

The Reigning Woman as a Heroic Monarch?

Maria Theresa Traced as Sovereign, Wife, and Mother

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The Empress is one of the most beautiful princesses in Europe: despite all her vigils and puerperia, she has held up very well. When she was younger, she loved hunting, games, and theatre. Today, her only pleasures are governing her empire and the education of her children.¹

This quotation from Carl Joseph, Baron of Fürst and Kupferberg, contains essential aspects that can be found very often in representations of Maria Theresa: the dual nature of her representation, namely on one hand the monarch and on the other the mother. Maria Theresa consciously used – among others – these two elements to create her identity. It is interesting to see how contemporaries perceived these two contrary public personas and how these personas promoted the adoration of Maria Theresa as an “Austrian heroine”,² as she was called in a eulogy for her husband, Francis Stephen.³ The impact was at any rate so strong that

¹ All English translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own. “Die Kaiserin ist eine der schönsten Prinzessinnen Europas: all ihren Nachtwachen und Wochenbetten zum Trotz hat sie sich sehr gut erhalten. Früher liebte sie Jagd, Spiel und Theater. Das einzige, woran sie jetzt Geschmack findet, ist die Regierung ihres Staates und die Erziehung ihrer Kinder.” Carl Joseph Maximilian Freiherr von Fürst und Kupferberg. Severin Perrig (Ed.), “Aus mütterlicher Wohlmeinung”. Kaiserin Maria Theresia und ihre Kinder. Eine Korrespondenz, Weimar 1999, p. 17.

² “Österreichische Heldinn”, Ignaz Mayrhofer, Trauerrede auf Franzen den Ersten römischen Kaiser, Grätz 1765, p. 11.

³ Research on female sovereigns during the Early Modern period is a comparatively recent subject. Until the 1990s, female sovereigns had been presented as rare exceptions in a male system of government and as temporary solutions without agency of their own. Exemplary summaries and overviews of female rule are: Heide Wunder, Herrschaft und öffentliches Handeln von Frauen in der Gesellschaft der Frühen Neuzeit, in: Ute Gerhard (Ed.), Frauen in der Geschichte des Rechts. Von der Frühen Neuzeit bis zur Gegenwart, München 1997, pp. 27–54; Claudia Opitz, Hausmutter und Landesfürstin, in: Rosario Villari (Ed.), Der Mensch des Barock, Frankfurt am Main [et al.] 1997, pp. 344–370; Pauline Poppel, Die Regentin. Vormundschaftliche Herrschaft in Hessen 1500–1700 (Geschichte und Geschlechter; 43), Frankfurt am Main/New York 2004; Regina Schulte (Ed.), The Body of the Queen. Gender and Rule in the Courtly World, 1500–2000, New York/Oxford 2006.

For Maria Theresa’s situation see especially Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, Maria Theresia. Eine Kaiserin in ihrer Zeit. Eine Biographie, Munich 2017, pp. XIV–XXIV. Please note that this profound and comprehensive biography was not yet published in 2015, when the main work on the text at hand was done.

Elizabeth I seems to be the queen who was most often an object of research, also with regard to gender aspects. See e.g. Carole Levin, The Heart and Stomach of a King. Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power, Philadelphia 1994; Ursula Machoczek, Die regierende Königin – Elizabeth I. von England. Aspekte weiblicher Herrschaft im 16. Jahrhundert,

Joseph von Hormayr noted in his *Österreichischer Plutarch* about thirty years after Maria Theresa's death: "There has been no woman who was greater on the throne and more exemplary in her private life at the same time."⁴

This shows that Maria Theresa acted in many different roles, or, to be more precise, that she was marked in different ways and spheres: she was marked by status, descent, and gender, to name just a few areas of importance. Contrary to the fairly inflexible sociological concept of roles,⁵ for example, the tracer concept as it is discussed in this volume highlights allusions, overlaps, and slight differences of several markers. The meanings that were associated with these differences were used with a certain intention. They are resources, which means that they achieved something for the one who used them, either for Maria Theresa or for other persons.

Along these lines, the exemplarily selected representative spheres of monarch, wife, and mother discussed here interpenetrate and overlap in the case of Maria Theresa. The different spheres are presented with various ascriptions, attributes, and properties. It is therefore important to take a close look at the respective situation in which a marker or resource was used.

Maria Theresa as Sovereign

Treatises on the state and moral writings from the Early Modern period usually exclude women from rule because of their sex. Nevertheless, there were in fact many female sovereigns at all levels in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period.⁶ Like Maria Theresa, who ruled from 1740 to 1780, most women inherited the right to rule when there were no male descendants.⁷

Pfaffenweiler 1996; Louis Montrose, *The Subject of Elizabeth. Authority, Gender, and Representation*, Chicago/London 2006.

For biographic research concerning Maria Theresa, her governance, and her motherhood, see e.g.: Adam Wandruszka, *Maria Theresia. Die große Kaiserin (Persönlichkeit und Geschichte*; 110), Göttingen 1980; Heinz Rieder, *Maria Theresia. Herrscherin und Mutter*, Munich 1999; Klaus Günzel, *Der König und die Kaiserin. Friedrich II. und Maria Theresia*, Düsseldorf 2005; Werner Telesko, *Maria Theresia. Ein europäischer Mythos*, Vienna [et al.] 2012.

⁴ "Die Frau hat nicht gelebt, die zugleich größer auf dem Thron und musterhafter im Privatleben gewesen wäre." Joseph von Hormayr, *Österreichischer Plutarch oder Leben und Bilder aller Regenten und der berühmtesten Feldherren, Staatsmänner, Gelehrten und Künstler des österreichischen Kaiserstaates*, Vol. 11, Vienna 1807, p. 123.

⁵ For the role concept, see e.g. Ralph Linton, *The Study of Man: An Introduction*, New York [et. al.] 1936; Ralf Dahrendorf, *Homo Sociologicus. Ein Versuch zur Geschichte, Bedeutung und Kritik der Kategorie der sozialen Rolle*, in: *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*; 10 (Issue 2), 1958, pp.178–208 and 10 (Issue 3), 1958, pp. 345–378.

⁶ For instance, Elizabeth I, Christina, Queen of Sweden, Elizabeth of Russia, and Catherine the Great were all monarchs in their own rights. Moreover, many female rulers reigned custodially for their underaged sons, for example Margaret of Austria, Marie de' Medici, her daughter Christine of France, Amalie Elisabeth of Hanau-Münzenberg, and Elisabeth

That a daughter could assume the throne had been an established right in the Habsburg Empire for a fairly long time. In the case of Maria Theresa, this right was guaranteed explicitly by the Pragmatic Sanction.⁸ Nevertheless, ruling a country was considered a primarily male domain. Charles VI, Maria Theresa's father, and the Austrian power elites also hoped for a male descendant to be born before Charles died.⁹ Because this male descendant failed to appear, Charles VI tried more and more to establish Maria Theresa's husband, Francis Stephen, as the next regent and to present him as a great warrior – but Francis Stephen had failed during the war with the Ottoman Empire (1736–1739). Moreover, he was rather unpopular with the Austrian power elites because of his family's French ties. Maria Theresa herself was neither involved in the business of reigning alongside her father, nor was she presented on a large scale as the heiress to the imperial throne.¹⁰ The extent to which Maria Theresa really was prepared to serve as regent cannot be determined with certainty.¹¹ The fact is that she was educated in history, religion, and the common languages, Italian, French, Spanish, and Latin, and enjoyed an excellent musical education as well.¹²

The demands on female sovereigns were high: in addition to exercising authority and representing the institution (which could be called the body politic, according to Ernst H. Kantorowicz),¹³ they had to produce a successor (this

Dorothea of Hesse-Darmstadt. See Claudia Opitz, *Hausmutter und Landesfürstin* (Fn. 3), pp. 360–361; Pauline Puppel, *Die Regentin* (Fn. 3), pp. 190–235 and 279–302.

