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# BERLIN

The spatial structure of a divided city

T.H.ELKINS  
*with* B.Hofmeister

METHUEN  
London and New York

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## Preface

Anyone attempting to write about both sides of Berlin enters a political minefield; at any moment some apparently neutral statement of fact may suddenly be challenged as having political undertones, and even such seemingly innocuous expressions as the names of places are revealed as value-laden. This being so, it is essential to make clear where responsibility for the text that is to follow lies. Without the assistance of Professor B.Hofmeister of the Technical University, Berlin, this book would never have been written. He has allowed his own extensive writings on West Berlin to be drawn on, he has suggested numerous sources of information, and has read through the text, making suggestions for improvement, removing errors of fact, and correcting German orthography.

Without this support, the author would not have dared to begin work, yet it has to be emphasized that the whole concept of the book, its writing, and all value judgements contained in it are his responsibility and his alone. He carries sole responsibility for whatever errors remain in the text, and in particular is solely responsible for the sections of the text dealing with East Berlin.

The selection of appropriate forms of place names involves difficulties, partly because they must be intelligible to English-language readers, partly because, where alternative versions exist, they may be politically 'loaded'. The term 'Germany' is taken in a general sense of indicating the area occupied by German-speaking people until the nineteenth century, but from 1871 as meaning the territory included at any one time within the pre-1939 boundaries of the German Reich. The internationally accepted designations 'Federal Republic of Germany' (abbrev. 'Federal Republic') and 'German Democratic Republic' (abbrev. 'GDR') are employed. Where there is an accepted English form for states, Prussian provinces, other large areas and physical features spanning political boundaries, this will be used; to write of 'Preussen' rather than the familiar 'Prussia' would be unacceptably pedantic. As for the names of towns, it was the initial intention to follow internationally agreed usage and to employ the form current in the state concerned. As writing proceeded, it became apparent that while the correct forms for German towns were reasonably acceptable (nobody is going to be confused by 'Hannover' or 'München'), the policy would involve the use of forms for cities outside Germany that are not used in everyday English

speech: 'Torino' or 'Genève' seem unacceptably precious. So there has been a fall-back on expediency; where customary English-language names exist, they are used. It should however be noted that in the historical section of the book German forms are used for towns in areas once occupied by a German-speaking population which now lie outside German control and bear other names.

Divided Berlin presents particular problems. In the view of the Federal Republic, the accepted nomenclature is Berlin (West) and Berlin (East). Even this apparently innocent, purely geographical terminology is in fact value-laden, as it may be held to support the position, common to the Federal Republic and to the three western occupying powers (United Kingdom, France, and the United States), that the city is a unity under a special regime, and just happens to be divided into western and eastern portions. This is a viewpoint countered at every possible opportunity by the GDR, which insists that the eastern part of the city is an integral part of its territory and indeed its capital, and so officially bears the title 'Berlin Capital of the German Democratic Republic' (Berlin Hauptstadt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik). The author is clearly placed in a difficult position; whatever terminology is chosen will be liable to criticism. A weak resort to expediency seems the only way out. The official GDR title is both extremely cumbersome and totally unfamiliar to the vast majority of English-language readers, who daily in their newspapers read of 'East Berlin', just as they read of 'West Berlin'. These names will accordingly be used, and it is no doubt futile to insist that they are intended only as convenient labels expressing geographical location, not as some kind of political proclamation.

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The author wishes in addition to acknowledge assistance for study visits to Berlin received, at various times, from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), the Economic and Social Research Council, the Academy of Sciences of the German Democratic Republic (on the nomination of the British Academy) and the GDR Ministry for Universities and the Humboldt University (on the nomination of the British Council). Even when such visits were devoted to other research objectives, they contributed to a build-up of familiarity with the city and its problems. The author also wishes to thank all those members of the Free University, the Technical University, the Humboldt University, the GDR Bauakademie and the Hochschule für Ökonomie in Berlin-Karlshorst who have at various times given of their time in interviews and on excursions to demonstrate aspects of the development and nature of the city.

