

ABSTRACTS

TRANSFORMATIONS OF NOBILITY IN THE BOHEMIAN LANDS

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On the basis of both older and recent historiographic insights, this study does not only deal with the conditions of rise, development, and internal composition of the nobility in the Bohemian lands from the early middle ages up to the 20th century, it also attempts at picturing the changes in the collective identity of the social groups that made up nobility. Being part of nobility presupposed positive proof that one had generations of noble ancestors. Widespread traditionalism enhanced the importance of the evolution and maintenance of recollections, this making up a central and constitutive element of noble identity. Just as fundamental was the belief that things are unalterable. Thus, rituals in the life cycle of noble persons remained almost the same from the high middle ages up to the 20th century. On one hand, when in the 19th century in connection with the change from estates to a bourgeois society the special position of the nobility eroded more and more, public rituals did form the element on which noble persons based their new societal extraordinariness. On the other hand, they had to take into account the changes of modern society just as everyone else. Nobility was instrumental in bringing about civilisatory, cultural, and economic innovation. During their training, in the course of travels abroad and stays at court, noble persons adopted new patterns of culture and models of behavior, which they passed on, in the long run, to other strata of modern society.

While the authors of the present study cannot devote the same attention to every phase of development and every identity change of nobility in the Bohemian lands because of the state of historical research, they do arrive at general conclusions which may form the basis of further research into the life of noble persons.