This is the first accessible and comprehensive history of the early modern Habsburg monarchy to appear in any language. Professor Ingrao challenges the conventional notion of Habsburg state and society as peculiarly backward by tracing its emergence as a military and cultural power of enormous influence, with a large and growing population, progressive judicial and educational systems, and a sizable industrial base.

The Habsburg monarchy was undeniably different from other European polities: geography and linguistic diversity made this inevitable, but by 1789 the Habsburg peoples were already beginning to nurture a common, anational identity that transcended their particular cultural or historic heritage. The volume ends with the reaffirmation of these Habsburg achievements, in the wake of the French Revolution, with the defeat of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna. Professor Ingrao unravels the web of social, political, economic, and cultural factors that shaped the Habsburg monarchy during the period, and presents this complex story in a manner that is both authoritative and accessible to non-specialists.

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The Habsburg Monarchy
1618–1815

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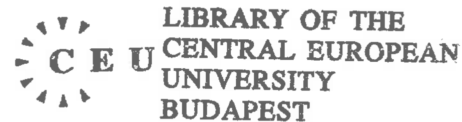
The Habsburg Monarchy 1618–1815

CHARLES W. INGRAO
Professor of History, Purdue University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To Kate and Chris

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Preface

Neville Chamberlain spoke for millions of his British and American contemporaries when, at the height of the Munich Crisis, he lamented the prospects of going to war over "a faraway country" inhabited by "people of whom we know nothing." The prime minister was, of course, speaking of Czechoslovakia. But he could have just as easily used these same words to characterize his knowledge – or concern – about the other lands and peoples of the former Habsburg monarchy. A half century later we still know very little about the region, and even less about its history. Nor should this come as a surprise. Neither a bygone empire nor the small "succession states" that replaced it can inspire the same interest as great modern entities like France, Germany, or Russia. Yet, even before its dissolution in 1918, the monarchy's diversity made it much more difficult to comprehend, thereby discouraging anyone from investigating it in the first place. Part of the reason is that the monarchy was really three different countries at the start of the seventeenth century, each nested with several smaller, but distinct sub-societies. In many respects they remained disparate throughout its history. Of course, the same can be said of other European societies. But whereas it is possible to write Soviet or Russian history from the Great Russian perspective, and British history from an English viewpoint, the component states of the Habsburg monarchy were much too numerous, populous, and wealthy to be ignored, either by the Habsburgs or by those who study it. Finally, the monarchy's very diversity created a greater number of problems, many of which demanded solutions different from those applied in major nation states like France or Germany. Fascinating though they were, the monarchy's unique conditions and eccentric development make it a poor choice for anyone searching for a conceptually clean, "typical" example of an evolving nation state.

Yet neither the monarchy's ultimate extinction nor its complex problems should deter us from studying it. By the second half of the eighteenth century it not only had the continent's most innovative government and largest army, but was also a leader in public education and the world of music. It subsequently played a leading role in turning back the French

Revolution and crafting an international system that remained in place until 1914. When it finally collapsed four years later, it had already outlasted every other major monarchy in both longevity and dynastic continuity, despite having more natural enemies and less wealth with which to confront them. And, as we now know, the problems it confronted did not die with it, but persist today.

This book will try to overcome some of the obstacles by presenting at the very outset several generalizations that can help unify and give purpose to the factual material, as well as to the monarchy's history beyond the volume's closing date of 1815. In keeping with the series' "new perspectives" format, the rest of the volume will supplement the traditional narrative with additional generalizations and analyses that will hopefully give students cause for discussion, and scholars food for thought. From the very beginning of my research I have endeavored to afford social, economic, and cultural themes as much attention as possible, despite the relative dearth of published material on those subjects. By contrast, I have given minimal coverage to military campaigns, despite their immediate importance in defining the course of the monarchy's history. I have found it impossible, however, to write a book about the Habsburg monarchy and its people without devoting a great deal of attention to the political, and even diplomatic actions of its leaders. Indeed, given the highly artificial nature of their state and society, Habsburg statecraft played the most decisive and unifying role in determining virtually all aspects of its history, including its social and cultural evolution.