For permission to reprint material, acknowledgement is made to the following: to K Baedeker Verlag (Freiburg) for extracts from their 1936 English-language *Germany*; to the *Geographical Magazine* for the reproduction of material on the Berlin S-Bahn; to B.Hofmeister and Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, for figures 6.3, 7.2, and 7.3; to B.Hofmeister and D.Reimer Verlag for figures 4.2 and 6.5; to B.Hofmeister and Colloquium Verlag, Berlin for permission to use a modified version of a map from *Von der Residenz zur City; 275 Jahre Charlottenburg* (Berlin 1980) as the basis of figure 7.1; to B.Backé and *Berichte zur deutschen Landeskunde* for figure 8.2; to H.Müller and G.Westermann Verlag for figure 8.6; to G.Wettig and Westview Press for permission to draw on his contribution to R.D. Francisco and A.Merritt (eds) *Berlin Between Two Worlds* (Boulder, Colo. and London, 1986); to the Bodleian Library for permission to reprint a c.1737 map of Berlin (Hope Adds. 415) as frontispiece.

Susan Rowland (Sussex) drew figures 2.1, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.4, 7.5, 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4, 8.5, and 8.6; Angela Newman (Oxford) 1.2, 3.1, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 5.1, 5.2, 7.3, and 7.4; H.-J.Nitschke & G.Braun (Berlin) 4.2, 6.3, 6.5, 7.1, and 7.2. The photographs are by the author.

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## Abbreviations

ARWOBAU	Arbeitnehmer-Wohnheimbaugesellschaft mbH (West Berlin: provides accommodation for immigrant workers from the Federal Republic)
AVUS	Automobil-Verkehrs-und-Übungsstrasse (prototype autobahn)
BEWAG	Berliner Kraft- und Licht AG (electricity supply company)
BIG	Berliner Innovations- und Gründerzentrum (West Berlin Centre for Industrial Innovation and Promotion)
BRD	Bundesrepublik Deutschland (see GFR)
BVG	Berliner Verkehrsgesellschaft (unified public-transport organization)
CDU	Christlich-Demokratische Union (Christian Democratic Union)
DDR	Deutsche Demokratische Republik (German Democratic Republic)
DM	Deutsche Mark (German Mark, in Federal Republic)
EEC	European Economic Community
EWG	Europäische Wirtschaftsgemeinschaft (European Economic Community); see EEC
DB	Deutsche Bundesbahn (German Federal Railways)
DR	Deutsche Reichsbahn (German State Railways, in GDR)
FDGB	Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (Free Federation of German Trade Unions, in GDR)
FDJ	Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth, in GDR)
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei (Liberal Democratic Party)
Federal Republic	German Federal Republic (Bundesrepublik Deutschland)
FU	Freie Universität (Free University)
GASAG	Berliner Gaswerke (gas supply company)

GDR	German Democratic Republic (Deutsche Demokratische Republik)
GEHAG	Gemeinnützige Heimstätten Spar- und Bau A.G. (a housing association or building society)
GFR	German Federal Republic (form found in GDR English-language publications, and sometimes elsewhere: 'Federal Republic' is here preferred)
IBA	Internationale Bauausstellung (International Building Exhibition)
ICC	Internationales Congress Centrum (International Congress Centre, in West Berlin)
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (German Communist Party; in the Federal Republic only; was dissolved, and succeeded by DKP—Deutsche Kommunistische Partei)
LSG	Landschaftsschutzgebiet (protected area of outstanding natural beauty)
M	Mark (German Mark, in GDR)
NEG	Naherholungsgebiet (short-period recreational area in GDR)
NSG	Naturschutzgebiet (nature reserve)
RIAS	Rundfunk im Amerikanischen Sektor (Radio in the American Sector)
S-Bahn	Stadtbahn (city rail system)
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (United Socialist Party of Germany, in GDR)
SEW	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Westberlins (West Berlin equivalent of SED)
SFB	Sender Freies Berlin (broadcasting station of Free [West] Berlin)
SMA, SMAD	Soviet Military Administration
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany, in Federal Republic and West Berlin)
SSD, STASI	Staatssicherheitsdienst (State Security Police, in GDR)
TSI	Treuhandstelle für Industrie und Handel (Office of Trustee for Industry and Trade, in West Berlin)
TU	Technische Universität (Technical University)
U-Bahn	Utergrundbahn (underground railway, subway; sections are at surface or even elevated)
VOPO	Volkspolizei (People's Police, in GDR)



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# Introduction

The existence of Cölln, one of the twin towns which formed the original nucleus of the present great city of Berlin, is first recorded from 1237, a date which is conventionally taken as that of the foundation of the city as a whole. The 1987 celebrations on the 750th anniversary of this date were the occasion for the publication of the present book.

