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From the Periphery to the Centre of European Social History

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From the Periphery to the Centre of European Social History: The Case of the Middle and Upper Classes in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Europe

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A fuller and deeper understanding of modern and contemporary Europe certainly requires the study of the history of the middle and upper classes, the bourgeoisie and the nobility. Above all, the bourgeoisie (and, to a lesser extent and in smaller numbers, the nobility) played a leading role in key transformations of modernity, such as industrialisation, urbanisation, scientific and technological modernisation, bureaucratisation, the consolidation of parliamentarism and the capitalist system, the formation of nation-states and colonialism, from which they derived wealth, professional and social prestige, political power and self-confidence.

The period from the French Revolution to the First World War constitutes a period of the generalisation, expansion and consolidation of the bourgeois worldview, of bourgeois norms and values, in other words of bourgeois culture (in an interactive relationship with the culture of the nobility or in the context of gentlemanly culture).¹

And although democratisation, mimesis, the expansion of the middle classes and the critique of the bourgeois model undermined the social exclusivity of bourgeois culture and its function as a model, historians such as Klaus Tenfelde argue that bourgeois culture did not reach its historical end in 1918 but underwent a formal transformation. They consider that despite the great increase in the diversity of lifestyles and living conditions in contemporary European societies, traditional bourgeois principles and values concerning the behaviour, education and culture of the individual remained durable, constitutive and guiding even until the end of the twentieth century.²

The middle class, composed of entrepreneurs, free professionals and academically educated civil servants, university professors and secondary school teachers, executives or officers, as well as the nobility, made up of entitled members of the society, irrelevant of their wealth, power and occupation, have heterogeneity and internal differentiation in common.³ The middle classes and the nobility overlapped but they did not identify with elites, the sociological term introduced in modern social and political sciences by Italians

Vilfredo Pareto (*The Mind and Society*, 1916) and Gaetano Mosca (*The Ruling Class*, 1896) that refers to a sum of powerful and influential individuals who hold a disproportionate amount of wealth, privilege and political power, enjoying a higher level of authority or prestige compared to the members of their social class or the population at large.⁴ Thus, elites are not necessarily identical with the upper strata in terms of social origins; yet during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the political, economic, administrative and intellectual elites were composed almost exclusively of bourgeois and noblemen.

By focusing mainly on the middle and upper middle class, on the one hand, as well as on the upper nobility (aristocracy) in modern Europe, on the other, historiography (and thus also this article) has dealt to a great extent with members of the European elites.

The history of the European elites, primarily the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, from the French Revolution to the middle of the twentieth century, has constituted in recent decades an internationally recognised and recognisable direction of social and cultural history. Indicative of the lively and quite internationalised academic interest in elites as a distinct component of social history is the continuous presence – at least since 2004 – of the Elites and Forerunners Network at the biennial European Social Science History Conference (ESSHC) organised by the Amsterdam-based International Institute of Social History (IISH) in various European cities.⁵ This network comprises early modern and modern historians from most European countries, especially from western, northern and central-eastern Europe. Cultural practices as practices of social distinction, values of education and upbringing, identities, marital behaviour, the constitution, reproduction and function of local elites, lifestyle and material culture, the administrative and political elites of empires have been the main topics of their research and presentations.

On the periphery

If the study of the middle classes and the nobility as social groups/formations has been taken for granted in the context of social history in the past three to four decades, as we will show in more detail below, then how can the subheading “on the periphery” be justified as far as the history of the elites is concerned? When, for how long, on what terms and for what reasons were the middle and upper classes of modern Europe marginalised and did they stay on the periphery of historiography, principally of social history?

At first sight, the word “periphery”, as far as the position of the elites in the historiography of late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is concerned, sounds paradoxical, in times of the primacy and predominance of historicism. Moreover, “leading personalities within the framework of great political institutions” constituted the main object of the hermeneutics of the school of Leopold von Ranke that established history as a science by the mid-nineteenth century.⁶

Furthermore, a main point of the criticism of the new social science of the older historiography and political history of historicism was that it “too narrowly focused on individuals, especially on ‘great men’ and events, as making up the subject matter of history, and that it neglected the broader context in which these operated”.⁷

The rising criticism of the Rankean paradigm by historians in France, Belgium, the United States, Scandinavia and even Germany in the beginning of the twentieth century was accompanied by appeals for a history that accounted for social and economic factors. Such a history would fit into an emerging mass society in a democratisation process by turning away “from a concentration on events and individual leading personalities to focus on the social conditions in which these existed”.⁸

However, it was after 1945 when increasing attention was given to social history, because conventional forms of political and diplomatic history dominated in the profession even in the first postwar years, at least in the West.⁹

Therefore, it is not surprising that from the 1950s to the 1970s most social historians argued that it was time “that more attention be given to peasants and workers, and less to social elites like nobles” [and bourgeois].¹⁰

Of course, the lower strata were primarily researched in the context of macrohistorical social and economic structures and processes. Even though some social historians turned after 1970 from the study of social structures to the study of culture in the broad sense of everyday life, shifting from macro- to micro-history, history began again to pay more attention to individuals, not to the famous and mighty, but to common folk.¹¹ The late 1960s and early 1970s were, in any case, not the most favourable period for the study of elites in Western Europe. The traditional middle-class norms and values were shaken in an era of postmodernist challenge, the spread of different versions of Marxism, an anti-imperialist spirit, rising feminism and the radical youth movements (May 1968, etc.).¹²

As the German historian Jürgen Kocka points out, until the mid-1980s studies of the bourgeoisie as a coherent social formation were rare. Modern and contemporary historians’ interest in the nobility was even rarer, all the more since in general interpretations of both liberal-bourgeois and Marxist historiography, nobility appeared as the defeated estate of the ancien régime; not deserving any special historical mention and attention. Indeed, in 1990 the founder of the so-called “historical social science” (*Historische Sozialwissenschaft*) in Germany, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, described the history of the post-1750 European nobility (*Adelsgeschichte*) as a “terra incognita”.¹³

Apart from the general historiographical context mentioned above, the history of the middle and upper classes was confronted with specifically adverse circumstances in central and east-central Europe during the interwar as well as postwar era (roughly until 1989).

