

EGER, NÜRNBERG AND PRAGUE

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The starting point for the relations between Nürnberg and Eger, which in a later phase extended to include Prague, was the fact that both were originally part of the northern *gau* of Bavaria. Documentary mention of Nürnberg and Eger first appears at about the same time (1050 and 1061 respectively). While the castle of Nürnberg had already under the Salians become an important center of the royal dominion, the castle of Eger was until the mid-12th century the administrative and military center of the newly settled „regio Egere“ of the northern *gau* (first mentioned in 1135). With the development of the areas around Nürnberg, Eger and Altenburg in Thüringen to imperial lands, there emerged a regional concentration of the power of the Hohenstaufen imperium which had considerable general political importance, not only as a connecting link in the Hohenstaufen royal domain, but also as a wedge dividing the Guelphic north-south axis, and due to the key position of Egerland with respect to Bohemia.

Within the framework of the organizational development of the imperial lands, the burgher communes around the imperial castles of Nürnberg (1183: „papatium“) and Eger (1183: „castrum imperatoris“) acquired the legal status of towns at nearly the same time. This phase ended in each case with the „universitas civium“ as a legal person entitled to bear a seal: in Nürnberg the first documentary reference to this dates from 1245; in Eger 1242. Corresponding to the consolidation of the two towns, whose economies were based primarily on trade, was the development of their own municipal law. In this process, Nürnberg was already at an early stage an influential center in shaping the municipal law of other towns. From the very beginning, Eger was also part of this sphere of influence of Nürnberg municipal law. After the Interregnum, when both towns came close to being forced into a status of dependency on the ruling prince — Nürnberg on the Duchy of Bavaria (as part of the inheritance of Conradin); Eger on Bohemia (through King Přemysl

Ottokar II, who was installed as regent of the imperial dominions) — each rose to become free imperial towns, as a result of the revindication policy of King Rudolph of Habsburg.

Even before the mid-13th century, the relations with Prague, which had been initiated by merchants, became still closer. Not only did the merchants' colony in Prague, the „vicus theutonicorum“, adopt the Nürnberg municipal law in 1234, but the latter spread, as the municipal law of the Old Town of Prague, throughout western and southern Bohemia. A further consolidation appears to have taken place at the beginning of the Luxemburg regency in Bohemia, through merchants from Eger who had settled in the Prague Old Town and risen to leading positions in the municipal government. Likewise under the first two Luxemburg kings, the municipal law of Eger spread into the adjacent areas of northwestern Bohemia, favoured in part by the circumstance that in 1322 the imperial town of Eger, together with its territory, which had in the meantime been considerably reduced vis-à-vis the Hohenstaufen imperial land, accepted the suzerainty of the Bohemian King Johann in exchange for certain privileges. The enactment of the imperial suzerainty, with the guarantee of territorial integrity and juridical independence with respect to the Kingdom of Bohemia which it involved, also led to a reorientation vis-à-vis Bohemia, with which it was now tied by a vassal-suzerain relationship. The result was that Eger grew into the role of a mediator. At the same time the vassal land had the function, as part of the Luxemburgs' territorial policy, of being a base and point of departure for the extension of a land-bridge stretching through the territory — called „Neuböhmen“ — of the Upper Palatinate along the convoy roads from Eger to Nürnberg and Frankfurt, and into the Rhineland. There were numerous mutual exchanges between Prague — now not only the capital of the Kingdom of Bohemia, but also the residence of the Emperor — and particularly Nürnberg, stressed by Emperor Charles IV as one of the declared focal points of the Empire. Eger found itself between the political power groups, but was nevertheless at first able to maintain its special position and to further improve its economic position as a base for long-distance trade. The crisis of the Empire after this „golden age“ of Charles IV, however, and the political changes which began already under his successors caused the three towns to drift apart. The increasing political and economic importance of the imperial city of Nürnberg became even more marked in the 15th century, preparing the way for its pinnacle in the 16th century. Eger, which first began to be hard pressed by the emerging power of the Estates at the end of the 15th century, increasingly lost the independence which it defended so stubbornly. In the case of Prague, which, however, again became the residence of the Emperors under the Habsburgs, the political, economic and cultural potential shifted more and more toward the Danube area.