It is an inevitable consequence of the present political situation in Berlin that any such celebration must take place separately in the two halves of the city. Berlin, while having many aspects of its life in common with other great cities throughout the world, is an enormous geographical exception, a divided city. What is more, while East Berlin has relatively normal access to its hinterland in the German Democratic Republic, West Berlin is to a considerable degree sealed off both from East Berlin and from its natural hinterland; its links are essentially with the Federal Republic, 175 km or more distant. The evolution of this extraordinary situation will be followed in greater detail below ([chs 1–2](#)), but the implications of division and insularity run through every section of the book.

---

# 1

## Berlin: product and victim of history

### 1.1

#### The rise to capital status

##### 1.1.1

##### *No outstanding natural advantages*

At the heart of modern Berlin, the dark, polluted waters of the river Spree slide malodorously round the island of Cölln, that once contained the Berlin Palace of the rulers of Prussia and of the German Second Reich, now replaced by the glass-fronted modernity of the Palast der Republik of the GDR, a building that houses the country's parliament (see figs 6.1 and 6.2). Here, where the stream once divided into three branches and was further interrupted by sandbanks, was from the earliest times the lowest easy crossing of the Spree before it emptied into the wider and often lake-like Havel river. It lay at a point where the low glacial-drift plateaus of Barnim to the north and of Teltow to the south, zones of relatively easy movement by land, were less than 5 km apart across the course of the Berlin *Urstromtal* (former proglacial melt-water channel) within which the river flows. In this part of its course the Spree is clear of the lakes which clutter the Havel confluence in the neighbourhood of Spandau to the west and the Dahme confluence in the neighbourhood of Köpenick to the east, lakes which were later to become a precious recreational resource for the future world city (see fig. 3.1). It must not be forgotten that the Spree, as well as being an obstacle to be overcome, was also a means of movement by water, as it remains to this day. When frozen in winter it could also be used for movement by sledge (Cornish 1923:153–5).

If the geographical situation of Berlin had some advantages, its site was not particularly suitable for building purposes. The sands which form the floor of the *Urstromtal* are intermixed with peat, forming a particularly treacherous foundation. The earliest nuclei, from which medieval Berlin coalesced, clung to sandbanks, still marked today by the city's surviving medieval churches, such as the Marienkirche, which now shares its 'island' with the East Berlin TV tower.

Problems with the foundations of buildings have continued throughout the city's history.

Cölln, on its island, was one of the numerous towns founded in the course of the German eastern colonization. The year 1237, when it was first recorded, is conventionally accepted as the date of the foundation of the whole city. Its twin town of Berlin, on the north bank, was first recorded in 1244, but archaeological evidence suggests a Germanic occupation of both Cölln and Berlin at least eighty years earlier than indicated in documentary sources, perhaps in the decade 1160–70. Unlike some other German town sites in the region, Berlin-Cölln does not appear to have been preceded during the Slav period by any significant settlement.

The advantages of the Spree crossing were not overwhelming, even in the medieval period. Within the area of what was to become Greater Berlin there were two earlier sites of urban or proto-urban nature. To the west, Spandau was a fortified Slav settlement dating from the end of the eighth or the beginning of the ninth century AD, commanding the Spree-Havel confluence. Similarly, the Slav settlement of Köpenick to the east commanded the Dahme-Spree confluence (see [section 6.4.4.](#)). Between the two, Berlin had no particular prominence among the German towns that were established between the Elbe and Oder rivers, and lay away from the major medieval trade routes. What can perhaps be said is that as soon as the plateaus of Teltow and Barnim became the scene of organized German village settlement, their easy accessibility enabled Berlin-Cölln to organize a coherent local market area, whereas Spandau and Köpenick were hemmed in by the lakes which, at an earlier stage, had been a defensive advantage. It was also possible at Berlin to dam one of the branches of the river to power a public mill, still recorded in the street name Mühlendamm. Nevertheless, towns a little further afield, such as Magdeburg or Frankfurt on Oder, were certainly better endowed by nature than Berlin-Cölln. We must look to other causes than the natural environment for a sufficient explanation of the rise of the city to world status.