The dissolution of three empires (Russian, German and Austria-Hungarian), the prevalence of the Bolsheviks after the October Revolution in Russia, the emergence of new nation-states (though hardly homogeneous in the case of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Poland), the abolition of nobility predicates and other titles in Austria and Czechoslovakia,

rising antisemitism, National Socialism and “actually existing socialism” after 1945 for decades long created an unfavourable socio-political and ideological environment for a thorough and unprejudiced study of elites in this vast region of Europe.

In respect to Austria-Hungary during the last months of the First World War and particularly to its successor states, after the war ended the political landscape was dominated by the notion of an “Austrian prison of the nations”, congruent with US President Woodrow Wilson’s policy of self-determination.¹⁴ It was consequently not surprising that the post-1918 national historiographies, especially in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, focused on a clear break with the Habsburg imperial past,¹⁵ making the (mainly German-speaking) bourgeois and nobles who could be identified as pillars of the dismantled empire (in many cases alien to the majority of the native population)¹⁶ unworthy of research, as scapegoats of history. As far as the first postwar decades are concerned, there was a lack of historical interest in the communist countries on nationally not easily identifiable, politically unacceptable, former privileged social groups of pre-1918 central Europe such as the nobility and bourgeoisie.

The lack of socio-historical research on the imperial elites of bourgeois and noble origin is reflected, however, even in later approaches to the society of these countries before 1918, which avoided national and class narratives. Characteristically, Czech historian Otto Urban’s monumental work *Česká společnost 1848–1918* (Czech society, 1848-1918) (1982), refers mostly to political developments and deals with the elites almost exclusively in the light of their political position and activity.¹⁷

Even in small, ethnically homogeneous and non-communist Austria there was little interest in social groups associated with a failed and obsolete political formation after the First World War as well as the Second World War. Until the late 1980s, historiographical research had not dealt with the middle classes of the nineteenth century. Even historians of bourgeois origin were not interested, and the political parties of the Second Austrian Republic (1955–) had little interest in working on the history of the bourgeoisie, as they had nothing to gain from it for their own identity. The Second Republic’s largest “bourgeois” party, the Austrian People’s Party (Österreichische Volkspartei, ÖVP) mainly represented the lower middle classes, farmers and employees, while political Catholicism rather than liberalism was its main ideological vehicle; and it also lacked the radical nationalist and antisemitic features of its interwar predecessors, the Christian Socials.

On the other hand, the more liberal and bourgeois Austrian Freedom Party (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ) appropriated liberal phraseology and support for the market economy but cannot be considered a genuine exponent of the liberals as it was the continuation of the German nationalists and National Socialists of Austria, protagonists of Austrian antisemitism during the interwar period.¹⁸

Furthermore, the almost universal hushing up of the pre-1938 Jewish (largely

bourgeois) presence in Austria in the postwar period sustained and served as the founding myth of the Second Republic, according to which Austria was described as “the first free country” to fall victim to “Austrian” Hitler’s aggressive policy with the Anschluss of 1938, but without mentioning the acknowledged “complicity” of many Austrians as contributors to the “final solution”, harsh persecutors of the Jews and protagonists of the predatory “aryanisation” of Jewish property.¹⁹

For at least four decades, the historical oblivion of the imperial past and the extermination-persecution of Austrian Jews under National Socialism was an inhibiting factor for conducting historical research on the Austrian and, above all, Viennese bourgeoisie, as both the liberal and academically educated middle classes (scientists, professionals, etc.), as well as the big businessmen (merchants, industrialists, etc.) in Vienna before the First World War, were mainly Jewish.²⁰

Apart from the unfavourable political and ideological landscape in central and eastern Europe since the late 1930s, the postwar lack or reduced interest in imperial and interwar elites was interwoven with a complete subversion of these elites’ terms of existence. The Second World War and the establishment of the socialist system largely led to the social decline and devaluation, economic weakness and political disappearance of the traditional, owning (possessing) classes, so that the bourgeoisie and the nobility actually disappeared as distinct social categories and, thus, as potential subjects of historical research.²¹

Back to the centre of historiography

The negative bias of social history towards the bourgeoisie and aristocracy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in central Europe described above began to be revised from the 1980s and even more so after 1990, bringing the elites to the forefront/centre of history. According to one historian of early modern Europe, Jonathan Dewald, “the methods of social history can as profitably be employed on the privileged as on the weak”, both of them impelled by social forces that they could not control.²²

Middle classes

Let us examine briefly and distinctly the emergence and consolidation of the historiography of the middle classes, on the one hand, and of the nobility, on the other, beginning with the former as it was a precedent of the latter and showed comparatively greater dynamics until the early 1990s. The contention that “much European historiography since the French Revolution has focused on the rise of the middle classes and the consequent decline of the nobilities”,²³ but also the importance of the middle classes per se in the modern era may partly and in general terms explain this precedence.

