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Frederick III of Hapsburg, Letters Patent for Hans Zscheggenbürlin
In German, manuscript on parchment
Austria, [Wiener] Neustadt, May 28, 1456

1 leaf, written in chancery cursive script, unruled (justification 355 x 145 mm.), illustrated with one miniature (62 x 82 mm.). In good condition, miniature and colors fresh (seal missing). Dimensions 470 x 330 mm.

This is an excellent example of a type of document that originates in the fourteenth century and became more common in later centuries, a letters patent, granting nobility or heraldry (in this case heraldry) to an individual favored by the imperial court. Not all such documents are as skillfully illuminated as the present example. The recipient of this document was an important and colorful personage at a critical moment in the history of Basel.

PROVENANCE

1. Hans Zscheggenbürlin the Elder, for whom the act was made.

TEXT

Incipit, "Wir Friderich von Gotes Gnaden Romischer Keiser [...] bekennen und tun kunt allermenichlich mit disem brieve daz uns unser und des Reichs liebergetrewr Hanns Tschakaburlin von Basel hat diemutlich bitten lassen, daz wir dise nachgeschriben wapen ... "; explicit with date, "Geben zu der Newnstat an freitag nach sand Urbans tag, nach Krists gepurt verczehenhundert und im sechs und funfczigisten, unsers reichs im sibenzenden und des keiserthumbs im funfften jare" [1456].

This is a letter patent issued by Emperor Frederick III, allocating a silver coat of arms "une chienne de gueules, terrassée de sinople," to Hans Zscheggenbürlin, who is referred to in the act as "unser und des Reichs liebergetrewr Hanns Tschakaburlin von Basel." The family name, Zscheggenbürlin is probably of Lombard origin and a derivative of the Italian name Ceccopieri; this name was written in many different ways combining *Zsch* or *Tsch* or *Sch*, *a* or *e*, *ck* or *gk* or *ckg* or *gg* or *g* or *k*, *e* or *a* or *en*, *bur* or *pur* or *bür*, *en* or *lin* or *ly* or *le*. The spelling *Tschakaburlin* used in the emperor's letter is not the most common, but the coat of arms confirms the identity of the recipient. Modern-day dictionaries use *Zscheggenbürlin* or *Zscheckenbürlin*.

Usually allotted as a reward for rendered services or to acknowledge a lineage's ascension, letters patent were given by the emperor or by the Palatine Counts (*Hofffalzgrafen*). The oldest one known was granted by Emperor Louis IV of Bavaria in 1338.

Hans Zscheggenbürlin (d. 24 July 1477) is the legitimate son of Heinzmann Zscheggenbürlin, a goldsmith and money changer, who was judge and receiver of the Rappoltstein in Ribauvillé, and died in 1418. He was also the nephew of Henmann, the master of money in the town from 1373 to 1404, member of the council, provost of the corporation of Hausgenossen, member of the tribunal of the town, and member of the College of Seven, who died in 1411. His social ascension was important: he began as a money changer after the example of his father; he was also a banker, and he was associated with the silver mines of Plancher-les-Mines, of Massmünster and Todtnau. He rose in urban government to become a member of the Tribunal of the town in 1439, then provost of the corporation of Safran in 1442 and member of the Council in 1452, then member of the College of Seven, *Lohmberr*, and finally, *Oberstzunftmeister* in 1469, that is "chef des métiers," in the town of Basel, which following the wars of nobility, was completely in the hands of the corporations in the second half of the fifteenth century. He was often sent on missions or chosen as arbitrator of commercial negotiations, and, among other cases, he arbitrated between the bishop and the count Oswald von Tierstein in a dispute of Adrien de Bubenbergh against the bishop of Strasbourg and the Palatine Count of the Rhine. His two successive marriages show the rise of his social position: of his first spouse Elisabeth, we know next to nothing, but the second, Margaretha, was daughter of the noble Hans von Basel.

In the case of Hans Zscheggenbürlin, it is difficult to know if the letters patent simply recognized a situation of fact, or if its issuance resulted from a specific service rendered to the emperor. The context lends itself to that, because peace between the peace of Brisach between Basel and Austria intervened in 1449, followed by uprisings until 1456. Perhaps Hans Zscheggenbürlin played a role that is still ignored by chroniclers. In any event, his position on the Town Council would have obliged him to take a position, and it is probable that such a position would have been one of moderation and one that favored the emperor.

The tax rolls of Basel are the surest testimony to the rise of the fortune of Hans Zscheggenbürlin: in 1429, he paid an estimate of c. 1500-2000 Gulden; in 1453, these rose to 6400 Gulden; and in 1475, 12800 Gulden, an imposition that made him the richest man in Basel! His two elder brothers, Hans and Ludwig, together had a fortune of 8200 Gulden, so that the family fortune exceeded 21,000 Gulden. A contemporary Georgius Carpentarius de Brugg, continuing the Chronicle of the Carthusian of Basel (*Continuatio chronicorum Carthusiae in Basilea minori*, ch. 2) wrote: "Hieronymus Zschegkenbürlin, legum licentiatu, cuius genitor [Johannes] aliquando fuit tribunus plebes Basiliensis, de quorum adventu domus non modicum sumpsit in temporalibus incrementum" (Hieronymus Zscheggenbürlin, licenced in law, whose father [Hans] was the Tribune of the Plebians of Basel, whose house is know for its notable accumulation of wealth). Here it is worth noting the phrase, "tribune of the plebians," to designate the role played by Hans Zscheggenbürlin in the affairs of the city of Basel.

At the end of 1474, Hans and his sons are implicated in a lawsuit of one of their associates, Johannes Baer, director of money. The latter was imprisoned on 31 December 1474 for

counterfeiting, that is, for having chemically trimmed pieces of money in order to extract their precious metals. He was rapidly released against a significant bail. Hans Zscheggenbürlin was neither imprisoned nor otherwise disturbed; he was left free on the condition that he not leave or take his goods out of Basel. Although he was liberated from this promise on 20 January 1475, he lost his title of *Oberstzunftmeister*.

ILLUSTRATION

1 miniature (measuring 82 x 62 mm.), showing the shield of Hans Zscheggenbürlin (coupé au 1 d'argent à une chienne de gueules, et au 2 de sinople, à cimier à tête humaine, portant de même, le tout sur fond bleu avec cadre rose). These arms are described in the body of the Act: "geteilt, der oberteil weis und der under grun, und in dem obern weissen teil, ein rots hind und einen helme mit einer weissen und grunen helm deck geczwet, darauf ein mann sprustpilde in weis geclaidet habend auf seinem haubt ein rts gugell mit einem langen ziph und an seiner brust auch ein rots hinde als in dem schilde." This is immediately followed by a description of the illumination: "wie dann die in mitte diss briefs mit farben eigentlich ausgestrichn sind, gnediclich bestetiget und von newes gegeben."

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