

# Specificities of the Family Life of the Elites Senior Civil Servants Working in Bohemia in the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and at the Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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*Senior civil servants are a highly interesting group of people, for whom social mobility played a key role. Only some of them are descendants of the traditional elite classes; much more often they are members of the so-called new elites.*

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## Introduction

**T**HE 19<sup>th</sup> century, and especially its second half, was a time of turbulent changes. These changes took place on many levels and can be said to have permeated the whole society—affecting the political, economic, social, religious and cultural spheres, they became manifest in the society's approach to law, religion, science and education, health, hygiene, and housing. Last but not least these changes significantly affected the private space—the family. Family conditions were, naturally, very strongly linked to the reproductive behavior of individuals, and it is in this area that a fundamental transformation, known

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as the demographic revolution or “first demographic transition,” took place during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> This term encompasses a whole range of different aspects—improvements in mortality leading to longer life expectancy, restrictions on fertility resulting in a reduction in family size or changes in partnership. While under the so-called old demographic regime the differences in mortality rates or in access to fertility were not very significant between the different social groups,<sup>2</sup> the demographic transition changed this. Changes in marriage and reproductive behavior are occurring in different social environments at different times and with different intensity—for example, elite groups are considered to be the bearers of restricted fertility, followed by the middle classes.<sup>3</sup>

This article focuses on a specific group belonging to the elite—namely, the senior civil servants working in Bohemia, one of the Crown lands of the Habsburg Monarchy. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the bureaucracy was a socio-professional stratum with a significant increase in numbers. Civil servants undoubtedly participated in the building of civil society, wielding considerable influence and power that enabled them to influence, at many levels, the environment in which they operated and where they enjoyed a significant degree of social prestige.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this study, however, is not to comprehensively assess the demographic behavior of the members of the civil service. It focuses only on selected aspects of the family life of senior civil servants, especially those which are related to the formation and dissolution of their marital unions. This study starts from the investigation of the marital status of civil servants at the time of their death. The answer to this question will bring several important findings. Firstly, we will be able to assess how widespread it was for senior civil servants to remain unmarried throughout their lives—and whether in this respect they differed or not from the rest of the society. Secondly, we will learn whether it was more common for a civil servant to outlive his wife and thus die a widower, or whether, on the contrary, he lived out his days in marriage or in separation. It is the separations/divorces that will be our next point of focus. Finally, this study will also look at the age at which civil servants usually got married and whether they followed the pattern that was customary at the time, or whether, on the contrary, they differed from the average age typical for the general population in Bohemia. Although the main focus will be on first marriages, we will also examine how often civil servants remarried.

## Dataset

AS MENTIONED above, this study focuses on a specific segment of the population, namely, the senior civil servants. The most typical representative of this group was the district captain (*Bezirkshauptmann*), with authority over the individual districts.<sup>5</sup> The district captains were appointed by the government and were supposed to represent the interests of the government, and therefore the state. Their responsibility was to maintain order and security in their district and to ensure that the other institutions operating there (municipal and district self-government bodies, financial and school administrations, etc.) carried out their activities properly. Their responsibilities were regulated by a law of 1868, which created a system that lasted in Bohemia until 1928. The number of districts run by captains was set at 89 in the administrative reform carried out in 1868 in Bohemia. During this period this number increased until it reached 104. Compared with the period before 1868, when Alexander von Bach's administrative reform was introduced in 1855, the number of district captains was about half as large. Between 1855 and 1868, when a regional administration was also in place, the territory of Bohemia had been divided into 207 districts, headed by the so-called *Bezirksvorsteher*.<sup>6</sup>

This study draws on data related to the district captains/chiefs who held this post in one of the Bohemian districts in the period 1861–1918. The total number of these officials was 1,087. The year 1861 was chosen as the starting point of the analysis because the research on senior civil servants is part of a broader project focusing on the social mobility of the elites, which also includes as an elite group the deputies to the Bohemian Diet (*Český zemský sněm*) and the Imperial Council (*Reichsrat*), for whom 1861 was crucial due to the restoration of parliamentary life.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, for the purposes of this study the year 1868, when the administrative reform took place, does not represent a significant watershed that should have influenced the family strategies of the officials. It can be assumed that behavior in this area was conditioned by the more extensive changes that were gradually taking place in society.

From the perspective of this study, the key changes were those that took place in the demographic domain, and especially those that affected marriage behavior. In this respect, it was the rising life expectancy that most affected partnerships.<sup>8</sup> Whereas in the old demographic regime remarriage was relatively common, the extension of human life and consequently life in partnership gradually reduced this eventuality, as widowhood was increasingly moved further into older age.<sup>9</sup> Research in some areas of Bohemia before the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century showed that about 17% of marriages were terminated by the death of

one partner within five years of marriage and that only about 30% of marriages lasted longer than 25 years.<sup>10</sup> In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, this situation changed: since partners tended to live longer in marriage, the need to remarry declined. The share of protogamous marriages (i.e., first marriages) concluded between previously unmarried partners increased from 75% to 90% just before World War I, reaching its historical peak in Bohemia.<sup>11</sup>