The country in which a coherent and multidimensional historical research on the bourgeoisie was developed earlier than elsewhere was France. Having played a central role in the major event of the French Revolution, as well as in subsequent French political and social life, the French bourgeoisie of the nineteenth and early twentieth century became from very early on an object of contemporary interest, examination, reference, admiration, and criticism by politicians, sociologists, philosophers, journalists, lexicographers, etc. As a result, valuable sources and materials were preserved and used in postwar historiography on the middle classes.²⁴ Besides, interest in the French bourgeoisie was not limited to France, as the French middle classes and their culture exerted a lasting influence beyond French territory, especially on the German bourgeoisie, both before and after German unification in 1871.²⁵ According to a French historian of the bourgeoisie, Adeline Daumard, “the study of the French bourgeoisie is important not only for the French but also for other Europeans and European identity as it can shed light on the decisive role played by the bourgeoisie in the evolution of our civilisation over the last two centuries.”²⁶

Important synthetic works on administrative and regional bourgeois elites, on capitalists, officials and the middle classes of certain French cities were published in France as early as the mid-1950s, but mainly after 1970.²⁷ In the most comprehensive monograph on the French bourgeoisie, Daumard examines, among other issues, the terminology and meaning of the bourgeoisie, the economic, ideological and cultural conditions of its constitution and consolidation, the sources of and differences in income, reproduction and family traditions and dynasties, internal differentiations and value codes in a dynamic course of adaptation and transformation from the early nineteenth century to the early 1980s.²⁸

The publication of Daumard’s study of the French bourgeoisie in 1987 coincided with the publication of the edited volume *Histoire de la vie privée* (History of private life), a key work for understanding and approaching French and, more broadly, European bourgeois culture. Gender roles and age in the context of the bourgeois family, the various rituals of private-family life of the elites, the bourgeois home with its distinct spaces and their furnishings, the keeping of personal diaries, entertainment and other aspects of urban culture constitute its central themes-chapters.²⁹ The interest in the study of the bourgeoisie and the elites and indeed in an international comparative context was maintained in France even in the first decade of the twenty-first century.³⁰

In Britain, a country where feudalism was deconstructed earlier than in France and continental Europe and where the aristocracy and gentry as the upper classes supported parliamentarism and the free economy and constituted the ruling political elite at least until 1870, the middle classes were defined and researched more in economic and occupational terms, with an emphasis on the distinct income groups or categories within them.³¹ Already

since the late 1970s, and especially in the 1980s, some important studies on the British middle classes, especially the entrepreneurial capitalists, the free and educated professions have been published,³² while the focus of English historian Harold Perkin on the central role of professionals in the context of an increasingly professional society in late nineteenth- and twentieth-century England led him to a comparative examination of the increasingly dominant professional elites in the most powerful states of postwar Europe and the world.³³ Another field that developed in English-language historiography was the examination of bourgeois culture in the wider Anglo-Saxon world.³⁴

In West and, since 1990, unified Germany, a strong impetus to research the middle classes was given by the major research project “Social history of the modern middle classes: Germany in international comparison” (1986–1997), which was hosted by the University of Bielefeld, the very centre of Historical Social Science (*Historische Sozialwissenschaft*) since its foundation in 1972.³⁵ The project resulted in about 500 academic publications of all kinds (monographs, journal articles and contributions to edited volumes) by 2000, while 15 habilitations, 31 PhD theses and 18 volumes of the series *Bürgertum: Beiträge zur europäischen Gesellschaftsgeschichte* (Middle classes: Contributions to European social history) were completed within its framework.³⁶

Starting epistemologically from the adoption of the Weberian concept of “political power (*Herrschaft*), economy and culture as three interrelated forces that determine every society”,³⁷ and wishing to contribute to the historiographical debate on the “special German path” (*Sonderweg*) to modernity in a European comparative context, the Bielefeld circle set four main thematic axes and issues for research on the middle classes: a) the constitution and internal differentiation, b) its delimitation vis-à-vis and relations with other social groups, c) its political influence and role, and d) the degree of generalisation-dominance of bourgeois culture. The *Bürgertum* as a social formation, *Bürgerlichkeit* (as a habitus) and bourgeois society (as an aspired utopia) constitute the main analytical categories.³⁸ The spirit, dynamics and international dimension of the project are reflected in the three volumes edited by Kocka, titled *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert: Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich* (Middle classes in the 19th century: Germany in European comparison),³⁹ the fruit of the work of an interdisciplinary research group during the 1986–1987 academic year, which included historians from various countries. Twenty-five years later, the interest in comparative studies of European middle classes with a focus on politics, society and culture remains alive in Western historiography as reflected in the work of American historian Jerrold Seigel on modernity and bourgeois life.⁴⁰

In the German-speaking world, Austria made a particular contribution to the development of historiography on the middle classes thanks to initiatives mainly launched at the Institute for Economic and Social History at the University of Vienna since the mid-1980s. At that time, it became clear that until then research in the field of social history had neglected the middle-class strata, with the exception of some local studies on Graz and Salzburg.⁴¹

