The Palatinate and its Networks in the Empire and in Europe

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Kurpfalz, the Electoral Palatinate, was a prosperous, influential estate of the Holy Roman Empire in 1618. Among the empire’s ca. 500 other estates, the Palatinate was internally organised despite its extreme territorial fragmentation, integrated in the empire and connected to some of Western Europe’s greatest powers. The Palatinate’s glittering, sophisticated court could have helped to mediate and mollify a variety of conflicts festering among Europe’s bellicose, ruling elite, but it did the opposite. The reigning prince, Frederick V, leaped into the arena normally reserved for Europe’s mightiest warlords, hoping that his many worthy connections would provide support, and that others would follow, join the fray and help him attain his ambition. Doing so opened the floodgates to three decades of war.

The Palatinate deserves special attention in any study of the Thirty Years’ War because of its central role in the development of the crisis, a point that hardly needs scholarly argument. The earliest written accounts of the tragedy from 1618 to 1648, by simple people such as Christoph Raph, a town clerk, Hans Heberle, a shoemaker, and Gallus Zembroth, a village major and wine-grower, cite the Elector Palatine as one of the war’s originators and the Palatinate as one of the chief victims. A Lutheran pastor in Hessen, Johann Minck, wrote of Frederick V’s infamous attempt to take over the kingdom of Bohemia, ‘This gave rise to a large-scale war and devastation, not only in the Palatinate, but in the whole Roman

1 Leading scholarly periodicals that publish articles about Palatine history are Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins and Mitteilungen des historischen Vereins der Pfalz. The latter features studies in local history, primarily administrative and territorial, as well as some brief biographies of notable people. The best collections of publications are at the university libraries in Heidelberg and Munich and at the Institut für pfälzische Geschichte und Volkskunde and the Pfalzbibliothek in Kaiserslautern. For documentary research, the Landesarchiv in Speyer has records and papers for the electoral Palatinate, the duchy of Zweibrücken and several other principalities and ecclesiastical estates in the region. The Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv in Munich has the largest repository of unpublished archival materials from the reign of Elector Palatine Frederick V, in the Kasten Blau and Kasten Schwartz collections.

and Bohemian Empire. This lasted thirty full years, and was foretold by the comet ... which appeared in 1618.  

People, Land and Government

The Palatinate in 1618 reminds us that early seventeenth-century imperial estates, especially the principalities, had little in common with the modern, territorial nation-state and its extensive bureaucratic apparatus. An imperial estate was a community, an ordering of people, with political, legal, social, religious, economic, cultural and other ramifications, supported by the fruits of the people labouring on the land. The estate was usually embodied in a person, the prince, who, with his court, occupied the centre of political, cultural, artistic, economic, military and administrative influence in his estate, regardless of the actual place of residence.  

As the loci of authority, prestige and honour, princes were the founts of patronage and preferment, the key to advancement in state, society, scholarship and frequently the church as well. Princes usually received their authority, titles and dignity by right of inheritance and were expected to hold on to them until death. They were not office holders or bureaucrats; office holders were the prince’s servants, supposedly for the good of the community of his subjects. Of course theory differed from practice, given the interest and ability of each individual prince, but the expectations were clear enough. Still, no prince was as absolute as he probably would have liked. Without the consent and support of his family, dynasty, household, noblemen, servants and many other people, the prince would have been just one man among many. According to Jeremy Black, ‘the essentially contractual nature of government inherited from the Middle Ages prevailed, whatever its constitutional or political form; and the conviction that rulers were answerable to God did not absolve them from the need to govern legally and to avoid arbitrary rule’.  

When it comes to the history of the Thirty Years’ War, the Elector Palatine counted more than the Palatinate. In the preceding three centuries, these princes, all members of the Wittelsbach dynasty, had developed for themselves a unique position of power in the Holy Roman Empire. Although sovereign in his estate, like the other six imperial electors, only the Elector Palatine could sit in judgement of the emperor if he were prosecuted by the archbishop-electors. The Elector Palatine was also one of the two imperial vicars who were supposed to rule in the emperor’s stead during a period of interregnum. The last Elector Palatine to be elected King of the Romans was Ruprecht (r. 1400–10). Since 1437 the Habsburgs had occupied the topmost seat in the empire. The Elector Palatine in 1618 ruled over about 600,000 commoners, making the Palatine estate one of the more populous in the empire, exceeded by Bohemia and Saxony each with over one million and Bavaria with 800,000.

