish tradesmen continued to receive special privileges to found manufactories such as a woollen mill in 1760 and a printing business in 1763. In 1791 the banker Wolf Breidenbach was appointed privy councillor, "Fürstlich Ysenburgischer Rat", and became instrumental in abolishing the *Leibzoll* in 1803

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offenbach/18-jahrhundert/freie-fahrt-fuer-marktschiffer.php

<sup>15</sup> See Maria Meissner, *Die wirtschaftliche Entwicklung Offenbachs unter dem Hause Isenburg-Birstein* (Offenbach: Offenbacher Geschichtsblätter, 1972, vol, 22).

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.bfhg.de/die-hugenotten/hugenotten-und-ihre-nachkommen/bernard/>

<sup>17</sup> August Hermann André, *Zur Geschichte der Familie André* (Garmisch: Selbstverlag, 1963).

<sup>18</sup> K.P.Decker, 'Juden in Offenbach unter isenburgischer Herrschaft in der fruehen Neuzeit', *Zur Geschichte der Juden in Offenbach am Main: Von den Anfängen bis zum Ende der Weimarer Republik*, 2 vols (Offenbach: Magistrat der Stadt, 1990), II, pp.5-98.

in Isenburg.<sup>19</sup> Wolfgang Ernst also granted privileges to the Catholics in Offenbach to found a congregation in 1798 and allowed them to conduct masses in his Isenburg castle - thus in a private setting.

Graf Reinhard von Isenburg reformed the state's faith to Lutheranism in 1542 but Wolfgang Ernst I decided the principality's faith to be Calvinism - a quasi-second Reformation based on the principle of the 'Konfessionsstaat'. The Lutherans in Offenbach were expelled and only invited again in 1734 to settle and exercise their faith in Offenbach. The theological library of the principality and the court preachers serving Isenburg during particularly the reign of Johann Phillip, document however a close affinity of the court to Pietism.<sup>20</sup> Preachers such as Conrad Bröske (1660-1713) and Samuel Nethenus (1628-1707) were influential in questions of religious tolerance and 'gute policey' of education in the principality. Shantz has suggested that Johann Phillip 'evidently shared a lively interest in Bröske's eschatological speculations, as well as sharing his Philadelphian tolerance for a spectrum of theological persuasions. Bröske was obviously a key figure in the inter-play of political, economic and religious factors which made Offenbach an early centre of religious toleration in Germany, and a refuge for persecuted radicals.'<sup>21</sup> Wolfgang Ernst II also appointed, though less radical, Pietist court preachers such as Johann Jakob Stolz who served between 1781 and 1784 and Georg Christoph Tobler, serving between 1784-1792. Both were Swiss disciples of Lavater who himself had visited Offenbach in 1774.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Heinrich Schnee, 'Breidenbach, Wolf', *Neue Deutsche Biographie* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, Berlin 1955), II, p. 571.

<sup>20</sup> On the theological book collection of the house Ysenburg-Buedingen, see Martin Tielke, *Theologische Literatursammlung des Fuerstenhauses Ysenburg-Buedingen* (Emden: Kulturstiftung der Länder; Johannes a Lasco Bibliothek, 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Douglas H. Shantz, 'Conrad Bröske, *Hofprediger* in Offenbach: The Life and World of a Late-Seventeenth-Century German Court Preacher and Eschatologue', *Historical Papers: Canadian Society of Church History* (1999): pp. 119-139 (p.124); Douglas H. Shantz, *Between Sardis and Philadelphia: The Life and World of Pietist Court Preacher Conrad Bröske* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> Decker, 215; Hans-Martin Kirn, *Deutsche Spätaufklärung und Pietismus: Ihr Verhältnis im Rahmen kirchlich-bürgerlicher Reform Bei Johann Ludwig Ewald*



Perhaps the most significant enlightened reform was the abolishment of serfdom in the principality. On March 26th 1794 Wolfgang Ernst issued the decree underpinned by 'Unsere Achtung und Sorge vor die Beförderung und Vermehrung ihres uns billig vorzüglich am Herzen liegenden Glückseligkeit und teutsche Selbstschätzung'<sup>23</sup>. Though, as Decker has pointed out, Wolfgang Ernst's humanitarian generosity was somewhat restricted by some minor decrees that guaranteed the Prince's access to some assets if he chose to do so, his motivation was enlightened and, as I would argue, patriotic.

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Wolfgang Ernst II's reforms facilitated a rich cultural life in Offenbach, so much so that Emil Pirazzi called Offenbach the 'Musensitz am Main' [the Seat of the Muses on the river Main].<sup>24</sup> The term 'Musensitz' evokes of course the eighteenth-century 'Museum' of Anna Amalia's Weimar where, with the help of the generous patronage of the hosts, a rich literary and artistic sociability developed.<sup>25</sup> Offenbach's sociability did not revolve around a court or in the case of other 'Museum' such as Nennhausen, Blumberg and Kunnersdorf, aristocratic country seats.<sup>26</sup> In fact, Wolfgang Ernst dissolved the princely court household and reigned at his seat of administration in Offenbach. The sociability of the 'gebildete Stände' - aristocracy and middling classes - took place at different venues though Wolfgang Ernst II acted also as a patron when, in 1791 he instigated the foundation of the 'Fürstlich Isenburgisches Schauspielhaus'. In

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(1748-1822) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1998), p. 41.

