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Pre-White-Mountain patents of arms for Bohemian, Moravian and Silesian towns, market towns and villages : summary

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SUMMARY

Pre-White-Mountain patents of arms for Bohemian, Moravian and Silesian towns, market towns and villages

This publication is focused on municipal patents of arms from the years 1526–1620, which is known as the Pre-White-Mountain (PWM) period. The grants were for coats of arms, but the ruler may have added more rights, such as the right to hold week or annual fairs, to seal with a specific wax colour, and localities often received a higher status, whereby villages were elevated to market towns and market towns to towns. These rights were granted differently and there are several patents where only some of the above rights were granted and no coat of arms. This publication deals only with patents where the coat of arms was a single right or one of several. For the PWM period there are 156 known municipal patents of arms.

Even though municipal coats of arms are a very well-researched area of the Czech heraldry there are many errors in the heraldry literature. The pioneering authors in the second half of the 19th century were amateurs who often did not have access to the primary sources when studying municipal coats of arms. Therefore, they often published inaccurate and erroneous findings. The researchers who followed were also amateurs and there were few academics and archivists among them. However, even they frequently accepted the findings of the earliest authors without attempting to verify the information.

The most reliable source is a patent of arms. It allows us to evaluate plausibility of earlier findings and also offers the best evidence of the image of the coat of arms. How earlier authors and researchers understood the term “patent of arms” is another issue. The first researchers held the view that the patents of

arms were just the original parchment charters. Over time this hypothesis gradually changed and now it is commonly held that the term patent of arms is not just the original parchment charter, but also later verified and unverified copies of it, and also the concept of the charter. The existence of the original charter is not essential for the meaning of the term. There are many cases in which the original charter does not exist, and in this study, I dealt with all its forms. The “modern” meaning allowed for the creation of a typology of patents, which is important for my research. Some of the categories were traditional, such as classifying them according to the issuers or recipients, while some were less conventional, for example, classified on the basis of the language of the patents, which may also be of interest to the reader of this book.

The owners of the localities were the most frequent intercessors for the grant of the rights from the ruler. Of the 156 patents that were issued, 87 were at the owners’ request. Of this figure 76 were noblemen, eight were abbots/abbeys and three were royal towns (a royal town could also be the owner of a village or market town) and one was bishop. These 88 patents were issued by the Czech king (from 1531 also the Roman king, and from 1556 also Roman emperor). The recipients of the patents supplicated 58 times. The ruler issued 31 patents of the 58, noblemen issued 14 and ecclesiastical representatives issued the rest. There were no intercessors mentioned in the patents for Jáchymov, Havlíčkův Brod and Dolní Dunajovice, which are believed to have been issued on the initiative of the issuers. Copies (and the only extant forms) of seven patents were abridged, and therefore we do not know for certain who pleaded for their grant.

Information on the intercessors was entered into a diplomatic formula *narratio*. Written forms of plea were not prevalent in PWM period; I only encountered five written supplications. However, on account of them I realised that the information in the pleas could be different from the information in charters. For example, the manorial lord is not mentioned in a plea for Heřmanův Městec, although he is mentioned in the charter *narratio*.

One of the main aspects of the work is the diplomatic analysis of the graphic and verbal elements of the charters. Graphic elements such as materials, scripts, seals, and miniatures were scrutinised. The most inspiring results were obtained from examining miniatures, especially with regard to when they were painted, who they were painted by and the relationship of miniature and the production of the seal. In the Czech crown lands (Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia) the miniatures were commonly painted in the middle of the charter and surrounded by the text. Several circumstances indicated that the miniature was

painted after the text was written. The patent of arms for Vlachovo Březí and a verified copy of it brought greater certainty to the issue. The coat of arms for the town was painted into the charter without the usual decorative frame, but it was still placed in the symmetrical rectangular space. By contrast, the text in the verified copy surrounded the coat of arms in the shape of a shield. This hypothesis was confirmed by the patent for the town of Loučná pod Klínovcem, because it did not have a miniature – there was only text with a vacant rectangular space. Among the patents there were a number of market towns that had been elevated from the status of villages. They probably could not afford the expensive painters who worked for the ruler. Furthermore, the quality of the miniatures is quite varied, and therefore it is out of the question that they were painted in the same workshop. It can be assumed that the most recipients procured painters for the miniatures. They may have worked near the royal town or manorial town in which the recipients had the seal made. Whether the seal was made according to the miniature is another as yet answered question.