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4 In imperial free cities, an oligarchic council of urban magnates usually occupied the centre.


6 J. Black, ‘States and Societies in Early Modern Europe: A Revisionist Approach’, Historically Speaking, xii/2 (2011); pp. 40–41.

7 Ruprecht did not receive the imperial title, but there was no prince in the empire with higher dignity.
The Elector Palatine’s land-holdings were extensive but not as big as Bohemia, Bavaria or Saxony in terms of total area. Unlike these more condensed estates, however, the Palatinate was fragmented, first cut into two separate parts, the Lower and the Upper Palatinates, then both of these fissured and scattered by the presence of numerous neighbouring and interspersing estates under the lordship of other princes and municipalities of the empire.\(^8\)

The many districts of the Lower Palatinate centred around the area where the Neckar River flows into the Rhine, south of the archbishoprics of Trier and Mainz. In this region the Lower Palatinate was dispersed into more than a dozen separate parcels of land, with centres of authority based in towns such as Simmern, Kreuznach, Alzey, Oppenheim, Frankenthal, Mannheim, Heidelberg, Neustadt, Kaiserslautern, Germersheim, Mosbach and Umstadt. The Lower Palatinate’s main strongholds were the fortress towns of Heidelberg, Mannheim and Frankenthal, garrisoned by the elector’s standing army of 15,000 men. None of the many old castles perched on hilltops was able to house an army of significance. Apart from the three centres of military power, the Lower Palatinate was basically indefensible, especially in the outlying districts. There were no distinct, cohesive borders and no systematic border controls. This complexity and fragmentation rendered them impossible to defend.

The Lower Palatinate boasted one of the most temperate climates in Germany and exceptionally fertile lands, especially in the valley of the Rhine, which sustained the vast majority of the principality’s population. There the Palatinate’s fields, hills and forests produced grains for beer and bread, corn, fruits, nuts and supported sheep and other livestock. The slopes of the low mountain ranges west and east of the Rhine provided grapes for the Palatinate’s famous wines, and further west a dramatic landscape of hundreds of densely forested hills offered timber and game. The Lower Palatinate’s agricultural wealth sustained its relatively dense population living in towns, villages and hamlets.\(^9\) The towns, the largest and most important being Heidelberg, hosted wine merchants, cloth workers, artisans, metalworkers and goldsmiths. Revenues from land rents, fees, taxes, customs and tolls on the traffic on the Rhine sustained the elector’s court.

The Palatine court had its seat in the beautiful Heidelberg Schloss (castle) with its famous gardens, the Hortus Palatinus, both icons of Renaissance art and architecture.\(^10\) The Schloss also housed the famous Großer Fass, an enormous barrel, built in 1589–91, that held 130,000 litres of wine. Heidelberg also boasted Germany’s oldest university, founded in 1381. The faculty was small in the early seventeenth century, with about 20 professors on average,

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\(^{8}\) The full complexity of the electorate is detailed in W. Dotzauer, Der historische Raum des Bundeslandes Rheinland-Pfalz von 1500–1815: Die fürstliche Politik für Reich und Land, ihre Krisen und Zusammenbrüche (Frankfurt am Main, 1993), and H. Probst, Die Pfalz als historischer Begriff (2 vols, Mannheim, 1984). Probst’s second volume is a collection of 14 facsimile maps of the Palatinate from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Another useful overview is M. Schaab, Geschichte der Kurpfalz (2 vols, Stuttgart, 1988, 1992), vol. 2. The Institut für Frankisch-Pfälzische Geschichte und Landeskunde at the Ruprecht-Karls-Universität at Heidelberg (http://www.fpi.uni-hd.de) offers a virtual library about the Palatinate electorate, Geschichte der Kurpfalz, with a useful map, bibliography, sources and other valuable information.

