

Englisch



Hofburg Kaiserappartements

Sisi Museum Silberkammer

Silver Collection

2 The Vienna Court Table Silver

The fact that almost no court table silver has survived from earlier periods is due to two reasons: on the one hand table silver was melted down and other objects made from it as soon as it showed signs of wear or was no longer fashionable, or its owner found himself in need of money. However, the main reason for silver being melted down at the end of the 18th century was the Napoleonic Wars. Nearly every silver object in Austria was melted down to produce coins. No exception could be made for the Court Table Silver and so it was also sacrificed to this end. The silver plates and dishes were replaced by porcelain services made by the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory.

The Court Table Silver, a service made by the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory.

It was not until 1830 to 1835 that the Court Table Silver was gradually replaced. The commission for this went to Stefan Mayerhofer. Later the firm of Mayerhofer & Klinkosch and J. C. Klinkosch completed the service, which was enlarged considerably after the marriage of Emperor Franz Joseph to Princess Elisabeth in Bavaria in 1854.

3 Alexander of Lorraine / Imari porcelain

The Imperial Silver Collection owes its interesting and comprehensive collection of Far Eastern porcelain dating from around 1700 to Duke Alexander of Lorraine.

The Court Table Silver, a service made by the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory.

Karl Alexander was the younger brother of Emperor Franz Stephan, the husband of Maria Theresa. He married the latter’s only sister, Maria Anna, in 1744. After the wedding the young couple moved to Brussels, where Karl Alexander became governor of the Netherlands. He was a keen collector, a habit which led to him accumulating large debts. After his death his nephew Emperor Joseph II was appointed executor of his estate, and he had a large part of the collection auctioned off in Brussels. The valuable Imari porcelain, however, was added to the court holdings in Vienna.

The Court Table Silver, a service made by the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory.

Some of the surviving pieces represent an interesting symbiosis between Far Eastern and European culture. These porcelain plates and vessels from Japan and China were fitted with mounts by European silversmiths to adapt them for court use. Their blue, red and gold painted decoration is in the typical colours of Japanese porcelain of that epoch, which is known as Imari ware after the trading port it was exported from.

The Court Table Silver, a service made by the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory.

The centrepiece in the form of a rocky landscape was probably made by a Viennese silversmith. Incense could be placed inside the base of the silver tree, with the aromatic smoke escaping through the holes in the trunk. The fruits made of Chinese enamel also contained fragrant essences.

4 The “Mundzeug” of Empress Maria Theresa

The “Mundzeug” of Empress Maria Theresa is a set of eating implements made for the monarch’s personal use which accompanied her wherever she went. It comprises a knife, fork, serving fork and a spoon, with a small matching eggcup, an egg spoon with a marrow extractor, and a salt-cellar. Of solid gold, it was made around the middle of the 18th century.

The “Mundzeug” of Empress Maria Theresa, a set of eating implements made for the monarch’s personal use which accompanied her wherever she went.

It was not until approaching the end of the 18th century that matching sets of cutlery with place settings in multiples of 12 came into existence, the number being derived from the 12 apostles. Uniform sets of cutlery then replaced the personal, individually designed sets of the imperial family.

5 Sweetmeat stands of the New French Centrepiece (Arena)

In the atrium is a display of “tambours” or bronze-gilt stands which held sweetmeats and decorated the imperial dining table. They belong to the New French Centrepiece acquired by the young Emperor Franz Joseph.

6 Panorama Plates

The second-oldest porcelain manufactory after Meissen was founded in Vienna in 1718. Although at that time porcelain was a sought-after and costly collector’s object, it was not yet considered worthy of being used at the imperial table, except for the dessert course. The fact that it became acceptable at court around 1800 is also due to the court table silver having been melted down to produce coins during the wars.

In 1803 Emperor Franz ordered a porcelain service comprising 120 items for the court table, including 60 pictorial plates for dessert and 24 “panorama” soup plates of exceptional quality. The choice of motifs was both patriotic and Romantic. Framed by gold rims, the scenes include erupting volcanoes, icy glacier landscapes or imposing Viennese architecture – each plate displaying three views from Austria, Switzerland and Italy, executed by the best porcelain painters after old engravings, a painstaking task that took five years.

The Court Table Silver, a service made by the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory.

7 Old French Centrepiece

The Old French Centrepiece was commissioned in Paris in 1838 on the occasion of Emperor Ferdinand’s coronation as king of Lombardy-Venetia in Milan. However, it is not known who made this piece. At court it was customary to keep large foreign commissions secret or to arrange them via the offices of the Grand Comptroller in order to avoid offending Viennese craftsmen.

The Court Table Silver, a service made by the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory.