### 1.1.2

#### *Berlin's geographical situation*

The advantage to a capital of having a central situation within the territory of a state can, perhaps, be overstressed; it is not difficult to compile a list of capitals that have apparently managed to function quite adequately from markedly asymmetrical positions. Certainly, Berlin has rarely been centrally placed with regard to the fluctuating expanses of German territory that the city has from time to time controlled. Even within the Germany of the Second Reich of 1871, Berlin was not far off 100 km closer as the crow flies to its furthest north-eastern outpost at Memel (now Klaipeda in the Soviet Union) on the Baltic than to its south-western extremity in Alsace, although on the other diagonal the cities of industrial Upper Silesia and the Danish frontier were approximately equidistant. The biggest disparity was on Berlin's own latitude, where the boundary with

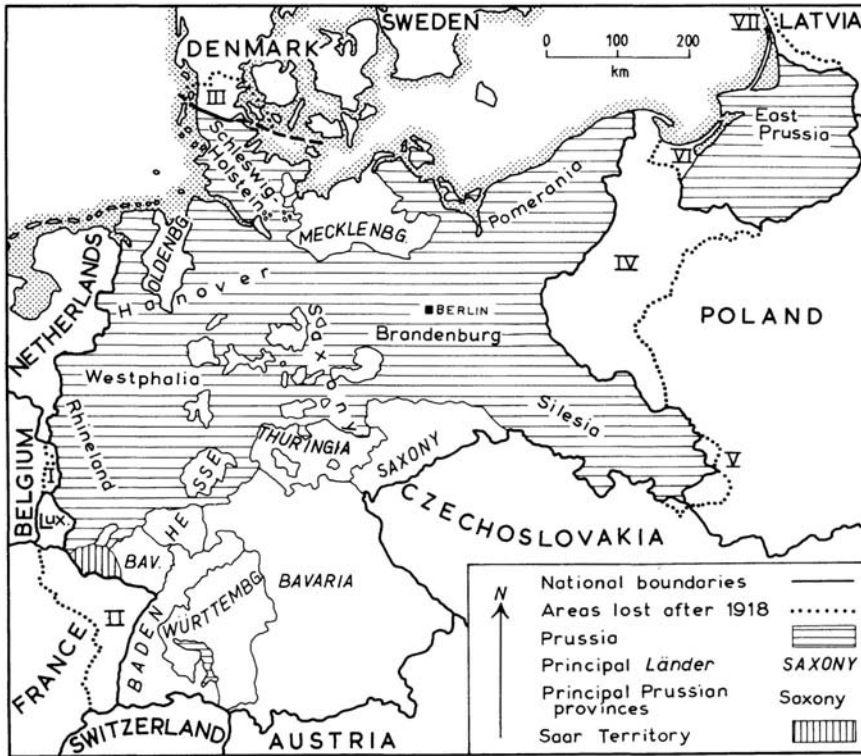


Figure 1.1 Political divisions after the First World War

Russian Poland to the east was about 280 km distant, whereas the Netherlands frontier in the other direction was over 400 km away (fig. 1.1). The asymmetrical location of Berlin has been accentuated by the results of two world wars: whereas the Netherlands boundary has scarcely changed, the boundary with the territory occupied by Poland as a result of the Second World War lies less than 80 km distant in the direct line. By autobahn to the official crossing point it is about 100 km, a little further, but still only about an hour and a half's journey even at the sober pace of GDR road traffic (fig. 1.2). Within the reduced area of the German Democratic Republic, Berlin is much more centrally placed than within the pre-1914 Reich; nevertheless, the southern crossing into Bavaria is some 275 autobahn km away (at present five hours or more by train) as compared with the proximity of the boundary with Polish territory to the east.