⁷ Puppel, *Die Regentin* (Fn. 3), pp. 15–17.

⁸ Ilsebill Barta, *Familienporträts der Habsburger. Dynastische Repräsentation im Zeitalter der Aufklärung* (Museen des Mobiliendepots; 11), Vienna 2001, p. 40.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 63–65.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 65–66.

¹¹ Karl Ludwig von Pöllnitz, author, educated traveller and member of the Saxon court, visited Vienna in 1735 and noticed: “The oldest archduchess Maria Theresa is educated with the intention that she will be the sovereign of the imperial hereditary lands someday.” (Die älteste Erzherzogin Maria Theresia wird in dem Absehen erzogen, daß sie mit der Zeit die Regierung über die grossen Kaiserlichen Erb-Lande erhalten werde [...].) Carl Ludwig von Pöllnitz, *Des Freiherrn von Pöllnitz Briefe welche das merckwürdigste von seinen Reisen und die Eigenschaften derjenigen Personen woraus die vornehmsten Höfe von Europa bestehen, in sich enthalten. Aus der letzten vermehrten französischen Auflage ins deutsche übersetzt*, Vol. 1, Frankfurt am Main 1738, p. 295. Maria Theresa herself stressed her lack of experience. She complained that her father “never involved me in foreign or inner affairs and did not inform me about them either” (niemals gefällig ware, mich zur Erledigung weder der auswärtigen noch inneren Geschäften beizuziehen noch zu informieren). Josef Kallbrunner (Ed.), *Kaiserin Maria Theresias politisches Testament*, Munich 1952, p. 26. Today, the opinion of Maria Theresa being educated as a common noble girl and not as a later monarch predominates. See e.g. Wandruszka, *Die große Kaiserin* (Fn. 3), pp. 18–21; Victor Lucien Tapié, *Maria Theresia. Die Kaiserin und ihr Reich*, trans. Uta Szyszkowitz / Eugen Wacker, Graz [et. al.] 1980 [Paris 1973], pp. 52–55; Perrig (Ed.), “Aus mütterlicher Wohlmeinung” (Fn. 1), pp. 1–5.

¹² Wandruszka, *Die große Kaiserin* (Fn. 3), pp. 18–21.

¹³ Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Mediaeval Political Theory*, Princeton, N.J., 1981 [1957].

would be the body natural). Female regents had to deal with political power on the one hand, and the female body on the other hand. They had to balance these two poles and create certain images of themselves. Finally, these images had to be communicated to the public.

At the beginning of her reign, Maria Theresa had to deal with high expectations. With her political body, she had to secure the Empire's lands and boundaries and direct the government. With her natural body, she had to give birth to a male heir after having initially birthed three daughters. The natural body was therefore linked very closely to the political body.¹⁴ Additionally, the usual requirements such as beauty, loveliness, and gracefulness were placed on the natural female body. These special aspects of the female body offered Maria Theresa the opportunity to increase the emotionalization within her self-representation.

In contrast to Maria Theresa's, Francis Stephen's education was aimed at the rule of his homeland Lorraine – and he already had some experience in governing. But the Habsburg legacy with its long tradition was sufficient for the legitimacy of Maria Theresa's reign. This reliance on ancestors is an important aspect of her representation (as well as of the representation of the Habsburgs in general). Apart from the divine right of kings, the continuity of the dynasty over several centuries was the most important factor to ensure Habsburg authority. Many copperplates and paintings present Maria Theresa together with her ancestors and their main virtues. These images were supposed to remind contemporaries of the magnificent past of the Empire and to show that Maria Theresa combined the ancestors' best qualities in her person.

Such measures were necessary because a woman on the throne was yet unknown to the Austrian Empire, even if reigning women were quite common in the Early Modern period.¹⁵ There had never been a female sovereign in Austria before Maria Theresa, so she was confronted with widespread scepticism at the beginning of her reign. Furthermore, her government was neither custodial nor that of a widow. She was the only legitimate successor to the throne and was therefore crowned Queen of Hungary in 1741 and Queen of Bohemia in 1743. The coronations were celebrated with all the common traditions. For this reason, Maria Theresa had to learn to ride a horse for the ceremony in Hungary.¹⁶ The crowning ride was documented with her in a chivalric and, therefore, traditionally heroic, pose (generally marked as masculine). The engraving in Image 1 shows Maria Theresa wearing the splendid coronation dress and the Holy Crown of Hungary, riding on a horse during the ceremonial sword stroke in all four directions of the compass on the coronation hill in Bratislava. A divine hand puts

¹⁴ Telesko, Maria Theresia (Fn. 3), pp. 71–72.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁶ Carl Hinrichs (Ed.), Friedrich der Große und Maria Theresia. Diplomatische Berichte von Otto Christoph Graf von Podewils, trans. Gertrud Gräfin von Podewils-Dürnitz, Berlin 1937, p. 51.



Image 1: Franz Leopold Schmittner, *Maria Theresia, römisch-deutsche Kaiserin*, engraving, 1741, Paris, Hachette Livre.

a laurel wreath at the point of her sword, which also states her legitimacy. All these symbols of monarchic power or even of the heroic itself were chosen deliberately according to that specific situation to present the young queen as a sovereign with high heroic potential.

Her official Hungarian title, *Domina et Rex noster*,¹⁷ can be regarded as a compromise which takes into account both her female sex and her male role. However, in documents, captions and the like, the female form *regina* is usually used. The Marian connotation of this title evokes an even stronger Christian association if one considers that in 1740, Maria Theresa gave birth to Joseph, the long awaited male successor, and that representative iconography pointed out her role as a mother in an unprecedented way.¹⁸ As Elizabeth I of England before her, Maria Theresa was likened to Mary, the mother of Christ, but Elizabeth primarily embodied Mary's virginity, whereas Maria Theresa embodied the role of a mother.¹⁹ This example shows that gender as a resource can be used in different ways. The way a symbol can be used and understood depends on the context and on the specific situation. In this example, Maria Theresa refers to Mary's motherhood, because a reference to her virginity would have been at odds with her fertility. Maria Theresa already had three children when she gave birth to Joseph. Moreover, the reference to motherhood and the family aspect stressed the connection to the long tradition of the Habsburg dynasty. The motherhood symbol allowed Maria Theresa, too, to present herself as a caring, motherly monarch for her subjects in contrast to the steadfast, hard-stance monarch that the anecdote from Thomas Robinson – which will be discussed later in this text – illustrated. This shows that a person can be marked differently within one role.

The fact that Maria Theresa exercised a male role was also reflected as the subject of operas. During her time, operas were a crucial part of the courtly medial representation and supported the legitimization of the political rule. Thus, the relationships presented on the stage did have significance for a broader context. Operas were entertainment, but also instruments of propaganda. Especially in the first years of her reign, Maria Theresa supported the idea that opera could serve as an apologetic substantiation of the monarchic principle by introducing strong sovereigns and leaders on stage, and that it could emphasize the importance of certain formal occasions. Thus, she followed the opinion and practices of her father. After a couple of years, she focused more and more on the entertainment factor of opera and opened the courtly theatre to the public. This does not mean, however, that the plot of an opera became less important for her representation.²⁰

¹⁷ Augusta von Oertzen, *Maria Theresia. Bildnis einer deutschen Frau. Unter Verwendung zahlreicher Selbstzeugnisse in Briefen*, Zeulenroda 1943, p. 34.