In order to observe how these general changes in demographic behavior manifested themselves in the bureaucratic professional milieu, the dataset under study was divided into three cohorts, i.e., generations differing in their date of birth. The first cohort included men born before 1831 (the oldest of them was born in 1790), the second included officials born between 1831 and 1860, and the third included officials born after 1860 (the youngest was born in 1883). As for the last group, however, it has certain source limitations that do not allow us to focus on all the questions that will be analyzed in the first and second cohorts. It is indeed not exceptional that some officials born after 1860, or their wives, died only after the Second World War, which makes it impossible to verify their marital status at death directly in the civil register, which is still inaccessible for research purposes. Although in addition to the civil registry data it was possible to draw information on marital status also from the presidial files of the individual district offices<sup>12</sup>—which made it possible, for example, to identify officials who never married or to establish the circumstances of the officials' first marriage—, it is not possible to state with certainty whether an official remarried during his lifetime, especially after he left the active service.

The main source of data relating to the marriage and death ages of civil servants and their wives were the parish and civil registers, which are largely digitized for the Czech lands. Additional sources included census sheets, presidial files, or the police register of inhabitants, as well as newspapers, which often published announcements on the deaths and marriages of important people. For the officials themselves, it was possible to find the necessary data in the vast majority of cases (95–99%). The marriage age of officials born before 1830 (determined in 83% of the cases) is an exception in this respect, since these men very often got married in a period for which it was not possible to use as many sources as were available in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and simultaneously, at that time, officials were much more mobile in their service, which made it difficult to identify the place where they married. As mentioned above, it was more problematic to obtain the necessary data for the third cohort, especially in terms of age of death (success rate of 90%), since in some cases it was not even possible to find out what was the fate of retired officials (some of them were moved away forcibly in the framework of the expulsion of the German population carried out after the Second World War).

However, the lowest proportion of data obtained relates to the age at death of the wives of civil servants—in the first and second cohorts this data item could be retrieved in 60–62% of cases, in the third cohort only in 31% (table 1). The main reason was that women were more likely to outlive men than vice versa. If an official died in service, his wife often did not have a deep attachment to the place where her husband had last served, so she then moved to a place that was often difficult to identify. Moreover, if the official’s marital status could be determined from his death record, which confirmed that he died before his wife, tracking down the exact date of the wife’s death, which would have been very time-consuming, was unnecessary for the purposes of this study.

TABLE 1. DIVISION OF OFFICIALS INTO COHORTS  
AND PROPORTIONS OF RECONSTRUCTED DATA

	Cohort 1		Cohort 2		Cohort 3	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
TOTAL	455	100.0	261	100.0	371	100.0
Never married	48	10.4	28	11.1	33	8.9
Probably not married	1	0.2	1	–	3	0.8
Married at least once	406	89.4	232	88.9	335	90.3
Reconstructed data						
Age at death of unmarried officials	48	98.0	28	96.6	30	86.1
Age of official at 1 <sup>st</sup> marriage	338	83.3	229	98.3	330	98.5
Age of 1 <sup>st</sup> wife at marriage	326	80.3	228	98.3	319	95.2
Age at death of married officials	402	99.0	229	98.3	302	90.1
Age at death of 1 <sup>st</sup> wife	252	62.1	139	59.7	103	30.7

NOTE: The distribution of officials into cohorts is related to their date of birth: cohort 1 (1790–1830), cohort 2 (1831–1860), cohort 3 (1861–1883).

The most important research question of this study is whether it is possible to observe changes in the marital status among different generations of civil servants. This involves not only research on marital status at death, which will answer the question of whether civil servants died more often in marriage or as widowers, but also finding out the proportion of permanently unmarried men. In addition, aspects of the behavior of widowed civil servants will be studied, i.e., how often and under what circumstances (age of widowhood, age at death of first wife, length of widowhood) they decided to remarry.

## Unmarried Officials

**I**F WE look at the proportion of civil servants living in the so-called definitive celibacy, we come to a rather surprising finding. For the men born before 1861, this proportion was between 10 and 11%, which was twice the usual average for men in the Czech lands (even for the men born after 1860 it was still as high as 9%).<sup>13</sup> The reason was certainly not that these men would die prematurely and would not have time to marry. The proportion of unmarried men (10.6% overall) does not change even when we apply it only to those civil servants who reached the age of 50. It is perhaps only in the second cohort that there was a higher proportion of officials who died unmarried before reaching the age of 60 (almost 40%, compared with 13% in the first cohort and 26% in the third). Nevertheless, even here the youngest clerk died at the age of 40, an older age than that when civil servants usually entered into marriage. For officials born between 1831 and 1860, it can generally be said that they died on average at the earliest age (67), i.e., 2–3 years earlier than the men belonging to the other two cohorts (table 4). For the first cohort, however, there is no difference in the age at death between men who remained unmarried and officials who married, with the former group dying on average at 70.5 years and the latter at 70.7 years.

The high share of unmarried officials, which was also noted by other researchers,<sup>14</sup> would deserve more in-depth research focusing on the social background of the unmarried men as well as on the course of their careers. From the analysis of the sample of single civil servants, it does not appear that they were predominantly from lower social classes. Only about one-fifth of them had craftsmen or smallholders as their fathers. The majority tended to come from the middle classes, from the families of doctors, lawyers or civil servants, but also of landowners. The question, however, regards their personal financial situation.<sup>15</sup> Men who could not rely on family support or marry into a rich family could usually think of starting a family only after they had reached a stable career position. Until then, they were serving without pay, which in itself was a difficult period.