\(^{9}\) The neighbouring duchy of Pfalz-Zweibrücken, by contrast, in the forested region to the west, had only 10,000 males over the age of 18 in 1606.

teaching and researching in arts (philosophy, logic and humanities), medicine, law and theology. Under Elector Palatine Frederick IV, new chairs were founded for universal history and the Arabic language. The medical faculty offered public anatomical instruction using human dissection in 1574 and perhaps earlier. In 1600, the university opened its own press and bookstore. A mark of the university’s prestige is the fact that roughly one third of matriculated students were foreigners. In 1618–19, Elector Palatine Frederick V sent three Heidelberg theologians to the famous Synod of Dordrecht in order to promote the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563. The prince’s library in Heidelberg, the Bibliotheca Palatina, was perhaps the greatest collection north of the Alps at the outbreak of the Thirty Years’ War. The ruling princes of the Palatinate used their patronage to shape and support the university for the sake of supplying their subjects with teachers, clergymen, lawyers, administrators and doctors.

More or less in the middle of the elector’s territories, on both sides of the Rhine, were a host of other imperial estates, ostensibly independent of the Elector Palatine: the imperial free cities of Worms and Speyer, the archbishopric of Worms, the bishopric of Speyer, the landgraviate of Hessen-Darmstadt and 60 imperial knights with holdings in the Palatinate, about half residing there. Some of these knights, such as the Hirschhorn, had large landholdings as big as some of the counties in the empire, while others had a little castle to their name, or just a subdivision of one. Some of these knights owed fidelity to the Elector Palatine, others to the Holy Roman Emperor directly, making allegiance a complex issue. The members of the Upper Rhine Knighthood elected a committee to represent them at meetings in Mainz, where they were supposed to make common decisions about political matters.

Over 150 miles to the east of Heidelberg, in a forested region at a higher elevation, the smaller, poorer Upper Palatinate sustained a population of approximately 180,000, with slightly less than 20 per cent living in towns surrounded by medieval walls, none larger than Amberg, which had only about 5,000 residents. For centuries the Upper Palatinate’s main source of wealth had been its iron and tin mines and hundreds of forges, foundries and hard-working smiths, but these industries were in decline by the early seventeenth century. Brewing wheat-beer, however, was on the rise. The economy of the region was overwhelmingly agricultural, operating just above subsistence and generally less productive than in the Lower Palatinate.

The Upper Palatinate, like the Lower, lacked territorial and jurisdictional cohesion, although the fragmentation was not as extreme. The duke of Pfalz-Neuburg ruled lands bordering the Upper Palatinate to the south, and the prince of Pfalz-Sulzbach controlled territories in the middle that nearly severed the Upper Palatinate in two. The county of

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11 P.F. Grendler, ‘The Universities of the Renaissance and Reformation’, Renaissance Quarterly, 57/1 (2004), pp. 1–42. The number of faculty does not include arts teachers with bachelor’s or master’s degrees.


13 F. Maier, ‘Die Reichsritterschaft im Pfälzer Raum während des Dreißigjährigen Krieges’, Mitteilungen des historischen Vereins der Pfalz, 108 (2010); pp. 491–506. When Frederick V invited the Protestant imperial knights in the Palatinate to attend a meeting of the Protestant Union held in Nürnberg in 1619, the group agreed to maintain their unity and neutrality with regard to the crisis in Bohemia.

