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Teacher - Writer - Reformer of the State. The Career of Joseph von Sonnenfels (1733-1817).

A Summary

The aim of this study is to analyze and explain the career of Joseph von Sonnenfels, a university professor, popular writer and statesman who had significant influence in reforming the Habsburg monarchy in the times of transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. An analysis of his life and service under four different monarchs has been considered a desideratum so far.

To reach its aim this study follows the traces that Sonnenfels left in social interaction with his contemporaries. His relationships and personal networks are presented and examined in a chronological order. In the course of the analysis his own account and point of view are compared equally with the descriptions and actions of others as well as official files. This approach does not only underline different views on events and developments, but also explains these differences. Thus Sonnenfels's life is not told as a narrative but analyzed as the sum of his social interactions in different fields of activity. He becomes a focus through which places and patterns of social interaction in eighteenth century Vienna can be examined in the following chapters.

Sonnenfels's childhood (Chap. 2) was a period mostly influenced by his family relations. The most important person was his Jewish father who converted to Christendom, and thereby opened new possibilities for himself and his sons. Even after his conversion he stayed in contact with the Jewish community in Vienna and worked as a translator for Hebrew and other biblical languages. Growing older, the young Sonnenfels started to cut his own path in life (Chap. 3). He studied in Vienna until he left the city to join the army. After two years of service during which he was promoted to corporal he returned to finish his studies at the faculty of law. Following his exam he worked as an intern in several departments of the Austrian administration. During these years he developed new skills and laid the foundation of his later career. Especially as a founding member of the German Society of Vienna he got in touch with influential statesmen who patronized him. In 1763 they made sure that he became professor of *Polizey-* and *Kameralwissenschaft* (later renamed *politische Wissenschaften* / political sciences) at the university of Vienna (Chap. 4). Sonnenfels soon became the center of several social networks developing around his professorship. Some of his students formed a

support group and defended him in cases of academic dispute. At the same time more and more colleagues tried to benefit from his connections to high level statesmen and in return enabled Sonnenfels to act less like a teacher and more like an academic coordinator. Once a client of important statesmen, he started to become a patron himself. Therefore, he was able to mobilize massive support whenever his position was challenged. Meanwhile, Sonnenfels started to work as a popular writer and published several weekly journals in which he explained his ideas of reform to a broader public. (Chap. 5) Never afraid of confrontation he used his connections in and outside of Vienna to push aside other writers. A network of reviewers supported him by devaluating his rivals. But in return the loyalties developed inside this networked forced Sonnenfels into conflict with famous authors of the German Enlightenment. It was only because of his multiple connections that he was able to get through these conflicts. Several years later still as famous teacher and writer he finally opened up a new field of social interaction for himself in 1782 (Chap. 6). He engaged himself in several secret societies where he met with influential noblemen. He started to built an informal academy of science with them but resigned as friends became rivals and Freemasonry was put under police control.

The results of analyzing Sonnenfels's relations and networks described so far are combined to examine the influence he had on six major reforms in the Habsburg Monarchy during 1763 and 1817. (Chap. 7) Their subjects were theater, the banishing of torture and capital punishment, public administration and the police, higher education, laws concerning the Jewish community, and finally the compilation of law in general. In all cases Sonnenfels had to deal with other people of the same or higher rank who had their own ideas and concepts on how to reform. Through cooperation or confrontation all of these statesmen tried to convince each other and the monarch of their ideas. In situations like these Sonnenfels used his networks to gain influence, as is described in each case. Sometimes he was successful and sometimes his efforts remained futile. But following his steps in the Austrian administration turns him in any case into a focus for a broader understanding. Especially the approach of analyzing his life as the sum of his social interactions and considering the accounts and opinions of his contemporaries as well as his own makes it possible to examine the process of reforming the Habsburg Monarchy from an inside point of view.

As a result this study improves the understanding on how reforms were developed inside the committees and how a person like Sonnenfels could gain influence in the Austrian administration.