



A Landscape Reminiscent of Bygone Days

*"...land of the free Imperial
knights of Franconia. Not only
do the ruins on the hilltops or
the Baroque castles speak of such;
above all, it is the churches..."*

Josef Dünninger



edge of the Hassberg Hills. The 45 kilometer stretch of wooded hills is where keuper rock comes to the surface. Occasionally lava was forced up and solidified to basalt. The Imperial knights literally sat on top of each other in the Hassberg Hills and even today the Hassgau region is a cornucopia of fortress ruins and storybook castles alongside half-timbered villages and towns. Somewhat off the beaten path, this region offers some of the romantic of a bygone era.

A stone statue of Roland stands as the symbol of peace in front of the town hall in Königsberg. The astronomer, Johannes Müller, was born here in 1436 and entered

the annals of science under the Latin version of his birthplace *Regiomontanus*. He set up the first observatory in Germany in Nuremberg in 1471 and Christopher Columbus sailed to the New World using Müller's calculations on the orbit of the stars.

Ebern has a gray tower whose glockenspiel depicts Death and an angel swinging their hammers. The parish church in Bannach has a late Gothic relief of Christ on the Tree of Life.

Two-hundred-forty-eight stone shields erected by a noble brotherhood decorate the Gothic choir of the *Ritterkapelle* or knight's chapel in Hassfurt on the Main.

The tympanum of the portal is rich in detail and depicts the arrival of the Wise Men at the manger in Bethlehem.

The Bettenburg castle is near the town of Hofheim. The lord of the castle, Christian Truchsess von Wetzhausen, wrote a comprehensive textbook on growing cherries that is still useful over a century later. Truchsess also opened his castle doors to writers of the German Romantic: Friedrich Rückert, Gustav Schwab, Friedrich de la Motte-Fouque, Heinrich Voss the Younger and Jean Paul were among his guests. Charlotte von Kalb, the young, impulsive yet unhappy friend of

Castle Moats and Half-timbered Buildings

The hills of the Rhön and the Hassberg as well as the foothills of the Thuringian Wood make up the fertile countryside of Grabfeld including the town of Bad Königshofen on the upper end of the Franconian Saale River. Königshofen, a former Würzburg fortification that lost its Baroque bastions in the early 19th century, is laid out like a checkerboard. The large market square boasts three impressive fountains and on the west side still stands a measuring stone for the grain dealers from the year 1525. The sodium chloride springs were dug in 1898.

An ancient trade route, the *Rennweg*, runs through the Thuringian Wood and atop the

Previous pages: The Old Castle in Gereuth with its Renaissance arcades is typical of the manor houses in the Hassberg Hills.

Above: A plaque in commemoration of the astronomer, Johannes Müller, who was born in Königsberg and called himself the Latin version of his birthplace, *Regiomontanus*.

Right: The pentagonal moated castle in Irmelshausen is surrounded by the Milz River and a pond.

Following pages: The reflection of the moated castle of Brennhausen in a weir.





the German playwright, Friedrich Schiller, lived in Waltershausen.

Reflections in the Ponds

Castles surrounded by water, their reflections shimmering in the moat, are characteristic of the Hassgau region. Often the castles have remained in the family for centuries and most of them are Renaissance edifices built after the Peasants' War in 1525. One such example is the moated castle in Kleinbardorf, a village which also has Bavaria's largest Jewish cemetery with over 4,400 gravestones. The barons von Bibra still reside in the fortified pentagonal castle in Irmelshausen on the Milz River; Renaissance castles can also be found in Trappstadt or Brennhausen. The ruins of a castle moat can still be seen to the north of the Rococo castle and orangery in Rentweinsdorf.

Two of the region's best known fortress ruins include Altenstein soaring out of a wooded setting and hewn out of rock and

the von Rotenhan family's ancestral castle whose lower floor was carved out of solid rock as well. The von Rotenhan family resides in a stately Renaissance castle, Schloss Eyrichshof, whose north wing displays early elements of the Rococo.

In Gereuth, the old castle built in 1600 stands adjacent to the new Baroque castle which the Jewish banker, Jacob Hirsch, bought from the Greiffenclau family in 1815. The Bavarian king then granted him the title of *Hirsch auf Gereuth* and hereditary nobility.

A smaller, simpler version of the Old Main Bridge or Saints Bridge in Würzburg spans the Baunach River near Frickendorf. This bridge has three arches and four Rococo saints whose robes flutter half-way round the columns. Logically, St. Nepomuk, the patron saint of bridges, is one of the four.

Below: The charming interior of the Eyrichshof Castle near Ebern.

Right: The Imperial barons von Rotenhan have resided in the spacious Renaissance castle Eyrichshof for nearly 700 years.