The signature pattern was developing in the PWM period. All the charters were signed by the emperor. However, the signatures of his chancery officers appear randomly. The signatures were often placed in the same locations, according to office rank, but they were not yet fixed precisely. The emperor wrote only his name without his ordinal number on the left side immediately under the text. The supreme chancellor wrote his name and office at the bottom of the charter, sometimes on the plica or under it. The vice-chancellor signed the charter on the right side of the plica with formula “*Ad mandatum sacrae Ceasarae Maiestatis proprium*”, or this formula was on the plica and vice-chancellor’s signature under it. The supreme scribe signed under the plica on the right-hand side.

The main verbal element, the analysis of the formulaic patterns, accounted for more pages than the previous analysis of the external features. My aim was to determine whether there were any relations between individual formulas in one charter and also between more charters. This method could ascertain whether there were any formulaic patterns of texts in the royal chancery. The narratio, the dispositive section, and the sanctio were the most useful formulas for obtaining results. In context of my research, my principal focus was on the beginnings of the formulas and the parts immediately preceding the grant of the coat of arms.

This part of work was so extensive, it is only possible to demonstrate the results of one of the formulas. I have selected narratio. The formula contains common reasons that led to the granting of the patent of arms. There were four different forms of this formula regardless of the language:

- I. Narratio with only one specified right and then “other rights” to be granted, mostly “elevation to market town and other rights”.
 - II. Narratio with all (several) rights named individually.
 1. The coat of arms is included among the rights.
 2. The coat of arms is not included among the rights.
 - III. Narratio with no specified rights, just rights in general.
 - IV. Narratio without any mention of rights.
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- I. Villages were elevated to market towns mostly in the first half of the 16th century. Therefore, 38 of 73 patents of arms issued by Emperor Ferdinand I were categorized into the first group.⁷³⁴ Among all the patents of arms of the rulers Maximilian II, Rudolph II and Mathias I, there is only one that falls into this category.
 - II. The main criterion here was whether the narratio mentioned the coat of arms. There were 12 charters of Ferdinand I in the first sub-group and 8 in the second sub-group; for Maximilian II it was 12 and 1 respectively; for Rudolph II it was 24 and 2 respectively; and for Mathias II it was 2 and 1 respectively.
 - III. There were only five charters in the third group. Only the patent of arms for the town of Břilina was issued in Czech, while the other four were in German.
 - IV. There were seven patents of arms in the final group. The only Czech charters in this group were those for Kralovice and Šumperk. There were four German charters of Ferdinand I and one of Rudolph II.

Important historical moments of the localities were mentioned in the narratios, mainly the loss of old charters due to natural catastrophes or wars.

At the beginning of the PWM period, the specifications of the right were written in simple terms, for example, “fair” or “annual fair” was requested by the supplicants. Over time they became more specific, for example, “an annual fair on the day of St. George”. Several coats of arms were amended – either completely changed or a charge had been added. However, former coats of arms were not always blazoned. In such a case, a narratio contained the blazon.

This kind of formulaic analysis of PWM patents of arms has never been done before. Therefore, I did not know if a general formulaic pattern would be found

⁷³⁴ Ferdinand I issued 73 patents of arms, Maximilian II 16, Rudolph II 33 and Mathias II 3.

or whether such a thing even existed. The patents of arms were simply divided into two basic categories – those with only a coat of arms and those with more granted rights. There were various statuses of recipients, as the patents were issued for various reasons. For Czech-language patents it can be said that these differences resulted in an inability to unify the formulaic patterns. More precisely, the depth of research depends on the state of uniformity of a pattern. The formulaic pattern was unified in general, but there were some slight differences between the charters. Those that figured in one group according to the *narratio*, did not necessarily appear in the same group on the basis of the *dispositio* and *sanctio*. Therefore, it can be said that even charters granting “the same” rights were not always alike. The formulas individually could be very similar or the same, but not whole charters. There were also differences between the formulaic patterns of patents of arms for natural persons and for legal entities. The formal status of the recipients played a role. The German department of the Czech royal chancery dealt with matters of royal and mining towns. The charters for those recipients were always issued in German. The charters in the German language exhibit a higher rate of uniformity in general than those in Czech. The influence of the emperor’s chancery played non-negligible role, which was confirmed by my research.