The future district captain František Vaniš (1861–1930) described in his memoirs the circumstances of the beginning of his service and his entry into marriage:

*From 8 May 1887 to 1 June 1889 I served without any pay, thus for over two years I worked for free. My parents had to lend me money for this free service, which I repaid after marriage. Thus, in agreement with the decree of the Governor's Office of 11 May 1889. . . . So I received my first salary of 500 guildens, which made me extremely happy. In the meantime, I made the acquaintance of the mayor of the*

*village of Všetaty . . ., who introduced me to one of his nieces, Marie Havlovská, daughter of the former village mayor and landowner of Křenek.*<sup>16</sup>

František Vaniš subsequently passed his practical political exam in April 1890, and five days later his wedding took place. Three months after the wedding, his salary was increased to 600 guildens per year. František Vaniš added: “Although it was very annoying to serve for such a small salary, I remained in political service because my father wanted me to be an imperial royal district captain one day.”<sup>17</sup>

But not all the officials were lucky enough to have their parents supporting them financially. Some, on the contrary, were expected to support the family from which they came, for example by providing financially for the education of their younger siblings. Even after a civil servant got a stable position, it took a relatively long time for his salary to rise enough for him not to worry that his family would become destitute. Martin Klečáček’s research has shown that in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in Bohemia, the waiting time for promotion from one rank to another lengthened, and therefore many officials spent up to two-thirds of their careers waiting to reach the position of district captain.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the same rank and salary did not necessarily mean the same social status, since the districts differed from each other in terms of the cost of living as well as the costs of the necessary representation.<sup>19</sup> Also, officials working in less important districts, whose seats did not even have a secondary school, incurred additional expenses if, for example, they wanted their children to study. Even the system of the service itself could have acted as another disincentive, since throughout most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it led to frequent changes in the official’s place of work. The cost of moving, including, in the earlier period, having to move to another Crown land, could be rather high and even the “relocation” of one’s entire family to a new place could cause considerable complications. All these circumstances may have played a significant role in the consideration of whether starting a family might be a rather onerous burden.

## Married Officials

**O**FFICIALS WERE a social class for whom the court decree of 29 July 1800 was generally applicable. This decree stipulated that state and municipal officials were not allowed to marry without the permission of their superior unless their annual salary reached at least 400 guildens if they served in Vienna, 300 guildens in other cities, and 200 guildens in the countryside.<sup>20</sup> However, it cannot be said that the provisions of this decree directly made officials

enter into marriage later than at the average marriage age of men in the Czech lands at that time. In fact, very few civil servants married before reaching a position of at least rank X (i.e., the position of junior drafting official), which also guaranteed them a permanent position and a regular salary.<sup>21</sup>

An analysis of the marriage age of all 973 civil servants who entered into marriage at least once showed a fairly stable pattern in this respect. The average marriage age at first marriage was around 33 years in all three cohorts. By comparison, the average age at marriage for men in the Czech lands in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was under 28 years.<sup>22</sup>

TABLE 2. STRUCTURE OF CIVIL SERVANTS  
AND THEIR WIVES ACCORDING TO MARRIAGE AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE

Age at marriage	Cohort 1 (%)		Cohort 2 (%)		Cohort 3 (%)	
	Officials	Their wives	Officials	Their wives	Officials	Their wives
15–19	–	17.8	–	18.9	–	13.5
20–24	2.1	44.2	3.1	44.7	1.5	46.7
25–29	29.6	27.0	34.1	25.9	34.8	24.8
30–34	32.8	7.7	34.5	5.7	37.6	7.8
35–39	21.6	1.2	18.3	1.8	13.0	2.8
40–44	8.6	1.5	5.7	1.8	5.5	2.8
45–49	3.0	0.3	1.7	1.3	3.3	0.3
50+	2.4	0.3	2.6	–	4.2	1.3
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	338	326	229	228	330	319

For civil servants, the age of 27–28 years was rather the lower limit, the turning point after which the proportion of married civil servants started to increase rapidly (table 2). Marriage at younger ages was rare (8% of men in the first and third cohorts, 13.5% in the second cohort). The number of men who married after the age of 35 was highest in the first cohort (36%). However, this proportion decreased for the later-born civil servants (26% for the third cohort) and marriages were clearly concentrated in two age groups (25–29 and 30–34), where 70% of men married. Relatively few men married for the first time after their 40<sup>th</sup> birthday—13–14% of men in the first and second cohorts and only 10% of men in the third cohort; after the age of 45, men married only exceptionally, accounting for less than 5%; the highest age at first marriage was reached by František Bláha (b. 1864), who married at the age of 65 in 1930, when he had already retired.