It is more meaningful to relate the geographical situation of Berlin not to distance in an absolute sense but to the distribution of population, which can broadly be taken as an indicator of the distribution of economic activity and economic opportunity. Central Europe has two major axes of population and urban density. One follows the Rhine from Switzerland to its mouth, the second intersects the first in the Ruhr area and runs somewhat south of east through

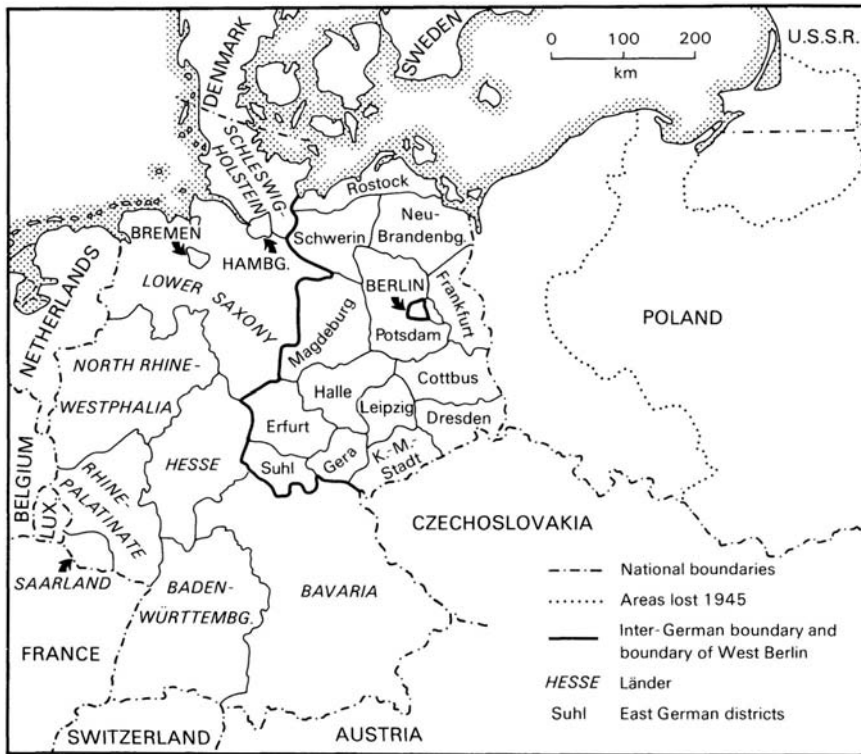


Figure 1.2 Political divisions after the Second World War

Hanover to Saxony and Silesia (fig. 1.3). It might be expected that an ideal German capital would be located somewhere on these axes, preferably at their intersection, whereas Berlin is situated in their north-east quadrant, in the relative emptiness of the North German Lowland. Within this general area it has not even the advantage of a situation on the Baltic coast. What can perhaps be said is that in the narrower context of the GDR the location of Berlin on the Northern Lowland provides a valuable spatial counterweight to the cities of industrial Saxony, contributing towards meeting the country's spatial-planning goal of balanced regional development.

Berlin's relative isolation from other major centres of population and economic activity is however mitigated by the lack of natural obstacles in the terrain that surrounds it; once the city began to develop in importance, it was able to establish the necessary external linkages without insuperable difficulty. Although Berlin was a member of the Hanse at the latest by 1359 (Vogel 1966), it was not on any of the really major routes running southwards from the coast, and it lay north of the great east-west routes along the Harz Foreland and through Thuringia. Yet once Berlin began to assume importance as a residence of the rulers of Brandenburg, there was no difficulty in diverting the post roads through

