



Summary

The New Nobility in Austrian Silesia after 1848

The presented monograph is a contribution to the knowledge of the nobilitated Austrian Silesians, who achieved noble crowns in the second half of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century. A sample including several tens of people, who came from various social classes and shared in the development of the Austrian Silesian region to different degrees, was selected for the analysis of the mechanisms of ennoblement. Their positions, ennoblement and engagement in the social and economic life of this region was analysed through an investigation of the nobilitation documents and relevant coats-of-arms, which comprise a separate chapter of this monograph.

Within the research, it was shown that officers, judges and officials reached through ennoblement the class of knight and the class of free lords (barons). For officers, ennoblement was, moreover, tied to the number of years served in the army. Entrepreneurs and managers, who are represented in our sample by, for instance, Schnack, Janotta or the brothers Keil, understood the title as a means to increasing their prestige. The evaluation of the significance of ennoblement for the new noble families was very closely related to the date of the assuming the title. The analysis of the sample showed that the majority of new noblemen were in the age between 50 and 60 years at the time of the issuance of the deed, but we also find people over 70 (e.g. Pohl, Säaf, Scharrer, Wessely and others). The oldest recipient in the investigated sample was Wiedenfeld at 80 years of age, Stellwag did not survive the preparation of the ennoblement deed.

It is not possible currently to answer the question of to what extent ennoblement influenced the life of the offspring satisfactorily as there are so many partial and fragmentary reports in the archival materials, but it is clear that we find people also in the examined sample, who understood ennoblement as appreciation of their own merits (Kreitner, Kropatschek), as well as individuals who attempted (unsuccessfully) to transfer ennoblement on selected members of their family (Urbanek). However, on the other hand, it can be said that there were also families, whose members achieved ennoblement in two generations, which can be considered as proof of a long-term social ascent.

In terms of the spatial mobility nobilitated people, represented in the followed sample, their economic union with Silesia was very free and with exceptions they did not boast of extensive family or landed property. This information



was surprising, if we take into account the actual process of ennoblement and especially the process of the negotiation and granting of predicates and coats-of-arms, to which the vast majority of the applicants for ennoblement devoted significant attention, because with a number of applicants for ennoblement we find references to a geographical origin or place of activity, which are closely connected with places in Austrian Silesia.

The newly nobilitated peers also differed from the old nobility in their way of life, because even after the granting of an aristocratic title they mainly remained faithful to the lifestyle of the urban patriciate, into which, however, they incorporated also elements, which were connected with the old nobility – the purchase of glorious palaces in towns or estates near provincial residences. Nevertheless, unlike the previous periods, these purchases no longer had the character of the reinvestment of monetary means, but represented an imitation of the lifestyle of the aristocratic families. Yet it is necessary to note at this point that the research confirmed the thesis of the genealogical closed nature of the old aristocratic families, who did not allow member of the new nobility among them. In the course of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, however, contact intensified between these two groups and they mutually merged in the public space.

The research further showed that the new nobility did not have such a homogeneous form as the old aristocratic families. While they belonged to the upper class in social stratification, there were distinctly diversified based on their professional orientation. In other words—the nobilitated officials and judges merged with the official elites. Ennoblement with the members of the technical intelligentsia played a somewhat ambivalent role, because with this group emphasis was placed on other—professional—qualities. However, it is necessary even in this case to distinguish between for instance the employees of the railway companies on the one hand and technical officials on the other hand. Precisely with the latter group, predominantly in the services of the Těšín chamber and the Order of Teutonic Knights, ennoblement gave the necessary shine and social prestige, outwardly expressed by a coat-of-arms and predicate. It thus could also be a means of social ascent. It is possible also to assess the efforts of the Opava and Těšín mayors to achieve ennoblement analogously. Using the example of the ennoblement of the Těšín mayor Demel, it is possible to speak of the increasing influence of civil society.

Multi-layered relations to Vienna are characteristic for all of the studied people. Many of them studied at universities there; some of them spent most of their professional life in the capital city of the monarchy, wither in public administration or in business or Vienna became a place in which they enjoyed the autumn of their lives.

Nevertheless, it is possible to label those nobilitated people from the examined sample, who during their careers served on the “periphery” without hesitation as the bearers and implementers of modernization. Undoubtedly, the entrepreneurs



or officials in the services of the already mentioned Těšín chamber and the Order of Teutonic Knights deserved it, because they brought new technologies to the region, modernized and rationalized the use of natural resources, contributed to the development of professional schooling etc.

Yet the significance of ennoblement did not manifest itself only in economic life but had far-reaching consequences in politics. A number of newly nobilitated peers were active on the communal level, which is proved also by a number of honorary citizenships granted in the municipalities of Austrian Silesia. The political ambitions of the new noblemen can also be judged based on a look at the composition of the Silesian Land Diet, through which 161 deputies went in 1861–1918: 28 belonged to the old families, 12 came from the new nobility. In seven cases, the deputy himself was directly elevated and in three cases the family had been nobilitated in the previous generation. However, regional politics did not have to be the “final” goal; we find in the examined sample newly nobilitated peers, who became for a short time ministers in many Cisleithanian governments of the second half of the 19th century.

However, research of the nobilitation deeds and nobilitations did not provide an answer to the question of the national feeling of those nobilitated. From the indications, it is possible to judge that their communicative language was German, felt like Germans and some of them apparently supported the Great German concept, but it is not possible to generalize this area based on the studied material, and so is a challenge for future research.