Cham was autonomous, and the bishops of Regensburg, Bamberg and Eichstätt each administered their own small territories in the region. The Landgrave of Leuchtenberg ruled his little dominion in the middle of the Upper Palatinate, and, further south, the Elector Palatine governed two parishes just outside the walls of the city of Regensburg, the seat of the bishopric. The Elector Palatine’s appointed governor of the Upper Palatinate, who was based in Amberg or Neumarkt, tried to govern these districts and towns on behalf of his distant, usually absent prince. Two hundred families in the Upper Palatinate enjoyed the privilege of lordship, including the administration of justice for lesser crimes and sometimes the right to appoint local clergy as well. They lived in hilltop castles and more fashionable country houses, drawing their wealth from the work of peasants, miners and craftsmen alike. Simple people living in villages and hamlets had little choice but to obey their rule.15

What held it all together? Nothing was more important than personal loyalty to the reigning members of the Wittelsbach dynasty, namely, the prince, his relatives, their spouses and their collective associates. This is not to say Palatine government was not developing as in the rest of Western Europe. Since 1480 a law code was in place that regulated marital relations, inheritance, fief and lien, trespass and crimes of violence, including court procedure and the appeal process.16 This legal system had been uniformly imposed on all residents of the elector’s lands in 1582. The Elector Palatine’s central government included three top officials (High Steward (Großhofmeister), Chancellor and Marshall) supported by councils for the prince, court and church, various courts of law, chancellery, exchequer, etc., such offices occupied by a mix of noblemen and qualified commoners.17 But around 1500, the elector also held the at least nominal fidelity of 500 fief-holders along the Rhine and Neckar, in, among and beyond the range of his own estates. Many of these and other members of the lesser nobility in the region belonged to the Palatine order of knighthood.18 The Wittelsbach family ruled by right of birth.

In 1618, the elector’s brother, Count Palatine Ludwig Philipp (1602–1655) ruled a northwestern subdivision of the Palatinate including Simmern, Sponheim and Lautern, and another line of the Wittelsbach dynasty, descendents of Ruprecht, King of the Romans, ruled the duchy of Pfalz-Zweibrücken west of the Palatinate. The fact that Elector Palatine Frederick IV chose his relative, Duke John II of Pfalz-Zweibrücken, to govern the Palatinate electorate as regent until Frederick V reached his majority shows the trust between the two Wittelsbach family lines. When Frederick V left for Bohemia in 1619, he also called on Duke Johann to rule the Palatinate during his absence.19

A close associate of the Wittelsbachs, Prince Christian of Anhalt, served as Statthalter of the Upper Palatinate for 25 years under Frederick IV and V until 1621.20 His loyalty to the elector in Heidelberg was unquestioned, but his distance from that court inevitably restricted

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19 Still other Palatine Wittelsbach lines, such as Pfalz-Veldenz, Pfalz-Sulzbach and Pfalz-Birkenfeld, are detailed in Probst, Die Pfalz als historischer Begriff, pp. 32–40.
his influence on its decisions. Mainly through correspondence, Anhalt enthusiastically encouraged war between Protestants and Catholics in the empire and beyond, especially in the years following 1608, but his plans usually came to nothing. Oddly, during his years as Statthalter, Anhalt did nothing to improve the Upper Palatinate’s defence works, as if he considered the region militarily insignificant.

The Elector Palatine’s government was financially precarious, despite the agricultural, mineral and mercantile wealth of the Palatinate. Deficit spending was the norm. In 1602, the elector could expect an annual income of approximately 285,000 Gulden, against annual expenses of 430,000, and the total debt was 1.5 million Gulden. When Frederick V assumed the reins of power, it reached 1.8 million. Frederick’s estate lacked the means to finance a major war on its own.

Religion and Confessionalisation

By the mid-sixteenth century, the Palatinate had instituted the Reformation: the electors closed monasteries and convents, revised doctrine and liturgy and placed the regulation of religion in the principality under the direct control of the prince and his Church Council (Kirchenrat). Confessional shifting, however, from Lutheranism to Calvinism in the 1560s and 1570s, then back to Lutheranism in 1576–1583, and then again to Calvinism in the later 1580s guaranteed instability and confusion. Each change involved replacing clergy, university professors and governing officials, distributing new books and catechisms, adjusting rites, some iconoclasm and, at times, involved popular resistance and violent protests. Success was mixed. In 1593–95, authorities in Heidelberg found that only one third of heads of households could recite the Ten Commandments, the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, or could explain baptism, the eucharist, salvation and faith according to Calvin’s teaching. Beyond the electorate’s capital city, the level of knowledge must have been considerably worse, despite the widely available resource of the Heidelberg Catechism.

