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HABSBURG MONARCHY

In the Habsburg Monarchy there was a similar drive by successive rulers towards establishing greater control. The problems they confronted, however, were appreciably greater than in France. If the latter was undoubtedly not a unified nation-state but an aggregate of provinces acquired at different times, it could never have been described as 'a mildly centripetal agglutination of bewilderingly heterogeneous elements', which was how Robert Evans memorably summed up the diversity of the Habsburg Monarchy. That diversity is also well conveyed by a simple statement of Joseph II's titles:

Joseph II, Roman Emperor, Apostolic King of Hungary, Bohemia, Dalmatia, Croatia, Slavonia, Galicia, Lodomeria, Archduke of Austria, Duke of Burgundy, of Styria, of Carinthia and of Carniola; Grand Prince of Transylvania, Margrave of Moravia, Duke of Brabant, of Limburg, of Luxemburg, of Geldern, of Württemberg, of Upper and Lower Silesia, of Milan, of Mantua, of Parma, of Piacenza, of Guastalla, of Auschwitz and Zator; Prince of Swabia, Prince-Count of Habsburg, Flanders, the Tyrol, of Hennegau, of Kyburg, of Görz and Gradisca, Margrave of the Holy Roman Empire, of Burgau, of Upper and Lower Lusatia, Count of Namur, Lord of the Windisch March and of Mecheln; Duke of Lorraine and Bar; Grand Duke of Tuscany.

Just in case any titles had been forgotten, the list was usually brought to an end with the formula 'etc. etc.'. The Habsburg possessions included all or part of the present-day countries of Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, the Ukraine, Romania, Hungary, Serbia and Montenegro, Croatia, Slovenia and Italy. As Sir Harold Temperley observed, the Habsburg Monarchy was not so much a country as a continent, all by itself.

France may well have been 'diverse to the point of absurdity' (Fernand Braudel), not least in matters of language, with two distinct forms of French (*langue d'oc* and *langue d'oïl*), four foreign languages (Basque, Breton, Flemish, German) and as many as thirty mutually incomprehensible forms of patois, but even that assortment paled by comparison with the linguistic kaleidoscope that the Habsburgs had to grapple

with. Leaving aside the French- and Flemish-speaking inhabitants of the Austrian Netherlands, five main groups of languages can be identified: the German speakers, concentrated in Austria and the Alpine provinces, but also strongly represented in Bohemia, the towns of Hungary, and Transylvania; the Italian speakers, forming a relatively homogeneous bloc in southern Tyrol (but which also included – as it still does – a minority of 'Ladins' speaking a form of Latin similar to the Romansch language of Switzerland), Milan, Parma, Piacenza and Tuscany; the Magyar speakers of Hungary and Transylvania; the Romanian speakers of Transylvania; and, finally, the speakers of Slavonic languages. This last-named group needs to be subdivided further into three: those with a long-standing sense of cultural identity and a written language, such as the Czechs of Bohemia and Moravia or the Poles of Galicia; those with an embryonic sense of separate identity but without yet a clear national consciousness, such as the Croats and Serbs of the Kingdom of Hungary; and those 'submerged nationalities', concealed by illiteracy, whose existence awaited discovery by the ethnologists of the nineteenth century, such as the Ruthenians (or Ukrainians) of Galicia or the Slovaks of northern Hungary. In addition, there were large Yiddish-speaking Jewish minorities in Galicia, Hungary, Bohemia and Moravia. As if that were not enough, Latin was also commonly used for academic and religious discourse and in Hungary for administration and justice too. Even this bewildering categorization fails to do justice to the complexity of the situation, by failing to record adequately just how *mixed* each area was. Especially in Bohemia, Moravia and throughout the vast Kingdom of Hungary and Transylvania, a plethora of different ethnic and linguistic groups lived together with varying degrees of mutual animosity.