The higher marriage age than was common in society was undoubtedly related to the course of a clerical career, which brought a stable position with a guaranteed salary only after several years of service.<sup>23</sup> Another important factor

influencing the age at marriage was university education, which was obligatory for a career as a civil servant. Equally important was the person of the bride, or rather the family from which the future civil servant's wife came. Officials were certainly aware that choosing a partner with a good dowry or family background could significantly accelerate their career, so it was best not to rush this step. In this respect, the benefit of a highly placed father-in-law was quite clear.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, a bride coming from an inappropriate social background could damage a civil servant's career.<sup>25</sup> All these factors led to these educated men, who subsequently rose to the ranks of the elite, marrying at about the same age that was more common among unskilled agricultural workers. It should be noted, however, that far from being specific to civil servants, this characteristic also applied to a certain extent to other educated groups of the population, such as lawyers.<sup>26</sup>

If we look at the average marriage age of the first wives of the officials, we find that it basically corresponded to the average marriage age for women in the Czech lands at that time. There was a predominance (approximately 45%) of brides who were aged 20–24 years, and throughout the period under review half of the brides were younger than 23 years. When comparing the individual cohorts, it can be seen that the average marriage age of the wives of civil servants increased slightly, which may have been due to the fact that, especially in the third cohort, there were among the brides more women who had already been married before (widows or separated). However, even here this proportion did not exceed 3%, which shows that the officials clearly chose unmarried women when they married for the first time. As for the age difference between the spouses, it was greatest for the first cohort, where it reached 9.4 years. For the other two cohorts, it was around eight years.

TABLE 3. MARITAL STATUS OF OFFICIALS  
WHO CONTRACTED AT LEAST ONE MARRIAGE

	Cohort 1		Cohort 2		Cohort 3	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Married	263	64.8	147	63.1	94	28.1
Widower	98	24.1	46	19.7	42	12.5
Separated	–	–	2	0.9	6	1.8
Not known	45	11.1	38	16.3	193	57.6
TOTAL	406	100.0	233	100.0	335	100.0

Given this relatively large age difference, it is clear that the wives usually outlived their husbands, unless they died prematurely for some reason. In fact, the average age at death for the first wives of civil servants who died after their husbands

was 73.6 years, while the average age at death of those first wives who left behind a widower was only 49.9 years. The cases in which the wife died before the husband were around 37% for the first two cohorts, but for the third cohort the lack of data makes it impossible to determine this proportion (table 1). This is why officials born after 1860 will be excluded from further analysis. If we also take into account the second and subsequent marriages of officials and ascertain their marital status at the time of their death, we find that officials died married about three-quarters of the time. Already in the second cohort, there were two men who died after they had been separated from their wives. This phenomenon became more significant for the third cohort, as will be shown below.

TABLE 4. MARRIAGE AGE OF OFFICIALS AND THEIR FIRST WIVES  
AND AGE AT DEATH OF OFFICIALS IN RELATION TO THEIR MARITAL STATUS

	Cohort 1		Cohort 2		Cohort 3	
	Mean age	Median	Mean age	Median	Mean age	Median
Marriage age of officials	33.3	32.0	32.4	31.0	32.8	31.0
Age at marriage of first wives	23.8	23.0	24.0	23.0	24.9	23.0
Age at death of officials married at least once	70.7	72.0	67.2	69.0	69.2	70.0
Age at death of unmarried officials	70.5	72.0	63.1	64.0	63.8	66.0

NOTE: The numbers of individual cases are stated in table 1.

## Widowers

AS SHOWN above, more than one-third of the civil servants born before 1861 who entered into marriage experienced widowhood. Whereas in the old demographic regime it was common for a widower to remarry very frequently and relatively quickly, which was one of the reasons why there were three times as many widows as widowers in society, this also changed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> Improved mortality conditions meant that people no longer had to cope with being widowed so frequently in their middle age, with widowhood increasingly moving into old age. Naturally, this fact also influenced widowers' considerations about whether or not to remarry. The high proportion of remarried men in earlier times was also due to the fact that if a wife died young, she usually left behind small children whom the man could not look after by himself.

On the other hand, the position of civil servant offered other alternative solutions to this problem. In middle-class families, it was common for the wife not to take care of the children and the household just by herself, but to have a housekeeper or maids who could take over the household even after her death. The second option was to ask someone from the family to help. It was this option that the above mentioned František Vaniš decided to take after his wife Marie died unexpectedly in 1918 at the age of fifty-two:

*Since there were still two dependent children, Antonín and Zdenka Eliška,<sup>28</sup> I asked my sister Maria Šedová, the widow of a headmaster and industrial teacher in Nové Hradky near Vysoké Myto, to stay here as my housekeeper. She stayed here and asked to be sent into retirement.<sup>29</sup>*

At that time Vaniš was working at the governor's office in Prague, but since 1899 his family had been living in Rakovník, where Vaniš was first chief district commissioner in 1901–1908 and then district captain in 1912–1917. Therefore, he requested that the district office in Rakovník be entrusted to him once again. As everything was happening in the turbulent times of November 1918, his request was granted and Vaniš remained in the position of Rakovník captain until his retirement in 1925 (he also died there five years later). But before that, in 1920, the fifty-nine-year-old František Vaniš remarried. It is possible that he met his wife through his sister Marie, since his second wife, Alžběta Knölová, who was 34 years old at the time of their marriage, came from Nové Hradky, where her new sister-in-law formerly resided. At any rate, Marie Šedová, who was then 64 years old, remained as the housekeeper of the newlyweds for at least six months after the wedding.<sup>30</sup>