If the Habsburg monarchy is complex, so is its nomenclature. To avoid confusion, the text refers to it as "the monarchy" or "the Habsburg dominions," while reserving the terms "empire" and "Germany" for the lands and peoples of the Holy Roman empire. There are only two exceptions: in Chapter 4, I allude to a "second Habsburg empire" akin to the great dynastic conglomeration of Charles V; in Chapter 7, after the creation of the Austrian empire (1804) and dissolution of the Holy Roman empire (1806), the monarchy is finally accorded that designation. Although the word "Austrian" is occasionally used as an adjective to refer to the Habsburg monarchy's army or foreign policy, "Austria" itself is employed only to represent those provinces that comprise the so-called Austrian lands. Only after the creation of the Austrian empire does the term stand for the entire Habsburg monarchy. Another maddening ambiguity about the monarchy's terminology is the double connotation attached to the words "Hungary" and "Bohemia." When referring to all of the Hungarian or Bohemian crownlands, I often employ the terms "greater Hungary" and "greater Bohemia"; by contrast, "Bohemia proper" and "Hungary proper" (or "central Hungary") allude only to the individual component kingdoms of

the same name. Unfortunately, there is no easy solution to the problem of place names. Given east central Europe's mixed ethnic composition, many of its cities have two or three names. Whenever possible, the text uses the English-language names for towns, provinces, and geographical expressions. In those instances where there is no English equivalent, I have employed that designation which is most often found in other English-language histories, with other widely used alternative spellings in parentheses.

This is, without question, the most difficult writing project I have ever undertaken. Most of the problems have stemmed from the conceit that I could address both an undergraduate and a scholarly audience in the same book. Undoubtedly the greatest problem was space. Whereas textbook publishers and their readers demand brevity, scholars crave a completeness and sensitivity to nuances that can only be addressed in a longer work. Trying to engineer both probably doubled the amount of time it took to complete the manuscript. I am, however, grateful to my editor, Richard Fisher, for his willingness to expand the book a quarter beyond its contract length. Another challenge has been accuracy. Despite my every effort to prove them wrong, my more experienced colleagues are likely correct in predicting that it is impossible to avoid making numerous factual errors in a broad survey. One sacrifice that I have made is footnotes. Editorial limits on the number of notes make it impossible to give proper credit to all the published authors whose work I consulted. Yet, as I soon found out, citing *some* of these scholars involves making arbitrary decisions that are unfair to those who are left out.

Finally, I would like to reserve a word of thanks for those institutions and individuals who assisted me in this project. Fellowships from Purdue University's Center for Humanistic Studies (1988), Robinson College, Cambridge (1989), and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (1992) provided me with both the release time and a congenial environment for research and writing. The late Ruth Rothenberg and her colleagues at Purdue University's Inter-Library Loan Department were very effective in securing sometimes obscure titles from numerous North American libraries. The final draft benefited from the careful reading and detailed criticisms of my faculty editors, William Beik, Timothy Blanning, and Robert Scribner. Also helpful were the honest evaluations of my Purdue seminar students, who read and commented on a laserjet photocopy of what they thought was someone else's book, without ever knowing the identity of its author. The book is, however, dedicated to my two teenaged children, who are prepared to assist me in spending any royalties that result from it.

1 The distinctiveness of Austrian history

On 9 June 1815 the representatives of the great European powers gathered in the Hofburg, the medieval city palace of the Habsburgs, to sign the peace settlement that ended the Napoleonic Wars. The final act of the so-called Congress of Vienna was accompanied by no fanfare or celebration. Yet, as the last of the European princes and the other 100,000 visitors who had crowded into the city now departed for home, there was no mistaking the import of a treaty that would help define the European state system and preserve it from another great war for the next hundred years.

Although representatives of Great Britain, Prussia and Russia – and even defeated France – had played a major role in the peace negotiations, none had helped shape the course of the negotiations more than their Austrian hosts. And with good reason. Although it has always been fashionable to give the British Duke of Wellington the credit for defeating Napoleon at Waterloo, his fate had been sealed two years earlier when Austria entered the war. It was, in fact, the Austrian empire that had contributed the allied army's largest contingent and its commander-in-chief to the first conquest of France since the Franks. And it was the war aims of the emperor's foreign minister, Clemens von Metternich, that had served as the basis for the final peace settlement. Indeed, the so-called Metternich System that he directed from Vienna was destined to dominate the domestic and foreign policies of the continent until 1848.