By 1648 the Habsburgs had triumphed over two overlapping groups: the Protestants and the nobility of the 'Hereditary Lands', that is to say the mainly German-speaking core territories (Upper and Lower Austria, the Vorarlberg, the Tyrol, Styria, Carinthia and Carniola) and the 'Lands of the Crown of St Wenceslas' (Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia). This was not a foregone conclusion, for by the later sixteenth century the Austrian nobility was predominantly Protestant and the Emperor Maximilian II (1564–76) was sympathetic. The crucial date was 8 November 1620, when a multinational Catholic army comprising Bavarians, Spanish, Walloons, German, French (among them Descartes)

and Austrians routed the Bohemian insurgents. Although it took time, eventually both Catholicism and royal authority were imposed, indeed they went hand in hand. In June the following year, twenty-seven Bohemian nobles and burghers were publicly executed in the main square of the Old Town in Prague, the event being visually recorded to serve as an awful warning for the present and posterity. The tongue of Jan Jessenský (Jessenius), rector of the University, was cut out and nailed to the block before he was beheaded. In 1624 Catholicism was declared to be the sole permitted religion; three years later the non-Catholic nobility and burghers of Bohemia were ordered to convert to the true faith or to emigrate. It has been estimated that about 20 per cent of the Bohemian and Moravian nobility (i.e. c.85 families) and about 25 per cent of the burghers chose exile. Overall around 150,000 individuals emigrated in the years following the battle of the White Mountain.

Out of the tumultuous decades of the mid-seventeenth century came a triple alliance between the dynasty, the Church and the great aristocratic magnates on which the Habsburg Monarchy was to rest for another century and more. To flourish in this fast-moving world of political and confessional strife, a noble needed to be sure-footed, lucky, Catholic and loyal to the house of Habsburg. The rewards were enormous, as there was a huge amount of land expropriated from the losers available for redistribution. Leaving aside royal and Church estates, about three-quarters of the land in Bohemia changed hands in the course of the 1620s. The major beneficiaries were the magnates. In the mid-sixteenth century, the total acreage of the gentry estates had exceeded that of the magnates, yet a hundred years later the magnates owned 60 per cent of all land and the gentry only 10 per cent. When the victors' lands were expropriated in their turn after the First World War by the newly created Czechoslovak state, the Kinskys lost 170,000 acres, the Liechtensteins 400,000 and the Schönborns and Schwarzenbergs more than half a million each – and those were just their holdings in Bohemia and Moravia. No wonder their loyalty to their Habsburg benefactors was commensurate. While hunting near Prague in 1732, Prince Adam Franz von Schwarzenberg was accidentally shot by the Emperor Charles VI. Although mortally wounded, the luckless prince was able to gasp 'it was ever my duty to give my life for my sovereign' before he expired.

Architectural expression of the new tripartite alliance that dominated the Habsburg Monarchy can be seen in the cityscape of Prague: in the

greatly expanded royal castle-cum-palace, the archiepiscopal palace next door, the massive Collegium Clementinum of the Jesuits and the University they directed, the baroque churches and monasteries, the statues of saints on the Charles Bridge, and the numerous aristocratic palaces (Černin, Sternberg, Martiniz, Schwarzenberg, Lobkowitz, Clam-Gallas, Golz-Kinsky, Kaiserstein, Kaunitz, Kollowrat, etc.). After Vienna, Prague was the greatest *Residenzstadt* in central Europe.

In the aftermath of the battle of the White Mountain, Emperor Ferdinand II's chief priority was to advance the interests of the Catholic religion he held responsible for his victory. But this confessional revolution was swiftly followed by a political equivalent, embodied in a new constitution for Bohemia. Although the assembly of the Estates was not abolished, it lost its right to initiate legislation and its claim to elect the king was formally abrogated in favour of the hereditary right the Habsburgs had always claimed was theirs. Decision-making for the province was located firmly in the Bohemian Chancellery in Vienna, where the Habsburg court was now finally fixed. Yet the Estates continued to dominate political life, especially in the crucial area of taxation. Given the absence of a professional bureaucracy and Habsburg preoccupations elsewhere, it could not be otherwise.

The Bohemian, Moravian and Silesian magnates continued to flourish during the second half of the seventeenth century and into the next. The expansion of the Habsburg court, army and diplomatic corps created opportunities for remunerative and prestigious employment. Below the elite, however, rule from Vienna was still resented. In 1720, when the Emperor Charles VI sought the agreement of the Bohemian Estates to the 'Pragmatic Sanction' and thus to the succession of his daughter Maria Theresa, most nobles indicated their hostility by absenting themselves from the vote. A more emphatic demonstration came twenty years later when Charles VI died and the Elector of Bavaria laid claim to the Bohemian crown. At a ceremony at Prague on 19 December 1741, the self-proclaimed king received the homage of more than four hundred members of the Bohemian Estates. Together with the Archbishop of Prague (a Count von Manderscheid), there were representatives from most of the leading aristocratic families of Bohemia present to publicize their desertion of the Habsburgs – Kinsky, Gallas, Königsegg, Kollowrat, Clary, and so on. There was a clear division between officials working on the ground in Bohemia and those operating in Vienna or in the army.

