

An exclusive position of the nobility in early modern society was attributed to its special status comprising several elements. One of them was their cultural background and shared values that manifested themselves in the ways they solved various life situations as well as in the way they built their specific environment (life-world). Another sign of the noble rank was its legal delineation given by a set of privileges that enabled members of this class to follow their own rules in the area of law and to participate in the political power in the country. The third code of distinction distinguishing the nobility from other estates was their origin and tradition (primordially). Its importance stemmed from a conviction that honor – this dominant socio-cultural construct of early modern society – can be passed on from generation to generation. This honor could be gradually cumulated, and a family honor thus constituted a sum of individual ancestors' honors, who had added their own merits to it, such as excellent deeds on the battlefield or in connection with peace activities. Therefore, a family was a community composed of ancestors, contemporaries, as well as of still unborn family members, who were obliged to participate in the building of the family honor.

Thanks to the family honor cumulation, the position of each member of the given noble family in society could be legitimized retrospectively. Proof of ancestors' merits and status was required when one wanted to enter an exclusive community (such as Orders of Knighthood, or the Chapter), and served as a basis when searching for a suitable life partner or for one's acceptance among higher noble ranks. However, in addition to this public dimension of the family honor, there was also its private dimension, since this honor was part of each nobleman's self-acceptance; each nobleman derived his value from it and thus manifested his family origin by various means – for instance by demonstrating his ties to the family seat, using the family coat of arms for representative purposes, or by showing his respect to his ancestors. Like this, the nobleman's identity was embedded in the past, in the lives of his ancestors, whose outstanding characteristics he was to inherit according to the period's conviction and whose examples he was to emulate and continue in his everyday life.

The historical legitimization of the nobility was a common phenomenon that helped to co-define this class of the medieval and early modern society in entire Europe. However, the area of Central Europe, delimited by Germany and by the Habsburg monarchy, manifested certain specifics given by its political organization, religious development, and cultural differences. A significant landmark in the evolution of the historical legitimization of the nobility came with the development of written culture in the 15th century, followed by the invention of the printing press that enabled to build a new type of public. The nobility thus found itself under the pressure exerted by other social groups to prove

THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Historical Identity of Central European Nobility in the 17th Century

Prague, 9.–10. April 2025

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their origin and thus also their exceptionality through written evidence among which – in addition to the royal privileges or epitaphs on graves – genealogical research played a key role. It is no coincidence that this pressure met with the emergence of a new way of historical thinking brought about by humanism. The noblemen soon discovered that this humanistic historiography was beneficial for them and they could use it for their own historical legitimization, and humanists found generous patrons among the nobility. This established a mutually beneficial relationship that lasted throughout the entire early modern period and culminated in the Baroque period, that is just before the critical enlightened historiography asserted itself.

The above-mentioned theses have to be confirmed or disproved using examples of particular noble families and individuals of noble birth, for whom historical legitimization was important due to various reasons. That is the basis for numerous topics that will be discussed at the international conference organized by The Institute of History of the Czech Academy of Sciences and The National Archives of the Czech Republic **on April 9 and 10, 2025**. Since this meeting will be interdisciplinary, we cordially invite not only historians, but also literary scholars, art historians, archivists, or historical sociologists.

In particular, contributions on the following topics are welcome:

- History as part of the family representation: building of family galleries, treatment of family (eponymous) castles and memory spaces (burial sites)
- Materialization of the noble history: treatment of special objects of material culture with ties to the family history (epitaphs, liturgical equipment, ancestors' funeral paraphernalia, ancestors' clothes)
- Founding of family archives and libraries in the early modern period and their social history (placement, figures or archivists and librarians, possibilities of their usage, organizational principles)
- Humanist writers and historians as authors of family narratives and their ties to individual noblemen; history of the nobility as part of the period polemics, humanistic correspondence, as well as an argument in legal disputes
- Genealogies of the nobility and their treatment in the early modern period, reasons for and ways of their creation

- Influence of the printing press on presentations of the family history (reasons for and possibilities of publications of family genealogies, descriptions of family seats, descriptions of significant events in the family history, etc.)
- Family and picture galleries and their constructions at Baroque seats: portraits of ancestors and famous scenes from the family's history
- Role of the coat of arms as a symbol of the family honor cumulation and a tool for its visualization
- Family legends and mythology (specifics and general topoi), the influence of ancient and biblical motifs on the creation of family myths, the origin myth versus the reality of the family origin, intentionally invented history
- Historical education of the noblemen, communication of historical topics to the individual family members as part of their socialization and their knowledge/lack of knowledge
- Absence of the family history as a handicap: attempts of newly promoted families to compensate for the absence of a historic origin

Organizing committee: Jiří Hrbek, Martina Hrdinová, Martin Holý, Michal Vokurka, Veronika Lešková

Conference languages: English and German

Contribution length: 20 minutes

Abstracts of the maximum length of one page of text have to be delivered to the e-mail address **balbin@hiu.cas.cz** by October 31, 2024. The organizing committee reserves the right to choose contributions. Participants will be informed about the potential admission of their contribution to the conference by the end of November 2024.

Following a reader's report, selected contributions are planned to be published in the journal *Český časopis historický/Czech Historical Review*, which is part of the SCOPUS database.

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