The Upper Palatinate was a case in point. Calvinism was largely unwelcome and imposed on the populace, common and elite alike. The Elector Palatine, Frederick IV, took up residence himself in Amberg in 1596–98 to oversee official establishment of Calvinism in those territories, but the project had to accept the limitations of reality. In 1598, when the authorities ordered weekly training in Calvinist doctrine, they directed teachers to avoid the controversies that divided Lutherans and Calvinists. By 1618, the Upper Palatinate was still largely Lutheran, focusing on reading scriptures, hearing sermons, and singing psalms in schools and churches. Visitations showed slow progress, if any, in terms of literacy, knowledge of the Lord’s Prayer, the Decalogue, and the Creed. The situation was slightly better in the towns than in the rural villages. In some parishes, despite decades of imposed Protestantism, the religious culture of the general populace maintained customs and beliefs closer to those of the Catholic Church before the Council of Trent.

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24 Johnson, Magistrates, pp. 27–39.
Many historians have fought for and against the confessionalisation thesis. Did the elite regime of prince, court and church create and impose group identities based on Christian confession, using various methods of indoctrination and social discipline, and did this process contribute to the development of the modern state and modernity itself?25 The debate goes on, but few can deny that princes certainly intended and endeavoured to bring their people’s faith into line with their own, no matter how well or badly they managed to carry out such a project. With some ingenuity, the Palatinate can be used as an example either way.

In the first decades of the seventeenth century, the elector’s church was of necessity as tolerant as it was Calvinist. Fully aware of the sizeable Lutheran minority in the Lower Palatinate and the majority in the Upper, the electors supported irenic dialogue between Calvinist and Lutheran divines. By 1608, the elector had issued toleration edicts for Lutherans, Catholics, and even sectarian Christians residing in the electorate, as long as they practised their religion privately and lived in an orderly, quiet manner.26

Throughout the Palatinate, as elsewhere in early seventeenth-century Europe, the parish was synonymous with the community. The parish church stood in the middle of the settled area, its bell measuring time and marking events of significance, whether markets, festivals or grave emergencies. Confessional fluctuations and diversity in the region, however, frayed parish unity and uniformity. Still, co-existence was the norm. The few Catholics that remained in the Lower Palatinate went to the neighbouring bishopric of Speyer to attend Mass, for example, and Speyer’s Calvinists in the other direction for Sunday services in the bordering villages.27 Reality on the ground often differed gravely from the plans and papers discussed in the elector’s privy and church councils.

While Heidelberg’s theologians did not refrain from anti-Catholic polemic, they did not share in the apocalyptic expectations of some of the members of the Palatine court such as Christian of Anhalt. The Palatine irenic tradition welcomed the grounding of the Protestant Union in 1608, but did not promote the idea that a conspiracy of the Pope, Spain and the Habsburgs would attempt to wipe out Protestantism in the empire.28

Networks

In 1618 Elector Palatine Frederick V’s contacts and connections, both within the Holy Roman Empire and beyond, came as much from his family as from his confession. The most important, formal network was the Protestant Union, also known as the Union of Auhausen, founded by his father and his associates in 1608. Established by the Lutheran and Calvinist princes of the Palatinate, Württemberg, Baden-Durlach, Ansbach, Kulmbach and Pfalz-Neuburg, the Union did not move the empire toward inevitable religious war but attempted to retain influence for Protestants and equilibrium with Catholics. The Union expanded quickly at first, adding the princes of Zweibrücken, Anhalt, electoral Brandenburg, Hessen-Kassel and imperial free cities such as Ulm, Straßburg and Nürnberg within two years, but the new association remained limited in scope and aim. The members never sought to set up a Protestant shadow state in the empire but to maintain the balance between the emperor’s authority and the freedom of the estates to maintain their cultural and confessional diversity. Moreover, the necessarily divergent local concerns of the Union princes and cities prevented the group from becoming anything more than a defensive alliance of the last resort, if at all.