Looking more closely at the dataset of state officials born in the first and second cohorts, we find that both the age of the deceased wife and the age at which the civil servant was widowed were major factors that undoubtedly played a role in the decision to remarry (table 5). At the same time, however, the data analyzed seem to indicate a gradual change in the marriage behavior of widowed men. As already mentioned above, during the so-called old demographic regime, for widowers, especially for those with dependent children, remarriage was a relatively obvious choice. Indeed, the civil servants born between 1790 and 1830 were quite clearly following this pattern. For the men who became widowed by the age of 50, the proportion of remarriages was very high (87.5% overall). However, there is a clear break after this age, with just under a quarter of men in their fifties remarrying, while no civil servant widowed after the age of 60 remarried.

For men born between 1831 and 1860, however, we see a somewhat different pattern, confirmed by the incomplete data for the members of the third cohort. Here, the preference for remarriage is clearly dominant only among men widowed before age 40 (90.9%). Men who became widowed in their 40s more often chose remarriage over widowhood, but to a lesser extent (58.3%). On the other hand, more than a third of the men who were widowed between the ages of 50 and 70 also remarried, which was not the case for the first cohort. It is possible that this generation began to see life from a different perspective, also under the influence of demographic changes. One might also consider that later-born men may have no longer felt so bound by what might be considered social conventions and that they acted more according to how the situation suited them personally. It is also possible that widowed men in their forties simply did not always desire remarriage and were content to cohabit informally with a woman who formally acted as their housekeeper.

TABLE 5. STRUCTURE OF THE SECOND MARRIAGES OF CIVIL SERVANTS  
ACCORDING TO AGE AT WIDOWHOOD AND AGE AT DEATH OF THEIR FIRST WIFE

Age	Age of civil servant at widowhood				Age at death of his first wife			
	Cohort 1		Cohort 2		Cohort 1		Cohort 2	
	R	W	R	W	R	W	R	W
Under 29	1	–	1	–	18	3	9	1
30–34	13	–	6	1	12	–	–	2
35–39	9	2	3	–	10	3	5	5
40–44	5	2	2	2	4	13	7	6
45–49	14	2	5	3	2	20	1	10
50–59	4	14	5	11	–	26	4	15
60–69	–	23	5	9	–	13	–	3
Over 70	–	35	–	17	–	–	–	1
TOTAL	46	78	27	43	46	78	27	43
%	37.1	62.9	38.6	61.4	37.1	62.9	38.6	61.4

NOTE: R—remarried; W—remained widowed.

After all, we cannot rule out such behavior even in the men born earlier. An example of this is Adolf Felix (1811–1871), who in 1842 at the age of 30 married Josefina Lhotáková, five years his junior, the daughter of a burgher in Hradec Králové, where Adolf worked at the magistrate's office. During their short, eight-year marriage, a total of six children were born before Josefa died in 1850. At that time, Adolf Felix served as an assessor at the Land Court in Hradec Králové. Within two years after his wife's death, he began a relationship with

Barbara Šindlerová (b. 1825), 14 years younger than him, the daughter of a master tailor, who gave birth to his first illegitimate child in 1853. In 1855 Adolf Felix was appointed district chief in Chlumec nad Cidlinou and remained in this position until he retired in 1864.<sup>31</sup> Here Adolf had two more illegitimate sons before he decided to marry Barbara Šindlerová in 1859. It is possible that the decision, after many years, to finally marry the woman who bore him three children was only made under pressure from Felix's superiors.<sup>32</sup>

TABLE 6. LENGTH OF WIDOWHOOD FOR SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS

Length of widowhood	Cohort 1		Cohort 2		TOTAL	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
0–5 months	2	4.9	1	3.7	3	4.4
6–11 months	6	14.6	3	11.1	9	13.2
12–23 months	10	24.4	5	18.5	15	22.1
24–35 months	6	14.6	6	22.2	12	17.6
36–47 months	2	4.9	4	14.8	6	8.8
4–6 years	8	19.5	4	14.8	12	17.6
7–9 years	5	12.2	3	11.1	8	11.8
Over 10 years	2	4.9	1	3.7	3	4.4
TOTAL	41	100.0	27	100.0	68	100.0
MEAN/ MEDIAN	42.4 months	27.0 months	44.8 months	25.0 months	43.4 months	26.5 months

There were undoubtedly other factors that entered into the decision of whether or not an official would remarry after being widowed, which cannot be explained here in detail and which would deserve future in-depth research. Indeed, even a second marriage could accelerate the official's career if he was widowed at a time when his career was still developing. Thus, the final decision to remarry may have been taken only when the official had the chance for a financially convenient second marriage. The length of widowhood also seems to suggest this. It was relatively rare for a man to remarry before a year had elapsed since the death of his wife (in the first cohort, 20% of officials did so, in the second cohort only 15%). In this respect, a certain change in behavior is evident among later-born men. While officials in the first cohort most often remarried in the second year of their widowhood, men in the second cohort did so only in the third year. This fact suggests a certain behavioral strategy where multiple factors seem to enter into play. At the same time, it appears that remarriage was not seen as a solution to the need to take care of households or orphaned children, since such a solution had to be taken immediately after the wife's death. However, the proportion of remarriages that took place in the first six months of widowhood was very low (4%), suggesting that officials were able to solve this particular

problem in other ways. Overall, it can be summarized that remarriages most commonly occurred within 1–6 years after the death of the first wife. It was rare for a state official to remarry after more than a decade of widowhood.

