

Nuremberg's Noble Servant: Werner von Parsberg (d. 1455) between Town and Nobility in Late Medieval Germany*

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The noble and steadfast knight Werner von Parsberg was then called to lead the third division, and he was entrusted with the banner of the noble town of Nuremberg.¹

On 11 March 1450 Werner von Parsberg served as standard bearer for the imperial town of Nuremberg at the encounter later known as the battle of the Pillenreuther Weiher, one of the few pitched battles—and Nuremberg's most notable victory—in the war which had broken out the previous summer between the town and the Hohenzollern Margrave Albrecht 'Achilles' of Ansbach. This was in turn just one theatre in a major conflict taking place throughout the southern German-speaking lands of the Holy Roman Empire between an alliance of territorial princes and a league comprising mostly towns, with some princely allies. In this struggle—the so-called Second South German Towns' War—Werner von Parsberg appears at first sight to have been fighting for the wrong side: he was a nobleman riding into battle for a town, in a war that was presented by both sides as one between 'town' and 'nobility'. This article will explain why Parsberg ended up as Nuremberg's standard bearer, and discuss the implications of his crossing of supposed social boundaries for our understanding of the long-term evolution of German social identities.²

The battle between town and nobility was the chief theme in the wartime propaganda of Albrecht Achilles, whose ancestors had gradually ceded the rights which they had once held in Nuremberg to the town's council. Albrecht's partisans depicted townspeople as arrogant 'peasants behind walls' and compared them to a donkey trying on the pelt of a lion. The donkey was to be tamed by its master, the margrave, and the 'peasants' who had become sick on their inappropriately rich diet were prescribed thin gruel by the margrave as a wise doctor, who also suggested a cure for ailing noblemen: they should capture rich merchants and sweat

*I would like to thank the staff of the Parsberg castle museum for allowing me to access their collections. I am also grateful to Duncan Hardy and Len Scales for their comments on previous drafts. The research underpinning this article was undertaken at Durham University and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (grant number AH/G01518X/1), the Institute for Historical Research and the German History Society.

¹Karl von Hegel *et al.* (eds), *Chroniken der deutschen Städte*, 37 vols (Leipzig, 1862–1968; reprinted Göttingen, 1961–9) (CDS), vol. 2, p. 484: 'auch war berüft der edel und vest ritter herr Wernher von Parßberg in daz dritt glit an die spitzen, und im ward bevolhen daz panier der edelen stat Nurmberg'.

²On the battle of the Pillenreuther Weiher, see Enno Bünz, 'Kunz von Kaufungen im Markgräflerkrieg (1449/50)', in Joachim Emig (ed.), *Der Altenburger Prinzenraub von 1455* (Beucha, 2007), pp. 161–94, here pp. 179–80; Rochus von Liliencron (ed.), *Die historischen Volkslieder der Deutschen vom 13. bis 16. Jahrhundert*, 5 vols (Leipzig, 1865–9), vol. 1, pp. 420–7. On the Second Towns' War see Gabriel Zeilinger, *Lebensformen im Krieg: eine Alltags- und Erfahrungsgeschichte des süddeutschen Städtekriegs 1449/50* (Stuttgart, 2007).

out their money.³ The margrave had himself presented as nothing less than the saviour of the lower ranks of the nobility from the townspeople, who were supposedly usurping nobles' privileges and who sought to 'oppress' the nobility and to drive it from its rightful leadership of society.⁴ It is no surprise therefore that Nuremberg's partisans had their revenge in song following the margrave's retreat from the field at the Pillenreuther Weiher, which the town's propagandists represented as just desserts for Achilles's showboating. But even in their mockery of the margrave's hubris, Nuremberg's lyricists did not dispute his contention that the war was between town and nobility: the lesser nobility (*adel*) had also thirsted for the battle, and they too were punished in short order.⁵ Erhard Schürstab, the councillor charged with directing Nuremberg's war effort, wrote that the fighting began when the 'princes and the entire nobility were so stirred up against Nuremberg and all the imperial towns' that these towns were forced to ally for mutual protection.⁶

Werner von Parsberg was not only defying the neat distinctions of commentators with particular agendas to promote. He was also in opposition to members of his own family and to hundreds of his fellow rural nobles who, for whatever reason, backed Albrecht Achilles and other princes.⁷ On Parsberg's side there were considerably fewer nobles, and some of these were mercenaries from far afield. Parsberg's commander at the Pillenreuther Weiher, Heinrich Reuß von Plauen, was a Saxon noble employed by Nuremberg solely as a military leader in this particular conflict. But Parsberg was entrusted with the town's standard because he had been in Nuremberg's service since 1430, at first as a salaried retainer and latterly also in the office of imperial chief magistrate (*Reichsschultheiß*). This in itself is no satisfactory explanation of his role in 1450, however, because the extent of Parsberg's engagement with Nuremberg only deepens its contrast with the voices which framed townspeople and nobles as opponents.⁸

Parsberg and his family were of considerable significance in their homeland, today's south-western Upper Palatinate. Werner's brother Friedrich had been bishop of Regensburg until his death in 1449,⁹ and another brother, Hans, was regent in

³Karina Kellermann, *Abschied vom 'historischen Volkslied': Studien zu Funktion, Ästhetik und Publizität der Gattung historisch-politische Ereignisdichtung* (Tübingen, 2000), pp. 143–7; Ernst Schubert, 'Albrecht Achilles, Markgraf und Kurfürst von Brandenburg 1414–1486', in Gerhard Pfeiffer and Alfred Wendehorst (eds), *Fränkische Lebensbilder*, vol. 4 (Würzburg, 1971), pp. 130–72, here p. 140; Michel Beheim, *Die Gedichte des Michel Beheim*, ed. Hans Gille and Ingeborg Spriewald, 3 vols (Berlin, 1971), vol. 2, pp. 640–2 (no. 318).

⁴Kellermann, *Abschied*, pp. 143–5. See Hilla Zmora, 'Das Verhältnis Markgraf Albrecht Achilles' zum fränkischen Adel', in Mario Müller (ed.), *Kurfürst Albrecht Achilles (1414–1486), Kurfürst von Brandenburg, Burggraf von Nürnberg* (Ansbach, 2014), pp. 235–48, here pp. 236–40; also Ben Pope, 'Identity, Discourse, and Political Strategy: Margrave Albrecht Achilles (1414–86) and the Rhetoric of Antagonism between Town and Nobility in Mid Fifteenth Century Upper Germany', in Linda Clark (ed.), *The Fifteenth Century XV: Writing, Records and Rhetoric* (Woodbridge, 2017), pp. 73–92.

⁵Kellermann, *Abschied*, p. 166.

⁶CDS, vol. 2, p. 137: 'die herren und aller adel wurden so seer bewegt wider die stat Nürnberg und wider all reichstet'.

⁷For Parsberg's opposition to Nuremberg see CDS, vol. 2, pp. 431, 435, 441.

⁸Parsberg's career at Nuremberg has previously been only very briefly described: Heinz Schauwecker, 'Die Ritter von Parsberg im Dienst der freien Reichsstadt Nürnberg', *Die Oberpfalz*, 38, 6 (1950), pp. 97–100.

⁹See Karl Hausberger, 'Parsberg, Friedrich von (um 1385–1449): 1437–1449 Bischof von Regensburg', in Erwin Gatz and Clemens Brodtkorb (eds), *Die Bischöfe des Heiligen Römischen Reiches, 1448 bis 1648: ein biographisches Lexikon* (Berlin, 1996), pp. 517–18.

the Upper Palatinate for the Wittelsbach King Christoph of Denmark in the 1440s. Werner therefore had political options, and he chose the one which was an anathema to the vociferous 'pro-noble' party of Albrecht Achilles, and which four hundred years later would be considered a near impossible step for all but the most base or desperate of nobles. Without knowing it, and (as we shall see) in clear-eyed pursuit of his own political advantage, Parsberg created a small breach in a dichotomy at the heart of generations of Germans' understanding of their own society.

I: 'Town' and 'Nobility' in Models of German Society

Werner von Parsberg's relationship with Nuremberg directly challenges an important way of thinking about German society which was particularly widespread and significant between the Enlightenment and the Cold War. But it is in the late Middle Ages that we first encounter social commentary which assumes the opposition of 'town' and 'nobility'. This discourse developed themes from the earlier dichotomy of 'merchant' and 'knight', but it transformed their application from a discourse primarily about aristocratic social morality to that of conflicting social forces which we find in the polemics of Albrecht Achilles.¹⁰ The later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries produced more—and more vociferous—partisan apologies and denunciations from self-identified 'town' or 'noble' standpoints, now universally depicted as mutually exclusive and often hostile social identities.¹¹

This late medieval dichotomy of 'town' and 'nobility' fed into the post-Enlightenment dialectic of bourgeois and aristocratic cultures and social values. A preoccupation with antagonistic relationships between town and nobility was nourished in turn by social and political tensions common to the industrializing societies of western Europe, but also by fears of a bourgeois weakness in relation to the nobility which was seen as denying Germany the 'natural' triumph of bourgeois liberalism taken for granted elsewhere in western Europe.¹² The burgeoning interest in medieval history produced a 'heroic age' for this duality of town and nobility, giving its past a depth which helped to explain its apparent inevitability in the present, whilst difficult contemporary concerns could sometimes be best addressed in medieval and early modern period costume.¹³

Wagner's opera *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (1868) is a classic example, with its central tension between the impulsive and passionate young knight Walther von Stolzing and the orderly but ultimately stifling world of the artisan mastersingers in the town. It also

¹⁰ See Ursula Peters, *Literatur in der Stadt: Studien zu den sozialen Voraussetzungen und kulturellen Organisationsformen städtischer Literatur im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen, 1983), pp. 48–58.

¹¹ For example, the *Entschuldigung des Adels zu Francken, so bey dem Schweinfurtischen vertrag gewest sindt* (1523), reprinted in Karl Schottenloher (ed.), *Flugschriften zur Ritterschaftsbewegung des Jahres 1523* (Münster, 1929), pp. 100–12. An undated text (probably mid- to late fifteenth century) presents each side's grievances against the other in a fictional court case (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Cgm 4930 ff. 20r–23v).

¹² David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford, 1984), especially pp. 39–43.