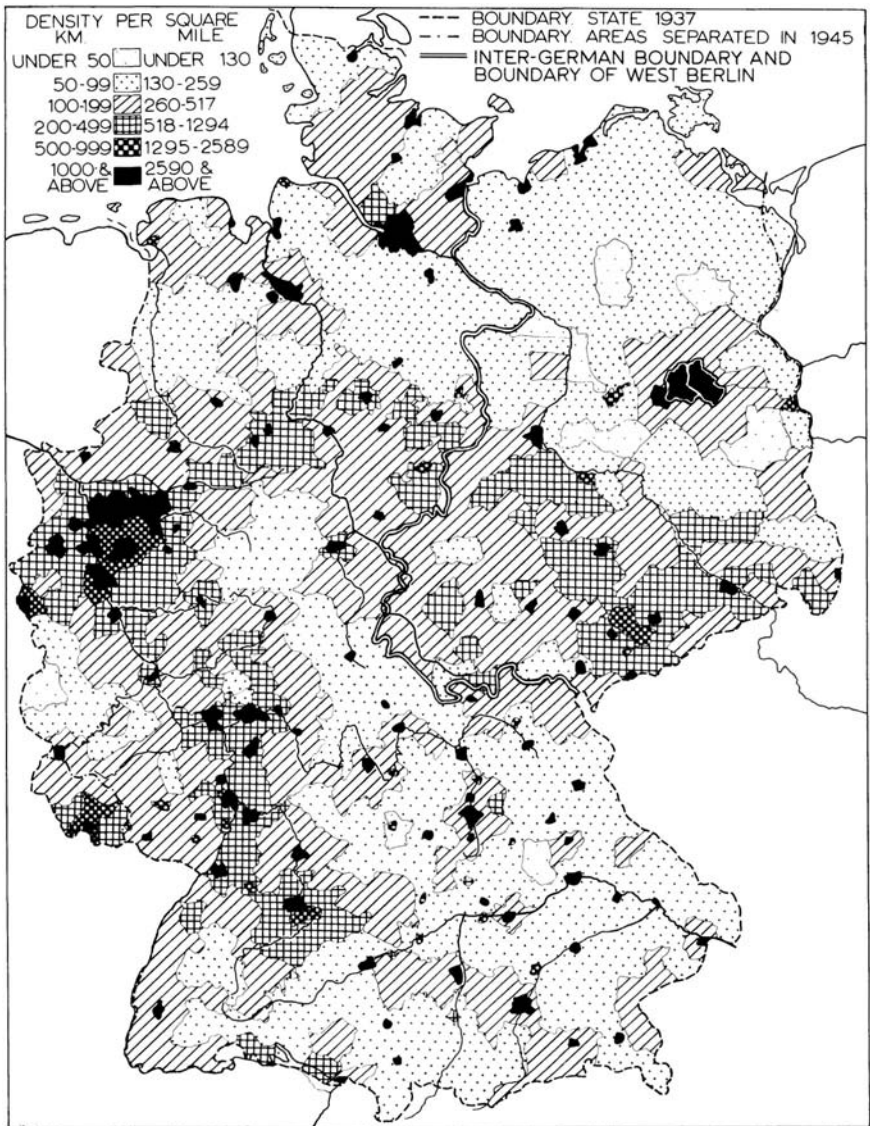


Figure 1.3 The distribution of population, c.1950.

the city and the adjoining palace town of Potsdam. Similarly, there was no obstacle to making Berlin the heart of the nineteenth-century Prussian rail system, and the point of origin of the national autobahn system in the 1930s. Only with waterways has nature played a more positive role; the combination of shallow, generally east-west trending *Urstromtäler*, north-south breakthrough stretches

(such as those occupied by the Havel) and a profusion of lakes facilitated a steady improvement of river navigation and the building of canals from the eighteenth century onwards.

### 1.1.3

#### *The product of history*

It is impossible to dissociate the rise of Berlin from the rise of Brandenburg-Prussia to hegemony in Germany. Initially, the dual settlement of Berlin-Cölln was only one component in the totality of colonization measures initiated in what became the Mark of Brandenburg, designed to increase the power, the lands, and the tax revenues of the ruling Askanier family. Although the Askanier retained a residence in Berlin, the town was not one of the bastions of their power, unlike the fortress at Spandau. Berlin-Cölln was essentially a central market settlement for the planned villages of Barnim and Teltow, into which were concentrated both colonizing Germans and the indigenous Slavs, who had formerly lived in small, scattered settlements. Some of the earliest German villages appear to have originated at the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries under the protection of the Knights Templar (hence the place-name Tempelhof), whose patroness was the Virgin; their villages Mariendorf and Marienfelde (among others) are part of Greater Berlin today. A mint had also been established by 1280, the most important in the Mark of Brandenburg.