¹⁸ Telesko, *Maria Theresia* (Fn. 3), p. 15.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

²⁰ Elisabeth Fritz-Hilscher, *Musik im Dienste einer Staatsidee. Aspekte höfischen Musiklebens zwischen 1735/1740 und 1745*, in: *id. (Ed.)*, *Im Dienste einer Staatsidee. Künste und*

One of the occasions that needed to be celebrated with an opera was Maria Theresa's coronation in Prague in 1743, where the festive opera *La Semiramide riconosciuta* was performed in the evening. Although the score of this opera is probably lost and we cannot make any statements about the music, it is interesting to see that the court chose that well-known subject for this very important occasion in the midst of the War of Succession: Semiramide, a woman disguised as a man, rules over the kingdom of Assyria. After some trouble and a love affair, Semiramide is unmasked. Because of her good manner and rule, she is finally accepted and praised as a reigning woman, and can live freely without her disguise. This subject fit perfectly to Maria Theresa's political situation at that time and confirmed her claim to the throne.

A few years later on 14 May 1748, the newly renovated Burgtheater was re-opened with another musical performance of *Semiramide*, composed by Christoph Willibald Gluck as his first major dramatic work for Vienna. The fact that more performances took place on Maria Theresa's birthday, as well as on the day the Pragmatic Sanction was ratified as part of the peace treaty of Aachen,²¹ shows that Gluck's opera clearly served as a musical representation and embellishment of festive and political courtly events.

Although Gluck's operas were not Maria Theresa's favourites, she attended *Semiramide* five times – more than any other opera written by Gluck. *Semiramide* specifically seemed to be *her* opera: Gluck and the librettist Pietro Metastasio provided it with a *licenza*, an aria of obeisance sung by Semiramide in the end. This *licenza* is directly addressed to Maria Theresa; she is mentioned as a “glorious lady, daughter of Charles and spouse of Francis”.²² Gluck never again wrote such a personal obeisance in his later operas.²³

The subject of *Ascanio in Alba* by Mozart is also related to Maria Theresa and her political position. Here the goddess Venere is to be understood as an allegory of the female sovereign, who brings together her son Ascanio and the nymph Silvia as lovers and thus ensures a continued, benevolent reign in Alba when Ascanio becomes the new king of Alba. This opera was staged, for example, on the occasion of the wedding of Maria Theresa's son Ferdinand and Maria Beatrice

Künstler am Wiener Hof um 1740 (Wiener Musikwissenschaftliche Beiträge; 24), Vienna [et. al.] 2013, pp. 209–225, here pp. 212–218.

²¹ Josef-Horst Lederer, Von der Schwierigkeit, den “Göttern” und der Kunst zu dienen. Christoph Glucks Wiener Musikdramen, in: Pierre Béhar / Herbert Schneider (Ed.), Der Fürst und sein Volk. Herrscherlob und Herrscherkritik in den habsburgischen Ländern der frühen Neuzeit. Kolloquium an der Universität des Saarlandes (13.–15. Juni 2002) (Annales Universitatis Saraviensis; 23), St. Ingbert 2004, pp. 197–239, here p. 198.

²² “Donna gloriosa di Carlo figlia, e di Francesco sposa”: Christoph Willibald Gluck, *La Semiramide riconosciuta*, in: id., Sämtliche Werke, Vol. III/12, Kassel [et al.] 1994, p. 354.

²³ Lederer, Von der Schwierigkeit (Fn. 21), pp. 199–200.

d'Este in Milan in 1771.²⁴ In contrast to the majority of *opere serie*, in this case a woman controls destiny, not a man. Numerous choruses show the adoration of Venere / Maria Theresa, being particularly obvious in the final chorus in which Venere's reign of the whole world is praised: "The noble goddess rules the whole world; / how happy the earth will be."²⁵

In reality, Maria Theresa was confronted very quickly with the difficulties of ruling and she experienced that this business was anything but easy. In the first few months, she seemed to feel quite frightened and worried about her situation, as she tells us in her first political memorandum from 1750/51, according to which she was "without money, without credibility, without an army, without experience and knowledge and, ultimately, without any advice"²⁶. Moreover, Maria Theresa was confronted with an attack by the Prussian King, Frederick the Great, who marched into then-Austrian Silesia and occupied that area – thereby starting the War of the Austrian Succession. But Maria Theresa learned quickly and showed ambition and determination in her new position as queen. A short time after her coronation as Queen of Hungary during the War, she allegedly mentioned: "I am a poor queen, but I have the heart of a king."²⁷

Despite her lack of experience, Maria Theresa turned out to be a strong-willed and brave queen. On no account would she accept the occupation of Silesia, and ordered the counterattack on Prussia against the advice of her Council, on which the British envoy Thomas Robinson commented: "The deathly pale ministers fell back in their chairs; only one heart remained steadfast: that of the Queen."²⁸ Regardless of the veracity of this anecdote, its deeper meaning is interesting. The storyteller emphasizes Maria Theresa's fearlessness and determination in a difficult situation, which can be read as a heroic virtue: the heroine is the only person who is not afraid. Moreover, the anecdote could have been used to make Maria Theresa look good in front of her subjects. In the hard time of a war, the subjects probably needed encouragement by a strong figure by which they could orient themselves.

²⁴ Christine Siegert, Oper als Fest: *Ascanio in Alba* (KV 111) und *Il sogno di Scipione* (KV 126), in: Dieter Borchmeyer / Gernot Gruber (Ed.), Mozarts Opern. Teilband 1, (Das Mozart-Handbuch, Vol. 3/1), Laaber 2007, pp. 202–212, here pp. 203–205.

²⁵ "Alma Dea tutto il mondo governa; / Che felice la terra sarà", Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Ascanio in Alba*, in: id., Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke, Vol. II/5/5, Kassel [et al.] 1956, pp. 263–264.

²⁶ "ohne Geld, ohne Credit, ohne Armee, ohne eigene Experienz und Wissenschaft und endlich auch ohne allen Rat": Josef Kallbrunner (Ed.), Politisches Testament, Munich 1952, pp. 26 and 29.

²⁷ "Ich bin eine arme Königin, aber ich habe das Herz eines Königs." Telesko, Maria Theresia (Fn. 3), p. 76.

²⁸ "Da fielen die Minister leichenblass in die Stühle zurück. Nur ein Herz blieb standhaft, das der Königin." Karl Vocelka, Glanz und Untergang der höfischen Welt. Repräsentation, Reform und Reaktion im habsburgischen Vielvölkerstaat, Vienna 2001, p. 166.

Later, Maria Theresa refused Prussian peace proposals. She would make no concessions and wanted to defeat her enemy using military force. In doing so, she prevailed against her husband, who would have preferred a diplomatic solution to the conflict and tried to assert his position with anonymous letters to some ministers.²⁹ It is noteworthy that Francis Stephen – a man – used indirect and secret communication channels, which were usually used mainly by women. In contrast, Maria Theresa acted in a way that was considered to be typically male: she publicly voiced strong opinions and returned the Prussian aggression.

