

THE NOBILITY AND THE ALIMENTATION
OF THE POOR IN BOHEMIA, 1848-1914

Tatjana Tönsmeier

Even after the revolution, Bohemian aristocrats did still possess large estates, which were administrated with a view to maximizing profit. These estates were the reason why the nobility was able to maintain a form of governing power with regard to a distinct territory even after its privileges had been withdrawn. One of the tactics exploited towards this end was charity. The Czernin Endowment for the Poor is a good example to demonstrate that the “alms” distributed mostly went to people who had once been on the payroll of the count’s estates, provided they were as loyal as they were in need of support. As an instrument of power, the funds donated were aimed at overcoming anonymity by singling out individual recipients, thereby transforming economic or legal ties into affective ones. To the local poor this meant that they had to seek the means to cover their needs from either communal institutions or the ones established by the count. They stood the best chance of success when they managed to “use” local authorities to make sure their interests were acted upon by the count’s endowment for the poor.