

# The Habsburgs

The Habsburg dynasty is descended from a line of Alemannic counts from the Aargau (today in Switzerland). After Rudolf I of Habsburg had been elected Roman-German King in 1273, he enfeoffed his sons with the former Babenberg archduchies of Austria and Styria in 1282. This date marks the beginning of Habsburg hegemony in Austria, which was to last more than 630 years from the late 13th century to the end of the First World War in 1918.

Shrewd and energetically pursued policies ultimately led to these small possessions on and around the Danube and in Styria developing over the course of the centuries into a global empire which at its height stretched from central Europe to South America.

\* The first date refers to the year of birth, the second denotes the start of the monarch's reign and the third marks the end of the monarch's reign and/or the year of death.

## **Frederick III** (1415/1452-1493)\*



was **the first Habsburg** to be crowned Holy Roman Emperor by the Pope at Rome. From then on the imperial title was to remain in the possession of the Habsburgs (with one brief interlude from 1741 to 1745) until the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire. Frederick legalised the title of archduke for the Austrian patrimonial lands, a title which the Habsburgs continued to bear right to the end of the monarchy. Frederick preferred Wiener Neustadt as his residence, however. On visits to Vienna he stayed in the Swiss Wing, where he had the palace chapel built, the same chapel where today the Vienna Boys' Choir still sings at High Mass every Sunday.

## **Maximilian I** (1459/1493-1519)\*



was **the initiator of the famous Habsburg marriage policy**: "Other lands may wage war, but thou, oh happy Austria, marry". Maximilian, known as 'the last knight', married Mary of Burgundy in 1477, heiress to the rich duchy of Burgundy to which the Netherlands also belonged. His son Philip the Fair married Joan the Mad, heiress to Castile and Aragon, as a result of which Spain together with its rich colonies in South America now belonged to the Habsburg empire. His grandson Ferdinand then married Anne, heiress to the kingdom of Bohemia and Hungary. Thus within the space of only three generations the global empire of the Habsburgs "on which the sun never sets" had been created by a shrewd policy of marriage alliances.

### **Charles V** (1500/1519-1558)\*



devoted his reign chiefly to the campaign against the Reformation. In order the better to administer his heterogeneous empire, he divided up the Habsburg lands and their attendant functions between himself and his brother Ferdinand, thus founding **the Austrian and Spanish line of the Habsburgs** with their respective residences in Vienna and Madrid.

### **Leopold I** (1640/1658-1705)\*



The 17th century was dominated by the defensive campaigns against the Ottoman Empire. In 1683, during the reign of Emperor Leopold I (1640/1658-1705), **the second siege of Vienna** took place which ended in victory for the imperial forces and put an end to the threat from the East. Leopold had the Hofburg extended and built the wing named after him (facing the Imperial Apartments) which today houses the office of the Federal President of Austria.

### **Charles VI** (1658/1711-1740)\*



At the beginning of the 18th century the Habsburgs lost their Spanish possessions in the War of the Spanish Succession to the French Bourbon dynasty. Charles VI (1658/1711-1740), who had spent his boyhood in Spain, returned to Vienna as emperor and **extended the Vienna Hofburg in the Baroque style**. Besides the National Library and the Winter Riding School (home to the Spanish Riding School's Lipizzan stallions), his reign also saw the building of the Imperial Chancellery Wing, which contains part of the Imperial Apartments.

### **Maria Theresa** (1717/1740-1780)\*



In 1740 Charles's elder daughter, Maria Theresa (1717/1740-1780) followed him as successor to the Habsburg empire. During the early years of her reign Maria Theresa successfully defended her inheritance against France and Prussia, although she was forced to cede the rich province of Silesia. Her reign was influenced by the ideas of the Enlightenment, and she took the first steps towards reforming the administration, introduced compulsory elementary education and abolished torture. Married to Franz Stephan of Lorraine, she continued the traditional Habsburg policy of marriage alliances, marrying off the majority of her 16 children to members of various royal houses in Europe and thereby earning herself the epithet of 'the mother-in-law of Europe'. She resided in the Leopoldine Wing. After her death her former apartments were used as the magnificent state rooms of the Habsburg residence until the end of the monarchy.