It is with the Congress of Vienna and the subsequent Age of Metternich that many students' and historians' knowledge of Austrian history begins. As a rule they associate Austria's success with its great prime minister, while viewing the empire itself as a declining power that was destined for dissolution in World War I. Yet historians who credit (or criticize) Metternich for the system he helped to create forget his own characterization of himself as a mere helmsman who only followed the dictates of his Habsburg sovereign. In truth, Metternich adhered to many of the same principles that had inspired Austrian statecraft for most of the past three centuries. Moreover, our awareness of the Austrian empire's decline in the nineteenth century comes at the expense of ignoring its emergence during the seven-

teenth century as a powerful, at times innovative, force that often played a leading role in international affairs and coalition diplomacy.

But the Habsburg monarchy was also different from the other great states and societies of Europe. And it was because of its distinctiveness that it conducted its domestic and foreign affairs in ways that have encouraged western historians to visualize it as something of a European backwater, a political anomaly whose structural immaturity condemned it to a constant state of crisis and decay from the very beginning of its history. It is only by understanding the monarchy's inherent individuality that we can comprehend how it successfully dealt with problems that were present from the very beginning of its history and how it not only survived, but steadily grew in size and strength to the point where it had the military power and domestic stability necessary to resist and, ultimately, triumph over revolutionary France.

It is possible to identify at least five interdependent factors that were influential in determining the distinctive course of Austrian history after 1815, but which were already evident at least two centuries before: the impact of geopolitics and balance of power diplomacy; the diversity and individuality of the Habsburg dominions; the dynasty's close identification with Germany; its dependence on achieving a consensus among both domestic elites and foreign allies; the key role of the monarchs themselves in providing continuity and security for their state.

Diplomacy and the formation of the monarchy

In considering the monarchy's early history and emergence as a great power it is appropriate to recall the famous observation by the nineteenth-century publicist, František Palacký, that if the Habsburg monarchy did not exist it would have to be created. The monarchy was, in fact, created at the beginning of the early modern period, and continued to grow largely because its development was consistent with the needs of the international community. Indeed, it is difficult to underestimate the central role that dynastic diplomacy played in the monarchy's unique evolution. Most countries like England, France, or Spain can trace their eventual emergence as nation states to a geographical continuity that promoted a substantial degree of economic, political, cultural, and linguistic homogeneity. To a great extent their rulers and ruling elites merely acted out roles that had been largely predetermined by this underlying structural reality. By contrast, the Habsburgs used dynastic politics to assemble a conglomeration of otherwise disparate dominions, over which they might later superimpose domestic policies aimed at providing the continuity that their territories lacked. Yet the Habsburgs were also driven by geopolitical forces that greatly

facilitated their success on the international stage. From beginning to end their monarchy's fate was shaped by the European practice of balance of power diplomacy, especially by the assistance of neighboring rulers and states that perceived it to be sufficiently strong to help resist more powerful enemies, yet weak enough not to pose a serious threat to their own security.

It was this double equation that had led to the election of the first Habsburg to the German imperial crown. The German princes who chose Rudolph I (1273–91) did so partly because, as the relatively obscure lord of several modest-sized southwestern territories, he was deemed insufficiently prominent to challenge their preeminent position within the empire. But they also valued his assistance in helping them to repel the threat posed by Germany's southeastern neighbors, Bohemia and Hungary. When Rudolph's forces killed the Bohemian king at the battle of Marchfeld (1278) he acquired his enemy's southeast German lands, including the duchy of Austria. By the middle of the following century his descendants had elevated themselves to the rank of "archduke" (with the help of a forged document) and had established their identity as the House of Austria.

But the dynasty acquired more than its Austrian identity at Marchfeld. It now assumed the possession of the empire's southeastern flank, which was exposed not only to Hungary and Bohemia, but ultimately to the growing menace of the Ottoman Turks. The Austrian lands' strategic position enhanced the Habsburgs' importance as defenders of Germany's frontiers and helped secure the election of a series of Habsburg emperors, beginning with the succession of Emperor Albert II (1438–40). Although the competing power of the other German princes greatly weakened the imperial office, the dynasty used it effectively to enhance its prestige and European profile. In a memorable flight of grandeur, Emperor Frederick III (1440–93) even adopted the all-vowel acronym AEIOU to represent his presumptuous, if prophetic, motto "Austria Est Imperare Orbi Universo" (*Austria is destined to rule over the entire globe*). Together with the acquisition of the Austrian lands, the Habsburgs' hold on the imperial crown also brought into play a second geopolitical factor that would help determine the course of Austrian history until the end of the monarchy: a strategic, central European location that exposed it to potential enemies and attracted an even greater number of solicitous allies.