¹³ See Peter Johaneck, 'Adel und Stadt im Mittelalter', in Gunnar Teske (ed.), *Adel und Stadt: Vorträge auf dem Kolloquium der Vereinigten Westfälischen Adelsarchive e.V. vom 28.–29. Oktober 1993 in Münster* (Münster, 1998), pp. 9–35, here p. 9. For post-Enlightenment ideas about town and nobility more generally, see Klaus Graf, 'Feindbild und Vorbild: Bemerkungen zur städtischen Wahrnehmung des Adels', *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins*, 141, n.s. 102 (1993), pp. 121–54, especially pp. 136–44.

neatly illustrates the complex relationship between modern and medieval discourses. In the opera, reconciliation is possible through the wisdom and self-denial of the cobbler and mastersinger Hans Sachs, although the real-life Sachs (1494–1576) was the author of a biting satire on the supposed rapacity of the nobility: a group of nobles in a tavern beg for the life of a highwayman to be spared, until they learn that he is not in fact a noble like themselves, and therefore has no right to be a robber.¹⁴ True to sources such as these, most German historians of the nineteenth century were sceptical about the potential for harmony between late medieval and early modern townspeople and nobles.

Medieval townspeople were credited with the full ‘firmament of values’ of the post-Enlightenment bourgeoisie.¹⁵ Those favourable to these values found in the late medieval towns (in comparison to the nobility) a ‘more pleasant and edifying tableau of ever-striving diligence ... and rational love of order which accepts the necessity of wise and fitting laws and willingly submits to them’.¹⁶ Just as the bourgeoisie was invested with the potential to ‘modernize’ nineteenth-century Germany, the medieval towns also pointed the way to the future: they were the cradles of ‘culture’ in Germany, and as isolated ‘walled republics’ nurturing ‘civic freedom’ they were the only basis for a ‘national reinvigoration’.¹⁷ Late medieval nobles, by comparison, were distinguished by their ‘unending violence, robbery and plunder’.¹⁸ Much of this was caused by nobles’ hatred and envy of the prosperity of the towns, whilst the nobles themselves were ruined by excessive luxury.¹⁹ In the view of Gustav Freytag, this difference in fortune went hand in hand with a fundamental opposition of mentalities: ‘the power of money seemed the greatest tyranny to those schooled to despise working for one’s living’.²⁰

Yet in Freytag’s popular *Bilder aus der deutschen Vergangenheit* (1859) we can also detect a sympathy with nobles’ apparent plight, and an identification with the ‘wild poetry’ of their desperate feuds against the towns.²¹ No one sought to deny the dark picture of the medieval nobility, but the Romantic counterpart to the liberal valorization of the towns extolled the nobility’s law of might (*Faustrecht*) as the ‘highest work of art’ and celebrated individual freedom, strength, bravery and loyalty to old ideals.²² From Goethe’s *Götz von*

¹⁴Hans Sachs, *Werke*, ed. Adelbert von Keller and Edmund Goetze, 26 vols (Tübingen, 1870–1908), vol. 17, pp. 276–9.

¹⁵For the ‘firmament of values’ see Manfred Hettling and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, ‘Der bürgerliche Wertehimmel: zum Problem individueller Lebensführung im 19. Jahrhundert’, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 23, 3 (1997), pp. 333–59.

¹⁶Dietrich Hermann Hegewisch, *Allgemeine Übersicht der deutschen Kulturgeschichte bis zu Maximilian dem Ersten* (Hamburg, 1788), p. 66: ‘das angenehmere und lehrreichere Gemälde des immer emporstrebenden Fleisses ... und der vernünftigen Ordnungsliebe, welche die Notwendigkeit billiger und weiser Gesetze erkennt und sich ihnen bereitwillig unterwirft’. See Peter Johaneck, ‘Mittelalterliche Stadt und bürgerliches Geschichtsbild im 19. Jahrhundert’, in Gerd Althoff (ed.), *Die Deutschen und ihr Mittelalter* (Darmstadt, 1992), p. 88.

¹⁷‘Cradles of culture’: Johann Christoph Adelung, *Versuch einer Geschichte der Kultur des menschlichen Geschlechts* (Leipzig, 1782), p. 372. ‘Walled republics’: Gustav Freytag, *Bilder aus der deutschen Vergangenheit: vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit* (6th edn, Leipzig, 1871; 1st edn, Leipzig, 1859), pp. 293 (‘bürgerliche Freiheit ... nationale Kraftentfaltung’), 296.

¹⁸Adelung, *Versuch*, p. 372: ‘unaufhörliche Gewaltthätigkeiten, Plackereyen und Raubereyen’.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 372; Freytag, *Bilder*, p. 296.

²⁰Freytag, *Bilder*, p. 300: ‘Die Macht des Geldes erschien denen, welche Erwerb durch Arbeit zu verachten gelehrt waren, als höchste Tyrannei.’

²¹*Ibid.*, p. 296.

²²‘Faustrecht’: Graf, ‘Feindbild und Vorbild’, p. 143, quoting Justus Möser (1720–94).

Berlichingen (1774) to George Eliot's *Mill on the Floss* (1860), the German robber knight (*Raubritter*) exerted a deep fascination. For Eliot these figures were 'somewhat grim and drunken ogres', yet 'they had a certain grandeur of the wild beast in them—they were forest boars with tusks, tearing and rending, not the ordinary domestic grunter'.²³ The imagined reconciliation of town and nobility had dramatic potential which was exploited by both Wagner and the English children's author Charlotte M. Yonge. In Yonge's *The Dove in the Eagle's Nest* (1866) a gentle daughter of the city is sent to live in the grim and forbidding castle of an impoverished noble family. The resulting love match tempers the majestically flawed noble characters with civic responsibility and restores a world in which the well-directed energy and leadership of the nobility once again carries the day.²⁴

Thus the dichotomy of town and nobility in the late Middle Ages was never questioned, although it was interpreted in radically differing ways.²⁵ However these qualities were perceived, the town stood for reason, order and the primacy of the material; the nobility represented virility, resilience and the overriding importance of individual honour. These universal values were matched by the apparent universality of their identification with the social groups of townspeople (or bourgeois) and nobles.²⁶ In this model there was obviously no room for alliances between town and nobility. Freytag noted that some nobles contracted to serve the towns, but assumed that they would inevitably be disloyal, as their hearts were with their relatives outside the walls.²⁷

The anachronisms of this liberal-Romantic tradition were exposed as the tensions which had inspired it retreated from the front rank of sociocultural issues after 1945. Otto Brunner pointed out that the medieval *Bürger* (burgher, or citizen of a town) could not be equated with the modern 'bourgeois' *Bürger*, let alone with the citizen of a liberal democratic state.²⁸ This threw into question the prevailing assumption that medieval towns were 'anti-feudal' forces. Brunner in fact asserted that towns were simply 'special peace districts' or 'autonomous jurisdictions' (*Sonderfriedensbezirke*) just like any noble lordship, and that the urban elite, like the nobility, expressed itself chiefly through chivalric culture. The latter contention in particular has been amply demonstrated by subsequent studies showing that medieval burghers—at least as far as those with wealth and power were concerned—shared more of their aspirations and assumptions with their noble neighbours than with any later bourgeois.²⁹

²³ George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (Ware, 1993; 1st edn, 1860), p. 253.

²⁴ Charlotte Mary Yonge, *The Dove in the Eagle's Nest* (Oxford, before 1948; 1st edn, 1866).

²⁵ See Ulrich Andermann, *Ritterliche Gewalt und bürgerliche Selbstbehauptung: Untersuchungen zur Kriminalisierung und Bekämpfung des spätmittelalterlichen Raubrittertums am Beispiel norddeutscher Hansestädte* (Frankfurt/Main, 1991), p. 18.

²⁶ See Dennis Sweeney, 'Class', in Matthew Jefferies (ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Imperial Germany* (London and New York, 2015), pp. 261–86, here p. 274 on the German bourgeoisie's 'unacknowledged universalizing of particular values and lifestyles'.

²⁷ Freytag, *Bilder*, p. 293: 'Ungehorsam der Edlen, welche der Stadt geschworen hatten, aber mit ihren Herzen zuweilen auf Seite ihrer Vettern draußen waren'.

²⁸ Otto Brunner, "'Bürgertum" und "Feudalwelt" in der europäischen Sozialgeschichte' (1956), in Carl Haase (ed.), *Die Stadt des Mittelalters*, 3 vols (Darmstadt, 1973), vol. 3, pp. 480–99. See also Otto Brunner, 'Bürgertum und Adel in Nieder- und Oberösterreich', *Anzeiger der österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse*, 86 (1949), pp. 495–517, especially p. 517.

²⁹ See in particular Peters, *Literatur in der Stadt*, p. 13; Rainer Demski, *Adel und Lübeck: Studien zum Verhältnis zwischen adliger und bürgerlicher Kultur im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt/Main, 1996). Also Werner Paravicini, *Die ritterlich-höfische Kultur des Mittelalters* (Munich, 1994), pp. 32–5; Horst Wenzel, *Höfische Geschichte: literarische Tradition und Gegenwartsdeutung in den volkssprachigen Chroniken des hohen und späten Mittelalters* (Bern, 1980), pp. 191–235.

This advance was aided by appreciation of the scale of burghers' rural land holdings—making them the immediate neighbours or even partners of nobles in the rural economy and rural lordship—and especially by new research on the presence of the nobility in many German-speaking towns, where nobles staged their premier social occasions using buildings and resources borrowed from civic authorities.³⁰ Some tenets of the liberal tradition were sustained by new socioeconomic approaches which contended that the rural nobility was being economically outperformed by the towns as a result of the demographic crises of the late Middle Ages and the problems which these caused for all landowners.³¹ But this 'crisis of the nobility' thesis has also come under sustained attack from research showing both that late medieval nobles were unlikely to have been experiencing structural economic problems on anything like the scale previously imagined, and that many nobles could raise huge sums of money and dominate certain credit markets.³²

The collapse of traditional interpretative models confronts historians with two main questions: first, how to account for the many conflicts and animosities between late medieval townspeople and nobles which were previously ascribed to a clash of cultures; and second, how to explain the origins and development of ideas about townspeople and nobles as antagonists. To date, only outline models of this process of identity formation have been proposed, ranging from a general 'late medieval process of social differentiation' to discussion of deep changes in the social structure and consequent self-perception of the nobility.³³ The most detailed hypotheses have been advanced by Klaus Graf and Joseph Morsel, who see the years of tension between princes and towns leading up to the war of 1449 as decisive in the 'ideological polarization' of town and

³⁰ Arend Mindermann, *Adel in der Stadt des Spätmittelalters: Göttingen und Stade 1300 bis 1600* (Bielefeld, 1996); Thomas Zotz, 'Adel in der Stadt des deutschen Spätmittelalters: Erscheinungsformen und Verhaltensweisen', *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins*, 141, n.s. 102 (1993), pp. 22–50; Andreas Ranft, 'Adel und Stadt im späten Mittelalter: ihr Verhältnis am Beispiel der Adelsgesellschaften', in Stefan Rhein (ed.), *Die Kraichgauer Ritterschaft in der frühen Neuzeit* (Sigmaringen, 1993), pp. 47–64; Thomas Zotz, 'Adel, Bürgertum und Turnier in deutschen Städten vom 13. bis 15. Jahrhundert', in Josef Fleckenstein (ed.), *Das ritterliche Turnier im Mittelalter: Beiträge zu einer vergleichenden Formen- und Verhaltensgeschichte des Rittertums* (Göttingen, 1985), pp. 450–99.