Most of the latter group – 302 of 351 – declared for Maria Theresa; most of the former – 114 of 132 – paid homage to the Bavarian usurper.

Only the sword could decide, and it turned out once again that the Habsburgs had the heavier weapon. By the end of 1742, the Bavarians and their French allies had been chased out, although the wider conflict continued in fits and starts until the Peace of Aachen in 1748. By this time, the fate of Bohemia was subsumed in a more general reform project directed by Count Friedrich Wilhelm von Haugwitz, a Silesian convert to Catholicism. His reforms, which began in 1749, concentrated the state's primal function of arranging security in the hands of the sovereign. To support a large standing army (108,000-strong initially), long-term grants of increased taxation were negotiated with the Estates, or imposed if they could not be negotiated. The tax exemptions hitherto enjoyed by clergy and nobility were abolished. The old-fashioned, baroque-sounding names of the new central and provincial bodies – the *Directorium in publicis et cameralibus*, which combined the Bohemian and Austrian chancelleries, and the Representations and Chambers, respectively – concealed a fundamental change from control by the Estates to control by the sovereign. The creation of a supreme court for the Hereditary Lands (*Oberste Justizstelle*) institutionalized the supremacy of royal justice. All this was accomplished by an act of the will from above: in the striking formulation of Peter Dickson, it amounted to a '*coup d'état*'.

Despite the wobble in loyalty in 1741 – and another one at the end of the 1780s, to be discussed in the next chapter – the history of Bohemia for most of this period demonstrated the relative efficiency of the typically Habsburg alliance with the privileged orders. In the other major kingdom that comprised the Monarchy – Hungary – it was quite a different story. There the opportunity for a similar axis appeared to be even greater, for the concentration of land, wealth and power in the hands of a few magnates was even more pronounced, the greater part of the wealth of the country being owned by just fifty landowning families. But the situation was a great deal more complicated. Although the Habsburgs had nominally ruled the entire Kingdom of Hungary since the last Jagiellon king fell fighting the Turks at the battle of Mohács in 1526, they had been able to make good their claim only to about a third, a crescent of territory stretching from south-west to north-east. Of the rest, another third, comprising the centre, was ruled directly by

the Turks, while the eastern third formed the Principality of Transylvania, ruled by a Turkish vassal. Following the great *reconquista* of the 1680s and 1690s, the Peace of Karlowitz of 1699 placed the entire kingdom, including Transylvania, under Habsburg rule *de facto* as well as *de jure*. A second war of 1716–18, ended by the Peace of Passarowitz, added the Bánát of Temesvár, northern Serbia and western Wallachia, although most of these latest gains were lost again in 1739.

As we have seen, Hungary was unusually diverse. At the core, however, both geographically and metaphorically, stood the Magyar gentry, the rock against which every Habsburg attempt at integration foundered. Their fierce sense of separatism stemmed from history, culture, religion, economics and geopolitics. They had sought to dominate the lands of the lower Danube ever since their ancestors first thrust their way over the Carpathians in AD 896. Even during the worst troughs of the ups and downs of the next millennium, they never forgot that once upon a time they had formed an independent kingdom, nor did they lose the ambition to resurrect it. Whether successful or not, the recurring need to repel invaders – German, Mongol, Turkish – periodically sharpened the sense of struggle which seems to be inseparable from acute nationalism. As Count Raimund Montecuccoli informed the Emperor Leopold I in 1662, 'The Hungarians nurse so intense a hatred for the Germans that they even hate those Hungarians who display any sort of inclination towards the Germans.' The integrity of their culture was preserved by their language: as anyone who has even toyed with the idea of learning Magyar will confirm, it is an exceedingly difficult language, not even Indo-European in origin but Uralic, related only to Estonian and Finnish. The Magyar gentry were also kept alienated from Vienna by religion. Of their two great enemies, the Habsburgs were Roman Catholic and the Turks were Muslim – so most Magyars opted for Protestantism, especially in its Calvinist or Zwinglian form. Only in those parts of the country not conquered by the Turks after the battle of Mohács and which therefore felt the full force of the Counter-Reformation was Catholicism dominant. A festering source of grievance was the not unreasonable belief that the Habsburgs treated them like a colony, as a source of cheap food and raw materials to be exploited, and as a dumping-ground for overpriced manufactured goods from other parts of the Monarchy. This resentment was intensified by the loss of Silesian markets in 1740 and the further disruption caused by the first partition of Poland in 1772.