Both of these factors – the Habsburgs' strategic position and their utility in achieving a balance of power among warring neighbors – played a decisive role in the dynasty's sudden emergence on the European stage at the end of the fifteenth century. Much of the individual credit belongs to Frederick III's remarkable son, Emperor Maximilian I (1493–1519), who was responsible for the conclusion and fruition of three key marriage alliances during the half-century 1477–1526. It was the first of these unions

in 1477, between the then young Habsburg prince and Mary, the daughter and heiress of the duke of Burgundy, that inspired the famous refrain:

> Let the strong fight wars.
> Thou happy Austria marry.
> What Mars bestows on others,
> Venus gives to thee!

Its author, King Matthias Corvinus of Hungary (1458-90), could appreciate his Habsburg rival's good fortune. He had conquered most of the Habsburgs' Austrian lands from Maximilian's father and had even made Vienna his capital in 1485. The gap between the Habsburgs' dynastic pretensions and martial impotence even prompted the Viennese to mock Frederick III with their own version of AEIOU: "*Aller Erst Ist Österreich Verloren*" (*Austria has just lost everything*). But, five years later, Matthias's empire fell apart when he died childless. By contrast the progeny of Maximilian and Mary ultimately inherited both the Habsburg lands in southern Germany and Burgundy's holdings in the commercially rich Low Countries. This dual inheritance converted the Habsburgs from German territorial princes into a European dynasty of the first rank.

The next great match transformed them into a world power. When Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile agreed to wed their daughter Juana to Maximilian's son Philip ("the Handsome") in 1496, they had no expectation that the Habsburgs would soon inherit the new Spanish empire that they themselves had done so much to create. Two elder siblings and, eventually, three nephews stood ahead of her in the succession. But the untimely death of all five of those heirs established Juana's claim. Thus it came to pass that four monarchies would be concentrated in the hands of Charles of Ghent, the Dutch-born, eldest son of Juana and her Habsburg husband Philip: Castile and Aragon through Charles's mother; Burgundy (including the Netherlands) and the dynasty's German lands through his father. His election in 1519 to succeed his grandfather Maximilian as German Emperor Charles V (1519–56) completed a stupendous dynastic coup far beyond the bitter expectations of Matthias Corvinus.

The Burgundian and Spanish marriages established a primarily western European conglomeration that included not only Spain and the Low Countries but also Aragon's extensive Italian possessions and Castile's emerging New World empire. It was not long before Charles V recognized his monarchy's Atlantic orientation and established Castile as its center. Given the relative remoteness of his Austrian lands, Charles ceded them to his younger brother Ferdinand in 1521. It was at this point that the consequences of a third, truly bizarre marriage compact involving Ferdinand led directly to the creation of a second major Habsburg state rooted in east-central Europe. In 1506 the two boys' grandfather, Maximilian, and the

Jagellon King Ladislas of Hungary and Bohemia concluded a highly speculative accord that foreshadowed a double marriage of Ferdinand to Ladislas's daughter Anna, and of Ferdinand's infant sister Mary to the as yet unborn (but, hopefully, male) child of Ladislas's pregnant wife. The subsequent birth of Ladislas's son and successor, Louis, enabled both weddings to take place, following the conclusion of a more definitive marriage compact in 1515. When the childless King Louis II died fighting the Turks at Mohács in 1526, his Habsburg widow Mary and brother-in-law Ferdinand were able to secure the latter's election as king of Hungary and Bohemia.

