

Cities of the Holy Roman Empire (c. 1500)

Abstract

Under the rule of the Roman king, who also held the title emperor, the German lands were governed by a myriad of secular and ecclesiastical princes, also by dukes, counts, and other titled and even untitled nobles, whose ranks and possessions went back to the High Middle Ages or earlier. Among these and other direct [*reichsunmittelbar*] subjects of the emperor, the Imperial and Free Cities formed a special group. Free from the rule of the territorial princes, they possessed seats and votes in the Imperial Diet [*Reichstag*] and were obliged to pay Imperial taxes and perform military services. The Free Cities, which had been developing since the thirteenth century, enjoyed even greater independence. Generally, they were bishop's sees and had once been ruled by their bishops. Overall, more than 65 Imperial or Free Cities existed around 1500, the majority of which maintained their independence until 1803. Some of them extended their territory far beyond their original city limits. They were more highly concentrated in the southern sections of the Empire than in the north.

The leading Imperial and Free Cities included: the Hanseatic cities of Bremen, Hamburg, and Lübeck, as well as the old Imperial city of Aachen, Cologne (the largest city in the Empire with approximately 40,000 inhabitants), Dortmund, Frankfurt, Speyer, Worms, Regensburg, Nuremberg, Ulm, and Augsburg. Among this group, Nuremberg had a special place: the Golden Bull of 1356 stipulated that the city was to be the site of the first Imperial Diet convened by each new Emperor. Nuremberg was given official custody of the Imperial insignia in 1424.

Source



Source: Original cartography by IEG-MAPS, Institut für Europäische Geschichte, Mainz, A. Kunz/

Joachim Robert Moeschl, 2007. Revised cartography (WCAG-compliant) by Gabriel Moss, 2022.

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