Inspired by the Bielefeld example, Austrian historians took the lead from 1988 onwards in organising conferences and academic projects with the participation of historians and researchers from neighbouring countries in order to shed light on basic aspects of the historical physiognomy and development of the middle classes in central Europe, beyond the limitations and stereotypes of separate national historiographies. The outcome of this collective effort was the ten volumes of the series *Bürgertum in der Habsburgermonarchie*, published between 1990 and 2003, which focused mainly on following themes: bourgeois culture, the value system and communication codes of bourgeois society, the position and role of bourgeois women, specific groups of the middle classes (*Wirtschaftsbürgertum/Bildungsbürgertum*), associations, housing, self-representations in urban planning, architecture and monuments.⁴²

The historical juncture in the 1990s proved to be particularly favourable for central European synergies in the study of middle classes, as the collapse of actually existing socialist regimes increased and motivated research interest in the elites before the establishment of socialism, as well as in the common imperial past of Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia and parts of Poland, Romania, Serbia, Italy, and Ukraine, within the framework of Austria-Hungary, up to 1918.⁴³

It should be noted, of course, for the sake of historical accuracy, that a few years before the dynamic impetus given by Vienna to the research of the bourgeoisie in central Europe, it was mainly Hungarian and Czech historians who preceded in the field with important studies,⁴⁴ in a period (1970s and 1980s) in which the given interest in economically based social history in the context of historical materialism in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland was combined with tendencies to deviate from Marxist orthodoxy and maintain contacts with Western historiography.⁴⁵ An important contribution was made by historians (mainly of Jewish central and eastern European origin) from the United States, who, as early as the 1970s, focused on the key role of the Jewish bourgeoisie and titular nobility (gentry) in the economic rise and social life/modernisation in Hungary and afterwards (during the 1980s) in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Austria (especially Vienna).⁴⁶

Nobility

The increased interest in the elites of the nineteenth and early twentieth century in the German-speaking and central European area was not limited to the middle classes. With a time lag of a few years, it was extended to the nobility, as demonstrated by the number of publications, conferences and edited volumes, mainly from the late 1990s onwards, by German and Austrian (or coming from the German-speaking academic-research environment) as well as by Czech and Hungarian historians.

The aristocratic past of central and eastern Europe awaited its rediscovery after the cosmogonical changes of 1989–1991, although in the context of Marxist historiography in the countries of “actually existing socialism” studies had already been carried out on the extensive aristocratic landed property and the nobility as the hegemonic class of the feudal socio-economic formation, as well as on their economic contribution to the capitalist transformation of the nineteenth century.⁴⁷

The gradual weakening of the nobility, on the one hand, and the struggle and adaptability of the nobility in order to maintain their position at the top of the social pyramid, on the other, constitute the key starting questions of the history of the nobility of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which has developed over the past 25 years.⁴⁸ Taking into account and examining the position, role and influence of the nobility in the politics, economy, society and culture of modern Europe, the social history of the nobility is intertwined with the political, economic and, above all, with the most recent cultural history because of the great temporal depth of aristocratic culture and the mechanisms of social inclusion, demarcation and exclusion that it created.⁴⁹

The country with the most dynamic research on the nobility in modern era is Germany, where the aristocracy, due to the political fragmentation until 1871 and its federal structure afterwards, was numerous, diverse and splintered.⁵⁰

From the 355 titles of literature and articles directly or indirectly related to German nobility listed by Heinz Reif in his fundamental and supervisory work on *Adel* in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is clear that the vast majority of publications come from the 1980s and 1990s, with most of them focusing on the political role of the nobility (primarily the Junkers), the remainder concerning land ownership, property and wealth, as well as professional status, mainly as state officials and dignitaries.⁵¹

The emphasis on the political role of the German (especially Prussian) aristocracy can be explained by the lively interest of many West German historians in interpreting the disastrous course of German history in the first half of the twentieth century, in the light of, among other things, the powerful position of premodern estates such as the Prussian landed aristocracy and the military as ruling elites (in collaboration with the industrialists) in unified Bismarckian and Wilhelmine Germany.⁵² Despite the relativisation of the *Sonderweg* of Germany already in the mid-1980s by Anglo-Saxon historians,⁵³ German historian Stephan Malinowski's seminal work on the destabilising role of the Prussian Junkers in particular during the Weimar Republic and the massive support for National Socialism, especially among the ranks of the lower nobility in north-eastern Germany, shows the importance of dealing with the multifaceted, and not one-dimensional, political role of the nobility. Indeed, there was also the other side of the coin, namely an aversion to Nazism and the resistance of some of the high-ranking nobility, with the attempted assassination of Hitler on 20 July 1944 (one-third of Hitler's executed opponents were nobles).⁵⁴

However, the historiography of the nobility developed in various fields and directions in Germany. Monographs and edited volumes on everyday life, aspects of culture and

sociability, on property and its use, and family histories or histories of local-regional aristocracies demonstrate the dynamism and variety of historical research since 2000.⁵⁵ In the same period, collective volumes by Czech and French historians, and composite studies by Austrian and American historians with similar themes (plus nationalism, transnational perspectives and central-regional politics), characterise the historiographical production in and for central Europe.⁵⁶ Special mention should be made of the pioneering Austrian social historian Hannes Stekl, who as early as the 1970s approached the history of prominent aristocratic houses in the Habsburg Monarchy with sociocultural questions.⁵⁷