<sup>23</sup> See Decker, pp.211-12 for the document.

<sup>24</sup> Emil Pirazzi, *Bilder und Geschichten aus Offenbachs Vergangenheit: Eine Festgabe zur Hessischen Landes-GewerbeAusstellung in Offenbach am Main* (Offenbach: Selbstverlag, 1879), p.17.

<sup>25</sup> See particularly Joachim Berger, *Anna Amalia von Sachsen-Weimar-Eisenach (1739-1807): Denk- und Handlungsräume einer aufgeklärten Herzogin* (Heidelberg: Winter Verlag, 2003) who rigorously dissected the ideal of the Weimar Museum.

<sup>26</sup> See Reinhard Blänkner and Wolfgang de Bruyn, eds., *Salons und Museum: Neuständische Geselligkeit in Berlin und in der Mark Brandenburg um 1800* (Hannover: Wehrhahn Verlag, 2010).

1775-80, the Huguenot entrepreneurs Bernard and d'Orville built the Büsing-Palais, a representative city palais and welcomed important literary luminaries such as Johann Wolfgang Goethe and Sophie von La Roche. Peter Bernard founded a small orchestra managed by the composer Ferdinand Fränzl (1767-1833) between 1795-1802, following his post as concertmaster at the Frankfurt national theatre. 'Die hiesigen Häuser Bernard und d'Orville', wrote the latter, 'unterhalten eine Theatergesellschaft, veranstalten zwanglose Assembleen und Konzerte. ... Ich wage zu sagen, dass Sie es besser finden werden, als ich es male'.<sup>27</sup> When Sophie von La Roche moved to Offenbach in 1786, Maria Elisabeth Bernard noted, 'Die Frau Laroche ist hier angekommen ... hat aber ausser bei den Fuerstinnen, dene sie äusserst gefallen soll, noch keine Visiten gemacht ...', indicating the polite etiquette that Wolfgang Ernst II still maintained.<sup>28</sup>

Sophie von La Roche moved to Offenbach in 1786 on the expressed wishes of her husband who sought a respite from the political conundrum he found himself in in Trier.<sup>29</sup> Hosted by Franz Carl Friedrich von Hohenfeld in Speyer, La Roche decided to move to Offenbach near his daughter Maximiliane and her husband, a successful Frankfurt banker and business man but sadly died in 1788. Whilst it was not Sophie von La Roche's choice to move to Offenbach, she was the most productive here, out of necessity, and started publishing with the local printer and publisher Carl Ludwig Brede.<sup>30</sup> The home in the Domstraße, ' die

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<sup>27</sup> Letter by Sophie von la Roche to Elsy de l'Espinasse, Offenbach, 4 October 1787, cited in Sophie von La Roche, *Ich bin mehr Herz als Kopf: Sophie von La Roche, ein Lebensbild in Briefen*, ed. by Michael Maurer (München: Beck, 1983), p. 293.

<sup>28</sup> quoted in Daniela Kohls and Heidrun Weber-Grandke, 'Sophie von la Roche in Offenbach am Main 1786 bis 1807', *Meine Freiheit, nach meinem Charakter zu leben': Sophie von la Roche (1730-1807), Schriftstellerin der Empfindsamkeit*, ed. by Jürgen Eichenauer (Weimar: VDG, 2007 ), pp. 85-99 (p.88)

<sup>29</sup> See Claudia Bamberg, 'Mit der Feder bin ich, was ich bin...', *Sophie von La Roche 6. Dezember 1730-18. Februar 1807* (Frankfurt: Freies Deutsches Hochstift, 2007), pp. 57-61.

<sup>30</sup> The newspaper, *Offenbacher Zeitung*, was founded in 1773, documenting

Grillenhütte', one of the newly built edifices in the West of the city, hosted salons which received French émigrés such as Mirabeau, politicians, writers, such as her old friends Herder, Christian Carl Ernst Wilhelm Buri, Goethe, Wieland, other salon women such as Barbara Juliane v. Krüdener, fellow Offenbachers (Andres and the Bernard family), old Frankfurt families such as the family Bethmann and von Holzhausen, and even Goethe's mother (though they were not the best of friends).<sup>31</sup> She was a good friend of and corresponded with Elise Gräfin zu Solms-Laubach, of the house Isenburg-Birstein and was part of the Isenburg circle in Offenbach. 'Ich habe die Gnade gehabt', wrote Katharina Elisabeth Goethe, 'am vergangenen Sonntag bey Ihro Durchlaucht der Regierenden Frau Herzogin in Gesellschaft der Mama la Roche und verschiedenen Preuschischen Officiren zu Mittag zu speissen. Wir waren sehr vergnuegt - blieben biss 5 Uhr - gingen dann samt und sonders ins Schauspiel.'<sup>32</sup> Bettine von Arnim's Offenbach experience