## The Divorced

**T**HE ENDING of a marriage by means other than the death of one of the partners was rather rare in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The circumstances of the divorce depended heavily on the confessional affiliation of the partners; for Roman Catholics, a possible separation of the spouses entailed the impossibility of entering into a new marital union. However, the 19<sup>th</sup> century is also characterized by increasing numbers of people turning away from the faith, which, together with the fact that divorce was liberalized or legalized in a number of states, led to divorce rates beginning to rise before the First World War.<sup>33</sup>

In the Czech lands, for a long time divorce was a marginal issue, which was mainly due to the fact that 96% of the population professed the Catholic faith.<sup>34</sup> According to the Civil Code, which for Cisleithania was adopted in 1811, Catholics were only allowed to divorce from bed and board, which did not imply a legal dissolution of the union and therefore did not allow divorced partners to remarry.<sup>35</sup> Thus, only non-Catholics were allowed to undergo separation, which definitively ended the marriage.<sup>36</sup> The situation did not change much even after 1868, when civil marriage, which could be terminated by separation, was introduced. The civil marriage was intended primarily for those who chose to leave the Church. However, until the First World War only a minimum of people made use of this alternative. In 1900, for example, only 30 couples in which both spouses declared themselves to be non-denominational entered into a marriage in the whole of Bohemia.<sup>37</sup>

After 1918, however, things slowly started to change. The First World War and the subsequent disintegration of Austria-Hungary, coupled with the separation from the Habsburg dynasty, caused more and more people to leave the ranks of the Catholic Church. This phenomenon was further enhanced in the early 1920s by the establishment of the new Czechoslovak Church, which in the first year of its operation gained half a million adherents (5.2% of the population) in the Czech lands.<sup>38</sup> The form of marriage and the possibility of its dissolution was also influenced by the 1919 Marriage Amendment, also known as the Separation Act, which made it possible for Catholic marriages to be dissolved. However, it retained the two-stage nature of this step—first the marriage had to be judicially divorced from bed and board and only after a further year could it be ended by separation.<sup>39</sup> The separated partners, regardless of their denomi-

national affiliation, could then remarry, obviously only in a civil ceremony. The absolute number of separations grew rapidly in the first years, doubling during 1919–1921. It can be assumed that, especially in the first months and years after the law entered into force, many of the couples who had been living separately for many years—that is, divorced from bed and board—took advantage of the new legislation and were now finally able to legally end their dysfunctional marriage. Although the trend of marriages ending in separation was on the rise in the 1920s and 1930s, the increase was by no means dramatic. Per 1,000 people, the number of separations constantly hovered around 0.5–0.6; however, as the number of marriages declined, the percentage of dissolved marriages increased (table 7). The proportion of separated individuals also increased among people who remarried (table 8).

TABLE 7. NUMBER OF MARRIAGES, SEPARATIONS AND DIVORCES  
IN BOHEMIA IN SELECTED YEARS

Year	Marriages		Separations		Divorces	
	Number	Per 1,000 inhabitants	Number	Per 1,000 inhabitants	Number	Per 1,000 inhabitants
1919	80,994	12.16	1,647	0.46	3,062	0.25
1920	92,552	13.88	2,608	0.63	4,207	0.39
1921	85,615	12.83	3,658	0.63	4,237	0.55
1925	66,302	9.59	3,021	0.44	3,457	0.50
1930	68,842	9.71	3,636	0.51	3,983	0.56
1935	57,471	7.95	4,457	0.62	4,282	0.59

SOURCES: *Pohyb obyvatelstva v Československé republice v letech 1919–1920* (Prague: Státní úřad statistický, 1929); *Pohyb obyvatelstva v Československé republice v letech 1921–1922* (Prague: Státní úřad statistický, 1929); *Pohyb obyvatelstva v Československé republice v letech 1925–1927* (Prague: Státní úřad statistický, 1932); *Pohyb obyvatelstva v Československé republice v letech 1928–1930* (Prague: Státní úřad statistický, 1936); *Pohyb obyvatelstva v Československé republice v letech 1934–1937* (Prague: Ústřední statistický úřad, 1941).

TABLE 8. REMARRIAGES ACCORDING TO THE MARITAL STATUS  
OF MEN AND WOMEN, BOHEMIA

Year	Men		Women	
	Widowers	Separated	Widows	Separated
1920	9,927	1,339	7,579	802
1925	5,772	2,120	3,716	1,394
1930	5,020	2,451	2,441	1,623
1935	4,306	2,589	2,054	1,858

SOURCES: See table 7.

Let us now return to the senior civil servants and see whether divorces or separations affected this group of the population as well. Even though the absolute number of marriages ending in separation is too small to allow for statistical analysis, their analysis can nevertheless give us a fairly clear picture of the situation. In total, a document proving the dissolution of marriage by separation could be found for 17 officials. It is perhaps not surprising that, with two exceptions, they were members of the third cohort, i.e., persons born after 1860. For these people, however, the sources are not yet fully available due to privacy concerns, so it is possible for the actual numbers of persons separated to be even higher.

