

Hochadelsdorf Project

The German high nobility (Hochadel, Reichsadel) is (especially in the Modern Age) a basically closed community for what concerns marriage relationships. In a sense it is a kind of “delocalized” village, whose family relationships might be studied applying conceptual categories and methodologies similar to those that might be applied to a geographically defined community.

From this point of view German nobility is especially interesting because all the relevant information concerning its genealogic links has been already carefully collected and is easily available, not only in books (like the *Europäische Stammtafeln* initiated by von Isenburg and completed by Schwennicke) but also in databases (like De Rougladre, Stoyan, van De Pas and others) that appear to be quite complete and reasonably reliable for the Modern Age, especially after some cross-checking.

The project aims at extracting from reliable secondary sources a collection of data concerning marriage and family relationships for the German high nobility in the Modern Age, starting from the second half of the XV century, when information becomes quite complete and the exclusion of other social groups becomes almost permanent, and arriving at the beginning of the XIX century, when the Napoleonic wars and the end of the German *Reich* change all social patterns and marriage policies in a substantial way. In such a time interval one can find from ten to twelve generations of a given family.

The data are to be employed in order to perform a diachronic statistical analysis of genealogic and family relationships within the “village”, aiming at a quantitative measure and at a dynamical interpretation (as a Yule process with immigration) of their main features.

In particular we should be able to evaluate:

- The average time distance between generations and its variability.
- The average fertility, the distribution of the number of newborn, the growth coefficient.
- The frequency of “extinctions” (disappearance of the male line of descent) and of “mutations” (appearance of new denominations for family subgroups belonging to the same lineage).
- The frequency of “immigrations” (marriages with women not belonging to the community) and “emigrations” (marriages with men not belonging to the community), in comparison with the number of marriages occurred within the community, it should be possible to include also the case of marriages with subjects not belonging to the community but descending from “emigrates”.
- The average degree of consanguinity, its time evolution and its connection with marriage isonymy.
- The distribution of the number of different ancestors, also as a function of the number of generations (*cfr* Derrida *et al.*, *Statistical theory of genealogical trees*, PRL (1999)).
- The quantitative analysis of marriage policies by the correlation analysis of the couple formation and of the lines of descent.
- The frequency distribution of the repetitions of ancestors (*cfr* Derrida *et al.*).
- The search (if possible) of the Most Recent Common Ancestor (MRCA) and of the (identical ancestors point” (the time in the past when all the living subjects belonging to the community are either ancestors of everyone belonging to the last generation or of no living subject).

The total number of subjects to be taken into consideration amounts to a few thousand. For example, the number of tenth generation descendants of Philipp I von Habsburg is about 1,000, but the list includes subjects belonging to almost all lineages considered, and also a number of descendants from emigrates; the total number of descendants (till the year 1800) is about 3,600.

We have already taken into consideration about 60 lineages, including all the *Hochadel* families, a small number of European royal families having strict family links with German nobility (Bourbon, Stuart, Aviz, Braganca), the Italian princely families belonging to the *Reich* (Savoy, Sforza, Gonzaga, Farnese, Este, Medici), and a number of German noble families constantly involved in marriages with the higher nobility and with each other (Bentheim, Erbach, Hohenlohe, Isenburg, Mansfeld, Oettingen, Salm, Solms, Stolberg).

The total number of subjects identified is about 6,000, almost equally balanced between the two genders.. The number of marriages is about 2,000, and about three quarters of the marriages in the list happen to be between members of the above-defined group. The first significant (and easily accessible) result could be the matrix of marriages, indicating the number of marriages occurred between any given couple of families and offering an opportunity for the quantitative and diachronic study of marriage policies.

It seems now possible to build up (partially independent and almost complete) Ancestors' Tables involving ten generations for about a hundred individuals belonging to the most recent generation appearing in the data collection.

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