³¹ For example Herbert Helbig, 'Die brandenburgischen Städte des 15. Jahrhunderts zwischen Landesherrschaft und adligen Ständen', in Wilhelm Rausch (ed.), *Die Stadt am Ausgang des Mittelalters* (Linz, 1974), pp. 227–50, here p. 230. See summary in Andermann, *Ritterliche Gewalt*, pp. 70–2.

³² Joseph Morsel, 'Adel in Armut—Armut im Adel? Beobachtungen zur Situation des Adels im Spätmittelalter', in Otto Gerhard Oexle (ed.), *Armut im Mittelalter* (Ostfildern, 2004), pp. 127–64; Hilla Zmora, 'Princely State-Making and the "Crisis of the Aristocracy" in Late Medieval Germany', *Past & Present*, 153 (1996), pp. 37–63; Kurt Andermann, 'Zu den Einkommensverhältnissen des Kraichgauer Adels an der Wende vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit', in Stefan Rhein (ed.), *Die Kraichgauer Ritterschaft in der frühen Neuzeit* (Sigmaringen, 1993), pp. 65–121; Markus Bittmann, *Kreditwirtschaft und Finanzierungsmethoden: Studien zu den wirtschaftlichen Verhältnissen des Adels im westlichen Bodenseeraum 1300–1500* (Stuttgart, 1991).

³³ Johaneck, 'Adel und Stadt', p. 25: 'das Ergebnis eines spätmittelalterlichen ständischen Differenzierungsprozesses'. Heinz Lieberich, 'Rittermässigkeit und bürgerliche Gleichheit', in Sten Gagnér, Hans Schlosser and Wolfgang Wiegand (eds), *Festschrift für Hermann Krause* (Cologne and Vienna, 1975), pp. 66–93, here pp. 68–70, 86; Joseph Morsel, 'Die Erfindung des Adels: zur Soziogenese des Adels am Ende des Mittelalters—das Beispiel Frankens', in Otto Gerhard Oexle and Werner Paravicini (eds), *Nobilitas: Funktion und Repräsentation des Adels in Alteuropa* (Göttingen, 1997), pp. 312–75.

nobility (Graf), or in the discursive formation of opposing 'town' and 'noble' identities which reinforced one another (Morsel).³⁴

An important approach to the study of late medieval antagonism between town and nobility (in both discourse and lived experience) is to examine the possibilities for peaceful coexistence and cooperation between townspeople and rural nobles. Such constructive relationships were potentially a significant factor in their own right, whilst changes in their nature and extent are also an important barometer of tensions. Yet close political relationships between townspeople and nobles have hardly been re-evaluated in light of the new tendencies in scholarship since 1945. Thus we still expect to find that nobles' service for towns was always and inevitably lacking in substance, sincerity and stability, with nobles caught between their consciences and their material needs. Max Mendheim summarized this orthodoxy in 1889, when he described Nuremberg's paid retainers as members of the 'downwardly mobile knighthood' who took service with the towns primarily to secure a steady income, and secondarily for protection against the power of territorial princes.³⁵

In the same tradition as Mendheim's study, the presence and significance of towns' noble servitors has consistently been recognized by research on urban military history. Work in this field has focused on the terms of servitors' contracts and the duties which they undertook, with limited analysis of the servitors' lives beyond their employment with towns.³⁶ The most significant amongst a handful of studies offering a broader perspective is Hans Domsta's work on Cologne's network of noble 'outburghers', which formed a counterweight to the archbishops of Cologne on the lower Rhine.³⁷ This was a system of exceptionally long-lasting relationships (the outburgher status could be hereditary), and Domsta's conclusions have not been compared with the less substantial arrays of nobles bound to towns across the German-speaking Empire by treaties, contracts or other reciprocal arrangements as both employees and political allies.³⁸ Thus

³⁴ Graf, 'Feindbild und Vorbild', especially pp. 126–7, 132; Morsel, 'Die Erfindung des Adels'. For a recent overview of the problem see Niklas Konzen, *Aller Welt Feind: Fehdenetzwerke um Hans von Rechberg († 1464) im Kontext der südwestdeutschen Territorienbildung* (Stuttgart, 2014), pp. 52–8.

³⁵ Max Mendheim, *Das reichsstädtische, besonders Nürnberger, Söldnerwesen im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1889), p. 4: 'die Glieder des sinkenden Rittertums'. See also Karl Saur, 'Die Wehrverfassung in schwäbischen Städten des Mittelalters. Straßburg, Basel, Augsburg, Ulm, Rottweil, Überlingen, Villingen' (Ph.D. Thesis, Albert-Ludwigs Universität, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1911), pp. 50, 66.

³⁶ For example, Brigitte Maria Wübbeke, *Das Militärwesen der Stadt Köln im 15. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1991). Older research in this field is discussed in David Eltis, 'Towns and Defence in Later Medieval Germany', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 33 (1989), pp. 91–103. See also Eberhard Isenmann, *Die deutsche Stadt im Mittelalter 1150–1550: Stadtgestalt, Recht, Verfassung, Stadtreigement, Kirche, Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft* (Vienna, 2012), pp. 453–4. One study of alliances between a town and rural nobles takes a similar approach: Jochen Zorn, 'Bündnisverträge der Stadt Frankfurt am Main mit der Adel der Umgebung im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert' (Doctoral Thesis, Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe Universität, Frankfurt/Main, 1966).

³⁷ Hans J. Domsta, *Die Kölner Außenbürger: Untersuchungen zur Politik und Verfassung der Stadt Köln von der Mitte des 13. bis zur Mitte des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Bonn, 1973).

³⁸ For a brief case study of Lüneburg see Niels Petersen, *Die Stadt vor den Toren: Lüneburg und sein Umland im Spätmittelalter* (Göttingen, 2015), pp. 75–7. See also overviews in Tom Scott, *The City-State in Europe, 1000–1600: Hinterland—Territory—Region* (Oxford, 2012), p. 156, and Herbert Obenaus, *Recht und Verfassung der Gesellschaften mit St. Jörgenschild in Schwaben: Untersuchungen über Adel, Einung, Schiedsgericht und Fehde im fünfzehnten Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1961), pp. 205–10. Florian Dirks, *Konfliktaustragung im norddeutschen Raum des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts: Untersuchungen zu Fehdewesen und Tagfahrt* (Göttingen, 2015), p. 269 calls for further research in this field.

we find that even historians who question the interpretative value of the supposed ‘crisis of the nobility’ still read nobles’ service for towns as ‘of almost exclusively economic interest’ to nobles, in comparison to the broader range of reasons leading them to enter princely service.³⁹ The case of Werner von Parsberg cuts right across these assumptions and enables us to examine an individual nobleman’s reasons for entering into the service of a town in expectation of personal and familial advancement rather than in flight from political and economic problems. A close examination of Parsberg’s opportunities and possible motives will enable us to develop a new model for understanding cooperative relationships between towns and rural nobles.

II: Nuremberg and its Servitors

To understand Werner von Parsberg’s motivation we also need to consider the town’s reasons for entering into this relationship. In practical terms this question refers to the policy of Nuremberg’s ruling oligarchy (or patriciate) of around forty families, who in the mid-fifteenth century had firm control of civic government through their members who served on the town’s inner council.⁴⁰ These men directed the internal affairs and external relations of a metropolis of over 20,000 people, which was effectively an autonomous city state under imperial overlordship (although with particularly close financial and ideological ties to the crown) and enjoyed pan-European trading links and an international reputation for craft production in metalwork and other fields.⁴¹

In common with other wealthy and politically independent German-speaking towns, Nuremberg maintained a force of mounted soldiers who served the town in various capacities.⁴² In any given year during peacetime Nuremberg retained between around sixty and one hundred servitors, many (though not all) of whom were rural nobles.⁴³ They were deployed in a variety of tasks: on patrol in the surrounding countryside to combat the threat of highway robbery; escorting visiting dignitaries to and from Nuremberg; as troops in battle and as military commanders; and as diplomatic envoys and representatives. Certain servitors had particular specialisms or worked within a certain region, but in general any servitor could undertake tasks of any type. There was, however, a clear hierarchy within the group which ensured that a high-ranking servitor such as Werner von Parsberg would only escort the town’s most honoured guests, serve as a commander in the field or undertake the kind of diplomatic missions which might also be entrusted to town councillors.

³⁹Andermann, ‘Zu den Einkommensverhältnissen’, pp. 90–1: ‘so gut wie ausschließlich unter wirtschaftlichem Aspekt interessant’.

⁴⁰For a detailed overview see Peter Fleischmann, *Rat und Patriziat in Nürnberg*, 3 vols (Neustadt/Aisch, 2008).

⁴¹On Nuremberg’s population see Gerald Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century* (New York, 1966), p. 37.

⁴²For groups of servitors retained by the Swabian League, Frankfurt am Main and Lübeck see Harro Blezinger, *Der schwäbische Städtebund in den Jahren 1438–1445: mit einem Überblick über seine Entwicklung seit 1389* (Stuttgart, 1954), p. 17; Gerhard Fouquet, ‘Die Finanzierung von Krieg und Verteidigung in oberdeutschen Städten des späten Mittelalters’, in Bernhard Kirchgässner and Günter Scholz (eds), *Stadt und Krieg: 25. Arbeitstagung des Südwestdeutschen Arbeitskreises für Stadtgeschichtsforschung in Böblingen 1986* (Sigmaringen, 1989), pp. 41–82, here p. 55; Elsbet Orth, *Die Fehden der Reichsstadt Frankfurt am Main im Spätmittelalter: Fehderecht und Fehdepraxis im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden, 1973), pp. 116–17; Demski, *Adel und Lübeck*, pp. 75–6.

⁴³Paul Sander, *Die Reichsstädtische Haushaltung Nürnbergs: dargestellt auf Grund ihres Zustandes von 1431 bis 1440* (Leipzig, 1902), p. 151 gives figures of between 63 and 108 soldiers for the 1430s.