The Bohemians had also been divided from their Habsburg rulers by history, language, culture and material interest. What made the Magyars so much tougher nuts was their capacity for organization. Since time out of mind, the Kingdom of Hungary had been divided into fifty-odd counties (*comitatus*), governed by the gentry who met periodically at county assemblies (*congregationes*). It was here that they gained the political experience, organizational skills, self-confidence and *esprit de corps* which made them so intractable. Whenever the Habsburgs were diverted by trouble elsewhere, the Magyars of Hungary and Transylvania were quick to take advantage. When the Turks marched on Vienna in 1683, they were helped by the Calvinist Prince of Transylvania, Michael I Apafi, and his co-religionist Imre Thököly, appointed by Sultan Muhammad IV as 'King of Upper Hungary' under Ottoman suzerainty. If the Magyar thorn in the Habsburg flesh never proved fatal, it did inflict sharp pain again and again. Thököly's stepson, Francis II Rákóczy, wrote in his memoirs: 'bearing in mind that no fewer than five wars were conducted within a century, one could say they were continuous'. His own rebellion, begun in 1703, was the sixth. It ended in defeat on 30 September 1711 with the Peace of Szatmár, when the Hungarian magnate commanding the Habsburg army – Count János Pálffy – signed an agreement with the Hungarian magnate commanding the rebel army – Count Sándor Károlyi. Rákóczy was dismayed by the settlement and went into exile.

Despite their heavy commitments in the south and the west of Europe, as part of the War of the Spanish Succession, which was still very much underway, the Habsburg forces had been successful yet again. The terms they granted were generous in the circumstances: a full amnesty, restitution of confiscated property, an end to religious persecution, and a pledge to respect the traditional constitution, including the tax exemptions of the nobility. This clemency paid a handsome dividend in the dark days of 1741 when a desperate Maria Theresa went to Pressburg (or Pozsony, as the Hungarians called it) to make a personal appeal to the Estates, carrying in her arms her six-month-old son and heir Joseph. They responded in Latin with the cry '*vitam et sanguinem pro Rege nostro Maria Teresia!*' (our lives and our blood for our queen Maria Theresa). If only slightly more than half of the 100,000 men promised actually materialized, they were enough to turn the tide in her favour. As she later wrote to her younger son, Maximilian Franz: 'Anything can

be done with this nation if it is treated well and shown affection . . . You will see this and be astonished at the advantages I have obtained and still obtain from it.'

Maria Theresa wrote those words in 1776, four years before her death. During her forty-year reign, she had demonstrated that a light touch need not be a soft touch. She had succeeded in increasing the central government's share of revenue at the expense of the privileged orders, but without provoking counter-productive alienation. If she had failed to generate the resources necessary to win back Silesia, for whose loss the province of Galicia, won in the first partition of Poland, represented meagre compensation, at least she had kept the Monarchy intact in a particularly perilous period. The magnitude of her achievement was to be thrown into sharp relief by the failures of Joseph II in the 1780s, which will be considered in the next chapter.

BRANDENBURG-PRUSSIA

A 'light touch' is not the sort of image normally associated with the Habsburg Monarchy's great rival – Brandenburg-Prussia – yet in terms of political development they had more in common than might be supposed. If not quite 'a mildly centripetal agglutination of bewilderingly heterogeneous elements', Brandenburg's territory did straggle in bits and pieces more than 600 miles (1,000 km) across northern Europe, from Cleves near the Dutch frontier in the west, to Tilsit (which today is called Sovetsk and is part of the Russian Federation) on the River Memel (Niemen) in the east. If it could not boast such a rich variety of religions, it was sufficiently heterogeneous to pose the same sort of problems for its rulers. If it had a greater potential for a sense of common identity, in 1648 it was still very much an aggregate of separate provinces. In 1650 the Estates of Brandenburg declined to vote money to support the Elector's policy in his neighbouring province of East Pomerania on the grounds that it was 'foreign'. The main point of difference between the Habsburg Monarchy and Brandenburg in 1648 was one of standing. Although the Elector of Brandenburg was a member of the elite group of German princes entitled to elect the Emperor, in terms of resources he was some way behind his secular colleagues (Saxony, the Palatinate and Bavaria).