Studies on German and central European aristocratic women show the interest in women's history and the gender dimension in the German-speaking world,⁵⁸ while the study of the rules, discourses, practices-strategies and representations of the aristocratic family as a basic institution of the reproduction, sociability, memory, solidarity, economic cohesion, self-determination and social self-consciousness of the nobles has also been at the centre of the social history of the nobility during the last decade.⁵⁹ The publications of the new series *Adelswelten* (worlds of nobility) by the prestigious German-Austrian publishing house Böhlau/Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht and the recent volume on the ideology, political attitudes and national identifications of the Habsburg nobility show that the historiographical interest in nobility in German-speaking and central-eastern Europe is still flourishing.⁶⁰

A lively interest in the nobility was also shown by Western European and Anglo-Saxon historians as early as the mid-1980s and more intensively from 1990 onwards. Most of them share the argument that aristocratic social and political structures survived, albeit in decline, in most western European countries (including Italy) in the nineteenth century, while the nobility managed, albeit to a lesser extent than in central and eastern Europe, to maintain a significant part of their political, economic and social power until 1918 and, above all, to preserve their cultural capital, which ensured them islands of social exclusivity and the consciousness or, occasionally, the illusion of their social superiority.⁶¹ Historians from several European countries have recently pointed to the reconversion strategies and memory culture of nobilities in Europe even in the twentieth century, in a volume edited by leading historians, sociologists and cultural anthropologists from the Netherlands.⁶²

The trigger for the increased interest in the study of modern nobility was American historian Arno Mayer's pioneering and much-discussed book *The Persistence of the Old Regime* (1981), which highlighted, albeit partly schematically and generally, the persistence of the premodern economic and social structures in Europe until the First World War.⁶³

We should also underline the decisive contribution of French elite sociologist Monique de Saint Martin, a collaborator of Pierre Bourdieu, to the cultural turn of historiography in the study of modern and contemporary nobility through her work on the space of nobility in twentieth-century republican France.⁶⁴ A recently published volume, edited by German and Belgian historians on leisure and elite formation in nineteenth-

century Continental Europe, which investigates places where old and new elites came together, met and interacted, but also where the rules and conventions for new elites were forged, proves the value and actual interest of socio-cultural approaches of the modern European elites.⁶⁵

Finally, it is worth noting that in recent years the study of elites not only as national ruling classes but also as cohesive elements of an empire has been favoured by the recent “biographical turn” in the historiography of empires (Russian, Habsburg, British, Ottoman), as “imperial biographies” primarily concern subjects whose careers, business performance, wealth and social advancement were determined and favoured by the existence of a multiethnic imperial context.⁶⁶

If the interest/focus of the historians turns to a global context made up by or under the impact of colonialism and imperialism, and studied by global history, we can speak of global bourgeoisie and middle classes in terms of global elites, as a recently published edited book, the outcome of an international and above all British-German scholarly cooperation indicates.⁶⁷ The volume was based on an international conference held in August 2015 at the University of Cambridge with the aim to look at the global rise of a new middle class in the age of empire through the comparison and examination of global connections, interactions and interdependencies between the members of this social groups in different regions of the globe.⁶⁸

Conclusion

This article sought to outline and interpret the great development of the historiography of the bourgeoisie and the nobility since 1980 and especially after 1990, as a return of the elites to the preferences of historiography, not in the context of a traditional political history but of an interdisciplinary and methodologically broad social history.

The historiographical benefits of dealing with the bourgeoisie and the nobility in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe can be manifold. Despite their relatively small proportion to the general population, they possessed a disproportionate economic, social, political and cultural power, and it was they who constituted the ruling classes (elite), almost exclusively until the First World War.

They formed patterns of organisation, values and rules of behaviour that spread to wider society, while reactions to their economic, political and socio-cultural hegemony led to mass movements (labour-socialist and peasant movements) and socio-political transformations. The conditions as regards the constitution, reproduction and social demarcation of the European elites contribute to the understanding of local socio-political developments on the way to democracy or fascism, Bolshevism, nation-states, antisemitism as well as the differences between Western and Eastern Europe.

The strong dynamic created for the history of the middle classes and the nobility of modern Europe by the great changes of 1989–1991, which in any case redefined the

framework of the constitution and the possibilities for the emergence, influence and adaptivity of European elites, has been maintained, with important contributions to a comparative view of them in a European and even global context.⁶⁹

¹ Peter Lundgreen, "Einführung," in *Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte des Bürgertums: Eine Bilanz des Bielefelder Sonderforschungsbereichs (1986–1997)*, ed. Peter Lundgreen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 22.

² Manfred Hettling, "Bürgerliche Kultur: Bürgerlichkeit als kulturelles System," in Lundgreen, *Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte des Bürgertums*, 337–39.

³ Jürgen Kocka, "The Middle Classes in Europe," in *The European Way: European Societies in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. Hartmut Kaelble (New York: Berghahn, 2004), 16; Jonathan Dewald, *The European Nobility, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xiii (n. 1), 22–27, 40–47.

⁴ Michael Hartmann, *The Sociology of Elites* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 12–15, 18–21, quoted in Judit Pál, Vlad Popovici and Oana Sorescu-Iudean, eds., *Elites, Groups, and Networks in East-Central and South-East Europe in the Long 19th Century* (Paderborn: Brill Schöningh, 2022), 1.

⁵ For the conference programmes and abstracts available online (5th to 13th ESSHC, 2004–2021), see <https://esshc.iisg.amsterdam/en/about/past-conferences>.