As previously mentioned, the patents could contain only a coat of arms or more rights. This means there are many patents with certain rights and no coat of arms, for example, those elevating the status of a locality, or granting week and annual fairs. Having also examined them, I concluded that the granting of coats of arms could not have had any influence on the whole formulaic pattern of the charter.

In conclusion, the above-mentioned facts and the finding that the formulaic pattern developed little during PWM period, it can be said a unified formulaic pattern for patents of arms for municipal recipients probably did not exist.

Sometimes even an inconspicuous word may catch the researcher’s attention. In this case it was the word “*znovu*” or “*von neuem*” in German patents, which could mean “newly” or “anew”. Besides the word “*znovu*” there were sometimes the words “*zase*” and “*v nově*”, which raise the question of whether the rights were granted for the first time or whether they had been granted in the past and were renewed in the period in question, for example, because of the loss or destruction of the old charters. As those words appeared in the *narratio*, *dispositio*, and *sanctio* randomly, sometimes they meant newly and sometimes anew, regardless of the context. The researcher was not able to determine whether the rights had been granted before the issue of the patent of arms simply on the basis of the word “*znovu*” or another term.

In contemporary Czech heraldry, the blazon takes priority over the image of the coat of arms. A coat of arms can exist merely as a verbal description. Very few people were able to read in the 16th century and therefore the image was more easily comprehended, which means the opposing view was formerly held. The quality of the descriptions and depictions, and how the depiction corresponded to the blazon, were other important questions of my research. Around half of the total number of PWM period municipal patents of arms have been preserved in their original form, or, at least, there are copies with an image of the coat of arms. These documents made the research possible and also allowed us to imagine the original image of the coat of arms. The question of language was as important as was mentioned previously in relation to formulaic pattern. German descriptions were more unified and precise, while those in Czech differed. Although some were thorough (more so than some of those in German), some were very simple, of mainly mediocre quality. The blazon of the coat of arms of the market town of Vlastějovice is very simple: *“štít modrý, v němž jest hamr s nakovadlem, držíc na témž nakovadle muž v bílém odění v rukú šín železa”* (azure shield, iron forge with anvil and a blacksmith with a piece of iron in hand). However, the emblazonment is far from simple; it is virtually a technical drawing of the interior of the forge. Moreover, the power hammer was depicted in a functional form. The absence of a charge in the blazon was not rare. For example, the painting of the coat of arms of the town of Poběžovice contains the coat of arms of the lords of Švamberk, but it is not mentioned in the blazon. There were also certain errors in the description of the position of a charge. There is a copy of the unpreserved patent for the market town of Stará Říše from 1586, in which there is a lion, rampant, holding a pentagram (positioned according to the general rule facing the dexter side of the shield). However, in an image from 1732 it is contourné (i.e., positioned contrary to the general rule facing the sinister side of the shield). There is an old seal in existence that corresponds to the original description. Today, Stará Říše uses the coat of arms with the lion rampant according to the general rule. There is a question, might the image be made according to the original charter miniature in 1732?

There is a hypothesis as to why the German descriptions are more accurate than those in Czech. The patents were issued in German in the case of royal and mining towns or where they belonged to “German” lords, such as the vice-chancellor for German matters Jiří Mehl of Střelice (who came from Silesia, where German was the official language). It can be supposed that there was greater knowledge of the granted coat of arms for such recipients. The supplications were more often in verbal form; the use of written ones was in its infancy in the PWM period. These supplicants knew exactly what the future coat of arms should look like. There is also different information in written pleas.

In some cases, it is accurate and in others it is not, and pictures of the coats of arms were not attached in all cases. Therefore, the royal officers relied on the information provided by the applicants. They had the seals made, which could be another possible reason why the pictures were painted into the charters after the text. The emblazonment and the seal could have been done at the same time. I did not focus on this issue in great detail, but there were several images and seals that looked very similar and further research could bear this out.

Patents of arms from the PWM period exhibit different manners and styles of describing a coat of arms. Some charges were not described very precisely, as the authors of blazons often used one word to cover a variety of meanings. For example, the word “*štrych*” (stripe) was used for chief, chevron, base, pale and so on. The researcher should not be surprised by the style of blazoning, as certain terms are not in use today. It is necessary to prepare and learn the terms that were in use. A curious feature of Czech heraldry terminology is its use of different terms for a charge eagle. The version with one head is described as a female eagle, while the two-headed version is blazoned as a male eagle. In the PWM period, apart from one case, the sole term used for all eagles was male eagle.

