

were Arsonists were burned at the stake. Those guilty of swearing false oaths had two joints of their foremost fingers removed, while blasphemers lost their tongues. Lesser crimes brought whipping and banishment.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, Nuremberg entered a gradual decline as a trading and manufacturing center. Europe's great trading centers had shifted to the Atlantic seaboard, away from the Adriatic and the Mediterranean, to which Nuremberg provided convenient access. Lisbon, Antwerp, and later Amsterdam displaced Venice and Genoa as western Europe's main trading ports. New protectionist policies, reflecting the political centralization of nation-states and their growing competition, curtailed Nuremberg's markets, especially in France and the Netherlands. Within the city itself, Italian firms, eighteen of which had resident representatives by 1574, skimmed off much of the spice and precious cloth trade, key items in Balthasar's business. Nuremberg's famous penchant for moral order and discipline also played a role, for the city's conscientious supervision of mercantile activity drove some merchants to relocate in cities with freer trade policies and greater willingness to bend laws—Augsburg in particular.

A series of major epidemics that struck between 1560 and 1584 also sent the city reeling in the second half of the century. Plague killed an astonishing 9,186 children over the four-year period between 1561 and 1564. In 1570, some 1,600 children died of smallpox. Between 1573 and 1576 there were 6,500 deaths from plague and dysentery, while spotted fever (measles or smallpox) took 5,000 lives in 1585. During these twenty-five years, Nuremberg suffered population losses that it took a generation to replenish.

The artistic and cultural life of the city also declined in the second half of the century. During the first half, Nuremberg had been the center of the German Renais-

sance and Reformation, and the art of Albrecht Dürer and the poetry of Hans Sachs reached an international audience. Such preeminence could not be sustained, despite the brilliant goldwork of Wenzel Jamnitzer and the versatile prints of Jost Amman. When Nuremberg's wealthy merchants collected art in the 1570s and '80s, they competed for the masters of the first half of the century. There was a notable architecture (especially magnificent private town houses), portraiture, and sculpture during the second half of the century, but its influence remained local. The artistic and cultural life of the city had reached a plateau—a high one, to be sure, but not the heights of the age of Dürer.

❖ THE BEHAIMS AND THE PAUMGARTNERS

Behaim and Paumgartner are important names in Nuremberg's political, commercial, and cultural life. The Behaims had been established merchants in Nuremberg since the thirteenth century, the Paumgartners since the late fifteenth, when family members migrated from Augsburg to expand their business. Magdalena's and Balthasar's kin shaped a considerable part of Nuremberg's sixteenth-century history. Magdalena's father, Paul (d. 1568), was a senior burgomaster and a captain general in the 1550s and 1560s, and in 1561 he led the city's delegation to the congress in Naumberg where Lutheran territories, preparing for talks with Catholics at the Council of Trent, reaffirmed the oldest Lutheran confession, the Augsburg Confession. Magdalena's brother Paul (d. 1621) served the city as a junior burgomaster in the 1580s and '90s, while her brother Friedrich (d. 1613) was superintendent (*Pfleger*) over Gräfenburg

and Hilpoldstein. Her siblings (she was the eldest of eight, all of whom she outlived) married into several of Nuremberg's most politically influential and commercially successful families.

Apart from the fact that Magdalena was educated to vernacular literacy and rarely traveled far beyond Nuremberg, we know little about her life during the years before her marriage. The same may be said for the years after her marriage. She was forty-five when Balthasar died, and she lived another forty-two years before her own death. The family genealogy indicates that she never remarried. One inference about her activity during these silent years may be drawn from her letters to her husband. She was very close to the members of her family, involved in both their private and business lives. Such intimacy was perhaps influenced by the fact that she was the eldest, although she, her siblings, and her in-laws seem also genuinely to have liked one another.