It is easy to attribute these three incredibly fortuitous unions to the frenetic matchmaking of Maximilian I, who actually planned and concluded numerous other, less fruitful marriage alliances during his lifetime. They came about, however, because Maximilian's dynastic partners shared a mutual concern over the growing threat posed by rival powers to the regional balance of power. In selecting Maximilian for his daughter, the duke of Burgundy was seeking assistance against his bitter enemy, the king of France, whose Swiss allies actually killed him in battle three months before the wedding. The union with Spain stemmed from Ferdinand of Aragon's desire to protect his own dynasty's possessions in Italy following France's sensational conquest of the peninsula in 1494. Although they produced no male heirs, two subsequent Anglo-Spanish marriage alliances were likewise motivated by England's historic rivalry with France. If Burgundy, Spain, and England envisioned the French as a menace to the balance of power in western Europe, the Jagellon kings of Hungary and Bohemia – and the noble diets that subsequently elected Ferdinand to succeed them as king – were driven by the need to enlist Habsburg assistance against the Ottoman Turks' relentless march through the Balkans. Indeed, their sense of urgency was not lost on the entourage of the ill-fated Louis II which literally had to fish the Hungarian crown out of the swamp in which their king had drowned while fleeing the Turks at Mohács.

The question arises why all these countries found the Habsburgs to be such desirable partners with whom to face these various foreign threats. Once again, the central location of the Austrian lands and the Holy Roman empire made Maximilian and his successors equally sensitive to the emergence of aggressive states all along the fringes of Germany, whether to the west in France, to the south in Italy, or to the east in the Balkans. Moreover, as each marriage bore fruit and added to the Habsburg patrimony, it steadily expanded the reach of their geopolitical interests and security needs, drawing them deeper in each direction until they embraced most of the continent. Moreover, although they were now the preeminent German dynasty and were invariably elected to hold the imperial crown, the Austrian Habsburgs were never regarded by Maximilian's contemporaries as

great a threat to the regional balance of power as the French or the Turks. Hence they made ideal allies, in keeping with Machiavelli's famous dictum that one should always ally with weaker powers against stronger ones. Never again over the next four centuries would the Austrian Habsburgs reap significant territorial gains from dynastic marriages. But the reasons that had made Maximilian such a ready and desirable partner – the Austrian lands' strategic, central location, and the Austrian Habsburgs' usefulness as a benign counterweight in balance of power politics – remained more or less a constant in European politics to the end of the monarchy in 1918.