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another element of the public sphere that developed so rapidly in Offenbach. During the period in Offenbach, La Roche published *Briefe an Lina, ein Buch für junge Frauenzimmer, die ihr Herz und ihren Verstand bilden wollen*, 1785; *Tagebuch einer Reise durch die Schweiz*, 1787; *Journal einer Reise durch Frankreich*, 1787; *Tagebuch einer Reise durch Holland und England*, 1788; *Geschichte von Miß Lony und Der schöne Bund*, 1789; *Briefe über Mannheim*, 1791; *Lebensbeschreibung von Friderika Baldinger, von ihr selbst verfaßt. Hrsg. und mit einer Vorrede begleitet von Sophie Wittwe von La Roche*, 1791; *Rosalie und Cleberg auf dem Lande*, Weiß und Brede, 1791; *Erinnerungen aus meiner dritten Schweizerreise*, 1793; *Briefe an Lina als Mutter*, 1795-1797; *Schönes Bild der Resignation, eine Erzählung*, 1796; *Erscheinungen am See Oneida, mit Kupfern*, 1798; *Mein Schreibtisch*, 1799; *Reise vom Offenbach nach Weimar und Schönebeck im Jahr 1799*, 1800; *Fanny und Julia, oder die Freundinnen*, 1801; *Liebe-Hütten*, 1804.

<sup>31</sup> After the death of Maximiliane, Sophie von La Roche took in her grandchildren, Bettine von Arnim and Clemens Brentano. The former enthusiastically reported on these assemblies in her own writing. See Waltraud Schade, *Bettine Brentano und Karoline Von Günderrode: Ein Gespräch* (Berlin: Frank und Timme, 2006), pp. 26-27.

<sup>32</sup> See Kurt Kampf, *Sophie La Roche: Ihre Briefe an die Graefin Elise zu Soms-Laubach 1787-1807*, (Offenbach: Offenbacher Geschichtsverein, 1965); Katharina Goethe is referring to Ernestine Esperance Victoria (1756-1819), Wolfgang Ernst's second wife. Letter from Katharina Elisabeth Goethe, 22 January 1793, cited in Quoted from Mario Leis and others, eds., *Die Briefe von Goethes Mutter*

echoes Goethe's celebration of its 'freiste Luft' when she described the 'Grillenhütte' as a place of liberal sociability that stood in contrast to the more formal polite society of Frankfurt and at the same time celebrates its rural character, 'mit silbernen Wellen garniert und mit blühenden Feldern von Hiazynthen und Tausendschönchen gestickt...'.<sup>33</sup>

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The discussion of Johann Phillips's and Wolfgang Ernst's social, political and economic reforms in the principality of Isenburg, with particular focus on Offenbach, indicates the principal complexity of political reform in the context of the Holy Roman Empire.<sup>34</sup> Whilst Wolfgang Ernst was posthumously brought into the fold of his enlightened fellow-rulers of the Empire, 'aufgeklärte und edel denkende andere Reichsmitstände', a closer look revealed an aristocratic rule that was informed by Pietism, Enlightenment principles of human rights and good government ('gute policey') and mercantilism and created a cultural space where the 'gebildeten Stände' mixed. Ernst Casimir Graf zu Ysenburg und Büdingen acted as a valuable example to Wolfgang Ernst with an Edict of Tolerance that extended its statutes to the management of the public household, the local economy, education and the conduct of the aristocracy and provincial court. His reform rule was informed thus by Pietism and ethics. But unlike Wolfgang Ernst II, he was not, as Benad suggests, able to develop these reforms systematically and radically as he remained throughout his reign, an essentially reform absolutist ruler.<sup>35</sup> Wolfgang Ernst not only embraced mercantilism but also the creation of

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(Frankfurt: Insel Verlag 1996), p. 303.

<sup>33</sup> Winfried B. Sahn, 'Ei, wie fein ist doch die Grossmama': Sophie von La Roche und Offenbach am Main in Bettine von Arnims Briefromanen, '*Meine Freiheit nach meinem Charakter zu leben*', pp. 101-113 (p. 110 and p. 111).

<sup>34</sup> A meticulously researched example that could serve as comparison is the market town Vohburg on the Danube. See Elizabeth Able, *Ein kurbayerischer Markt in der Epoche des Reformabsolutismus: Vohburg and der Donau, 1745-1799* (München: Herberg Utz, 2008).

<sup>35</sup> Benand, Toleranz, p. 344

the (Habermasian) public sphere which not only provided a counter-point to the provincial court but indeed replaced it successfully. His reforms, I would suggest, were patriotic gestures that determined the identity of a small principality in a vast Empire that sadly ceased to exist in 1816 when it was assimilated by the Grand Duchy of Hesse-Darmstadt.