The centrepiece is made of gilded bronze. The rectangular mirror plateaus would have reflected the candlelight from the girandoles or candelabra. The figurative decoration and the soft, curving tendrils evoke an impression of elegant grandeur.

The Court Table Silver, a service made by the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory.

8 The New French Centrepiece

One of the first new acquisitions made for the young Emperor Franz Joseph after his accession during the revolution of 1848 was the “New French Centrepiece”, commissioned in Paris in 1850/51.

The Court Table Silver, a service made by the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory.

This decorative bronze-gilt piece surpasses the other centrepieces by far in the opulence of its decoration. The huge candelabra have a richly decorated superstructure composed of scrolls and rocaille work and are animated by playful putti, leaping game animals and fluttering birds. The need for a centrepiece of this size had arisen because the young emperor used to issue regular invitations to his advisors and ministers to dine at court. Under the influence of Archduchess Sophie, neo-Baroque and neo-Rococo elements became popular at court, a circumstance that was particularly reflected in the way the apartments were furnished but also had an influence on the design of utensils for the dining table.

9 The Thun White and Gold Service

The Court Table Silver, a service made by the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory.

This white and gold dinner service was acquired for Emperor Ferdinand in 1851. Ferdinand, nicknamed “the Good-Natured” by the people, abdicated from the throne during the course of the bourgeois revolution of 1848 in favour of his young nephew, Franz Joseph. Ferdinand subsequently moved to the fortress at Prague, where he lived in quiet retirement until his death in 1875.

The Court Table Silver, a service made by the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory.

The white and gold dinner service was ordered for his new household in Prague from the porcelain manufactory of the Counts of Thun at Klösterle in Bohemia.

The Court Table Silver, a service made by the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory.

The design of the service was the very height of fashion at that time. Tastes had changed around the middle of the century, with the emphatically clear lines of the Biedermeier era giving way to a softer, more flowing formal idiom. The rich gold decoration expresses the growing need to demonstrate feudal magnificence, a tendency that also made itself felt at the imperial Viennese court.

The Court Table Silver, a service made by the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory.

10 Dinner and dessert service with green ribbons (Sèvres)

The service with the green ribbons was a precious gift from the French king, Louis XV, to Empress Maria Theresa. It was intended as a sign of increasing rapprochement between France and Austria after the bloody wars of succession.

Green intertwining ribbons represent the main decorative element, while the forms of the individual items are modelled on Baroque goldsmith’s work. Between the ribbons are delicate Rococo scenes after paintings by François Boucher. They represent allegories of love, poetry, music, painting and sculpture or contain references to world literature from Homer to Molière. The service is a magnificent example of the elegant wares produced by the royal French porcelain manufactory at Sèvres, founded in 1738. They are made of a special porcelain known as “frit”, which, while more fragile, allows the colours to develop a particularly intense radiance due to the lower firing temperature. The brilliant green of this service had only been developed a short time previously. It was used just this once with the double ribbon motif to make this gift for Maria Theresa.

11 Gold “Sheaves of Corn” Tureens

In 1777 Emperor Joseph II visited his sister, the French queen Marie Antoinette, at Versailles. On his return he brought with him a total of 500 costly porcelain objects from Sèvres, including the apple-green dinner service and four magnificent tureens, three of which have been preserved in the Imperial Silver Collection.

The Court Table Silver, a service made by the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory.

The round Olio tureen – used for a nourishing soup – and the two soup tureens have four curving legs and rest on stands. The sculptural gilded decoration representing sheaves of corn together with the fruit, agricultural produce, flowers, eggs, sea creatures as well as gardening and agricultural tools painted in the medallions, symbolise fertility and the fruitful cultivation of Nature.

12 Folded napkin (swan), table linen

The Court Table Silver, a service made by the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory.

The folding of table napkins into imaginative shapes is an old but unfortunately dying art. These complex creations imitating the shapes of fans, fish, shells, swans, ducks or flowers were used as table decorations above all in the early Baroque era. They can only be achieved with napkins of the finest linen and a certain size. The imperial table napkin measuring one square metre is eminently suited for this, and there still exists a wealth of models from the 17th century for these artistic creations.

The Court Table Silver, a service made by the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory.

13 Meissen Service

The first – and for many years the best – porcelain manufactory in Europe was established at Meissen in 1710. This Meissen service made around 1775 is striking for its exquisite floral painting. The shapes of the individual pieces are good examples of “Baroque Classicism”. While the bulbous tureens with finials in the shape of fruits still seem to belong to the Baroque era, the perforated fruit basket already displays elements of Classicism with its predilection for the formal repertoire of Antiquity.

14 Gold Service

The Court Table Silver, a service made by the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory.