The Union’s first military action showed its lack of cohesion. In June 1610, troops from four Union member estates (the Palatinate, Hessen-Kassel, Ansbach and Baden-Durlach), without consulting the others, crossed the Rhine and attacked towns in Alsace where the Hapsburg Archduke Leopold was supposedly gathering arms and building up a military force. They killed dozens, perhaps as many as a hundred people, in the act. Other Union members regarded the deed as offensive. The Union was unquestionably part of the Elector Palatine’s network in the empire and beyond, but the association was never meant to supplant the members’ loyalty to the emperor. Frederick V’s acquisition of Bohemia forced the issue, and almost all Union members rapidly shrank from the conflict, declared their neutrality and dissolved the alliance.

Palatine relations with Britain were strong but complicated. Frederick V’s greatest personal and political triumph was to win the hand of Elizabeth Stuart, daughter of James I and VI, king of England, Scotland and Ireland, in 1613. The wedding festivities were notably extravagant, and the many entertainments and literary compositions have produced great interest among scholars. King James spent £93,293 on the celebrations, supposedly

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29 With diplomatic history out of fashion, most of the published research in this area is decades old. C.-P. Clasen, The Palatinate in European History (Oxford, 1963), provides a basic overview, but the text completely politicises the Calvinist confession and consigns the Palatine electors and their supporters to the same ‘aggressiveness’ routinely ascribed to communists throughout the world in one of the most heated phases of the Cold War. Many factual errors mar the text as well. A superior study, despite its age, is M. Prestwich (ed.), International Calvinism, 1541–1715 (Oxford, 1985).


32 For a highly theoretical and eclectic treatise on these relations, see M. Rüde, England und Kurpfalz im werdenden Mächteuropa (1608–1632). Konfession – Dynastie – Kulturelle Ausdrucksformen (Stuttgart, 2007).

33 There is no recent scholarly monograph of Elizabeth Stuart, but her letters have been published. See N. Akkerman (ed.), The Correspondence of Elizabeth Stuart, Queen of Bohemia (3 vols, Oxford, 2011–12). Also see M. Lemberg, Eine Königin ohne Reich. Das Leben der Winterkönigin Elisabeth Stuart und ihre Briefe nach Hessen (Marburg, 1996).

34 The most complete treatment is C. Ginzel, Poetry, Politics and Promises of Empire: Prophetic Rhetoric in the English and Neo-Latin Epithalamia on the occasion of the Palatine Marriage in 1613 (Göttingen, 2009). Also see L. Piepho, ‘Making the Impossible Dream: Latin, Print, and the Marriage of Frederick V and
more than on 10 years of building and maintaining all his palaces in England.\textsuperscript{35} Despite rather bellicose wedding panegyrics that frequently invoked Protestantism’s struggle with the papacy, King James preferred a pacific foreign policy.\textsuperscript{36} Also in 1613–14, James pursued a marriage between his son, Charles, and the Spanish Hapsburg Infanta Maria, daughter of King Philip III, a tantalising prospect that lasted until 1623. Pursuing such diverse marriages sent mixed messages, but when Frederick accepted the proffered crown of Bohemia in 1619, James condemned the move in no uncertain terms.

As for James’s other kingdoms, Scotland may be considered part of the Palatine network. Many Scots, officers and soldiers, went to war in the empire on behalf of Elizabeth Stuart. The Elector Palatine and his wife relied on the services of Scottish diplomats such as James Hay, Earl of Carlisle, Sir James Spens, Andrew Sinclair and Sir Robert Anstruther to try to extract money and military commitments from the leaders of Denmark, Sweden, and the Dutch Republic.\textsuperscript{37} The Elector Palatine had no official connections with any notable figures from Ireland. Most of the Irish who came to fight in the empire did so on behalf of the Habsburgs, the Catholic League, and Poland, but 89 are known to have fought for the Palatinate and other Protestant powers.\textsuperscript{38}

After the wedding was over, the pair travelled to Heidelberg, an eight-week, 1,200 km journey, from April to June 1613, considered ‘one of the most spectacular and memorable royal progresses of the era’.\textsuperscript{39} It also revealed the names and nature of Frederick V’s connections on the Continent.