Although it might seem that the 4.5% of separated officials belonging to cohort 3 did not differ much from the national average, it is more likely that marriages in this social group ended in separation even more often than was customary in society as a whole. Indeed, it can be assumed that more marital unions, about which we have no information, eventually broke up. Given the legal restriction prohibiting the definitive dissolution of Catholic marriages, all the separations of civil servants, who were mostly Catholic, took place only after 1918.

The only case in which a marriage was judicially dissolved before the First World War took place in 1908. It concerned the relationship of Karel Burda (1869–1952), who in 1906, at the age of 37, when he was a district commissioner in Prague's Smíchov district, married the 20-year-old daughter of a senior official in the self-government body. However, after only two years the marriage was declared null and void by a ruling of the Land Court in Prague.<sup>40</sup> This effectively annulled the marriage, and therefore in 1923, when Karel Burda, the head of the Slovakian department in the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Small Businesses, married again at the age of fifty-four, this time the 27-year-old daughter of a miner, he was listed as unmarried in the marriage register.<sup>41</sup>

Although the other separations of civil servants' marriages took place only after the adoption of the abovementioned 1919 Separation Act, this does not mean that the actual break-up of a marriage had not taken place earlier. While we do not always have data as to when the divorce from bed and board occurred in the individual separated marriages, it is apparent that some marriages were dysfunctional long before their legal dissolution. A typical example of a clerk who took advantage of the separation law a mere two months after the amendment came into force was Edmund Liebisch (1857–1935), who served as district captain in Broumov and Smíchov in today Prague in the 1890s, and from 1896 until his retirement in 1919 held the post of director of the Mortgage and Loan Office in Prague (*Pfand- und Leihamt*).<sup>42</sup> Edmund Liebisch tied the knot for the first time in 1882, at the age of 24, when he married a merchant's daughter, a year

younger than him.<sup>43</sup> An only son, Egon (b. 1885) was born in this marriage. Subsequently, the spouses were divorced from bed and board in 1901, but both partners had to wait nearly eighteen more years to end their marriage. It was not until 12 July 1919 that Edmund Liebisch obtained the dissolution of the marriage, which he immediately took advantage of when, on 28 August 1919, he married the 43-year-old unmarried daughter of a photographer. The speed with which the second marriage took place suggests that Edmund Liebisch wanted to legalize as soon as possible a relationship that had apparently existed for some time. It is very likely that the two partners had already shared a household before the wedding, as they gave the same address when they married.<sup>44</sup>

Similar motivations can be assumed for other officials as well. During the first six months of the separation law, five civil servant marriages were terminated. In four of these cases (E. Liebisch was one of them) a new marriage soon followed. Only Karl Peyerl von Peyersfeld (1866–1930) did not remarry. It may be that in this case it was his wife who suggested that they separate—this district captain had already been placed under judicial supervision in 1908 because of his mental state, and in 1915 he was sent into retirement.<sup>45</sup> The divorce from bed and board of this couple took place as early as 1909, less than seven years into their marriage. Two children were born to the couple—a son, Karl (b. 1905), who stayed with his father after the divorce, and a daughter, Vlasta (b. 1904), a year older, who grew up with her mother.<sup>46</sup>

However, when ending the marriage by separation became easier after 1919, it did not lead only to civil servants deciding to end their existing marriages in this way (only the first marriages were ended by separation; no second or subsequent marriages that ended that way could be identified). After the First World War, cases in which an unmarried civil servant married an already separated wife also began to appear. Civil servants born before 1861 clearly preferred to marry a single girl—there were more than 98% of such cases; widows were rather rare among civil servant brides. A similar situation can be observed for the clerks belonging to cohort 3—out of 335 cases of first marriages, the bride was widowed in five and separated in three other cases.

If we take a closer look at the men who married a separated woman, it is clear that they did so at a later age than the usual marriage age of civil servants. They were aged between 42 and 51, and even here the question arises whether those marriages were not the culmination of a relationship that had actually lasted longer, but because separation was a two-stage process lasting at least a year, could not have been legalized earlier. This was probably the case at least for the ministerial secretary Otto Eisenstein (1877–1958). Otto Eisenstein married the thirty-one-year-old Františka on 27 November 1919, the very next day after the court dissolution of Františka's first marriage.<sup>47</sup> The strange thing about the

whole situation was that Františka's first husband's name was Václav Eisenstein (b. 1877). Although the two Františka's spouses were not related, Otto was a classmate of Václav's from the law faculty of the University of Prague, and moreover, in 1913, when the wedding of Václav and Františka took place, Otto was the best man for the newlyweds.<sup>48</sup>