If town and nobility are understood as opposites, they can also be considered complementary. An assumption that towns employed nobles because they needed men with military expertise remains the scholarly consensus, though it originates in the idea of town and nobility as diametrically opposed cultures in which nobles fought and burghers traded.⁴⁴ This almost certainly underestimates the fighting capacity of burghers, including that of the civic elite. The Nuremberg patrician Ulman Stromer's late fourteenth-century chronicle of his family and town, for example, names members of Nuremberg's leading families who were killed or wounded in battle.⁴⁵ Werner Overstolz of Cologne served with men under his command against the Hussites in 1421 and 1422, then returned to take up a judicial office in the town, whilst the Besserer family of Ulm won a reputation through successive generations as military leaders.⁴⁶ The armour and warhorses owned by citizens as well as their chivalric self-presentation on funerary monuments and in chronicles could all be dismissed as window dressing, but the leading citizens of Nuremberg were certainly not non-combatants.⁴⁷ At the battle of the Pillenreuther Weiher Werner von Parsberg had command over sons of patrician families including Herdegen Holzschuher, Fritz Derrer and Balthazar Pömer; alongside him as a division commander was the patrician Erasmus Schürstab Junior, and Sebald Pfinzing protected his rear.⁴⁸ Overall command was given by the council to the prominent nobleman Heinrich Reuß von Plauen, but beneath him at least as many high-ranking burghers took the field as did noble servitors.⁴⁹

Were nobles indispensable as diplomats? In the highest political circles the leading citizens generally had the better connections, and the noble servitors functioned chiefly as status symbols. During the 1444 imperial diet in Nuremberg the council ordered that a number of the noble servitors should be present at the town hall every day to help carry wine for the princes meeting there.⁵⁰ Noble servitors did undertake diplomatic missions alongside and on behalf of the councillors: Werner von Parsberg, for instance, accompanied councillor Nicholas Muffel to Saxony in 1443 and 1444, having himself

⁴⁴Isenmann, *Die deutsche Stadt im Mittelalter*, p. 453; Johanek, 'Adel und Stadt', p. 30; Mindermann, *Adel in der Stadt*, p. 340; Andermann, 'Zu den Einkommensverhältnissen', p. 188; Obenaus, *Recht und Verfassung*, p. 209.

⁴⁵CDS, vol. 1, pp. 10, 68.

⁴⁶Overstolz: Wolfgang Herborn, 'Bürgerliches Selbstverständnis im spätmittelalterlichen Köln: Bemerkungen zu zwei Hausbüchern aus der ersten Hälfte des 15. Jahrhunderts', in Werner Besch, Klaus Fehn, Dietrich Höroldt, Franz Insigler and Matthias Zender (eds), *Die Stadt in der europäischen Geschichte: Festschrift Edith Ennen* (Bonn, 1972), pp. 490–520, here pp. 493–4. See also Wübbeke, *Das Militärwesen der Stadt Köln*, pp. 116–18. Besserer: Albrecht Rieber, 'Das Patriziat von Ulm, Augsburg, Ravensburg, Memmingen, Biberach', in Hellmuth Rößler (ed.), *Deutsches Patriziat 1430–1740* (Limburg/Lahn, 1968), pp. 299–351, here pp. 302, 307.

⁴⁷Military equipment: Demski, *Adel und Lübeck*, pp. 76–7; Wübbeke, *Das Militärwesen der Stadt Köln*, pp. 150–1; Brunner, 'Bürgertum und Adel in Nieder- und Oberösterreich', p. 499. On self-presentation see, for instance, Gottfried Hagen's chronicle of 'chivalric Cologne': Wenzel, *Höfische Geschichte*, pp. 191–235. Compare Kellermann, *Abschied*, p. 166, in which Nuremberg's citizens are described as fighting 'in knightly manner' (*ritterlich*) at the Pillenreuther Weiher.

⁴⁸CDS, vol. 2, p. 484. See also Zeilinger, *Lebensformen im Krieg*, pp. 58, 169.

⁴⁹On Reuß von Plauen see Walther Böhme, 'Heinrich Reuss von Plauen als Nürnberger Feldhauptmann im Kampfe mit Markgraf Achilles von Brandenburg', in Vogtländischen Altertumsforschenden Verein zu Hohenleuben (ed.), *Festschrift zur Feier des fünfundsanzwanzigjährigen Regierungsjubiläums sr. hochfürstlichen Durchlaucht des regierenden Fürsten Reuss j. L. Herrn Heinrich XIV. am 11. Juli 1892* (Hohenleuben, 1892), pp. 40–78.

⁵⁰CDS, vol. 3, p. 387: 'Auch wart ein ordnung gemacht unter den erbergen soldnern und dienern, daz ir alle tag ein antzall auf dem rathauß waren, und so fursten und ander hern hinausen komen, daz sie hulfen den wein tragen'.

led a delegation to meet three unnamed princes at Neunburg vorm Wald in the Upper Palatinate in 1433 (he was asked to keep his expenses to a minimum on the journey home).⁵¹ But the councillors themselves handled far more of Nuremberg's diplomacy directly, especially the crucial relationships with the imperial court.

Noble servitors were useful entry points to networks of nobles in Nuremberg's hinterland with which the patriciate might otherwise have had few connections except for those mediated through princes, and Werner von Parsberg represented Nuremberg at a number of hearings and court sessions in his home region.⁵² But Nuremberg's service clientele was not structured to maximize these opportunities, as only a few servitors had a social standing comparable with Parsberg's. The lower-ranking servitors tended to be recruited through the more significant men, and were therefore clustered in certain regions, not necessarily the areas in which Nuremberg most needed to build bridges. As we will see, leading servitors such as Werner von Parsberg were required to reside in Nuremberg, showing that the council placed a higher premium on having them available at short notice than on their integration with networks amongst the rural nobility.

Some towns valued their noble servitors as independent arbiters. At Regensburg the practice of appointing a rural noble as mayor (*Bürgermeister*) was introduced in the 1330s in order to guarantee the neutrality of this office in relation to factions within the town.⁵³ Nuremberg invested its leading servitor with the office of imperial chief magistrate (*Reichsschultheiß*) once the council had gained control of this position from the Hohenzollern dynasty in the late fourteenth century.⁵⁴ From around 1385 a series of Franconian nobles held the post in quick succession, but from around 1418 the office was occupied by the knight Wigeleis von Wolfstein until his death in 1442, when he was succeeded by Werner von Parsberg.⁵⁵ This made little practical difference to Parsberg's position in Nuremberg, however, as the office was (by this time) entirely ceremonial.⁵⁶ When in 1440 the nobleman Thomas von Rosenberg wrote to Wigeleis von Wolfstein about a letter he had received from him, Wolfstein replied that he had nothing to do with the document; it was simply the custom of the imperial court in Nuremberg to name the *Reichsschultheiß* at the head of each letter.⁵⁷

The employment of servitors was a major expense for towns.⁵⁸ During the 1430s Nuremberg spent around 9 per cent of its total outgoings (and over 50 per cent of

⁵¹ Saxony: Staatsarchiv Nürnberg (StAN) Rep. 61a, Briefbücher des inneren Rats (BB) vol. 16 ff. 167r, 29 Nov. 1443; 168v, 2 Dec. 1443; 205v, 25 Jan. 1444. Neunburg vorm Wald: BB 10 f. 230v, 3 Sept. 1433.

⁵² BB 15 f. 48r, 19 June 1441. BB 18 ff. 55v, 23 Sept. 1446; 149v, 26 Jan. 1447. Irene Stahl (ed.), *Die Nürnberger Ratsverlässe (1449–1450)* (Neustadt/Aisch, 1983), p. 130. Sander, *Die Reichsstädtische Haushaltung*, p. 525.

⁵³ Alfred Haverkamp, "Innerstädtische Auseinandersetzungen" und überlokale Zusammenhänge in deutschen Städten während der ersten Hälfte des 14. Jahrhunderts', in Reinhard Elze and Gina Fasoli (eds), *Stadtadel und Bürgertum in den deutschen Städten des Spätmittelalters* (Berlin, 1991), pp. 89–126, here pp. 111–14.

⁵⁴ Isenmann, *Die deutsche Stadt im Mittelalter*, p. 449; Christoph Wilhelm Friedrich Stomer von Reichenbach, *Geschichte und Gerechtsame des Reichsschultheißenamtes zu Nürnberg, aus Urkunden erläutert* (Nuremberg, 1788), pp. 29–36.

⁵⁵ Stomer von Reichenbach, *Geschichte und Gerechtsame*, pp. 81–6.

⁵⁶ Isenmann, *Die deutsche Stadt im Mittelalter*, pp. 449–50.

⁵⁷ BB 14 ff. 233v–234r, 8 Sept. 1440.

⁵⁸ At Cologne, the city council tried to reduce payments to servitors in the 1430s: Wübbecke, *Das Militärwesen der Stadt Köln*, p. 180.

its military budget) on mounted retainers.⁵⁹ And these direct expenses were not the only costs incurred: noble servitors exposed towns to risks arising from feuds amongst the nobility and between nobles and princes. Nuremberg reserved the right to dismiss any servitor who entered into a feud to the town's detriment, but in practice the council tended to support its retainers in their conflicts with third parties.⁶⁰ Werner von Parsberg benefitted from Nuremberg's diplomatic backing in 1432, when he was captured by Dukes Ernst and Wilhelm of Bavaria-Munich.⁶¹ Between 1441 and 1449 the town contested a dangerous feud with the Bohemian nobleman Hynek Krušina of Schwanberg on account of one of Schwanberg's men who had been executed by Parsberg at Lupburg, a jurisdiction entirely independent of Nuremberg and nearly 60 kilometres south-east of the town.⁶² Regardless of whether the judgement in Parsberg's court was a cause of or a pretext for this feud, his lordship had proved to be a point of weakness for Nuremberg.

Why did towns such as Nuremberg consider this expense and risk worthwhile? There is no denying that some nobles had military and diplomatic value for independent and assertive towns, but they were not nearly as indispensable to the burghers as is suggested by assumptions of a cultural dichotomy. The town certainly gained prestige from the high-ranking nobles in its employment: in the early 1440s Landgrave Johann of Leuchtenberg received the same annual salary as Werner von Parsberg, without there being any indication that he performed military or diplomatic tasks. It may have been largely his title which determined his price.⁶³ But the decisive factor was the indirect contribution which noble servitors made to the maintenance of Nuremberg's internal political order. The servitors formed a group of functionaries which the town council could deploy in any aspect of the town's business whilst preserving the exclusivity of power within the walls by obviating the need to look to the citizen body beyond the patrician elite for men to carry out these tasks. The council of Speyer alluded to problems which could arise from the employment of burghers as servitors in 1376, when it banned this practice on the grounds of the 'great trouble, harm and redundancy' it had caused.⁶⁴ Nuremberg's noble servitors did not threaten to blur any lines between the town's ruling elite and the remainder of its citizens. Military experts or well-connected diplomats had their value, but the real need was for men who would show long-term loyalty to the council and thereby help to maintain its power within the town and beyond.

