

THE RELATIONS OF THE JOACHIMSTHAL UPRISING OF 1525 TO SAXONY

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Close relations existed between the Bohemian mountain town of St. Joachimsthal, founded in 1516, and in the possession of Count Schlick auf Schlackenwerth, and the neighbouring Saxon mountain localities of Annaberg and Buchholz, founded shortly before, in 1496 and 1501. St. Joachimsthal soon surpassed these two towns, both in size of population and output of silver. The greatest migration of miners to St. Joachimsthal came from the neighbouring localities and from Schneeberg, which flourished after 1471. The supply center for all of these mountain towns was Zwickau, an important trading and cloth-making town.

In the young silver town of St. Joachimsthal, on the southern slopes of the Erzgebirge, strong social tensions soon developed, for there settled, on the one hand, poor miners who had used up all their savings in the long journey over the Erzgebirge, and, on the other, various miners who had already uncovered ore veins in St. Joachimsthal lying „beneath the green turf“ and had as a result rapidly become rich. The rapid growth of the town also led to a housing shortage, provisioning difficulties, and thus numerous inconveniences. The miners still prospected as private mine proprietors, i.e. were the owners or co-owners of their pits. The deeper the mines went under-

ground, the more outside capital had to be employed. Already in 1517 there was an uprising of the miners. The „big wigs“ were inveighed against. Abuses in the administration and speculation by officials were discovered. Probably already at this time it was that Thomas Münzer took up contact with the Joachimsthal miners. At the beginning of the Peasants' War unrest arose here, when great Bohemian mine-owners and, in 1525, the district chief of Electoral Saxony, Kospoth, in St. Joachimsthal recruited mercenaries against the rebelling peasants, but failed to attract many recruits.

As early as 1519, Joachimsthal miners emigrated to Buchholz. Unrest began there in March 1525, especially against the clergy. Then the town of Schlettau and villages which were part of the property of the monastery of Grünhain rose up against the monks. All the traffic from Zwickau to St. Joachimsthal passed through this region. It is revealing that the miners of St. Joachimsthal asked the Council of the town of Zwickau for help, but the latter refused it. The Annaberg Council, on the other hand, which feared that the miners of this town would be infected by the Joachimsthal example, wanted to mediate between the rebels and the Schlick administration. Even the Dresden Council made efforts on behalf of a compromise in St. Joachimsthal, and experts from Freiberg took part as mediators.

As a result of their relationships, comradeship, and common experiences and distress, the miners on each side of the border felt close to one another. Thus Annaberg supplied bread and weapons to the rebels. Two Saxon miners, Wolf Göftel and Andreas Cosener, actively conducted propaganda — to be sure, without success — on both sides of the border for the common action of the miners together with the peasants.

The miners formulated their demands in 17 articles. Although the prestige of the miners was lowered by the defeat of the Central German peasants at Frankenhausen, the miners managed to score some successes, in the agreement of 25 May 1525, especially those of a social character. This agreement, consisting of ten articles, between Count Schlick and the miners of St. Joachimsthal put an end to the uprising. On the basis of these negotiations, the Schlicks promulgated, as the mine-owners of St. Joachimsthal, new mining rules.