

Baden-Baden, "Summer Capital of Europe". A history of French-German relations (1830-1870)

For almost a quarter of a century, from the mid-1840s until the Franco-Prussian War of 1870/1871, the spa town of Baden-Baden, situated between the Upper Rhine Plain and the western Black Forest, was the "summer capital of Europe". In terms of both the number of visitors and the internationality of its guests, as well as the scope and quality of its entertainment program, Baden-Baden was the undisputed leader among the fashionable European spas of the 19th century, and no other made as much of a splash.

When contemporaries on both sides of the Rhine referred to the city as a "French colony" or a "branch of Paris," they had good arguments for doing so: Most foreign tourists came from France, which, in addition to geographical proximity, was also due to the fact that Baden-Baden had already been connected to the main line of the Baden Railway since 1845, and since 1852 there had been an almost continuous connection from Paris, on which express trains ran in summer. French was the main language of communication, from the highest circles of the spa society, to the hotel and restaurant business, to everyday services. The center of spa life was the "Maison de conversation," whose sumptuous halls had been designed by Parisian scenographers. Their commissioners were also Parisians, namely the gambling entrepreneurs Benazet, who were called the "kings of Baden" because their influence extended far beyond the gambling tables. They had the clear intention, it was said, "to 'elevate' the beautiful Baden-Baden to a French resort, a gathering place for the Parisian world." And indeed, they imported Parisian architectural taste, salon and festive culture, and French par force hunting to the Oos Valley. They engaged the ensembles of the Théâtre des Italiens and the Comédie française for performances and the Paris Jockey Club as organizers of the Iffezheim gallop races, not to mention a large number of journalists who ensured that every year between May and October not a day went by without the name of Baden-Baden being mentioned in at least one Parisian newspaper.

But for all its French character, Baden-Baden was a German town, located about 15 kilometers as the crow flies from the French Rhine border in the Grand Duchy of Baden. For all the convenience that the journey had gained for French tourists thanks to the railroad, leaving one territory and entering the other was not an unnoticed process at the time: at the same time as the Rhine bridge was opened in 1861, mighty fortifications had been erected in Kehl, announcing the passing of the state border already on the opposite bank. On the onward journey with the Rhine Valley Railway, the travelers were accompanied by a scenic environment that corresponded in an almost phenotypical way to the romantic image of

Germany that was widespread abroad at the time - especially in France and England - also much in the town itself was "German": First of all, the local population should be mentioned, which in 1805 comprised 2023 inhabitants and grew to 9280 by 1868. The hotel business, gastronomy and other tourist services were in their hands alone, and trade in both everyday and luxury goods was predominantly controlled by local and regional actors. Moreover, even in the years with the highest international frequency, most guests came either from Baden itself or from another German state, including a comparatively high number of members of German ruling dynasties.

The Benazets did not ignore these facts and were not simply importers of French influences, but took into account the tastes of the German public as well as the needs of the local population and promoted Franco-German exchanges, such as through the periodical *L'Illustration de Bade*, founded specifically for this purpose, but also through the music and theater program.

This thesis examines the development of Baden-Baden in the 19th century as a history of Franco-German relations. In addition to cultural practices and physical space, i.e. infrastructure and architecture, the representations of Baden-Baden in German and French media are analyzed. Here, the potential for conflict inherent in Franco-German relations at the time came to the fore: in the German press, the denunciation of an alleged cultural "colonization" by France, encouraged the resort to stereotypes of foreign and self-perception, while French journalists drew the picture of a cosmopolitan space in which France, however, played a culturally leading role. The Franco-Prussian War of 1870/71 marked the demise of the "summer capital of Europe" and thus forms the end point of the study.