The problem of diversity

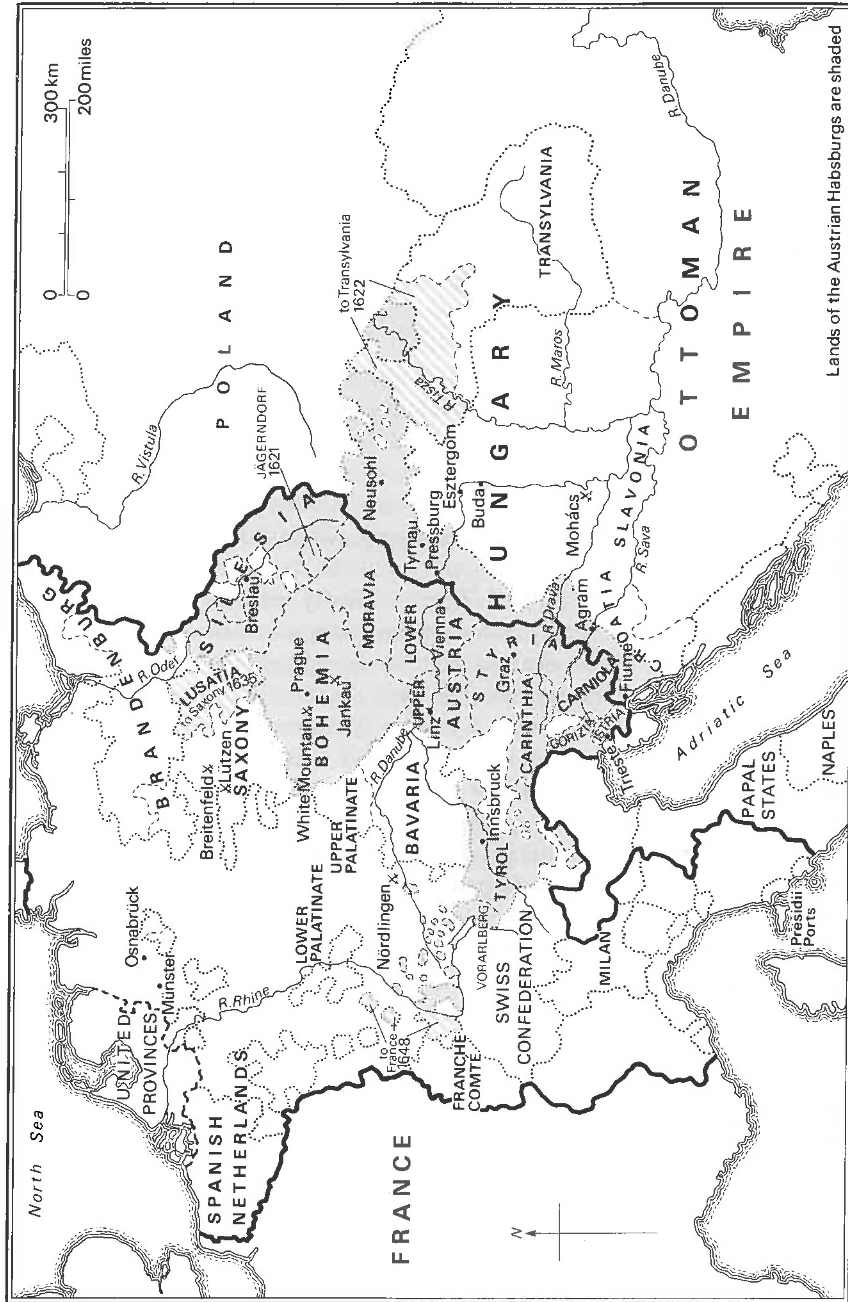
Acquiring an empire by inheritance was not, however, without its pitfalls. One of the unfortunate legacies of Maximilian's dynastic alliances was the diversity and individuality of the dominions that he brought together. As can happen in any arranged marriage, the subjects of these unions were sometimes incompatible, or at least unwilling to surrender their individual rights and independence to the dominant partner. Indeed, before they could receive the homage of their new subjects, the Habsburgs invariably had to swear to respect their privileges and autonomy – a constitutional nicety that would have been unnecessary had they acquired them by conquest. Hence both the Spanish and Austrian Habsburgs assembled a patchwork pattern of dominions in which the estates of their component territories retained a separate identity, as well as substantial control over the making and local enforcement of the law. Conditions such as these helped perpetuate each crownland's sense of independence at the expense of a common identity and loyalty to the monarchy as a whole. In the end these were fatal flaws that helped doom the Spanish Habsburgs to destruction in the seventeenth century, just as they ultimately contributed to Austria-Hungary's dissolution in the twentieth.

Whereas Spain's empire was scattered all over Europe and much of the globe, the Austrian Habsburg dominions at least had the advantage of being geographically contiguous. Nevertheless, as they entered the seventeenth century they were also, in the words of R.J.W. Evans, "not a 'state' but a mildly centripetal agglutination of bewilderingly heterogeneous elements." Ferdinand's union of Hungary and Bohemia with his Austrian lands had created an essentially tripartite territorial configuration that enjoyed limited economic ties and was linguistically, culturally, and constitutionally diverse. Much of this discontinuity stemmed from the lie of the land: with the singular exception of the Danube, which provided a solid link between parts of Hungary and Austria, the monarchy's unfortunate natural configuration of mountains and peripheral river systems had largely predetermined the

separate development of its three components. Yet a century of Habsburg rule had done little to break down these barriers.

