

“BY ROYAL BOHEMIAN POWER AND PERFECTION”.
Changes in Noble Titles in the Context of Ennoblements both in the Bohemian
Kingdom and under Habsburg Rule

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The present study furnishes a comprehensive insight into the development of noble titles in Bohemia in the period from the accession to the throne of Ferdinand I. (1526) through to the proclamation of the Austrian Empire (1804). The right to bestow a noble title upon somebody was a royal prerogative, admission to the noble corporations, however, was decided upon by the estates themselves. This kind of cooperation between king and estates was terminated in the 1620s as a consequence of the the estate rebellion having been defeated. The competences that had belonged to the estates were transferred in their entirety to the King of Bohemia. At the same time, a graduated set of noble titles modeled after the fashion of the Reich was introduced, which broadly corresponded to the one in use in the Austrian territories. A turning point in the legal and territorial definition of Bohemian noble titles was the substitution, in 1752, of a unified list of noble titles valid throughout the Austrian Hereditary Lands for the previously independent sets of Bohemian and Austrian titles. However, the legal competence of awarding noble titles in the Hereditary Lands remained with the offices of King of Bohemia and Archduke of Austria, respectively. This allowed, in a few individual cases in the second half of the 18th century, the titles of prince or duke to be awarded to Bohemian subjects. The legal dichotomy was not abolished until 1810 when a decree transferred all competences connected to the awarding of noble titles to the Austrian Emperor. Since then, the term ‘Austrian Imperial nobility’ has been finally justified.