The Gold Service was the most magnificent porcelain service of the Viennese court. Each individual piece of this dinner service with settings for twelve people is covered with polished gold; some of them are even gilded inside and underneath. The delicate matt gold ornaments are styled on the decorative friezes of Antiquity.

The Court Table Silver, a service made by the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory.

Made in 1814, the Gold Service is a masterpiece of the Viennese Porcelain Manufactory. It was urgently needed, as the gold service appropriate to an imperial court had been melted down for coin during the wars against Napoleon. When Emperor Franz visited Paris in 1814 and it emerged that Vienna was to host a large congress of all the European powers, this service was duly ordered from the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory. Thus the court had – at least as far as appearances were concerned – a substitute service for the use at state banquets.

15 The Milan Centrepiece

The monumental Milan centrepiece was commissioned for the coronation of Emperor Ferdinand as king of Lombardy-Venetia in 1838. It is the most elaborate ensemble in the Imperial Silver Collection and together with its mirror plateaus it can be extended to a length of 30 metres. On the central piece you can see the allegorical figures of Lombardia with her mural crown and a horn of plenty together with Venetia with the doge’s cap and the lion of St Mark, while around the rim of the plateau dancing genii alternate with candelabra.

Standing before this impressive centrepiece one can vividly imagine the magnificence of imperial banquets, with the tables decorated with luxuriant bouquets of flowers as well as arrangements of fruit and sweetmeats. The Classicistic figures on the centrepiece derive from the tradition of Baroque table decorations which, depending on the occasion for the meal, drew on elements of the classical pantheon, or the arts of war or love.

16 Elisabeth, her travelling service and the Miramare Service

Whenever Empress Elisabeth travelled to the villa called the Achilleion that had been built for her on the island of Corfu, she used the yacht Miramare.

On board she used a specially made dinner service and cutlery made of silver-plated alpaca; the pattern of the service was from the range offered by the Arthur Krupp metalware factory at Berndorf around 1890. The only clue to its illustrious use is an engraved coat of arms with a dolphin surmounted by the imperial crown. On the other side of the display case you can see further items bearing the famous dolphin mark which decorated all the objects that were for the personal use of the empress during her stays in Greece.

The silver cutlery also displayed here was made by a Trieste silversmith and was also intended for use at the Achilleion.

17 Service used for State Visits

The historic dinner service known as the “Court Form Service” which was used for state banquets up to the year 2000, far beyond the end of the monarchy, was made at the Vienna Porcelain Manufactory. The silver plates formerly used at court for dining were demoted in the Republic to serving as cover plates, while the food was served on the porcelain service known in the era of the Republic as the “State Visit Service”. It has a white ground, a delicate gold rim with a pattern of dots and a double eagle in black, red and gold. It is also interesting in terms of technique: the decoration was applied to the porcelain by means of a lithographic gold and polychrome transfer process, a technique invented around 1855. From this time onwards, hand-painting was superseded by the rationalised processes of mass-production.

Silver cutlery made by Josef Carl Klinkosch and glasses by the company of Josef. & Ludwig. Lobmeyr complement the State Visit Service.

The crowning feature of the place setting is the napkin arranged in the elaborate “Imperial Fold”, forming a hollow enclosing a small bread roll. This was only allowed to be used at court dinners when the emperor was present, and its technique was a well-kept secret that was only handed down by word of mouth to selected individuals. Even today, it may only be used on the occasion of state visits by crowned heads and presidents, and only two people know – and carefully guard – the secret of the technique!

18 The Vienna Court Table Silver

This is the last room in the old part of the former Court Silver and Table Room. In the central display case are silver plates, bowls, casseroles and terrines which give an impression of the range of court table silver needed for daily use. The solid silver service bears the imperial arms and is notable for its simple and restrained elegance. The large amount of silverware can be explained by the fact that the Viennese court dined off silver or gold plates. Porcelain, which had been produced in Europe from 1710, was for a long time only used for the soup and dessert courses; all other dishes continued to be served on silver plates. It was not until during the 19th century that porcelain services began to be used for meals taken in the family circle.

The showcases to the side contain gilded table decorations; the stands for sweetmeats and the bronze-gilt girandoles are part of the New French centrepiece which you will see later on in the tour.

19 Grand Vermeil

The Grand Vermeil is without doubt one of the most important services in the Court Silver Room. A major work of French goldsmith’s art, it originally included articles for 40 place settings. Around 1850 it was enlarged to 140 settings by Viennese silversmiths. Today this magnificent service consists of a total of 4500 items and weighs over 1,000 kg. It is made of fire-gilt silver which is called “vermeil” in French.

