

CHAPTER 6

AUSTRIAN HAPSBURG AND CENTRAL EUROPE

6.1 HISTORY OF THE HAPSBURGS

In 1273 Rudolph of Hapsburg was elected Holy Roman Emperor and gained permanent possession of Austria for the Hapsburg family. The Holy Roman Empire was still intact in the 18th century and consisted of 300 separate states, 51 free towns, and 1,500 free knights, each ruling a tiny state with an average of 300 subjects and an annual income of \$500. The largest states of the Empire were the Hapsburg Monarchy, with a population of ten million inside the Empire and twelve million outside; Prussia, with a population of 5.5 million; Bavaria and Saxony, with a population of 2 million each; and Hanover, with a population of 900,000.

The Emperor also claimed authority over seventy-five small principalities.

The custom was to select the ruler of Austria as the Emperor because he alone had sufficient power to enforce Impe-

rial decisions. (A brief exception was Charles VII of Bavaria.) After the War of the Spanish Succession (1701 – 13) and the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), the Spanish throne was occupied by a Bourbon, so Hapsburg power was concentrated in Austria. The Austrian Hapsburgs ruled the Empire: Naples, Sardinia, and Milan in Italy; the Austrian Netherlands (now Belgium); Hungary and Transylvania. Austria was not a national state; its lands included Germans, Hungarians, Czechs, Croats, Italians, Serbs, Rumanians, and others.

6.2 GOVERNMENT OF THE AUSTRIAN EMPIRE

Since different parts of the Empire bore a different legal relationship to the Emperor, there was no single constitutional system or administration for all parts of the realm. The Emperor was duke of Austria, margrave of Styria, duke of Carinthia, Lord of Swabia, count of Tyrol, king of Bohemia, king of Hungary, Transylvania, Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia, besides his titles in Italy and the Austrian Netherlands.

The Hapsburg Empire had four chancelleries: the Austrian (with two chancellors); the Bohemian; the Hungarian; and the Transylvanian. There were also departments responsible for the affairs of Italy and the Austrian Netherlands.

In addition the Central Government under the Emperor consisted of the Privy Council (*Geheimer Rat*), which discussed high policy; the *Hofkammer*, which made decisions regarding finance and trade; the *Hofkriegsrat* which was the War Council; the Imperial Chancellery, which dealt with matters of Empire; and the Court Chancellery, which dealt with domestic matters.

6.3 FEUDALISM IN THE HAPSBURG EMPIRE

The lords of the manor had political as well as economic controls over the peasants. Peasants were under the judicial authority of the lord. They could not marry without the lord's consent. Their children could not work or serve an apprenticeship outside the estate. The peasant could not contract a loan or sell without the lord's consent. Peasants were obligated to the *corvée*, or compulsory labor, for as many as 100 days a year. Peasants were obliged to buy products supplied by the lord at the prices he set. There were tolls to pay, customs duties, duties on transactions, quit-rents and other taxes.

6.4 MUSIC AND VIENNA

The most famous and popular of the arts in the Hapsburg Empire, and especially in Vienna, was music. Leopold I, a composer himself, was particularly significant as a patron of music. Royal concerts, ballets, and operas were part of the life of Vienna. Italians came to Austria, Bohemia, and Hungary to direct or improve their musical productions. The Slavs and Magyars excelled in singing and playing of instruments. Adam Michna z Otradovic (1600 – 76) composed hymns based on Czech poetry and the famous *St. Wenceslas Mass*, honoring the national hero.

6.5 EMPEROR LEOPOLD I (1658 – 1705)

Leopold I was the first cousin of King Louis XIV of France and also of King Charles II of Spain. He loved poetry, music, and was a patron of the arts. A devout Catholic, Leopold followed the advice of the Jesuits and sought to restrict severely his Protestant subjects. He employed German and Italian artists to build and decorate Baroque churches and palaces.

One of Leopold's most severe tests came with the Turkish invasion of Austria and siege of Vienna itself in 1683. The Turks were driven back by the Poles, Austrians, and Hungarians.

Emperor Leopold was a key figure in the War of Spanish Succession (See Chapter 1).

6.6 EMPEROR CHARLES VI (1711 – 40)

Following a brief reign by his older brother, Joseph I (1705 – 11), who died of smallpox at the age of thirty-three, Charles VI, son of Leopold I, came to the Austrian throne. Charles VI had a keen sense of duty and lived a conscientiously moral life. He was meticulous in his administration and personally involved in the details of governing.

Early in his reign he signed the Treaty of Szatmar with the Hungarians, recognizing their particular liberties and returning the Crown to St. Stephen. The Hungarian Chancellery was to be autonomous within the administration.

6.7 MARIA THERESA (1740 – 80)

Maria Theresa was not really the "Empress" although she was often referred to as such. First her husband and then her son was Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Technically she was "Queen of Bohemia and Hungary, Archduchess of Austria, ..." et. al.

Maria Theresa was a beautiful, courageous, high-minded, pious, and capable ruler. Her first reform was to increase the Austrian standing army from 30,000 to 108,000 by persuading the various estates to accept tax reforms and a tax increase. She gradually centralized the Empire and increased the power of the Austrian government.

Maria Theresa was a conservative Catholic, and considered the Church and the nobility to be the foundations of her state. She was concerned, however, with the freedom and well-being of her subjects and political realism was the hallmark of her reign. The two most important international events of her forty-year reign were the War of the Austrian Succession (1740 – 48) and the Seven Years' War (1756 – 63) (See Chapter 1).

6.8 JOSEPH II (1765 – 1790)

Joseph was co-regent with his mother for the last fifteen years of her reign. He sought to be an “enlightened despot” – with emphasis on *despot*. He wanted to govern decisively and forcefully, but rationally with the interests of his subjects in mind – at least as he envisioned them. He sought a full treasury, economy in government, and a strong military force. He sought to emulate the achievements and style of Frederick the Great of Prussia. His mother's adviser, Prince Anton von Kaunitz, provided a timely check on Joseph's ambitions. He wrote to the Emperor: “Despotic governments concern themselves with intimidation and punishment. But in monarchies [we must not forget] how much it is a joy worthy of a noble mind to govern free and thinking beings than to rule vile slaves.”

Although the Emperor was a devout Catholic, he expanded the state schools of Austria and granted religious toleration to both Protestants and Jews. Joseph II died at the age of forty-nine, having suffered recent military defeats from the Turks and fearing both the growing power of Russia and revolts in the Austrian Netherlands.