⁵⁹ Calculated by Fouquet, 'Die Finanzierung', pp. 55, 62, from figures in Sander, *Die Reichsstädtische Haushaltung*.

⁶⁰ Right to dismiss: Johann Christian Siebenkees (ed.), *Materialien zur Nürnbergschen Geschichte*, 4 vols (Nuremberg, 1792–5), vol. 1, p. 90.

⁶¹ BB 10 ff. 23r, 7 Aug. 1432; 97v, 11 Dec. 1432. Sander, *Die Reichsstädtische Haushaltung*, pp. 530–1, 562. Carl Heinrich von Lang, Josef Widemann, Maximilian von Freyberg and Georg Thomas Rudhart (eds), *Regesta sive rerum boicarum autographa*, 13 vols (Munich, 1822–54) (Regesta Boica), vol. 13, p. 261, 14 June 1433.

⁶² For this feud see StAN Rep. 2c 27; Miloslav Polívka, 'The Self-Consciousness of the Czech Nobility against the Background of Czech-German Relations at the End of the Hussite Period', *Historica*, 32 (1995), pp. 75–100.

⁶³ StAN Rep. 52b 269 (Bestallungen und Schulden der Losungstuben) f. 128r, 26 Feb. 1439 and 10 Jan. 1442.

⁶⁴ Mendheim, *Söldnerwesen*, pp. 23–4: 'groz ungemach schade und unnutz'.

III: Parsberg in Nuremberg's Service

Werner von Parsberg's entire career at Nuremberg was founded on such loyalty and on the accumulation of trust and substance in his relationship with the town and its leading citizens. Contact between the Parsberg family and Nuremberg had not previously been anything out of the ordinary in the context of Nuremberg's interaction with important noble lineages, but this in itself meant that there was a history of connections. In the early fourteenth century a Margarete von Parsberg (d. 1315) was married to Konrad II Waldstomer (d. 1307), from a family not represented in the Nuremberg council but very closely linked to the town.⁶⁵ In 1355 Konrad III Waldstomer (d. 1357) made a pious donation for the memory of his 'friend' Heinrich von Parsberg, who seems to have been cellarer of the Franciscan house in Nuremberg.⁶⁶

Connections of this sort between town and rural nobility were less common in the fifteenth century, and Werner's first known contact with Nuremberg exemplifies recurring tensions between town and nobility over issues of security in the countryside.⁶⁷ In 1405 and 1406 the council corresponded with Werner (together with his mother Margarete and brother Hans) concerning several Nuremberg citizens who had been robbed and captured by the Parsbergs.⁶⁸ These cases were quickly resolved, suggesting that the burghers had suffered as collateral damage in attacks targeting third parties. A few years later Werner acted as guarantor for another noble from his region, Hiltpolt von Fraunberg, who in 1412 was obliged to pay Nuremberg 762 Gulden within twelve months in compensation for a robbery.⁶⁹ This involved Parsberg in a long stand-off, as Fraunberg's debt remained unpaid until at least 1427.⁷⁰ But Werner was one of the two guarantors (the other being Wilhelm von Wolfstein) who did briefly send a servant to the appointed hostelry where the guarantors were supposed to stay until the debt was cleared.⁷¹

At this stage, however, Werner was making a successful career in princely service. In 1420 he was Duke Ludwig VII of Bavaria-Ingolstadt's captain at Freystadt (33 km south-east of Nuremberg) in the war between Ludwig and Margrave Friedrich of Brandenburg (Albrecht Achilles's father). This produced further tension with Nuremberg, as the fighting threatened the property of burghers who held fiefs from the Hohenzollern in the area of Freystadt.⁷² But shortly afterwards uncertainty arose about Werner's relationship to Nuremberg. He and other Parsbergs were in dispute with some Jews who had sought safe conduct in Nuremberg, and in connection with this the council assured Dietrich Landschad, vice-regent of Aschaffenburg, that the

⁶⁵Fleischmann, *Rat und Patriziat*, vol. 2, p. 1069; Adalbert Scharf, 'Die Nürnberger Reichsforstmeisterfamilie Waldstomer bis 1400 und Beiträge zur älteren Genealogie der Familien Forstmeister und Stomer von Reichenbach', *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg*, 52 (1963/64), pp. 1–41, here p. 16.

⁶⁶Andreas Würfel, *Historische, genealogische und diplomatische Nachrichten zur Erläuterung der Nürnbergschen Stadt- und Adelsgeschichte*, 2 vols (Nuremberg, 1766/67), vol. 1, pp. 266–7.

⁶⁷See Ben Pope, 'Finding Safety in Feuding: Nobles' Responses to Nuremberg's Rural Security Policy in the Mid-fifteenth Century', *Virtus: Journal of Nobility Studies*, 23 (2016), pp. 11–31.

⁶⁸BB 1 ff. 81r, 7 Dec. 1405; 82r, 14 Dec. 1405; 93v, 6 Feb. 1406; 102r, 26 Mar. 1406; 148r, 16 Sept. 1406.

⁶⁹StAN Rep. 2c 16 f. 2r–v, 3 Mar. 1412.

⁷⁰BB 7 f. 150r, 7 Mar. 1427.

⁷¹BB 4 f. 88v, 5 June 1415.

⁷²BB 5 f. 97v, 25 Oct. 1420.

Parsberg family were not citizens of Nuremberg, as Landschad had been told, but were 'knights and squires and the servitors of princes'.⁷³ Werner was indeed still in the service of Bavaria-Ingolstadt at this time, as by 1422 he had been promoted to the captaincy of Ingolstadt itself.⁷⁴ Landschad's confusion was understandable given the distance between Nuremberg and Aschaffenburg (150 km), but Parsberg's status in relation to the town was open to misunderstanding (or misrepresentation) nearer to home as well. In 1423 Abbot Lamprecht of St Michael's in Bamberg claimed that a robbery had been committed by servitors of Werner von Parsberg calling themselves servitors of Nuremberg.⁷⁵

These incidents could reflect connections between Parsberg and Nuremberg of which we are unaware, but they could also be a consequence of the entrance into Nuremberg's service in around 1418 of Wigeleis von Wolfstein, who before 1416 had married Werner's sister Margarete.⁷⁶ But Parsberg's pattern of interaction with Nuremberg did not noticeably change in the decade after his brother-in-law had become the *Reichsschultheiß*. There were further tensions over the risk to Nuremberg's citizens posed by a feud between Parsberg and the bishop of Bamberg.⁷⁷ Werner continued in princely service—now for the count palatine on the Rhine—as district governor of Waldeck in the northern Upper Palatinate.⁷⁸ His strong links with other nobles are shown by the leading role that he played in the Society of the Unicorn.⁷⁹ At the same time, however, the common effort in the imperial cause during the Hussite Wars (1419–1434) was creating many connections amongst the towns, nobles and princes along the Bohemian border. Members of the Wolfstein family, for instance, fought against the Hussites for both Nuremberg and for the Count Palatine Johann of Neumarkt, to whom Werner's brother Hans was closely connected.⁸⁰ It is on campaign against the Hussites, in October 1430, that we first hear of Werner von Parsberg in Nuremberg's service.⁸¹

He was soon taking on the typical duties of a standing servitor: a diplomatic mission within Franconia, and escorting the likes of Duke Ludwig of Bavaria-Ingolstadt and Margarete of Austria, the betrothed of Duke Friedrich of Saxony.⁸² He was retained for 50 Gulden per year, in exchange for which he served with seven other mounted men and opened his share of the castles at Lupburg and (from 1437) Adelburg for use by Nuremberg's forces whenever they required.⁸³ He took a leading role in Nuremberg's most substantial military undertakings during his years of service, including another

⁷³ BB 5 f. 114v, 14 Feb. 1421: 'Ritter und knecht und der herren diener'.

⁷⁴ BB 5 ff. 215r, 21 Apr. 1422; 216v, 29 Apr. 1422.

⁷⁵ BB 6 f. 31r–v, 26 Aug. 1423.

⁷⁶ Regesta Boica, vol. 12, p. 225, 23 Apr. 1416.

⁷⁷ BB 6 f. 29v, 22 Aug. 1423. BB 7 ff. 8v, 8 Oct. 1425; 97r, 3 Sept. 1426.

⁷⁸ BB 7 ff. 118r, 26. Nov. 1426; 166v, 26 Apr. 1427. BB 8 ff. 118v, 12 Mar. 1428; 169r, 3 Aug. 1429.

⁷⁹ BB 8 f. 217v, 11 Jan. 1430. Holger Kruse, Werner Paravicini and Andreas Ranft, *Ritterorden und Adelsgesellschaften im spätmittelalterlichen Deutschland: ein systematisches Verzeichnis* (Frankfurt/Main, 1991), p. 277.

⁸⁰ CDS, vol. 1, p. 370. Simon Federhofer, *Herrschaftsbildung im Raum Neumarkt vom 12. bis 17. Jahrhundert* (Neumarkt/Oberpfalz, 1999), p. 160.

⁸¹ BB 9 f. 59v, 30 Oct. 1430. StAN Rep. 54 9 f. 65r.

⁸² StAN Rep. 54 9 f. 66v; Sander, *Die Reichsstädtische Haushaltung*, p. 485.

⁸³ StAN Rep. 52b 269 ff. 48r–v, 22 Feb. 1433 and 2 Mar. 1436; 49r–v, 26 Jan. 1437; 130r, 3 Oct. 1441. See also Sander, *Die Reichsstädtische Haushaltung*, p. 451.

expedition against the Hussites in 1431, on which he shared command with the nobleman Hans von Wildenstein and the councillor Erhard Haller.⁸⁴ In the summer of 1435 he directed the successful siege of Kaltenburg castle (115 km south-west of Nuremberg).⁸⁵ Early in 1444 Parsberg was a commander on an expedition against Nuremberg's feud opponents Hans and Fritz von Waldenfels in their castles at Wartenfels and Lichtenberg (112 km north-east of Nuremberg), alongside two other noble servitors (who had local knowledge and connections) and the councillor Erhard Schürstab.⁸⁶ In October and November of the same year he had sole command of Nuremberg's contingent within an imperial force assembled to resist a French incursion into the Rhineland.⁸⁷ He also helped Nuremberg to control the surrounding countryside by taking the lordship of Hohenstein castle (30 km north-east of Nuremberg) in pledge from Ludwig VII of Bavaria-Ingolstadt.⁸⁸ Nuremberg later extended an 800 Gulden loan (guaranteed by Werner von Parsberg) to Georg von Wildenstein to enable him to take control at Hohenstein and open the castle to Nuremberg, and a similar arrangement may have been used to install Parsberg there.⁸⁹

In January 1442 *Reichsschultheiß* Wigeleis von Wolfstein fell unconscious in the council chamber of the Nuremberg town hall and died shortly afterwards. Four servitors accompanied his body to his family's favoured monastery at Seligenporten (west of Neumarkt in der Oberpfalz), and Werner von Parsberg was immediately installed as imperial chief magistrate.⁹⁰ He now received 400 Gulden per year, but otherwise his relationship with Nuremberg barely changed.