Even stranger were the circumstances accompanying the marriage of the clerk Miloslav Nedoma (1875–1954). He married for the first time in 1922, when he was already 47 years old and served as a councillor at the Presidium of the Land Political Administration in Prague, where he remained until his retirement in 1936. His first wife was Růžena Rautenkranzová (1867–1926), who eight years his senior. Růžena had already been married to Ludvík Rautenkranz (\*1857), the director of the well-known Rustonka engineering plant in Prague. She was the daughter of Vavřinec Svátek (1828–1910), a lawyer and long-time Old Czech deputy in the Bohemian Diet. The marriage, which began in 1887 and produced two children, Jan (\*1888) and Olga (\*1891), was divorced from bed and board as early as 1903. The spouses lived separately, with Ludvík taking in one Klara Paul (\*1879), formally as a housekeeper, together with her illegitimate son Ludvík (sic!) (\*1901).<sup>49</sup>

The marriage of Miloslav Nedoma and Růžena lasted only four years, because in 1926 the fifty-nine-year-old Růžena died. Miloslav Nedoma remained a widower for seven years, but eventually remarried. In 1933, at the age of fifty-eight, he married the forty-two-year-old Olga Košková, then separated, who was the daughter of his first wife. Miloslav Nedoma was the only official who married a separated woman at his second marriage, but who married separated women twice, and moreover, his two wives were mother and daughter.

## Conclusion

**T**HE AIM of this study was to analyse certain aspects linked to the marital status of senior civil servants who held office in Bohemia between 1861 and 1918. A closer analysis of this sample of 1,087 men revealed certain specificities that would merit a more detailed analysis in the future. The first peculiarity is the relatively high proportion of men who never married—consistently more than 10%, which is twice as much compared to the total male population of the Czech lands. Considering that definitive celibacy tends to be associated primarily with the economic unavailability of marriage, such a high incidence of unmarried men among the elite group is surprising, as is the fact that the average marriage age of civil servants was clearly higher compared to the national average, ranging from 32 to 33 years.

It can be assumed that both these aspects have the same causes, which underline the considerable diversity of this group. While higher-ranking officials can be seen as members of an elite class, they did not usually belong to this group throughout their lives. For many civil servants, especially those of Czech nationality, civil service became an opportunity for social advancement.<sup>50</sup> However, this ascent was relatively gradual, since it was linked to a career ladder, which meant that a man usually reached a position of decision-making power (belonging at least to rank VIII) only in the second half of his career. In addition, the start of a clerical career was delayed by the necessary university studies. In the meantime, however, these men were passing through a stage in which it was customary to start a family. However, their current career status, coupled with a low salary, discouraged many civil servants from taking this step or forced them to postpone it until an older age.

In conclusion, senior civil servants are a highly interesting group of people, for whom social mobility played a key role.<sup>51</sup> Only some of them are descendants of the traditional elite classes; much more often they are members of the so-called new elites.<sup>52</sup> This raises the question of what patterns of behavior were characteristic of these men. For members of the traditional elites, it used to be typical to respect a certain moral code that determined not only how an individual should behave in public, but also how he should conduct his family life. Unmarried cohabitation, illegitimate children, divorce or separation were types of behavior that certainly did not fit into these social conventions. However, this study showed that all these phenomena were present in the family life of civil servants.<sup>53</sup> Only further research can indicate whether this fact was influenced by the social background of individuals who grew up in other than “elite” circumstances, or whether the overall transformation of society that occurred in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the determining factor. It will also be important to clarify another aspect, namely how the social status and prestige of district captains was changing in the eyes of their contemporaries. □

## Notes

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28. Both children were already teenagers, the son, Antonín, was 18, and the daughter, Zdenka, was 13 years old. Beside these two children, František had his eldest son

František (\*1893), who studied chemistry and worked for the Prague Iron Company in Králův Dvůr near Beroun, and another son, Bohumil (\*1895), a construction worker in Hradec Králové.

29. Vaniš, 361. Marie Šedová (\*1856) had an only son, Leopold (\*1885), who married in 1917.
30. Vaniš, 365.
31. Martin Klečáček et al., *Slovník představitelů politické správy v Čechách v letech 1849–1918* (Prague: Masarykův ústav a Archiv AVČR; Národní archiv, 2020), 162.
32. “Es gewinnt daher den Anschein, daß die genewärtige Anzeige sich auf Wahrnehmungen bezieht, die in den früheren Jahren vorgekommen sind, wo Bezirksvorsteher Felix wirklich dem Trunke ergeben gewesen sein, und auch im Concubinate mit seiner dermaligen Gattin gelebt haben soll, welches früher bestandene unerlaubte Verhältniß jedoch schon vor längerer Zeit über Einschreiten der Geistlichkeit behoben worden ist.” National Archives in Prague, Land Committee for Affairs of District Authorities, no. 356/1863, box 74.
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### **Abstract**

Specificities of the Family Life of the Elites: Senior Civil Servants Working in Bohemia in the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and at the Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

The aim of this study was to analyse certain aspects linked to the marital status of senior civil servants who held office in Bohemia between 1861 and 1918. A closer analysis of this sample of 1,087 men revealed certain specificities that would merit a more detailed analysis in the future. While higher-ranking officials can be seen as members of an elite class, they did not usually belong to this group throughout their lives. For many civil servants, especially those of Czech nationality, civil service became an opportunity for social advancement. Only some of them are descendants of the traditional elite classes; much more often they are members of the so-called new elites.

### **Keywords**

Bohemia, senior civil servants, marriages, remarriages, widowers, social mobility