In the United Provinces of the Netherlands, which had joined the Protestant Union in 1613, Frederick and Elizabeth visited more than a dozen towns, costing the Estates General at least £20,000. Frederick’s mother, Electress Dowager Louise Juliana, was the daughter of William of Orange and connected to the dynasty of Nassau, which had supplied leaders in the Netherlands and court advisors and military commanders for the Palatinate. While in the United Provinces, the pair visited a Jesuit church in Emmerich and spent a night at a nunnery in Rhenen, gestures demonstrating their tolerance.

Further up the Rhine in Bonn, they met Johann Sigismund von Hohenzollern, the margrave-elector of Brandenburg, a member of the Union and the only other Calvinist

elector of the empire. One year later, Johann Sigismund would marry his son, Georg Wilhelm, to Frederick’s sister, Elisabeth, further strengthening the bond between the two princes and their principalities. Continuing on their progress, Frederick and Elizabeth dined with the Catholic archbishop-elector of Mainz, Johann Schweikard von Kronberg, the arch-chancellor of the empire, the most influential of the three archbishop-electors in the electoral college. Confessional differences did not prevent hospitality between neighbouring princes, but discretion kept the stay short, to one night. The elector of Mainz gave Elizabeth the apartments reserved for the Holy Roman Emperor and his own private suite for Frederick’s use. On the same journey, the young couple also met the archbishop-electors of Cologne and Trier. Despite differences in Christian confession, the reality of proximity and status, the fact that the Elector Palatine and the archbishop-electors were neighbours and colleagues in the empire, did not preclude basic hospitality and courtesy.

Frederick and Elizabeth also stopped in Worms, the main town of a miniscule bishopric, all but encircled by Palatine lands. It posed no threat, but there were tensions appropriate to the time period. Frederick complained to the bishop in 1618 about the growing number of Jesuits and their activities in or near Palatine territory. Palatine tolerance pertained to the status quo; it did not include Catholic evangelisation. Relations with the town and bishopric of Speyer were similar: neighbourliness had been the norm for centuries, right through the Reformation. The Palatine electors did not try to annex the bishopric of Speyer and the bishops tried to avoid incurring the electors’ ire. Problems about church and school attendance and processions flared up from time to time, but the elector only sent in troops in 1609, in order to free peasants imprisoned by the bishop in a local insurrection. A real crisis began in 1617, when Bishop Philipp von Söttern began to build up the fortifications around the town of Udenheim, later known as Philippsburg. Frederick V complained, with the full support of the imperial free city of Speyer and the duke of Württemberg, insisting on Palatine rights of self-defence, free passage and open access to the castle, rights inherited from the later Middle Ages. The bishop for his part pleaded self-defence, but a fortress at Udenheim could have been used by other military powers, such as those of Spain or the Catholic league. The bishop made assurances but kept on building. After more than a year of fruitless complaints, in June 1618 troops from the Palatinate, Württemberg and the city of Speyer occupied the town and tore down the fortress. The bishop riposted with lawsuits.

Georg Friedrich, the Calvinist Margrave of Baden-Durlach, and Johann Friedrich, the Lutheran duke of Württemberg, both Palatine neighbours and Union members, came to Heidelberg to greet Princess Elizabeth on her arrival in her new home. Frederick V’s relations with nearby Lutheran princes were generally amiable, but shared confession did not guarantee identical interests. Landgrave Moritz of Hessen-Kassel, a Calvinist, tried to push Frederick and the Union to be more open and responsive to Lutherans in other parts of the empire. Landgrave Moritz had close contact with the Lutheran princes of Hessen-Darmstadt and electoral Saxony, and, perhaps out of jealousy, Moritz did not want to see the Union become a military tool to serve Palatine interests alone.