The 400 Gulden paid to the *Reichsschultheiß* throughout the sixty years during which Wigeleis von Wolfstein, Werner von Parsberg and Werner's successor Sigmund von Egloffstein held the office (c.1418–1479) matched the going rate for a prince's steward of the household (*Hofmeister*) in early sixteenth-century Franconia, and was thus competitive with princely service.⁹¹ But even for the chief magistrate, service with Nuremberg was not likely to be more lucrative than service for a prince. Servitors were sometimes paid bonuses, but they had to surrender their most valuable prisoners and any booty taken on campaign was divided equally amongst those involved.⁹² Servitors also had to pay for their own equipment, food and accommodation during peacetime,

⁸⁴BB 9 f. 127v, 12 July 1431.

⁸⁵Lore Sporhan-Krempel, 'Die Roßhaupter-Fehde 1433–1439', *Mitteilungen des Vereins für die Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg*, 61 (1974), pp. 4–47, here pp. 25–7. BB 11 ff. 279v, 10 June 1435; 306v–307r, 29 June 1435; 322v, 18 July 1435; 323v–324r, 20 July 1435; 331r, 1 Aug. 1435. BB 12 ff. 2v, 13 Aug. 1435; 8v, 18 Aug. 1435; 15r–v, 24 Aug. 1435; 38v, 23 Sept. 1435; 53v–54r, 15 Oct. 1435.

⁸⁶CDS, vol. 2, pp. 57–92.

⁸⁷BB 17 ff. 141r, 4 Nov. 1444; 146v, 7 Nov. 1444; 152r, 16 Nov. 1444; 162v, 26 Nov. 1444. CDS, vol. 3, p. 388, 24 Oct. 1444. See Duncan Hardy, 'The 1444–5 Expedition of the Dauphin Louis to the Upper Rhine in Geopolitical Perspective', *Journal of Medieval History*, 38, 3 (2012), pp. 358–87.

⁸⁸BB 12 f. 153v, 21 Mar. 1436. BB 13 ff. 114v–115r, 19 Feb. 1438; 205v, 7 Aug. 1438. See also BB 13 f. 206v, 7 Aug. 1438. Sander, *Die Reichsstädtische Haushaltung*, p. 563.

⁸⁹StAN Rep. 60b (Ratsbücher) 1b f. 11r, 11 Aug. 1441. StAN Rep. 52b 269 f. 132v, 30 Jan. 1442.

⁹⁰StAN Rep. 54 12 f. 82v. StAN Rep. 52b 269 f. 131v, 23 Jan. 1442. See also StAN Rep. 54 11 f. 182r.

⁹¹Hillay Zmora, *State and Nobility in Early Modern Germany: The Knightly Feud in Franconia, 1440–1567* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 39.

⁹²A special payment was made to Werner von Parsberg for the siege of Kaltenburg: StAN Rep. 52b 269 f. 48r–v. For the division of booty see Siebenkees, *Materialien*, vol. 1, pp. 88, 91; Mendheim, *Söldnerwesen*, p. 90. For similar provisions at Frankfurt see Zorn, 'Bündnisverträge', pp. 104–5.

and the council stuck rigidly to its policy of not compensating servitors for damages incurred through their service to the town.⁹³

The main financial perk of service with Nuremberg in comparison with princely service was the option to have large sums paid well in advance, of which Werner von Parsberg made good use.⁹⁴ This contrasted sharply with the enormous debts for overdue service fees run by many princes. But these debts could be converted into pledges of lordship rights which might be more lucrative in the long run.⁹⁵ Thus service with a town such as Nuremberg was probably less risky than princely service (though it was not without risk), but was not necessarily a better economic prospect overall. The system of advance payments might have been attractive to nobles who needed cash quickly, but it also increased the advantages of making a long-term commitment to Nuremberg's service, so that larger sums could be advanced in anticipation of up to four years' wages (Parsberg received several advances of 200 Gulden).

Werner von Parsberg was probably required to reside in Nuremberg during his period of service.⁹⁶ We do not know whether he was provided with a house there by the council, and we only know that he did actually live in the town through the many occasions on which the council told others that he was not currently 'at home' (*anheim*).⁹⁷ There is no evidence for Parsberg's involving himself in the commercial life of the town. He retained his lordships at Lupburg and Adelburg, and even took a simultaneous position in the service of his brother, the bishop of Regensburg, as governor of Hohenburg castle.⁹⁸ But he was also under Nuremberg's lordship and jurisdiction, which was in some respects a further advantage of his position. He received a certain amount of diplomatic backing from Nuremberg in long-running disputes with Dukes Ludwig VII of Bavaria-Ingolstadt and Heinrich XVI of Bavaria-Landshut, and in feuds with the nobles Heinrich von Seckendorff-Egersdorf and Johann von Heideck.⁹⁹ As already mentioned, Nuremberg helped to secure his release from imprisonment by Dukes Ernst and Wilhelm of Bavaria-Munich, and he may also have benefitted from his relationship with the imperial town on two visits to Emperor Sigismund's court in 1436 and 1437, as he attempted to resolve his dispute with Hans von Freyberg and Heinrich von Seckendorff-Egersdorf over Rohrenfels castle (south of Neuburg an der Donau).¹⁰⁰ With the agreement of his opponents, Parsberg could bring such cases

⁹³ Peacetime liabilities: Fouquet, 'Die Finanzierung', pp. 62–3. For an example of the policy on damages see BB 8 ff. 105v–106r, 17 Jan. 1429.

⁹⁴ StAN Rep. 52b 269 ff. 48r–v, 22 Feb. 1433, 2 Mar. 1436 and 31 May 1441; 49r–v, 15 Dec. 1435, 26 Jan. 1437 and 21 Mar. 1437; 130r, 3 Oct. 1441.

⁹⁵ See Bittmann, *Kreditwirtschaft*, pp. 72, 75–6.

⁹⁶ Compare requirements for Konrad von Heideck (StAN Rep. 52b 269 f. 84r, 20 Feb. 1445), Hans von Rechenberg (StAN Rep. 52b 269 ff. 90r, 16 Jan. 1445; 177r, 27 Nov. 1461) and Sigmund von Egloffstein (Stromer von Reichenbach, *Geschichte und Gerechtsame*, p. 110, 2 Dec. 1458). Also Siebenkees, *Materialien*, vol. 1, p. 89.

⁹⁷ E.g. BB 15 ff. 284v–285r, 3 Aug. 1442.

⁹⁸ Wilhelm Volkert (ed.), *Archivrepertorien* (Historischer Verein für Oberpfalz und Regensburg), Part 2: *Urkunden*, Book 1: *Urkundenregesten von 1180 bis 1680* (Regensburg, 1996), no. 230, 4 Aug. 1440. StAN Rep. 54 12 f. 75r. Hauptstaatsarchiv München, Gerichtsurkunden Parsberg 32, 16 Dec. 1447.

⁹⁹ E.g. BB 11 ff. 133v, 5 Nov. 1434; 181r–182v, 15 Jan. 1435; 270r–v, 6 June 1435. BB 12 f. 272r, 17 Oct. 1436. Sander, *Die Reichsstädtische Haushaltung*, pp. 530, 536–7, 554, 565, 572, 595–9.

¹⁰⁰ *Regesta Imperii*, vol. 11/2, nos. 11381, 14 Aug. 1436; 11698, 5 Mar. 1437 (accessed at www.regesta-imperii.de). BB 12 ff. 295r, 23 Nov. 1436; 329r–v, 1 Feb. 1437.

before the Nuremberg council for arbitration, although he only attempted to do so on three occasions.¹⁰¹

Conversely, anyone with claims against Parsberg could bring them to Nuremberg, and many did. In May 1448, for example, he was ordered back to the town to answer a creditor who had sent a servant there to wait for him, and in 1447 the council took his son Friedrich to task for the detention of a citizen of Tachov.¹⁰² For entirely pragmatic reasons Nuremberg also bound its servitors to certain obligations concerning their behaviour beyond the immediate requirements of their service. All disputes with Nuremberg and its citizens were to be brought before the court in Nuremberg, including disputes relating to the service relationship after it had ended; servitors with cases against a third party were to proceed according to the ‘advice’ (*Rat*) of the council; and (as we have already seen) if a servitor entered into a feud which was detrimental to the town they could be dismissed, and any overpayment of their wages could be recovered.¹⁰³ Like all medieval lordship, this was a reciprocal relationship of loyalty, trust and mutual support. Parsberg probably experienced some gains and some losses from placing himself under Nuremberg’s lordship, but the crucial factor—again—was the importance of maintaining a long-term relationship with the town in order to build connections there and increase the chances of receiving favourable treatment in law and politics.

Thus the two reasons for nobles to enter the service of towns envisaged by both the liberal-Romantic tradition and more recent historians—financial gain and political protection—do not appear so compelling in the case of Werner von Parsberg and Nuremberg. Equivalent or greater financial rewards could be had in princely service, in which Werner and other members of his family had already been very successful, whilst the town’s protection was inherently a mixed blessing. The supposed loyalty deficit is even less apparent, as the structures and benefits of service relationships encouraged both nobles and the town council to seek longer-term, stable connections of precisely the sort that Werner von Parsberg formed with Nuremberg. But it is still not clear what motivated Parsberg to make the switch from serving princes and to form such a lasting relationship with Nuremberg, and indeed what enabled the council to put so much faith in his continued loyalty. It seems likely that the advantages for Parsberg ran deeper than the marginal financial and political gains, and an examination of his political context also suggests that this was the case.

IV: Parsberg Family Strategies

Werner’s patrimony, the lordship of Parsberg, was located in the valley of the Schwarze Laber, which flows from sources east of Neumarkt in der Oberpfalz to join the Danube just west of Regensburg. Both this valley and its surroundings were politically extremely fragmented, and Parsberg was just one of many small lordships in

¹⁰¹ BB 11 ff. 263v–264r, 18 May 1435. BB 12 ff. 276v, 22 Oct. 1436; 329r–v, 1 Feb. 1437.

