

ARTICLES

THE ORIGIN, GLORY AND FALL OF THE NEW BUSINESS NOBILITY OF THE HABSBURG MONARCHY

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The study describes the origin, glory and fall of several important business families (Fries, Henikstein, Friesenhof and others), who gained noble status in Vienna at the end of the 18th century and retained considerable social prestige and wealth in the early 19th century. However, their minimal political influence as new noblemen did not correspond to their enormous economic and great cultural importance. The strong founding generation was usually followed by stagnation and often gradual decline with members of later generations not having the necessary persistence and qualities.

This development is shown in most detail in the case of the Friesenhof family, with Johann Michael (1739–1812) founding a tradition as the first baron. His son Adolph (1798–1853) still significantly applied himself in the field of business, but his younger brother Gustav (1807–1889) already settled at Brodzany in territory now belonging to Slovakia, where he devoted his attention to business on the local level rather than on that of the whole state. With a loyal attitude to the court and the monarch, strong links with Russia, the Slovak national emancipation movement and Germany, he became a representative of a unique type within the new aristocracy with very strong European connections. His children developed these tendencies further. All this made the Friesenhofs a very interesting and entirely atypical noble family, which only confirmed the variety of this social group.

Key words: Habsburg Monarchy. 18th – 19th centuries. New business nobility. Friesenhof-Oldenburg baronial family. Links with Russia and Slovak politics.

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Three businesses with representatives who became part of the so-called new nobility will be in the centre of the attention of this text. Two Viennese banking