The lords of the Mark were also prepared to confer a range of taxation and trading privileges, mostly, no doubt, in return for hard cash. For example, merchants passing through the town were obliged to offer their goods for sale or pay disproportionately high customs dues. It also appears that Berlin merchants were not obliged to pay customs dues to the Margrave on goods moving within the Mark of Brandenburg (Vogel 1966). The citizens grew wealthy, trading rye and timber with the ports of the North Sea coast, although social contrasts opened up between a ruling group of rich merchants and the lesser traders and craftsmen, organized in guilds.

The death of the last Askanier Margrave in 1319 ushered in a period when the Mark of Brandenburg passed through the hands of a variety of frequently absent rulers; this was also a period when Germany as a whole was in a period of political disintegration. Like other towns throughout Germany, Berlin was able to use this period of confusion to bid for increased influence and self-government. Considerable land holdings were built up in the surrounding villages, and further taxation and legal privileges were bought from the various rulers. Berlin and Cölln increased their links, especially for defensive purposes, building a third town hall for common purposes on the bridge that linked them together. Berlin became a leading member of a league of towns of the central Mark, as well as a member of the Hanse.

Independence was, however, not to last, yet ironically its loss was to ensure that Berlin would rise to be a great capital rather than fall into the political

impotence of former great medieval free cities such as Augsburg. In 1411 the emperor appointed Burgrave Frederick VI of Nuremberg, a member of the House of Hohenzollern, to be governor of the Mark of Brandenburg; in 1415 he was definitively installed as Elector Frederick I.

The burghers of Berlin attempted to maintain their independence, looking for help to the Hanse, to the link with Cölln and to association with neighbouring towns in the Mark, but it was soon clear that a new era of direct princely rule had begun. The next elector, Frederick II (Irontooth), systematically eroded the privileges of the town, in part by playing on internal dissensions between the richer merchants and the rest of the population. The elector gained the right to receive the keys of the town on demand and to approve the burgomasters and members of the two town councils. Entry into leagues with other towns was forbidden, and the links with Cölln again dissolved. The commercial, customs, and legal privileges that had been granted to the town over the years were taken back into the increasingly absolutist hands of the ruler, who installed his judges in the former common town hall on the bridge linking the dual towns.

## 1.2

### Electoral and royal capital

The new order was symbolized by the building between 1443 and 1451 of the *Stadtschloss*, the electoral town palace, on the island of Cölln. From about 1470–80 this was continuously the seat of the electoral court, Berlin-Cölln thus entering on a new career as a *Residenzstadt*. Although clearly supreme in Brandenburg, of which it was now administratively an integral part, it was at this stage only one among many petty princely capitals in a politically fragmented Germany. That it was to rise above all these others was the result of the linkage of its fortunes with those of the House of Hohenzollern.

The transformation of Berlin-Cölln into a princely capital brought about a parallel transformation in the economic, social, and cultural life of the dual town. It came to be dominated by officials, who were under the legal jurisdiction of the court, not of the town, and who were exempt from the taxes and other obligations of citizenship. Initially, the Landtag (the parliament) met in the palace, which also housed the electoral Chancellery, the higher courts of justice, and the administrations for taxation, finance, and ecclesiastical affairs (Brandenburg accepted the Reformation in 1529–40, a move giving religious, economic, and political advantages to the ruler). What the new capital did not receive was Brandenburg's university, which was instead founded in 1506 in the trading town of Frankfurt on Oder. Readers in England will be well aware that this was not the only example of university location outside the capital; perhaps the Electors were fearful of student unrest, or desired to keep an uncontrollable foreign element at a safe distance (Schinz 1964:66). The demand for goods to supply the court, its officials, and the army stimulated the growth of manufacturing. The richer merchants increasingly turned from long-distance trade



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