### **Franz II/I** (\*1768, †1835)



At the beginning of the 19th century, in reaction to the coronation of Napoleon as emperor of France in 1804, Emperor Franz II (\*1768, †1835) proclaimed the hereditary empire of Austria, thus **becoming first emperor of Austria** as Franz I. In 1806, against the background of Napoleon's military victories, he finally dissolved the Holy Roman Empire, which, having been the supranational empire of Christendom for over a thousand years, then ceased to exist.

## **Ferdinand "the Benign"** (\*1793, †1875)

Under his successor, Ferdinand 'the Benign' (\*1793, †1875), who suffered from epilepsy, the state chancellor, Metternich, developed his system of repression based on police informers and censorship. Nevertheless, this epoch – known as the Biedermeier era – was to witness a flowering of the arts in Austria.

## **Franz Joseph I** (1830/1848-1916)\*



Franz Joseph I (1830/1848-1916) was born at Schönbrunn Palace in 1830. In 1848 at the age of 18 he succeeded his uncle, Ferdinand I, as Austrian emperor after the latter had been forced to abdicate during the course of the suppressed revolution and on account of his epilepsy. Franz Joseph's father, Archduke Franz Carl, had previously relinquished his claim to the throne. With a population of 56 million, the empire had developed over the course of the centuries into a multi-ethnic monarchy in which many different nationalities, including Germans, Hungarians, Czechs, Rumanians, Slovaks and Italians, lived under the one crown.

The early years of Franz Joseph's reign were overshadowed by a series of military defeats which saw the loss of the Italian possessions of Lombardy and Venetia as well as Austria's dominant position in the German League following the Battle of Königgrätz against Prussia. Franz Joseph continued the conservative policies of his predecessors, but found himself confronted with the growing tensions between the various nationalities in his empire. 1867 saw the Compromise with Hungary which laid the foundations of the **Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy** and ensured extensive independence for the Magyar nation. In the same year the emperor was crowned king of Hungary. Franz Joseph's reign saw the building of the Neue Hofburg on Heldenplatz (Heroes' Square) and the completion of the Michaelertrakt (St Michael's Wing), which gave the Hofburg the characteristic appearance it still has today.

In 1854 he married his cousin, the sixteen-year-old Archduchess **Elisabeth** in Bavaria, known to her family as Sisi.

## **Elisabeth** (\*1837, †1898)



**Empress Elisabeth** (\*1837, †1898) developed into a beautiful and extravagant woman whom Franz Joseph worshipped his whole life long. The emperor and empress had four children; their first child, Sophie, died at the age of two, their surviving daughters Gisela (1856-1932) and Marie Valerie (1868-1924) both married and had several children, from whom there are numerous descendants. Their only son, **Crown Prince Rudolf**, born in 1858, took his own life together with that of his mistress, the seventeen-year-old Baroness Mary Vetsera, at his hunting lodge at Mayerling in 1889. His marriage to Stephanie of Belgium had produced a daughter, Elisabeth – known as Erzsi –, who after her divorce from Prince Windisch-Graetz joined the Social Democratic Party and married the socialist Leopold Petznek, going down in Austrian history as the 'Red Archduchess'.

## **The end of Monarchy**

After the tragic suicide of Crown Prince Rudolf one of the emperor's nephews, **Franz Ferdinand** (\*1863, †1914), became heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne. However, he was also to meet a tragic end: in June 1914 he was **assassinated together with his wife, Sophie, in Sarajevo**, an act that triggered the outbreak of the First World War.



During the war, in November 1916, Franz Joseph died at the age of 86, after a reign that had lasted 68 years. He was succeeded by his great-nephew **Karl I** (\*1887, +1922), the **last emperor of Austria**. The end of the First World War also spelled the **end of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy**. On 11th November 1918 the **First Republic of Austria** was proclaimed after the emperor had renounced any share in the affairs of state. However, since he had refused to renounce his claim to the throne he had to go into exile with his family. In 1922 he died at the age of 35 on the Portuguese island of Madeira. His wife, **Zita** (\*1892, +1989) of Bourbon-Parma, also refused to relinquish her claim to the throne and thus spent the rest of her life in exile, latterly in Switzerland, where she died in 1989. Her body was transported to Vienna and she was buried as the last Austrian empress in the imperial crypt of the Church of the Capuchin Friars.