This ‘inverted world’ at the Viennese court did not pass unnoticed. Frederick the Great, for example, chose a special biblical quotation for a service of thanks after an important victory during the war: “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.”³⁰ But the young queen was anything but silent. Although she had to suffer painful defeats during the war, she ensured the cohesion of her empire and her sovereignty. For her people, Maria Theresa was the heroic defender of the realm who had successfully repelled the attack of a male aggressor.

Frederick commented on Maria Theresa’s success with cynicism and amazement. For instance, he wrote: “For once the Habsburgs have a man, and he turns out to be a woman.”³¹ In his *Politische Testamente*, written in 1786, he stated: “This woman, whom one could regard as a great man, solidified the dynasty of her forefathers.”³² In doing so, Frederick, the great enemy, gave Maria Theresa credit for her accomplishments.³³ Therefore, he denied her the female sex and attributed the male gender to her, which had a positive connotation in this situation.

Otto Christoph von Podewils³⁴ also reported some of Maria Theresa’s virtues and weaknesses and concluded: “She makes every attempt to deny the weaknesses of her sex and strives for virtues that do not at all correspond to her personality

²⁹ Renate Zedinger, Franz Stephan von Lothringen (1708–1765). Monarch, Manager, Mäzen (Schriftenreihe der Österreichischen Gesellschaft zur Erforschung des 18. Jahrhunderts; 13), Vienna [et al.] 2008, pp. 203–206.

³⁰ “Ein Weib lerne in der Stille mit aller Bescheidenheit. Einem Weibe aber gestatte ich nicht, daß sie lehre, auch nicht, daß sie des Mannes Herr sein, sondern ich will, daß sie stille sei.” 1Tim 2, 11–12.

³¹ “Einmal haben die Habsburger einen Mann, und dieser ist eine Frau.” Telesko, Maria Theresa (Fn. 3), p. 15.

³² “Diese Frau, die man als einen großen Mann ansehen könnte, hat die schwankende Monarchie ihrer Väter gefestigt.” Ibid., p. 15.

³³ In many ways, Frederick the Great represented the complete opposite of Maria Theresa: he was a man, a protestant, had no children and no happy marriage, he did not descend from a centuries-old dynasty and was mostly portrayed as a general wearing his uniform or as an enlightened monarch in touch with his subjects. The representation of Maria Theresa is very likely to be seen as an opposite reaction to him. Ibid., pp. 51–52.

³⁴ Otto Christoph Graf von Podewils (1719–1781) was a Prussian diplomat at the Viennese court. On behalf of Frederick the Great, he wrote literary characterizations of the court society and the members of the imperial family.

and that women rarely own. It seems as if she is angry to be born a woman.”³⁵ As can be seen here, her entire behaviour is regarded and judged in the context of her sex and the prejudice associated with this sex. Even the *Obersthofmeister* Johann Joseph von Khevenhüller-Metsch alluded to Maria Theresa’s femininity whenever she showed a weakness like caprice that was considered to be typically female: “The Empress has, due to her sex, the inherent disposition to get upset by every insinuation and to overturn today’s plans tomorrow.”³⁶

Maria Theresa was very conscious about her femininity and tried to use it to cultivate her image; for example, by finding suitable references and allegories from the arts to represent herself as a queen. Right at the beginning of her reign, the pamphlet *Die durch die Neu-aufgegangene Sonne Triumphierende Tugend und Liebe [...]*, published on the occasion of Joseph’s birth in 1741, glorified Maria Theresa as Pallas Athena, who was an important reference within antique mythology. Numerous illustrations followed. A copperplate made by Martin Tyroff shows the young queen disguised as Athena, wearing a helmet and a suit of armour. This clearly relates to another copperplate made by Jeremias Falck in 1649 that depicts Christina, Queen of Sweden; the picture detail and the posture are almost identical. Marie de’ Medici also had herself portrayed as Minerva, the Roman equivalent of Athena, or with a figure of Minerva. Minerva allowed the association of many different qualities such as wisdom and the protection of the arts and sciences, but she was also a goddess of war.³⁷ By referring to Athena/Minerva, Maria Theresa not only linked herself to antique mythology, but also to former European queens.

It was not only allegorical illustrations but also typical state portraits that presented Maria Theresa with the usual insignia of power, such as a lifted curtain, pyramid, sceptre, sword or cornucopia. The portrait by Martin van Meytens in Image 2, for example, shows Maria Theresa with these symbols plus four crowns: the Hungarian and Bohemian crowns, the archducal hat, and the imperial crown of the Holy Roman Empire. Although Maria Theresa refused coronation as empress when her husband was crowned emperor, she is often portrayed with the imperial crown in her official portraits.

³⁵ “Sie gibt sich überhaupt Mühe, die Schwächen ihres Geschlechts zu verleugnen und strebt Tugenden an, die am wenigsten zu ihr passen und die Frauen selten besitzen. Es scheint, als sei sie ärgerlich, als Frau geboren zu sein.” Carl Hinrichs (Ed.), *Friedrich der Große und Maria Theresia* (Fn. 16), p. 48.

³⁶ “[D]ie Kaiserin [hat] das ihrem Geschlecht angebohrne Faible [...], sich von jedem nur in etwas in sinuanten Délateur irr machen zu lassen und, was heut beschlossen ware, morgen wieder umzustossen.” Ilsebill Barta, *Maria Theresia – Kritik einer Rezeption*, in: Beatrix Bechtel [et al.] (Ed.), *Die ungeschriebene Geschichte. Historische Frauenforschung. Dokumentation des 5. Historikerinnentreffens in Wien*, 16. bis 19. April 1984 (Frauenforschung; 3), Himberg 1984, pp. 337–357, here p. 341.

³⁷ Matthias Schnettger, *Die wehrhafte Minerva. Beobachtungen zur Selbstdarstellung von Regentinnen im 17. Jahrhundert*, in: Martin Wrede (Ed.), *Die Inszenierung der heroischen Monarchie. Frühneuzeitliches Königtum zwischen ritterlichem Erbe und militärischer Herausforderung* (Historische Zeitschrift, Beihefte, N. F.; 62), Munich 2014, pp. 216–235.



Image 2: Martin van Meytens, *Maria Theresia (1717–1780) im rosafarbenen Spitzkleid*, oil on canvas, c. 1750/55, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, inventory number GG 8762.

When Francis Stephen died unexpectedly in 1765, his son Joseph, who had already been crowned Roman king by that time, became Roman emperor and was crowned promptly. But he did not, in fact, get an actual dominion with this title. In the hereditary lands, Maria Theresa – his mother – was still the queen and therefore the only sovereign due to the Pragmatic Sanction of 1713 and the legal coronations. Moreover, Maria Theresa considered herself to be a ruler by the grace of God. For these reasons, it was impossible for her to delegate the responsibility of the rule to Joseph. She decided to appoint her son coregent and assigned for example the military affairs to him, but this was arranged in a way that made Maria Theresa's decision reversible at any time and that ensured that she would not lose a single part of her own power.³⁸

In his speech on the occasion of Maria Theresa's 45th birthday, Joseph von Sonnenfels retrospectively admits: "We have to apologize for not expecting a woman to be so wise, so quick-witted, so fearless, brave, and steadfast, because to us, the burden seemed too heavy even for the shoulders of a man."³⁹ It is therefore not surprising that Maria Theresa was also mentioned in contemporary Enlightenment argumentation because she embodied the equality of the two sexes:

Our glorious reigning monarch shows the whole living world, to the credit of the female sex, that the greatest art of all arts, the art of governing countries, is not too difficult for women. She is a woman and a mother of her country, in the same way as a sovereign can be a man and a father of his land.⁴⁰

All these examples show that Maria Theresa's sex and gender were important for herself, for her self-representation, and for her perception by her contemporaries. Gender played a part in several heroization strategies: ascribing masculinity to the female body, emphasising female qualities such as motherhood, and portraying gender-neutral heroic symbols such as the laurel wreath. Moreover, Maria Theresa used specific markers that related to former reigning women. But she put them in a new context and used other meanings of these symbols to make them fit her various personal situations.