⁶ Georg G. Iggers, *Historiography in the Twentieth Century: From Scientific Objectivity to the Postmodern Challenge* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Dewald, *European Nobility*, 6–7.

¹¹ For the great development of the history of the labour movement, of labour, of workers-peasants and their everyday life and culture up to the 1980s in Germany, West and East, as well as in Austria, see Iggers, *Historiography*, 72–76.

¹² See Iggers, *Historiography*, 13–14.

¹³ Jürgen Kocka, "Das europäische Muster und der deutsche Fall," in *Bürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert: Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich*, vol. 1, *Einheit und Vielfalt Europas*, ed. Jürgen Kocka (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 12; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, ed., "Einleitung," "Europäischer Adel, 1750–1950," special issue, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 13 (1990): 10–12.

¹⁴ Adam Wandruszka, "'Notwendiger Völkerverein' oder 'Völkerkerker'?", in *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, vol. 3, ed. Adam Wandruszka and Peter Urbanitsch (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1980), xvi.

¹⁵ Claire Morelon, "Introduction," in *Embers of Empire: Continuity and Rupture in the Habsburg Successor States after 1918*, ed. Paul Miller and Claire Morelon (New York: Berghahn, 2019), 3.

¹⁶ For instance, Germans in the Czech lands and Slovenia or Magyars in Slovakia and Romania (Transylvania).

¹⁷ Otto Urban, *Die tschechische Gesellschaft 1848 bis 1918*, trans. Henning Schlegel (Vienna: Böhlau, 2017).

- ¹⁸ Ernst Bruckmüller, "Das österreichische Bürgertum zwischen Monarchie und Republik," *Zeitgeschichte* 20, no. 3–4 (1993): 60–61.
- ¹⁹ For Austrian antisemitism, see indicatively Bruce F. Pauley, *From Prejudice to Persecution: A History of Austrian Anti-Semitism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Gerhard Botz, "The Jews of Vienna from the 'Anschluß' to the Holocaust," *Historical Social Research Supplement* 28 (2016): 316–34. On the constitution of postwar collective memory in contemporary Austrian historiography, see Gerhard Botz, "Geschichte und kollektives Gedächtnis in der Zweiten Republik: 'Opferthese', 'Lebenslüge' und 'Geschichtstabu' in der Zeitgeschichtsschreibung," in *Inventur 45/55: Österreich im ersten Jahrzehnt der Zweiten Republik*, ed. Wolfgang Kos and Georg Rigele (Vienna: Sonderzahl, 1996), 51–85.
- ²⁰ Victor Karady and Don Yehuda, eds., *A Social and Economic History of Central European Jewry* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 1, 168, 171; Ernst Bruckmüller, "Was There a 'Habsburg Society' in Austria-Hungary?," *Austrian History Yearbook* 37 (2006): 5.
- ²¹ The confiscation of property and the extermination of Jews during the war and the deportations of millions of Germans from their ancestral homes in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, the Baltic countries and elsewhere in the last months and aftermath of the war wiped out significant sections of the bourgeoisie and gentry in central and eastern Europe, while the nationalisation of enterprises within the framework of the centrally planned economy, as well as the gradual monopolisation of high positions by the communist party after the establishment of socialist regimes, dealt a decisive blow to the reproduction and continuity of the bourgeois classes in administration, science and education, above all in their business activity. See Hannes Stekl, "Bürgertumsforschung und Familiengeschichte," in *Adel und Bürgertum in der Habsburgermonarchie 18. bis 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Hannes Stekl (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik; R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2004), 309.
- ²² Dewald, *European Nobility*, 7.
- ²³ "In fact, the great French social theorist and observer (and nobleman) Alexis de Tocqueville in the mid-nineteenth century offered the nobility's decline as the central thread of European history." Dewald, *European Nobility*, 7.
- ²⁴ Adeline Daumard, *Les bourgeois et la bourgeoisie en France depuis 1815* (Paris: Aubier, 1987), 27–30, 418–19.
- ²⁵ Hartmut Kaelble, "Französisches und deutsches Bürgertum 1870–1914," in Kocka, *Bürgertum*, 113.
- ²⁶ Daumard, *Les bourgeois et la bourgeoisie*, 8.
- ²⁷ See, indicatively, Jean Lhomme, *La Grande Bourgeoisie au Pouvoir (1830–1880): Essai sur l'histoire sociale de la France* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960); Daumard, *Les bourgeois de Paris au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 1970); Louis Bergeron, *Les Capitalistes en France, 1780–1914* (Paris: Gallimard – Julliard, 1978); Christophe Charles, *Les élites de la république 1880–1900* (Paris: Fayard, 1987). For more bibliography, see Daumard, *Les bourgeois et la bourgeoisie*, 418.
- ²⁸ Daumard, *Les bourgeois et la bourgeoisie*.
- ²⁹ Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, eds., *Histoire de la vie privée*, vol. 4, *De la Révolution à la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), 53–87, 89–100, 121–85, 193–261, 307–12, 319–21, 325–52.
- ³⁰ Christophe Charle, "Elite Formation in Late Nineteenth Century: France Compared to Britain and Germany," *Historical Social Research* 33, no. 2 (2008): 249–61.
- ³¹ Eric J. Hobsbawm, "Die englische *middle class* 1780–1920," in Kocka, *Bürgertum*, 87–88.
- ³² Particularly enlightening are the studies of W.D. Rubinstein, *Elites and the Wealthy in Modern British History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987) and "The Victorian Middle Classes: Wealth, Occupation and Geography," *Economic History Review* 30 (1977): 602–23.