40 On the Elector of Brandenburg, see B. Nischan, Prince, People and Confession. The Second Reformation in Brandenburg (Philadelphia, 1994).
The Upper Palatinate widened Frederick’s network further. First and foremost was the kingdom of Bohemia, under the control of the Habsburg kings and Holy Roman Emperors. Since 1608, a Palatine agent resided in Prague to represent the elector’s interests to the monarchy and the Estates of Bohemia. Leander Ruppel served in this capacity during the crisis in Bohemia that ushered in the Thirty Years’ War. Other Catholic neighbours of the Upper Palatinate included the bishops of Eichstätt and Regensburg, and Wolfgang Wilhelm, duke of Pfalz-Neuburg, a Wittelsbach relative who had converted to Catholicism in 1613, acquired Jülich and Berg in the Rhineland, and married Magdalena, the sister of Duke Maximilian of Bavaria. Lutheran neighbours of the Upper Palatinate included Joachim Ernst, Margrave of Ansbach, Christian, Margrave of Kulmbach, both members of the Protestant Union, and, most important, Johann Georg, the duke of Saxony, who valued his close relations with the Habsburg emperors more than with Union members, Johann Georg’s Lutheranism notwithstanding.44

To the south of the Upper Palatinate lay the duchy of Bavaria, ruled by another branch of the Wittelsbach family. Palatine relations with their Bavarian cousins were particularly fraught with dynastic and Calvinist–Catholic rivalry.45 Duke Maximilian, in corresponding with his brother, the archbishop-elector of Cologne, mentioned the possibility of converting Frederick V to Catholicism, which was wildly unrealistic. But just as unlikely was Frederick’s attempt to persuade his Bavarian cousin to support his acquisition of Bohemia, or, for that matter, to bring Duke Maximilian to stand for election to the throne of the Holy Roman Emperor against the Habsburg dynasty.46

Two more kingdoms lay on the periphery of the Palatine network: Denmark and France. That Elizabeth Stuart was a niece of the king of Denmark, Christian IV, helped to strengthen the ties between Frederick V and that prince, who as duke of Holstein also led the Lower Saxon Circle. King Christian would take up arms in the 1620s on behalf of the Palatines, but only after the war first came to his doorstep.47 Regarding France, the francophone Palatine court had military and financial support to Henry of Navarre during the wars that ravaged France in the later sixteenth century, but when Henry became king, he quickly distanced himself from the Palatine elector. In 1619, King Louis XIII and Cardinal Richelieu did not acknowledge Frederick’s claim to the throne of Bohemia and stayed out of the conflict until the 1630s.48

In 1614, at the age of 18, Frederick V signed his last testament, indicating his priorities for the Palatinate and the allies he thought he could trust most. In the event of his death, he named his eldest son the heir of the electorate and stipulated that it remain Calvinist. The guardians would be Frederick’s brother, Ludwig Philipp, and if he were yet too young, then Duke Johann II of Zweibrücken, Frederick’s Wittelsbach relative, who was also married to his sister, Louise Juliane. As executors Frederick named King James I and his son, Charles, the Protestant Union and the Estates General of the United Provinces.49

45 For a superb study of this long-standing, complicated relationship, particularly with regard to court culture and patronage, Renaissance humanism and marital ties, see Thomas, A House Divided.
47 See P. D. Lockhart, Denmark in the Thirty Years’ War, 1618–1648: King Christian IV and the Decline of the Oldenburg State (Selinsgrove, 1996).
Frederick V’s attempt to win Bohemia backfired, and the ensuing war devastated his lands. The people of the Palatinate suffered terribly for it, while the prince lived out his days as an expensive, undesirable guest in the Netherlands.50 Perhaps he should have listened to Thomas More’s Raphael, who advised the king of France to stay out of war lest he needlessly bring ruin on himself and his people. Instead, he should stay in his principality, which is quite large enough, rule well, make it prosperous, and keep it peaceful, letting go of all thoughts of acquiring new lands. One never knows, but chances are that in that case, history would have been rather different.

Selected Bibliography


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