The ascriptions, attributes, and symbols presented through gender often relate directly to the heroic itself. Contemporaries ascribed heroic virtues and qualities to Maria Theresa. From the beginning of her reign, this may have helped to es-

³⁸ Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia* (Fn. 3), pp. 532-533.

³⁹ "Wir sind zu entschuldigen, wenn wir so viele Klugheit, so viele Gegenwart des Geistes, so viele Unerstrockenheit, Muth, Standhaftigkeit von einer Frau nicht erwarteten, weil eine so schwere Bürde auch männlichen Schultern unerträglich schien." Joseph von Sonnenfels, *Rede auf Marien Theresien, Kaiserinn, Königin von Hungarn und Böheim*, Vienna 1762, n.p.

⁴⁰ "Unsere Glorreiche herrschende Monarchin überführt zur Ehre des weiblichen Geschlechts die ganze itzt lebende Welt, daß die größte Kunst aller Künsten, die Kunst Länder zu beherrschen, nicht über die Seele eines Frauenzimmers sey. Sie ist eine Frau, und eine Mutter ihres Landes, wie ein Fürst ein Herr, und Vater seines Landes seyn kann." Anonymous, *Der Adel*. Eine Wochenzeitschrift, Prague 1775, 9. Stück, 27 December 1775, p. 144.

tablish her as the first woman ruling the Habsburg Empire and to stabilize her position when interacting with enemies.

Maria Theresa as Wife

In contrast to her powerful political image, Maria Theresa also was presented as a loving wife and caring mother. Thus, she was defined unambiguously as a woman – unlike Elizabeth I, who never got married and had no children and could therefore be both king and queen in her one body.⁴¹

It was obvious that Maria Theresa had married the man she loved. At the Viennese court she established a relatively intimate married and family life. This was also recognized by visitors. The Grand Chancellor of the Prussian King reported in 1752 that “very few private persons live in such profound concord as the Emperor and the Empress”.⁴² Francis Stephen’s doctor of many years, Alexandre-Louis Laughier, wrote in a letter to Madame de Graffigny on 24 December 1756: “What is so charming is to see that honourable couple loving each other like good bourgeois people.”⁴³ Maria Theresa insisted on the common double bed – which found its equivalent in the magnificent sarcophagus in the Imperial Crypt – and showed her love and affection again and again. She demanded absolute fidelity, which caused Podewils to utter the remark: “She wants to have a bourgeois marriage with the emperor.”⁴⁴

But regardless of how much she loved her husband, it was clear that she was the ruler and therefore contradicted her husband harshly, as Podewils tells us:

A reliable source told me that one day, during a conference, the Empress was passionately defending an opinion with which her ministers disagreed. The Emperor offered his own opinion in response, but was sharply silenced by the Empress when she made it clear that he should not interfere in matters he knew nothing about.⁴⁵

Of course, a wife was not usually supposed to contradict her husband so harshly, but in this case, Maria Theresa put her role as sovereign first. She made her own decisions and therefore also refused to be crowned Roman empress in 1745, even

⁴¹ Schulte (Ed.), *The Body of the Queen* (Fn. 3), esp. Louis Montrose, *Elizabeth through the Looking Glass. Picturing the Queen’s Two Bodies*, *ibid.*, pp. 61–87.

⁴² “wenig Privateute in einer so innigen Eintracht leben wie der Kaiser und die Kaiserin”, Zedinger, Franz Stephan von Lothringen (Fn. 29), p. 260.

⁴³ “[...] ce qui est charmant, c’est de voir ce digne couple s’aimer comme des bons bourgeois”, *ibid.*, p. 261.

⁴⁴ “Sie möchte eine bürgerliche Ehe mit dem Kaiser führen.” Hinrichs (Ed.), *Friedrich der Große und Maria Theresa* (Fn. 16), p. 50.

⁴⁵ “Es ist mir aus guter Quelle versichert worden, eines Tages während einer Konferenz habe die Kaiserin, die eine Meinung mit großer Wärme gegen die Ansicht ihrer Minister verteidigt hatte, dem Kaiser, als er seine Auffassung bekannt gab, in sehr scharfer Weise Schweigen geboten, indem sie ihm zu verstehen gab, daß er sich nicht in Angelegenheiten mischen solle, von denen er nichts verstände.” *Ibid.*, p. 49.

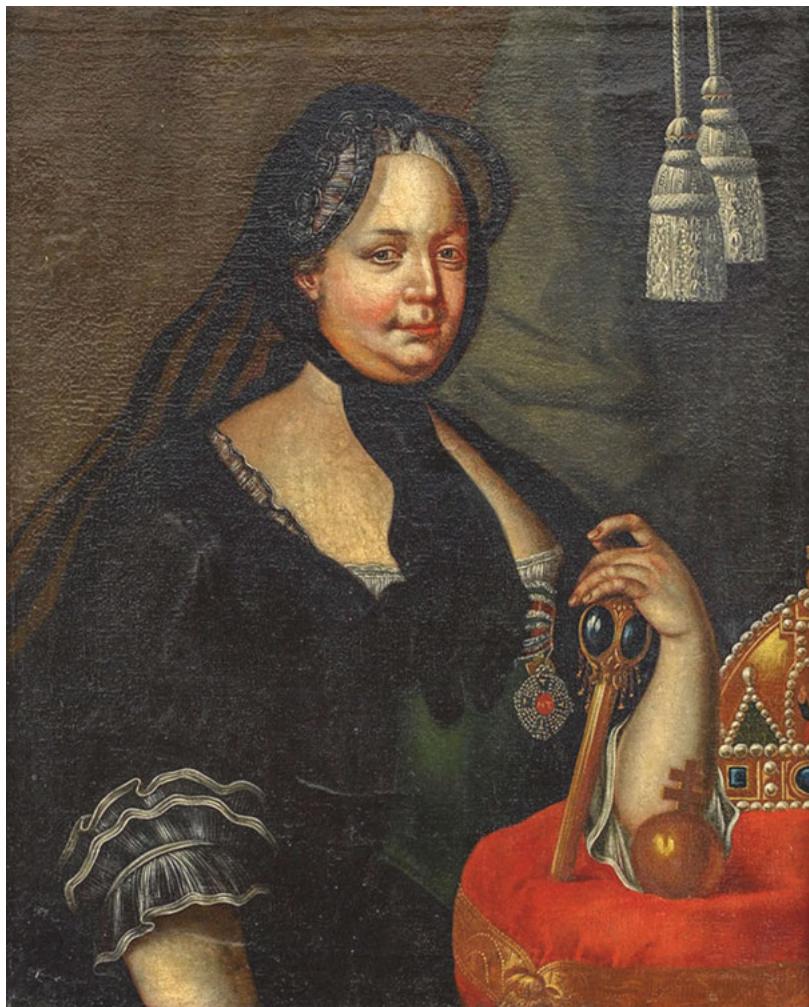


Image 3: Anonymous imitator of Joseph Ducreux, *Kaiserin Maria Theresia als Witwe*, after 1769, oil painting.

if that was one of Francis Stephen's biggest wishes, causing many disputes among the couple.⁴⁶

After the sudden death of Francis Stephen in 1765, Maria Theresa fashioned herself as a grieving widow for the rest of her life, which gave her the appearance of an especially loyal wife even after the death of her husband. To a friend, she wrote: "I lost the most perfect, the most amiable man; for 43 years, my heart was devoted solely to him; he was my comfort in the difficult course of my life."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Zedinger, Franz Stephan von Lothringen (Fn. 29), pp. 188–190.