¹⁰² Answering a creditor: BB 19 ff. 48r–v, 22 May 1448; 49r, 24 May 1448. Detention of a burgher of Tachov: BB 18 ff. 328v, 28 Aug. 1447; 329v–330r, 31 Aug. 1447; 338r, 7 Sept. 1447; 352r, 25 Sept. 1447.

¹⁰³ Siebenkees, *Materialien*, vol. 1, pp. 88–91; Stromer von Reichenbach, *Geschichte und Gerechtsame*, pp. 46–7, 110.

the region.¹⁰⁴ Parsberg was bordered to the east by the lordship of Lupburg, which Werner's father Hans had brought under the family's control as a pledge from the dukes of Bavaria-Munich in 1395.¹⁰⁵ Three of Hans's sons—Hans, Christoph and Werner—made substantial careers for themselves as laymen. There were other brothers, including Friedrich, bishop of Regensburg from 1437 to 1449.¹⁰⁶ But Hans, Christoph and Werner were able to divide the inheritance amongst themselves so that Hans occupied Parsberg and Werner took Lupburg. The two brothers were both involved in acquiring a share of the nearby Adelburg castle in 1435.¹⁰⁷ Lupburg is less than 3 kilometres from Parsberg, and all three brothers seem to have pursued partially coordinated strategies so that certain important offices in the Upper Palatinate—the governorships of Waldeck and Hohenburg, for instance—were often in the hands of one of them. All took significant positions in the service of both Bavarian and Palatine branches of the Wittelsbach dynasty.

The Parsbergs' neighbours and relatives from the families of Wolfstein and Stauff zu Ehrenfels were similarly prominent in princely service, but had also gained legal recognition of their substantial de facto independence from princely authority by receiving their principal lordships in fief directly from the Emperor (a status known as imperial immediacy).¹⁰⁸ In the 1350s both families had been able to use King Charles IV's territorial expansion in the present-day Upper Palatinate to their advantage: in 1353 Albrecht von Wolfstein received his lordship of Sulzbürg (22 km west of Parsberg) as an imperial fief, and in 1354 Dietrich von Stauff zu Ehrenfels promised not to sell the lordship of Ehrenfels (near Beratzhausen, 10 km south-east of Parsberg) to Charles in return for the annulment of the terms under which his family had purchased Ehrenfels from Emperor and Duke of Bavaria Ludwig IV in 1335.¹⁰⁹ This laid the foundations for the first imperial enfeoffment of a Stauff zu Ehrenfels with capital jurisdiction at Ehrenfels by King Sigismund in 1418, perhaps also made possible by Sigismund's conflict with the count palatine at this time.¹¹⁰ In 1465 the Stauff family joined the active

¹⁰⁴For the political development of Parsberg and its region see Manfred Jehle, *Parsberg: Pflegämter Hemau, Laaber, Beratzhausen (Ehrenfels), Lupburg, Velburg, Mannritterlehengut Lutzmannstein, Ämter Hohenfels, Helfenberg, Reichsherrschaften Breitenegg, Parsberg, Amt Hohenburg* (Historischer Atlas von Bayern, Teil Altbayern, 51, Munich, 1981). For the Parsberg family see also Karl Menner, 'Die Parsberger zu Lupburg', *Burgblick (Alt-Lupburg)*, 2 (2003), pp. 21–68; Xaver Luderböck and Karl Menner, 'Die Parsberger zu Lupburg: Linie Christoph (1)', *Burgblick (Alt-Lupburg)*, 2 (2003), pp. 69–129; Xaver Luderböck, 'Die Parsberger zu Lupburg II. Linie Werner (1)', *Burgblick: Heimatkundliche Arbeiten des Förderverein Alt-Lupburg und Umgebung*, 3 (2010), pp. 147–81.

¹⁰⁵Jehle, *Parsberg*, p. 207.

¹⁰⁶Hausberger, 'Parsberg'.

¹⁰⁷Regesta Boica, vol. 13, pp. 361–2, 21 Dec. 1435.

¹⁰⁸On Wolfstein, see Robert Giersch, 'Wolfstein, Adelsfamilie', *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns* (2013), http://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Wolfstein,_Adelsfamilie, accessed 27 July 2017; Federhofer, *Herrschaftsbildung*, pp. 152–67; Bernhard Heinloth, *Neumarkt* (Historischer Atlas von Bayern, Teil Altbayern, 16, Munich, 1967), pp. 73–111. On Stauff zu Ehrenfels, see Manfred Jehle, 'Staufer zu Ehrenfels, Adelsfamilie', *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns* (2013), http://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Staufer_zu_Ehrenfels,_Adelsfamilie, accessed 27 July 2017; Robert Dollinger, 'Die Staufer zu Ernfels', *Zeitschrift für bayerische Landesgeschichte*, 35 (1972), pp. 436–522.

¹⁰⁹Margarete Kühn (ed.), *Dokumente zur Geschichte des deutschen Reiches und seiner Verfassung 1350–1353* (Monumenta Germaniae Historica Constitutiones, 10, Weimar, 1991), p. 407 (15 July 1353). Jehle, *Parsberg*, pp. 162–3 (13 May 1354).

¹¹⁰Regesta Imperii, vol. 11/1, no. 3674, 30 Oct. 1418. A later enfeoffment by Sigismund included additional powers: Regesta Imperii, vol. 11/2, no. 7860, 14 Oct. 1430.

opposition to Albrecht IV of Bavaria-Munich and exploited Emperor Frederick III's own disputes with the Bavarian Wittelsbachs to gain elevation to the status of imperial barons (*Reichsfreiherrn*).¹¹¹

By 1430, however, the Parsbergs had not been able to exploit such favourable political constellations in order to significantly bolster their independence from princely authority through imperial preferment. They did hold recognized imperial fiefs, for example possessions in the region around Eger (present-day Cheb in the Czech Republic) and certain properties at Etterzhausen (9 km north-west of Regensburg).¹¹² But despite their continued regional prominence, the Parsbergs had little to show from the reign of Sigismund (1410–1437), whose patronage of the nobility in Upper Germany was focused on Swabia.¹¹³ The contrast in fortunes between the Parsbergs and Dietrich von Stauff zu Ehrenfels during Sigismund's visit to Regensburg in October and November 1418 is striking. Whilst Dietrich obtained imperial immediacy for his lordship of Ehrenfels, the Parsberg family's only gain was the enfeoffment of Christoph with a farmstead (the 'Puppenhof') at Beratzhausen, within Dietrich's now-imperial lordship.¹¹⁴ In the vicinity of Parsberg itself, the family had been enfeoffed by Kings Rupert and Sigismund in 1407 and 1414 with small incomes from tithes at the villages of Darshofen and Holzheim, with no mention of the lordship of Parsberg.¹¹⁵

Nonetheless, the political situation in this region in the mid-fifteenth century presented a considerable opportunity for noble families to seek greater independence. Small lordships in the immediate vicinity of large princely territories were always vulnerable, as the lords of Heideck (43 km west of Parsberg) discovered. The perpetual threat which they faced from the Hohenzollern territory to their west was probably the driving force behind a multi-generational alliance between Heideck and Nuremberg.¹¹⁶ But Parsberg's main princely neighbour was the small and disjointed Palatine appanage of Neumarkt, with the even smaller bishoprics of Eichstätt and Regensburg in the vicinity and the potentially domineering Bavaria-Munich mostly at a safe distance south of the Danube.¹¹⁷ In this narrow space between territories it was possible to strive for greater autonomy, even for the ultimate safeguard of formal imperial immediacy, and we can follow the progress made in this direction by the lordship of Parsberg.

The Parsberg family had historically been *ministeriales* and then retainers of the Wittelsbach dukes of Bavaria, though they had always enjoyed an unusual degree of independence.¹¹⁸ In the fifteenth century they possessed a charter from Dukes Stephan,

¹¹¹ Jehle, *Parsberg*, p. 168. See also Paul-Joachim Heinig, *Kaiser Friedrich III. (1440–1493): Hof, Regierung und Politik*, 3 vols (Cologne, Weimar and Vienna, 1997), vol. 2, pp. 1051–2; Hans-Josef Krey, 'Böcklerbund', *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns* (2010), <http://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Böcklerbund>, accessed 10 Aug. 2017.

¹¹² *Regesta Imperii* (Regesten der Pfalzgrafen), no. 5121, 31 Dec. 1407. *Regesta Imperii*, vol. 11/2, no. 10771, 6 Sept. 1434.

¹¹³ See Hermann Mau, *Die Rittergesellschaften mit St. Jörgenschild in Schwaben* (Stuttgart, 1941).

¹¹⁴ *Regesta Imperii*, vol. 11/1, no. 3686, 6 Nov. 1418.

¹¹⁵ Staatsarchiv Amberg (StAAm) Reichsherrschaft Parsberg 74 no. 12, 31 Dec. 1407 (in a copy from 1743). StAAm Herrschaft Parsberg Urkunden 7, 29 Sept. 1414.

¹¹⁶ See Dietrich Deeg, *Die Herrschaft der Herren von Heideck: eine Studie zu hochadeliger Familien- und Besitzgeschichte* (Neustadt/Aisch, 1968).

¹¹⁷ See Max Spindler and Gertrud Diepolder (eds), *Bayerischer Geschichtsatlas* (Munich, 1969), p. 21.

¹¹⁸ Manfred Jehle, *Die Reichsunmittelbarkeit der Herrschaft Parsberg* (Parsberg, 2009), pp. 5–8.

Friedrich and Johann of Bavaria, dated 19 June 1390, which confirmed their capital jurisdiction, safe conduct, hunting and mining rights within the lordship of Parsberg.¹¹⁹ This gave the family virtual sovereignty in their small territory, though under Bavarian protection. The charter survives only in a copy from 1456, when it was verified by an abbot in Regensburg, though there is no particular reason to doubt its authenticity. Other charters in the family's possession were, however, quite definitely forged, and were used to claim that Parsberg was an imperial lordship.¹²⁰

At some point in the early fifteenth century (to judge from the script) a number of documents purporting to be charters of the first Wittelsbach Emperor Ludwig IV (r. 1314–1347) and his brother Rudolf were created. These granted the rights contained in the 1390 charter with the unusual addition of a precise number of years for which they had already been enjoyed by the Parsberg family (apparently since the year 933).¹²¹ One of these forgeries expressly mentions the advocacy over the parish church at See, near Parsberg, which Ludwig (under the influence of his counsellors) had initially refused to confirm, before finding in favour of Dietrich von Parsberg. In 1422 Hans von Parsberg purchased this advocacy from Georg Zenger, suggesting that the forgeries were created after this date.¹²² In 1459, at a moment of particular tension between the Habsburg and Wittelsbach dynasties, Hans obtained the first genuine imperial enfeoffment for the lordship of Parsberg from the Habsburg Emperor Frederick III, and this was confirmed by Frederick's son Maximilian in 1500.¹²³ The family were never able to establish an undisputed claim to imperial status, but the direction of their policy in the first half of the fifteenth century is clear enough.