The division of shields was well described although it sometimes had to be deduced from the whole context of the blazon. The knowledge of noble coats of arms, which appeared in many municipal coats of arms, was also very helpful. For example, the coat of arms of the town of Bílina was blazoned in such a way that it could not be interpreted correctly if we did not know the coat of arms of the lords of Lobkovic, who were the former possessors of the town.

Subsequently, the blazoning of structures and buildings, mainly city walls and towers was observed, as these charges are typical for Czech municipal coats of arms. The chancery officers created blazons in context of the whole patent and with the information available. Generally, it can be said the attitude was generally inconsistent and did not develop over time, although they are mostly comprehensible. The PWM period blazon (and the whole text of the charter) should be perceived as more of a literary work of art.

The degree of incorporation of the coat of arms of the ruler or manorial lords or parts of it into the granted municipal arms was the final heraldry-oriented question. In this respect, I managed to excerpt four ways. Each of these categories was divided into two sub-groups according to role – issuer and intercessor.

The first group consists of coats of arms that are (almost) identical to the coat of arms of their ruler or lord. The ruler used three of his coats of arms, those of Czech king, Roman king/emperor and the House of Habsburg. The bishops

used not only the coat of arms of the diocese but also those of their house. Parts of coats of arms are more usual for manorial lords, for example, the lower half of the shield of Kralovice is the same as the lower half of the shield of Florian Griespek. The coats of arms of lords were often depicted as a small shield, sometimes with a helmet and crest.

Coats of arms with only the charges from the ruler's or manorial lord's coat of arms compose the second group. The charges of shields were most often used, some of them used as a crest. However, the coat of arms of the town of Chřibská is worth mentioning because of its uniqueness among PWM municipal coats of arms. The manorial lord Jindřich was a member of the house of Vartenberg. All its members had the same shield (per pale or and sable), but each ancestral branch had its own crest. The whole crest was used as the only charge in the coat of arms of Chřibská.

The use of only tinctures was rather frequent. However, there were many granted coats of arms with often-used charges such as towers and city walls. The tinctures of those charges were argent and or and they were used in gules and azure fields. Those four tinctures are the most common in Czech municipal heraldry. It cannot be determined whether the particular combination was intended or not. I tried to extract coats of arms that were composed with an intentionally used combination of tinctures or probable combinations.

There were also other ways of referring to the ruler or manorial lord. The most used charge was a capital letter of their first name, for example, the "R" for Emperor Rudolph II in the coat of arms of the town of Adamov. It is very interesting that some of the intercessors added the coats of arms or charges of their wives. The coat of arms of the town of Hostouň has charges and tinctures from the coat of arms of the intercessor Jiří of Gutštejn and his wife Anežka of Rabštejn. The above-mentioned Jiří Mehl of Střelice was quite ingenious in this regard. He used a combination of his own coat of arms and those of his two wives in the coats of arms of the towns of Chrastava, Hrádek nad Nisou, Rumburk and Jiřetín pod Jedlovou.

There were also a number of coats of arms without any reference to the ruler or a manorial lord. Most of them were canting arms, that is, they represent the bearer's name. Some of them do it directly, for example, the coat of arms of the town of Hora svatého Šebestiána contains a scene of Saint Sebastian's death. Several coats of arms depict the armiger's name with a visual pun, for example, there is a charge of a chateau in the coat of arms of the market town of Podhradí nad Dyjí. The old and German form of its name is Freistein, and therefore Chateau Freistein is represented in the charge. Furthermore, there is the reverse situation with the coat of arms of the market town of Hroznová Lhota. The former name of the village was Veselská Lhota, which was elevated to

a market town and granted a coat of arms with the charge of a bunch of grapes (in Czech grapes is *hrozen*, adj. *hroznový*). This charge was so significant to the market town that it changed its name to Hroznová Lhota in following years.

Although some very “simple” coats of arms were granted, many contained charges from several sources, for example, the coat of arms of the town of Jáchymov contains the lion from the coat of arms of the king, a small shield from the House of Habsburg and charges that reference the mining status of the town.

The original goal of this publication was to create a work that addressed the deficit of literature on Czech heraldry. It aims to be a reliable guide and to correct earlier literature that frequently repeats errors of the past. Moreover, my intention was to create a catalogue of patents of arms with basic information on their storage in archives, libraries and museums, their physical condition and literature in which these patents of arms are mentioned. Only the time will tell whether the aim has been achieved.