⁴⁷ "Den vollkommensten, den liebenswürdigsten Herrn habe ich verloren; seit dreiundvierzig Jahren war mein Herz ihm allein ganz zugethan; er war mein Trost in allem in meinem

To show her grief, she had herself portrayed as a widow after 1765, wearing black clothes and a widow's veil. This typical black clothing is to be found in solo portraits, in pictures with her children, and also in combination with her insignia of power. This created a standardized image and communicated a lot of emotion, because her personal misery was transmitted to the public.

Maria Theresa as Mother

With her 16 children, among them five sons, Maria Theresa kept up with the contemporary expectation that wives give birth to as many children as possible. Four sons and six daughters of Francis Stephen and Maria Theresa reached adulthood.

In some letters, Maria Theresa complained about crying children in her room who made it difficult for her to focus on the correspondence at hand. She liked to create the image of a normal family and presented herself as a loving and caring mother who was close to her children. Her daughter Marie Antoinette tells a friend about her mother's constant focus on her outward image: "As soon as one was informed about the arrival of an important foreigner in Vienna, the Empress surrounded herself with her family, and invited the foreigner to the dinner table; this shrewdly calculated proximity to her children created the impression that she managed her children's upbringing herself."⁴⁸

In fact, Maria Theresa seemed to be very interested in her children's education. She influenced their teachers and gave strict instructions. Of course, it was part of any mother's duty to control her children's education and for a female sovereign, there was no exception. But Maria Theresa's extended correspondence with her children when they left the Viennese court shows an extraordinary interest in them. She did send strict instructions and demands but also showed a lot of affection. Isabella, Joseph's first wife, reports: "The empress loves her children, but she operates on the wrong assumption that extraordinary strictness is best. Thus, one is always supposed to look after her, advise her to be lenient, and protect the children."⁴⁹

harten Lebenslaufe." Maria Theresa to Rosalie von Edling, 21 February 1766, Maria Theresa, *Familienbriefe. Mit einem biographischen Anhang*, Berlin/Vienna 1916, p. 107.

⁴⁸ "Sobald man von der Ankunft eines Fremden von Bedeutung in Wien Kenntnis erhalten hatte, umgab sich die Kaiserin mit ihrer Familie, zog ihn zur Tafel, und erweckte durch diese wohlberechnete Annäherung den Glauben, als leite sie selbst die Erziehung ihrer Kinder." Martin Mutschlechner, *Maria Theresia als Gattin und Mutter*, <http://www.habsburger.net/de/kapitel/maria-theresia-als-gattin-und-mutter>, 13 January 2015.

⁴⁹ "Was ihre Kinder betrifft, so liebt die Kaiserin sie, doch geht sie von einem falschen Grundsatz aus, der in allzugroßer Strenge besteht. Man muß sich ihrer daher jederzeit annehmen, zur Milde raten und die Kinder in Schutz nehmen." Letter from Isabella to Maria Christina Barta, Maria Theresia (Fn. 36), p. 343.

Sovereign women had to deal with conflicting spheres of life at times. Maria Theresa had to weigh political interests and maternal affection when planning the marriages of her children, for example. In light of her daughter Maria Josepha's intended marriage to Ferdinand I of the Two Sicilies, she wrote in a letter: "I cannot deny that I do see the advantages of this marriage, but my motherly heart is nevertheless extremely concerned. I consider poor Josepha to be a victim of politics."⁵⁰ In terms of marriage, the interests of the state were more important than the children's personal happiness; such political marriages were usual in noble families at that time. But the quoted letter also shows something else: in private, Maria Theresa distinguished between her different roles as sovereign and mother even more so than in public.

Her daughters and sons were treated equally when Maria Theresa made their wedding plans. For instance, she forced Joseph to marry again after the early death of his beloved first wife Isabella. With the greatest reluctance, he finally married Maria Josepha of Bavaria because he could not stand the pressure from his mother.⁵¹ There was only one exception: Maria Christina, Maria Theresa's favourite daughter, was allowed to marry the man she really loved.⁵²

When her children got married, Maria Theresa gave them strict instructions. She told them how to behave and what to do to ensure a happy marriage, and always demanded many grandchildren. In her instructions for Maria Christina, for example, she wrote: "You know that we women are subjects to our husbands, that we owe them obedience and that our only aim is to serve our spouse, to be useful to him, to make him a father and a friend."⁵³ That Maria Theresa herself had contradicted her husband many times, not only on political topics, was nothing she mentioned explicitly in these letters. Obviously, the complex field of dynastic prestige and family advancement, personal rule of the monarch, and female (mostly informal) influences in the courtly political sphere were apparently not part of the prescriptive canon of the time. One might wonder if she

⁵⁰ "Ich kann Ihnen nicht verhehlen, daß ich die Vorteile dieser Verbindung wohl einsehe, aber mein Mutterherz ist durch sie doch aufs höchste beunruhigt. Ich betrachte die arme Josepha als ein Opfer der Politik." Unfortunately, Josepha died before the wedding, so her sister Maria Carolina had to marry Ferdinand. Letter from Maria Theresia to Maria Walburga Gräfin Lerchenfeld, 13 October 1763, Perrig (Ed.), "Aus mütterlicher Wohlmeinung" (Fn. 1), p. 52.

⁵¹ Henry Vallotton, Kaiserin Maria Theresia. Herrscherin und Mutter. Eine Biographie, trans. Ulla Leippe, Hamburg 1968. Maria Theresa herself wrote to her daughter Maria Christina in November 1764 that Joseph would get married again and that she had convinced Joseph of that marriage "against my convictions, against my feelings" ("[g]egen meine Überzeugung, gegen mein Gefühl"). Perrig (Ed.), "Aus mütterlicher Wohlmeinung" (Fn. 1), p. 62.

⁵² Ibid., p. 9 and Tapié, Die Kaiserin und ihr Reich (Fn. 11), pp. 222–224.

⁵³ "Sie wissen, daß wir Frauen unsern Männern unterworfen, daß wir ihnen Gehorsam schuldig sind, daß unser einziges Streben sein soll, dem Gemahl zu dienen, ihm nützlich zu sein, ihn zum Vater und Freund zu Machen." Maria Theresia to Maria Christine, 1766, Perrig (Ed.), "Aus mütterlicher Wohlmeinung" (Fn. 1), p. 89.

viewed her performative public acts and other practices of rule as incompatible with the instructions to her daughters. But to Maria Theresa's mind, the dynastic position⁵⁴ was decisive for the role one was given in life and it was unthinkable to break out of it. Her public behaviour as a sovereign was therefore the consequence of the dynastic position she took because her father had no male heir. Since she herself had enough sons to ensure the succession to the throne, there was no reason why her daughters should be eligible for a ruler's position. Her daughters were meant to live the lives of common noble women in the eighteenth century.

