

THE COMPETITION BETWEEN BOHEMIAN AND IDRIAN MERCURY IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE 16TH CENTURY

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A study of new archival sources and a critical evaluation of familiar material reveals a detailed picture of the competition between Bohemian and Idrian mercury during the first half of the 16th century. About the year 1520 a group of wealthy merchants from Nürnberg opened the mercury mines at Oberschönbach in collaboration with Count Schlick. Hans Tegler, factor of the Mercury Monopoly Company of Hans Pflügel (Salzburg) and Wilhelm Neumann (Villach) took over, at Pflügel's request, the sale of mer-

cury from Oberschönbach. It was a binding term of the agreement that neither mercury nor cinnobar was to be supplied to Venice.

The firm of Hochstetter from Augsburg in 1525 took over the monopoly for the sale of mercury from Idria, and, like his predecessors, signed an agreement with Tegler for its sale and distribution. As the Augsburg firm did not keep to the prices agreed upon, Tegler ignored the prohibition against the delivery of mercury and cinnobar to Venice. As a result, Archduke Ferdinand at the request of the Hochstetters closed the passes of his hereditary lands against the transport of Bohemian mercury.

In 1534 Hans Steber (Staiber), a member of a rich Nürnberg merchant family, appears as the owner of the monopoly for the sale of mercury from Oberschönbach. In 1534 he contracted a three-year agreement with the mines at Oberschönbach for the sale of their mercury. In 1535 Hans Steber negotiated again with the Idria mines in Villach with the object of renewing his contract. Whether an agreement was signed is not known.

According to production figures (about a third of the output at Idria) the mercury mines at Oberschönbach could not compete with those of Idria and Almaden. „Bohemian Quicksilver“ however proved to be a troublesome competitor in the mercury market in the first half of the 16th century because it kept prices down.