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**Your Excellency or Your Grace: The Prussian Monarchy's Quandaries of Birth, Rank and Office, 1660-1806**

Few features were more characteristic of royal courts than disputes over precedence. Courtiers were notoriously status conscious and, for some, recognition of their rank was their primary reason for attendance at court. But, as Dr Horowski explained, there were various criteria that could be used to lay down rules on the subject. Often, as in Britain, hereditary noble titles could be used as one way of ranking those attending court. But Brandenburg-Prussia was different. Whereas the western Empire was divided into numerous tiny sovereign states, each with its own ruler, usually with his own hereditary title, the eastern Empire was dominated by a handful of large states (Brandenburg, Saxony, Bohemia) with extensive landowning classes which had noble rank but no titles. In Brandenburg the 'vons' were a noble class sharply demarcated from their tenants but equal in rank with each other. Any hereditary titles could only be granted by the emperor. Later, as kings in/of Prussia, the Hohenzollerns had the right to grant such titles, but those tended to be viewed as less prestigious than those of an imperial origin. So, when Frederick I set out an order of precedence in 1688, he did so based on office rather than title. That system survived even under his son, Frederick William I, who is conventionally thought to have rejected the usual niceties of court life, and so this remained the basis of Prussian court precedence until German unification in the late nineteenth century. This had the effect of making the position of privy councillor especially important, as such appointments could be used by the elector as a way of increasing the rank of a favoured courtier. Even Frederick II sometimes made ministerial appointments purely as an honour. **AB**