For this reason, Maria Theresa wanted her daughters to keep their distance from the business of ruling. Of course, the daughters were important instruments for Maria Theresa to extend and ensure her influence in Europe by forming dynastic alliances.⁵⁵ The best example is Marie Antoinette who became Queen of France. But she did not want them to get personally involved in such affairs, even if they were intelligent and well educated. How clearly Maria Theresa drew lines of distinction between the different personas and spheres – notwithstanding that she herself transgressed them constantly – is visible in the example of Maria Amalia. Maria Amalia married Ferdinand of the Two Sicilies after the death of Maria Josepha. Despite several warnings, she interfered in political business and tressed less carefully than her mother wished. Eventually, Maria Theresa broke off all ties with her daughter and even forbade her other children from sending letters to her.⁵⁶

But Maria Theresa was also capable of showing affection for her own children as well as for other people. In one instance, her differing views on war led to an argument with her son and coregent Joseph II. in 1772. He supported the idea of waging a war against Prussia and Russia in the context of the first Partition of Poland, while Maria Theresa opposed such a war. According to an anecdote, she told her son: "You think as a statesman, and I as a woman and mother."⁵⁷ Furthermore, she is said to have explained that she did not want to force mothers to send their sons to war. This once again marks Maria Theresa as a motherly monarch with female qualities – as someone who cares for the common people. After the wars against Prussia, the people likely longed for peace, so this anecdote presents Maria Theresa once more as a sovereign who tries to understand and fulfil the people's

⁵⁴ The importance of the dynastic element in early modern politics is now often discussed among historians: Johannes Kunisch (Ed.), *Der dynastische Fürstenstaat. Zur Bedeutung von Sukzessionsordnungen für die Entstehung des frühmodernen Staates* (Historische Forschungen; 21), Berlin 1982; Wunder (Ed.), *Dynastie und Herrschaftssicherung* (Fn. 3); Anne-Simone Knöfel, *Dynastie und Prestige. Die Heiratspolitik der Wettiner*, Köln 2009.

⁵⁵ Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia* (Fn. 3), p. 777.

⁵⁶ Barta, *Maria Theresia* (Fn. 36), p. 343.

⁵⁷ "Du denkst als Staatsmann, und ich als Frau und Mutter." Peter Reinholt, *Maria Theresia*, Wiesbaden 1957, p. 345.

needs. Her femininity (in terms of sex and gender) is used as a positive resource here, in contrast to Joseph's more aggressive – i.e. masculine – stance. Taking into account considerations of expedient political strategy, Maria Theresa's views might also have been shaped by her fear of losing that war, which could have led to the loss of power and influence in that region.

The iconographic representation of the imperial family was very important for Maria Theresa, which is why she established a new type of family portrait in her realm: while ancestors became less important, the children became more important as symbols for the future. Thus Werner Telesko states, "The *Domus Austria* concept of a dynastic family line shifted profoundly towards a new emphasis on the family nucleus, and the dynasty was thus iconically 'familiarized', so to speak."⁵⁸ Such portraits of the imperial nuclear family became a main characteristic of the representation of the Habsburg-Lorraine family in the second half of the eighteenth century. It seems as if Maria Theresa saw her own family, her own children, as the beginning of a new dynasty.

Several portraits of Maria Theresa with her immediate family exist. One of the most famous ones is a painting by Martin van Meytens (Image 4), which has Schönbrunn Palace as the backdrop and depicts Maria Theresa as both sovereign and mother. She sits on a red throne on the right side of the picture; her husband sits on a similar throne on the left side. Between them, their children are positioned in several groups, thereby visually connecting their parents. Francis Stephen points to his wife with his hand and the two oldest sons stand close to her. Maria Theresa herself points to her breast with her right hand. Both Francis Stephen and Maria Theresa are represented with their respective insignia of power such as crowns, *globus cruciger* and sceptre. A flowing curtain and massive pillars frame the scene and endow it with grandeur. Two little dogs playing in the foreground likely symbolize fidelity.

The number of children in this painting was adapted several times – when a child died or another was born. Therefore, this picture exists not only in this version with eleven children, but also in versions with nine and 13 children. The version with 13 children was widespread thanks to a copperplate engraving by Johann Christoph Winkler. At the bottom of that copperplate, there is a list of all the children with their names and dates of birth, which shows that this picture was meant to document and demonstrate the imperial family's fertility and ensured succession.

Fertility was considered the most important guarantee for the stability of a dynasty. For the Habsburg dynasty, it was even more important after the trouble with the War of the Austrian Succession. Only ensured succession guaranteed –

⁵⁸ "Der genealogisch-dynastische Familienbegriff der *Domus Austria* wurde einer tiefen Wandlung zugunsten einer neuen Betonung der 'Kernfamilie' unterworfen und die Dynastie somit gleichsam bildlich *familiarisiert*." Telesko, Maria Theresa (Fn. 3), p. 48.



Image 4: Martin van Meytens d. J., *Kaiserin Maria Theresia mit ihrer Familie auf der Schloßterrasse von Schönbrunn*, oil on canvas, 1754, Vienna, Schönbrunn Palace, inventory number GG.007458.

according to the common view at the time – peace, independence, and welfare.⁵⁹ In this context, it is easy to understand why Maria Theresa's enormous fertility was considered very positive by contemporaries.⁶⁰

Some interesting unofficial pictures of the family were also drawn by Maria Christina, Maria Theresa's favourite daughter, including one showing a family on Saint Nicholas Day in 1762 (Image 5). She based her picture off of an example: a graphic print in the form of copperplate and etching by Jacobus Houbraken and

⁵⁹ Barta, *Familienporträts der Habsburger* (Fn. 8), p. 62.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 73.



Image 5: Unbekannter Künstler, *Erzherzogin Isabella von Parma, Nikolobescherung in der kaiserlichen Familie*, Gouache on paper, 1762, Vienna, Schönbrunn Palace, inventory number GG.007521.

Cornelis Troost from the year 1761, so, of course, the presented scenery does not show a realistic event. Maria Christina just replaced the original faces by some of her own family. The scenery is located in a room which looks, with its open fireplace and its longcase clock, more like a bourgeois living room than a typical room in a castle. Francis Stephen sits on a chair near the fireplace and Maria Theresa stands behind him, her hands on the back of his chair. Four children are located in the left half of the picture. Although the family life of Maria Theresa in fact never took place in such a bourgeois setting, it is nevertheless interesting to see that Maria Christina painted her mother without any insignia of power and her father wearing clogs, a housecoat, and a turban. A younger sister shows off her puppet while a younger brother nibbles gingerbread on the floor. Maria Christina's unpublished drawings create a very bourgeois and emotional image of a happy imperial family, and suggest a very close relationship among the family members.