Werner's relationship with Nuremberg had the potential to advance this policy in several ways. His role as imperial chief magistrate in the very self-consciously imperial town of Nuremberg may have helped to establish the family's 'imperial' credentials. His contact with the monarchy as chief magistrate was entirely mediated through the council, but it was in the council's interests to have the Emperor delegate some functions to his nominal representative in Nuremberg. Thus Werner was commissioned by Frederick III to hear cases brought in the royal court against Nuremberg and to receive the homage of imperial vassals from the region.¹²⁴ We need not assume, however, that these trappings were what brought Parsberg and Nuremberg together. The Parsberg family was clearly seeking further independence from princely authority, and at least one of their number therefore had good reason to build a relationship with a non-princely employer. The path had already been trodden by their Wolfstein relatives (in support of that family's existing imperial immediacy), and the two families long held a privileged position at Nuremberg. Werner's successor, Sigmund von Egloffstein, was also a relative, having married Margarete von Wolfstein.¹²⁵ Werner's alliance with

¹¹⁹StAAM Herrschaft Parsberg Urkunden 16.

¹²⁰First recognized as forgeries by Helmut Bansa, *Studien zur Kanzlei Kaiser Ludwigs des Bayern vom Tag der Wahl bis zur Rückkehr aus Italien (1314–1329)* (Kallmünz, 1968), pp. 338–9.

¹²¹Stadtarchiv Amberg Urkunden 2049, 27 Oct. 1318; 2050, 16 Feb. 1334. StAAM Herrschaft Parsberg Urkunden 1, 16 May 1326. See also Bansa, *Studien*, p. 338, and StAAM Reichsherrschaft Parsberg 25 no. 6.

¹²²StAAM Herrschaft Parsberg Urkunden 12.

¹²³StAAM Herrschaft Parsberg Urkunden 18, 24 July 1459; 39, 10 May 1500.

¹²⁴E.g. *Regesta Imperii*, vol. 13/14, no. 374, 13 Feb. 1447.

¹²⁵For Sigmund, see Georg Wolfgang Karl Lochner, 'Sigmund vom Egloffstein, Ritter, Schultheiß', *Anzeiger für Kunde der deutschen Vorzeit*, 11 (1864), cc. 273–8, 313–17.

Nuremberg may or may not have been a significant factor in his brother's acquisition of a genuine imperial title to his lordship, but his positive, strategically sound reasons for entering Nuremberg's service in order to enhance his family's autonomy are readily apparent.

V: Conclusion

Werner von Parsberg died on 2 November 1455, according to his funerary hatchment, which still hangs in the parish church of St Laurence in Nuremberg. He was not the last of his family to serve the town: Wolf (grandson of Werner's brother Hans) was *Reichsschultheiß* from 1493 to 1499, and Wolf's son Haug held the same office from 1548 to 1554.¹²⁶ But by this time 'town' and 'nobility' were increasingly likely to be described as mutually exclusive and fundamentally antagonistic. Count Reinhard of Solms's 1563 treatise on the nobility, for instance, maintained that it was necessary for nobles' function as judges that they live outside of towns and avoid mixing with the commons through commercial activity.¹²⁷ Solms also insinuated that a shadowy alliance of the towns and the Swiss was threatening to 'oppress' the nobility, an allegation which had initially been made by Albrecht Achilles and others in the mid-fifteenth century.¹²⁸ It was a sign of changed times when in 1499 Wolf von Parsberg was released from his obligations to Nuremberg after he had refused to fight against his fellow nobles in a particularly unpleasant feud between Nuremberg and a coalition of rural noblemen.¹²⁹

But interests such as those of the Parsberg family were still a powerful voice in the later fifteenth century. After the noble Society of the Donkey had organized a tournament at Heidelberg in 1481 from which all townspeople and those nobles with links to towns were expressly excluded, a discussion was held ahead of a subsequent tournament at Heilbronn in 1482. It was agreed that nobles who had of their own volition become burghers or officials in towns could not take part, but those who were obliged to seek 'protection' from towns, or were simply employed by towns without further obligations, were to be admitted.¹³⁰ This appears to have been a face-saving device for nobles whose interests were bound up with one or more towns, and may have been one of the origins of the idea that nobles might accept 'protection' from towns as a last resort.

The case of Werner von Parsberg shows that nobles did not have to be weak to ally with towns, that they could do so for primarily political rather than purely economic reasons, and that hard-headed political calculation could lead to long-lasting and stable alliances. This was less a marriage of aristocratic militarism with bourgeois money, and more the meeting of two political actors and imperial subjects both ultimately

¹²⁶Stromer von Reichenbach, *Geschichte und Gerechtsame*, pp. 92–3, 95–6.

¹²⁷Reinhard Graf zu Solms, *Beschreibung Vom Ursprung und herkhomen des Adels, Adelichen vnderhaltungen vnd auffgelegtem gebürlichem bevelch, wie sich der Adel seinem Titel nach halten vnd herwiderumb solle gehalten werden Alles mit berichtlichen vrsachen angezeygt* (Frankfurt/Main, 1563), f. 11lv.

¹²⁸Solms, *Beschreibung*, ff. Xlr, XIXv–XXr. Pope, 'Identity, Discourse, and Political Strategy'.

¹²⁹Johannes Müllner, *Die Annalen der Reichsstadt Nürnberg von 1623*, ed. Gerhard Hirschmann, 3 vols (Nuremberg, 1972–2003), vol. 3, p. 189. For the feud, see Zmora, *State and Nobility*, pp. 26–33.

¹³⁰Cord Ulrichs, *Vom Lehnhof zur Reichsritterschaft: Strukturen des fränkischen Niederadels am Übergang vom späten Mittelalter zur frühen Neuzeit* (Stuttgart, 1997), p. 142; Ludwig Albert von Gumpfenberg, *Die Gumpfenberger auf Turnieren* (Würzburg, 1862), p. 75.

seeking to establish or uphold their right of self-governance under the protection of the Holy Roman Empire. Direct imperial enfeoffment with lordship and jurisdiction was the ultimate legal expression of this autonomy, but it was only one of the objectives pursued by noble families as they sought to enhance their independence. Their strategies included princely service, which was by no means necessarily antithetical to simultaneous emancipation from princely authority. But by entering the service of a town such as Nuremberg, families such as Parsberg and Wolfstein gained the advantages of a non-princely patron, an employer with the resources to retain such high-ranking nobles but without the means or motive to threaten the independence of these nobles' primary lordships. Nuremberg's own imperial status and identity may have been an additional motivating factor, and there were further potential financial and political benefits. As we have seen, the realization of these possibilities required a close and long-term engagement with the town.

Our own close engagement with Werner von Parsberg has been necessary in order to build a clear picture of his alliance with Nuremberg, and on this basis to develop a new way of reading such relationships between towns and rural nobles. These findings inevitably raise the question of the extent to which other towns' noble servitors were recruited from amongst those rural nobles who could aspire to significant independence from princely authority. What proportion of nobles who entered the service of towns were interested in building such long-term relationships, and how many were interested in quicker, primarily financial returns? The Parsberg example can help us identify further substantial and constructive relationships between towns and rural nobles which have previously been ignored or misconstrued, and we have already seen that Parsberg's case was not unique even in the context of Nuremberg.¹³¹ Through an appreciation of these alignments of town and noble interests in the fifteenth century we will be better placed to understand the growing opposition of 'town' and 'noble' identities in this period, as this dichotomy clearly had to establish itself against the interests of influential nobles such as Werner von Parsberg.

At the same time, our findings reveal some of the limits to town–noble rapprochement. The number of nobles who aspired to greater independence from princely authority was considerable, but the number of those with the means and opportunity to make much progress in pursuit of this goal was inevitably smaller. The most serious limiting factor, however, was the towns' demand for noble servitors, especially for expensive high-ranking nobles. As we have seen, this demand was a product more of internal politics than of concern for external relations, and consequently a town such as Nuremberg was always at risk of finding itself with few loyal partners amongst the rural nobility. This is one of the reasons that Werner von Parsberg found his fellow nobles mostly on the opposing side when he carried Nuremberg's banner at the Pillenreuther Weiher. But the battle was not the whole story, and the nobles who fought against Nuremberg on that day were not necessarily its implacable opponents the next. Parsberg carried his standard within evolving narratives of identity, and within a

¹³¹We might, for instance, return to the evidence from Cologne and Frankfurt with a different set of questions from those posed by Domsta and Zorn (Domsta, *Die Kölner Außenbürger*; Zorn, 'Bündnisverträge'). But we need not limit ourselves to these examples, as it is clear that many towns employed noble servitors. Above all, these relationships need to be examined more closely and with greater attention to the political contexts of the nobles involved.

history of identity formation. He is a long-overdue corrective to the study of alliances between town and nobility, which we still view through the lenses of identities which we no longer inhabit, but he is also part of the process through which generations of Germans came to see the world in this way.

Abstract

The nobleman Werner von Parsberg served the imperial town of Nuremberg between 1430 and his death in 1455 as a mounted retainer and (from 1442) as the town's imperial chief magistrate. In 1450 he carried Nuremberg's standard in battle during the Second South German Towns' War. This long record of close engagement with Nuremberg contrasts with the tradition of reading 'town' and 'nobility' in Germany as mutually exclusive and inherently antagonistic. In Parsberg's time this was a position advocated by Nuremberg's opponents amongst the territorial princes and rural nobility, and from the Enlightenment onwards a more rigid version of this dichotomy was projected back onto the late Middle Ages. This perceived opposition between 'town' and 'nobility' denied the possibility of meaningful cooperation between townspeople and rural nobles: all such relationships have consequently been described as the result of economic and political weakness on the part of the nobles concerned. Recent research, however, suggests that a re-examination of these relationships is necessary, and the case of Werner von Parsberg offers a model for such a reassessment. This article shows that Parsberg's service for Nuremberg was not a symptom of weakness, but part of an assertive strategy to advance the independence from princely authority of his family's lordship in the Upper Palatinate. Through this appreciation of the factors supporting town-noble cooperation in the late Middle Ages we are better able to understand the formation and development of the dialectic of town and nobility as a way of understanding German society.

Keywords: towns, nobility, princes, Holy Roman Empire, service, alliance, identity

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