It also has an interesting history, being closely connected to the rise and fall of Napoleon. The person who commissioned this sumptuous service in 1808 was probably Eugène de Beauharnais, Napoleon’s stepson. It was executed by the Parisian goldsmith Martin-Guillaume Biennais and the Milanese goldsmith Eugenio Brusa. The service was intended for use at the court in Milan, where Beauharnais governed as viceroy from 1805 to 1814/15. After its completion the service was brought to Milan, but following the defeat of Napoleon the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia fell to Austria. The conditions laid down by the Vienna Congress required Emperor Franz to purchase the service from Eugène de Beauharnais. On the occasion of his fourth marriage to Caroline Auguste he had the service taken to Vienna in 1816 after the engraved arms of Napoleon as King of Italy had been replaced with his own as Emperor of Austria.

20 Minton Service

A remarkable exhibit here is the unusual English dinner service that Empress Elisabeth gave to Emperor Franz Joseph for his hunting lodge at Offensee. Dating to 1870, it was designed by William Coleman and is decorated with naturalistic representations of insects, birds, sea creatures and plants.

21 Sanitary porcelain

Before Empress Elisabeth had her own bathroom installed in 1876 – the first member of the Austrian imperial family to do so – the palace had no bathrooms in the modern sense of the word. Even after this, the majority of those belonging to the court household had to make do with sets of sanitary porcelain consisting of washbasins, water jugs, footbaths, shaving bowls, soap dishes, chamber pots and so on. While these sets were not uniform, the majority of items were made of white porcelain and decorated with a gold rim and a gold imperial eagle.

22 The Old Silver Room, various services, silver cutlery

In the first room of the Old Court Silver and Table Room with its oak display cases dating from the time of the monarchy you will see individual items or pieces from Old Vienna, Hungarian and Bohemian services as well as examples of white and gold sanitary porcelain from Bohemia.

Note the fine glass services made by the firm of Lobmeyr in Vienna with different variations in the way they have been cut. The green glasses were used for Rhenish wines.

The display case in the centre of the room contains the imperial silver cutlery. This is still used today for state banquets. The first large set was supplied by Stephan Mayerhofer before 1837; later orders went to his successors Mayerhofer and Klinkosch and subsequently to Joseph Karl Klinkosch, Purveyor to the Imperial Household. A special feature here is the decoration on the side of the cutlery: the ever-popular ‘fiddle and thread’ pattern.

23 The Foot-washing Ceremony

There was a centuries-old tradition at the Viennese court according to which the emperor and empress washed the feet of 12 men and 12 women each year on Holy Thursday, in remembrance of the act of humility performed by Christ in washing the feet of his disciples.

The ceremony was performed on elderly paupers, who presented themselves at court on Holy Thursday, washed and dressed in clean clothes and having undergone a careful medical examination. After the foot-washing ceremony they were served a meal consisting of traditional Lenten fare and then presented with the gifts of a lidded earthenware jug filled with white wine, a silver beaker marked with the double eagle and the year, dishes of food and a pouch containing 30 silver coins, a reference to the thirty pieces of silver received by Judas for betraying Christ.

The two gold lavabo garnitures or sets were made by the foremost Augsburg silversmiths of the 18th century. They were used at Habsburg baptisms, for ceremonial ablutions at table and for the footwashing ceremony at Easter.

24 Dinner Service for Archduke Ferdinand Max

This service came to Vienna from Castle Miramare near Trieste, the former residence of Archduke Ferdinand Max, later to become Emperor Maximilian of Mexico. The archduke was the younger brother of Emperor Franz Joseph. In 1854 he became commander-in-chief of the imperial and royal navy. In 1864 he accepted the emperorship of Mexico, but failed to establish himself in his new empire. He was taken prisoner by the leader of the republican forces, Benito Juarez, who had him shot by firing squad in 1867. You will hear more about this episode in the Imperial Apartments.

The dinner service is a product of the Herend porcelain manufactory in Hungary, which initially specialised in copies of Chinese models. Emperor Maximilian ordered this service for his residence in Chapultepek in 1865. Moritz Fischer, the owner of the manufactory, was permitted to display the service in 1867 at the Paris World Exhibition as an advertisement for Herend’s wares. By the time the exhibition had ended Maximilian was dead, and the service was never sent to Mexico.

This concludes the tour of the Imperial Silver Collection. Please proceed to the main building of the Hofburg where you can visit the Sisi Museum and the historic residential apartments of Emperor Franz Joseph and Empress Elisabeth.

25 The Emperor’s Staircase

The Emperor’s Staircase with its magnificent marble stucco decoration and bronze-gilt vases takes you up to the main floor of the palace. It was used by Emperor Franz Joseph to gain access to his apartments.

The Hofburg was the residence of the Habsburgs for over six centuries and thus the centre of the Holy Roman Empire. In addition to its role as the seat of government and centre of administration, the Hofburg was also the winter residence of the imperial family. From the 18th century onwards, the court spent the summer mainly at Schönbrunn Palace.