The imperial family also made music together. Pieces of music were composed or arranged specifically for Maria Theresa and her children, so they could play instruments or sing together. In 1759, Maria Theresa organized a little concert on the occasion of Francis Stephen's saint's day. All the children (except Leopold, who was ill) participated:

Archduke Ferdinand played the overture on the tympani, whereupon the youngest, Maximilian, recited an Italian felicitation written by Metastasio. The youngest archduchess, Antonia, sang a French *vaudeville*; the others Italian arias. Archduke Charles played a violin concerto with the oldest archduke on the violoncello; and at the end, the archduchesses Maria Anna and Maria Christina played piano concertos, while the former, who because of her ill chest has a weak but very pleasant voice, sang in accompaniment.⁶¹

Another example is the *Litaniae Lauretanae* in G major with *Sub tuum praesidium* in B flat major and *Salve regina* in F major, written by Maria Theresa's former singing master and favourite composer, Johann Adolf Hasse. This litany was written for the imperial family and performed on 5 August 1762 with the participation of Maria Theresa and all the children plus her daughter-in-law, Maria Isabella, in a private circle in the Augustinerkirche in Vienna. Maria Theresa herself and several daughters sang solo arias, while archduke Joseph played the organ, and the other children took part in the choir.⁶² The original sheet music is located in the archive of the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* in Vienna today and notes which

⁶¹ "Der Erzherzog Ferdinand machte die Ouverture mit der Paucken, sodann recitirte der kleinste Herr Maximilian [einen] von Abbate Metastasio componirten welschen Glückwunsch [...]. Die kleinste Ertzherzogin Antonia sang ein französischen Vaudeville, die übrige alle aber italiänische Arien. Der Ertzherzog Carl spille ein Concert auf der Violine und der älteste Herr auf dem Violoncello; und zum Schluß haben die Ertzherzoginnen Maria Anna und Maria [Christina] auf den Clavier Concerti geschlagen und die erstere, welche wegen ihrer üblichen Brust eine zwar schwache, aber sehr angenehm- und raine Stimme hat, sich selbststn accompagniert." Friedrich Walter, Männer um Maria Theresia, Vienna 1951, pp. 208–209.

⁶² Wolfgang Hochstein, Verzeichnis der Litanei-Vertonungen von Johann Adolf Hasse, in: id. / Reinhard Wiesend (Ed.), *Hasse-Studien*, Vol. 5, Stuttgart 2002, pp. 58–77, here pp. 58–60.

family member sang which parts. "It is a piece of music for the mother and all of her children and, moreover, a testimony to the family's devotional exercises",⁶³ writes Otto Biba.

The children also had to accompany their parents to public events such as public masses, the annual Corpus Christi procession or the 600-year celebration of the Mariazell Basilica in 1757. Thus, Maria Theresa tried to win the hearts of her people and "styled herself as 'a figure the common subject could identify with'".⁶⁴

This domestic happiness was extended to everyone. Maria Theresa was presented as a good mother not only to her children but also to her subjects, and it was conveyed that she felt responsible for them. Her maternal affection was transported into the political sphere and created the feeling that Maria Theresa cared well for her people and showed a political sense of responsibility.⁶⁵ She was perceived as a caring, loving, motherly sovereign, not as a cruel one. This humanity is the reason why, according to Sonnenfels, other sovereigns "stand far below our queen in the ranks of heroes".⁶⁶ Therefore, Sonnenfels considers Maria Theresa's private and emotional image, which is in line with the bourgeois family ideal, to be part of the heroic, although intimacy and affection were in fact contradictory to the heroic and to common imperial self-presentation at that time. It is a moot point whether the heroic sphere is in this case extended to the intimate presentation of the family or whether Sonnenfels understands the heroic as a vague concept that can be applied to anything connected with Maria Theresa, no matter whether it corresponds to the common idea of a heroic monarch or not.

Conclusion – The Heroic Queen

Maria Theresa and her contemporaries used their gender difference as a resource with a wide range of meanings. Some of those meanings originate in the semantic field of femininity and masculinity, others in the semantic field of the heroic itself. The way that gender was used as a resource depended on the respective political and personal situation. But Maria Theresa has never been marked solely by her gender, but also by her status, her age, and her qualities as queen.

Queen Maria Theresa was perceived as a reigning woman at all times. She never masqueraded as a man. She did not deny her natural body, but instead put

⁶³ "Es ist ein Musikstück für die Mutter und alle ihre Kinder und darüber hinaus wohl auch ein Zeugnis familiärer Andachtspflege." Otto Biba, Die private Musikpflege in der kaiserlichen Familie, in: Roswitha Vera Karpf (Ed.), *Musik am Hof Maria Theresias. In memoriam Vera Schwarz (Beiträge zur Aufführungspraxis; 6)*, Munich [et al.] 1984, pp. 83–92, here p. 89.

⁶⁴ "stilisierte sich zur 'Identifikationsfigur für den einfachen Untertan'", Telesko, *Maria Thes-teria* (Fn. 12), p. 76.

⁶⁵ Wolfram Mauser, *Konzepte aufgeklärter Lebensführung. Literarische Kultur im frühmodernen Deutschland*, Würzburg 2000, p. 147.

⁶⁶ "in der Reihe der Helden tief unter unserer Monarchinn stehen", von Sonnenfels, *Rede auf Marien Theresien* (Fn. 39), n.p.

its qualities into service of her political body. Nevertheless, Maria Theresa as a sovereign was attributed masculine qualities several times, to her advantage. Body natural and body politic permeated and replenished one another. Thus, several old and new strategies of heroization became possible, some with male connotations and others with female connotations. Contemporaries reflected on and discussed her sex and her gender as important aspects of the discourse surrounding her heroization (and after her death even for her mythologization). Male and female qualities are combined by permanent transgression in her one royal body, which is incorporated into the political concept of monarchy. Hence, she created a flexible game with social roles that expanded her authority.⁶⁷ Very consciously, she used her royal body to represent her political power interests so as to become a figure of emotional identification for her subjects. Additionally, her self-presentation was a reaction to contemporary rulers and historical models.⁶⁸

Maria Theresa's self-fashioning alternates between different interpretative patterns and follows a wide frame of reference. The simple life with the happy family was not fitting for heroization at that time, especially for a royal family. Any official representation of Maria Theresa therefore had to stick to common strategies of heroization, using, for example, heroic aspects in connection to the military and the imitation of figures from antiquity, and show her in typical heroic poses. But it is not sufficient to reduce Maria Theresa to the image of a military monarch, nor to just the image of the motherly queen. The roles of sovereign and mother should be perceived as complementary to one another.

To answer the introductory question: indeed, the reigning woman acts as a heroic monarch and is perceived as such, though female rule was deemed marginal for a long time.⁶⁹ Employing gender as a tracer and tool to analyze manners of representation and structures of Early Modern monarchical power has made visible the complex interrelations and markers affecting the processes of heroization, thus helping us to better understand the inherently versatile, relational, and manifold character of heroic figures.

Franz Bourgeois phrased it aptly: "We asked for a successor who would resemble Charles VI, and see, we were given a princess who unifies all the male advantages with her feminine charms. – Let us add: we received a heroine."⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Telesko, Maria Theresia (Fn. 3), p. 77.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 75–77.

⁶⁹ Due to secularization and mediatisation and therefore an altered ruling system, female rule as a common form of rule was forgotten during the nineteenth century. Besides, historians neglected female rule by the end of the twentieth century. Wunder, Herrschaft und öffentliches Handeln (Fn. 3), pp. 27–29.

⁷⁰ "Wir baten um einen, Karl dem Sechsten ähnlichen Erben, und sieh, wir erhielten eine Prinzessinn, die mit allen Vorzügen des Mannes die Reize Ihres Geschlechtes vereinigte. – Laßt uns hinzusetzen: wir bekamen eine Heldinn." Franz Bourgeois, Rede von den militärischen Tugenden Marien Theresiens, Prague 1781, p. 14.

Image credits

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