- ³³ Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880* (London: Routledge, 1989); Perkin, *The Third Revolution: Professional Elites in the Modern World* (London York: Routledge, 1996).
- ³⁴ Linda Young, *Middle-Class Culture in the Nineteenth Century: America, Australia and Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).
- ³⁵ For the origins of historical social science in West Germany, see Iggers, *Historiography*, 65–77.
- ³⁶ For an introduction and a detailed list of the publications of the *Bürgertum* project, see Lundgreen, *Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte des Bürgertums*, 9, 13–39, 345–76. The new series *Bürgertum: Neue Folge*, ed. Manfred Hetling and Paul Nolte, which has published 18 volumes up to 2019, indicates the lively interest, to date, in various aspects of the bourgeoisie in the German historical community.
- ³⁷ Iggers, *Historiography*, 69–70.
- ³⁸ Lundgreen, “Einführung,” 18–21.
- ³⁹ Kocka, *Bürgertum*.
- ⁴⁰ Jerrold Seigel, *Modernity and Bourgeois Life: Society, Politics, and Culture in England, France and Germany since 1750* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- ⁴¹ Ernst Bruckmüller, “Hannes Stekl zum Sechziger,” in Stekl, *Adel und Bürgertum*, 9–10; Bruckmüller, “Das österreichische Bürgertum,” 62.
- ⁴² For a brief overview of the research on the middle classes in Austria and the titles of the series *Bürgertum in der Habsburgermonarchie* up to 2000, see Konstantinos Raptis, “Bürgertumsforschung in Österreich: Ein Bericht,” *Österreich in Geschichte und Literatur* 45, no. 2b–3 (2001): 173–78.
- ⁴³ A typical example of the new historiography on the middle classes in the former communist countries of Central Europe is the landmark volume on the study of the bourgeoisie in Slovakia in the twentieth century. Elena Mannová, ed., *Bürgertum und bürgerliche Gesellschaft in der Slowakei 1900–1989* (Bratislava: Academic Electronic Press, 1997).
- ⁴⁴ See Bruckmüller, “Das österreichische Bürgertum,” 63, and Györgi Ránki, “Die Entwicklung des ungarischen Bürgertums vom späten 18. Zum frühen 20. Jahrhundert,” in Kocka, *Bürgertum*, 244–45. Apart from the studies in Hungarian on intelligentsia and civil servants, a very important work on the bourgeoisie and bourgeois development in Central and Eastern Europe was published in German by the Hungarian historian Vera Bácskai, ed., *Bürgertum und bürgerliche Entwicklung in Mittel- und Osteuropa* (Budapest: Akademisches Forschungszentrum für Mittel- und Osteuropa an der Karl Marx Universität für Wirtschaftswissenschaften, 1986).
- ⁴⁵ See Georg G. Iggers and Q. Edward Wang, *A Global History of Modern Historiography* (London: Routledge, 2013), 267–68.
- ⁴⁶ See, especially, William O. McCagg, “Hungary’s ‘Feudalized’ Bourgeoisie,” *Journal of Modern History* 44 (1972): 65–78; McCagg, *Jewish Nobles and Geniuses in Modern Hungary* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972); Marsha Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna, 1867–1914: Assimilation and Identity* (New York: SUNY Press, 1984); Robert Wistrich, *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); and William O. McCagg, *A History of Habsburg Jews, 1670–1918* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).
- ⁴⁷ The background of economic and rural history in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), based on the rich archives of the landed estates east of the Elbe, was strong with openings in social and political history, while important studies were carried out in Bohemia (Czechoslovakia) already in the mid-1950s. Eckart Conze and Monika Wienfort, “Einleitung: Themen und Perspektiven historischer Adelforschung im 20. Jahrhundert,” in *Adel und Moderne: Deutschland im europäischen Vergleich im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Eckart Conze and Monika Wienfort (Cologne: Böhlau 2004), 5; and Ivo Cerman, “Jenseits des Marxismus:

Der Adel in der modernen Wirtschaftsgeschichte,” in *Adel und Wirtschaft: Lebensunterhalt der Adeligen in der Moderne*, ed. Ivo Cerman and Lubos Velek (Munich: Martin Meidenbauer, 2009), 9, 14–15.