Balthasar's grandfather Caspar (d. 1523) and his father, Balthasar, Sr. (d. 1594), were members of the Large Council. They also served as city planners (Caspar as *Baumeister*, Balthasar as *Baurichter*) and superintendents in neighboring territories (Caspar over Kronburg Steinbruch, Balthasar over Altdorf). Balthasar's famous relatives Bernhard and Hieronymus were key figures in the city's political life for almost half a century. Bernhard died a member of the Seven, the government's privy council, in 1549. Hieronymus guided Nuremberg through the Reformation. A friend of Luther and Melancthon, Hieronymus had been the first to whom Luther offered the hand of the renegade nun Katherine von Bora whom he himself finally married. At the time of his death in 1565, Hieronymus stood out among the powerful Three who ran the city. His son and our Balthasar's (personally distant) contemporary, Hieronymus, Jr., was curator of the Altdorf Academy, a school for patrician children founded in 1575 that evolved into

a university in the seventeenth century. This Hieronymus died as first *Losunger*, the city's recognized highest official, in 1602. In 1592, marriage again linked the Behaims and the Paumgartners, this time at the highest political level, when Hieronymus' daughter Rosina married Magdalena's brother Paul.

Balthasar also had an impressive pedigree on his mother's side. Helena Paumgartner (d. 1567) was a Scheurl. Her family, like the Paumgartners, had settled Nuremberg in the 1460s. Her father, Albrecht (d. 1530), was a successful merchant, and her uncle Christoph was the renowned humanist and jurist who conducted the disputations in the 1520s that made the Reformation official (although he himself later returned to the old church).

A medallion in the German National Museum bearing Balthasar's likeness dates his death in 1601 and describes him as being thirty-eight years of age at the time; a contemporary portrait conveys the identical information. However, all the authoritative genealogies, including an etching of his family tree, date his death in July 1600, without venturing either his birth date (in Altdorf, near Nuremberg) or his age at death. There are good reasons to challenge the accuracy of thirty-eight as Balthasar's age at death. Not only would this make him an incredible nine-year-old apprentice in Nuremberg, but he would also have been only twenty at the time of his marriage to Magdalena in 1583, well under the legal minimum age (twenty-five) for men to marry without parental permission, and his wife's junior by six years. A check of the baptismal book of Nuremberg's St. Sebald Church has definitely established his birthdate in 1551. He was baptized on February 19 of that year, a day or two after his birth. "Walthasar Paumgartner filius Walthasar—19 Februarii," reads the entry.

By comparison with many of their kin, Magdalena and Balthasar were very dim lights, ordinary members

of extraordinary families. Balthasar never held or aspired to any public office, and his financial success was hard won and modest. His once-in-a-lifetime indulgence was a Polish wolf coat, while Magdalena could rhapsodize over a bolt of silk; the high life for her was a few days with her husband in an Augsburg inn. Although Balthasar managed to purchase a small estate in Hohenstein in late 1596 and to escape the merchants' harsh regimen after 1597, he remained a man who had always to count his gulden.

It is the obscurity and ordinary qualities of our couple that give their story an advantage, for they are rich in frustration and hope, the real stuff of history. With their eyes fixed on the morrow, they are always game, searching, ready to experiment. And, best of all, they tell all.

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Balthasar Paumgartner and Magdalena Behaim were betrothed in October 1582 and married six months later, in April 1583. During their engagement, when passions were strong, they exchanged letters between Lucca, where Balthasar's business had taken him, and Nuremberg, where Magdalena awaited his return. Eleven of these letters have survived, eight from Balthasar, three from Magdalena. The lovers followed the epistolary conventions of the day, so the letters occasionally express love and affection in highly stylized formulas which a casual reader might mistake for insincerity or, at least, a lack of imagination. The couple greet each other, for instance, as "most beloved" or, setting piety ahead of desire, "after God, my heart's dearest treasure." Typically the letters bear solemn pledges of "true, friendly, benevolent, unending devotion." They can conclude with "one hundred thousand friendly and sincere greetings." Balthasar self-effacingly describes himself as "a poor reluctant writer, who prefers to say his words in person rather than write them." "Pay me a visit with a little letter," he will lovingly plead. Or he can blossom forth: "May God in His grace preserve us and bring us soon together again in our little garden of joy."