- ⁴⁸ Eckart Conze, *Von deutschem Adel: Die Grafen von Bernstorff im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 2000), 11.
- ⁴⁹ Eckart Conze, “Deutscher Adel im 20. Jahrhundert: Forschungsperspektiven eines zeithistorischen Feldes,” in *Deutscher Adel im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Günther Schulz and Markus Denzel (St. Katharinen: Scripta Mercaturae, 2004), 20–21.
- ⁵⁰ Conze and Wienfort, “Einleitung,” 1.
- ⁵¹ Heinz Reif, *Adel im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1999), 123–46.
- ⁵² Iggers and Wang, *Global History*, 264–65.
- ⁵³ The main argument was that aristocratic social and political structures survived not only in Germany but everywhere in nineteenth-century Europe. See the discussion in David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).
- ⁵⁴ Stephan Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer: Sozialer Niedergang und politische Radikalisierung im deutschen Adel zwischen Kaiserreich und NS-Staat* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003; Conze and Wienfort, “Einleitung,” 2–5).
- ⁵⁵ See, indicatively, Silke Marburg and Josef Matzerath, ed., *Der Schritt in die Moderne: Sächsischer Adel zwischen 1763 und 1918* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2001); Eckart Conze, Alexander Jendorff, and Heide Wunder, eds., *Adel in Hessen* (Marburg: Hessische Historische Kommission, 2010); Günther Schulz and Markus A. Denzel, eds., *Deutscher Adel im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (St. Katharinen: Scripta Mercaturae, 2004); Monika Wienfort, *Der Adel in der Moderne* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006); Conze, *Von deutschem Adel*.
- ⁵⁶ See “Les Noblesses de Bohème et de Moravie au XIXe siècle,” special issue, *Études danubiennes* 19, no. 1–2 (2003) and the series *Studien zum Mitteleuropäischen Adel*, 8 vols., 2006–2021, ed. Miloš Řezník; William D. Godsey Jr., “Quarterings and Kinship: The Social Composition of the Habsburg Aristocracy in the Dualist Era,” *Journal of Modern History* 71 (1999): 56–104; Hannes Stekl, “Der erbländische Adel,” in *Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918*, vol. 9, *Soziale Strukturen*, ed. Helmut Rumpler and Peter Urbanitsch (Vienna: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2010), 951–1013; Stekl, “Österreichs Adel im 20. Jahrhundert,” in *Adel und Bürgertum in der Habsburgermonarchie*, ed. Hannes Stekl (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 2004), 101–39; Eagle Glassheim, *Noble Nationalists: The Transformation of the Bohemian Aristocracy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).
- ⁵⁷ Hannes Stekl, *Österreichs Aristokratie im Vormärz: Herrschaftsstil und Lebensformen der Fürstenhäuser Liechtenstein und Schwarzenberg* (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 1973); Hannes Stekl and Marija Wakounig, *Windisch-Graetz: Ein Fürstenhaus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1992).
- ⁵⁸ Christa Diemel, *Adelige Frauen im bürgerlichen Jahrhundert: Hofdamen, Stiftsdamen, Salondamen 1800–1870* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1998); Martina Winkelhofer, *Adel verpflichtet: Frauenschicksale in der k. u. k. Monarchie* (Vienna: Amalthea, 2009).
- ⁵⁹ For an overview about noble families in Germany, see Daniel Menning, *Standesgemäße Ordnung in der Moderne: Adlige Familienstrategien und Gesellschaftsentwürfe in Deutschland 1840–1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2014). For a family case study about Habsburg aristocracy, see Konstantinos Raptis, *Die Grafen Harrach und Ihre Welt 1884–1945* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2017).
- ⁶⁰ Marija Wakounig, Václav Horčíčka and Jan Županič, eds., *Habsburgischer Adel: Zwischen Nation – Nationalismus – Nationalsozialismus (1878–1938/1945)* (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2021).
- ⁶¹ See, indicatively, David Higgs, *Nobles in Nineteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 217–19; Dewald, *European Nobility*, 5; David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New York: Yale University Press, 1990); Dominic Lieven, *The Aristocracy in Europe, 1815–*

- 1914 (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 156–57; Anthony L. Cardoza, *Aristocrats in Bourgeois Italy: The Piedmontese Nobility, 1861–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
- ⁶² Yme Kuiper, Nikolaj Bijleveld, and Jaap Dronkers, eds., *Nobilities in Europe in the Twentieth Century: Reconversion Strategies, Memory Culture and Elite Formation* (Leuven: Peeters, 2015).
- ⁶³ Arno Mayer, *The Persistence of the Old Regime: Europe to the Great War* (New York: Verso, 1981).
- ⁶⁴ Monique de Saint-Martin, *L'espace de la noblesse* (Paris: Métailié, 1993). For the, in many ways, common and cosmopolitan aristocratic culture in several European countries since the late nineteenth century, see Didier Lancien and Monique de Saint-Martin, eds., *Anciennes et nouvelles aristocraties: De 1880 à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2007).
- ⁶⁵ Martin Kohlrausch, Peter Heyrman, and Jan De Maeyer, “Elites and Leisure: Arenas of Encounter in Europe, 1815–1914,” in *Leisure and Elite Formation: Arenas of Encounter in Continental Europe, 1815–1914*, ed. Martin Kohlrausch, Peter Heyrman and Jan De Maeyer (Munich: De Gruyter, 2020), 1–17.
- ⁶⁶ Malte Rolf, “Einführung: Imperiale Biographien. Lebenswege imperialer Akteure in Groß- und Kolonialreichen (1850–1918),” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 40, no. 1 (2014): 5.
- ⁶⁷ Christof Dejung, David Motadel, and Jürgen Osterhammel, eds., *The Global Bourgeoisie: The Rise of the Middle Classes in the Age of Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).
- ⁶⁸ For a brief report of the conference, see Ghassan Moazzin, conference report on “The Global Bourgeoisie: The Rise of the Middle Class in the Age of Empire,” Cambridge, 27–29 August 2015, H-Soz-Kult, 1 October 2015, <https://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/fdkn-124802>.
- ⁶⁹ It is worth mentioning here the mainly German book series *Elitenwandel in der Moderne/Elites and Modernity* (established 2000), edited by Gabriele Clemens, Dietlind Hüchtker, Martin Kohlrausch, Stephan Malinowski, and Malte Rolf, and published by De Gruyter, with 24 volumes to date, which focus on the relevance and changing meaning of elites in late modern European history. For the volumes of the book series, see <https://www.degruyter.com/serial/ew-b/html>.