This lack of homogeneity was evident even within the monarchy's Austrian, Bohemian, and Hungarian dominions (see Map 1). The Austrian and other German territories that the dynasty had held since the middle ages were themselves little more than a disjointed cluster of over a dozen largely autonomous principalities that stretched over much of southern Germany. Over time the Habsburgs had done little to foster a common identity within these so-called hereditary lands, or *Erblande*. At his death in 1564 Ferdinand had renewed a common practice of his Habsburg predecessors by subdividing the Austrian lands among his three sons. This partition still obtained at the beginning of the seventeenth century. In addition to Bohemia and Hungary, the senior Habsburg line held only the two Danubian archduchies of Upper and Lower Austria or, more precisely, Austria above the Enns and Austria below the Enns (so named because of the small Danube tributary that separated them). Directly to the south, a second Habsburg court at Graz ruled a half dozen principalities that were nestled along the eastern fringes of the Alps: the three duchies of Styria, Carinthia, and Carniola, known collectively as Inner Austria, together with the much smaller Adriatic principalities of Gorizia, Istria, and Trieste. Finally, to the west a third Habsburg archduke at Innsbruck governed the most scattered and isolated lands of the Austrian lands: situated high in the Alps and almost totally detached from the other *Erblande* was the Tyrol; beyond it lay the *Vorlande*, or Outer Austria, the contiguous and equally mountainous county of Vorarlberg, roughly one hundred, widely scattered enclaves in southwestern Germany that included the oldest of the Habsburgs' ancestral lands. As geographically disjointed as these lands were, both the Tyrol and Inner Austria were further cut up by the presence of numerous enclaves belonging to a half dozen imperial prince-bishops.

Although most of the hereditary lands' roughly 2 million inhabitants (1618) were engaged in agriculture, their commercial economies were distinctive and largely independent of one another. The two archduchies were closely bound to the Danube river commerce that connected them with Hungary and Germany. The Upper Austrian capital of Linz was one of the monarchy's major commercial and manufacturing centers, specializing in the production and export of textiles, as well as the transshipment of wine and minerals from Hungary. The Lower Austrian capital of Vienna was also somewhat involved in the Danube trade, but was slowly assuming its role as the monarchy's administrative center. By contrast Inner Austria's largely agricultural economy also relied heavily on the mining of key minerals. Styria was one of the continent's foremost centers for the mining and crafting of iron, while Carinthia and Carniola were important producers of



1 The Thirty Years' War

lead and mercury respectively. Although it also utilized the Danube as a conduit for its mineral exports, much of Inner Austria's commerce ran south to the Adriatic principalities which were, in turn, primarily influenced economically by their proximity to the sea and to northern Italy. The Tyrol and Outer Austrian lands enjoyed virtually no commercial links with the rest of the hereditary lands. Instead, the Tyrol served as an important route between Italy and southern Germany, to whom it exported glass, silk, and the extracts of its own metal and salt mining industries in exchange for food products. Meanwhile, the remoteness of the Outer Austrian lands rendered them an integral part of the economies of the Swabian and Alsatian German lands that surrounded them.

Ultimately the *Erblande* would be permanently reunited in 1665, following the extinction of all but one branch of the family. Nevertheless, these political, physical, and economic divisions encouraged each of the hereditary lands to develop a separate sense of regional loyalty (*Landespatriotismus*) and to focus more on its own selfish interests than on those of the other Austrian lands, or the monarchy as a whole. Moreover, their individuality was reinforced by the retention of their own governmental institutions, even after reunification. Every land was headed by a governor (*Landeshauptmann* or *Landesmarschall*) who was nominated by the estates and appointed by the crown. But real power resided with the estates themselves. Individual diets enjoyed a genuine right to negotiate with the governor over the crown's requests. More often they simply set their own legislative agenda. They alone were responsible for such things as the building and maintenance of roads, health care and sanitation, all levels of public education, and even regional defenses and militia. Except for the archduchies, the individual estates also levied their own tolls and tariffs, thereby accentuating the long-standing divisions between the hereditary lands. Even when raising money for the crown the estates did so by composing their own tax laws and then collecting them through their own army of officials. With the singular exception of Lower Austria, the estates' own bureaucracy invariably equaled or outnumbered the crown's until well into the eighteenth century. Indeed, the center of each land's power was not so much its diet but the officials whom it designated and paid, and who functioned continuously, even when the diet was not in session. As a nominee of the estates even the governor tended to be at least as deferential to the estates as he was to the crown.

Finally, one step beyond the estates' officials stood the local, landholding nobility, whose task – or privilege – it was to enforce all governmental decrees in their own jurisdiction, or *Herrschaft*. At this level parochial interests always held sway over the priorities of the government in Vienna. This was also the case with the numerous imperial bishops whose Tyrolean and Inner Austrian enclaves enjoyed considerable administrative autonomy.

Nor were those interests necessarily expressed in German. The southernmost hereditary lands may have belonged to the German empire, but they generally spoke a different language. The Carniolan, and much of the Styrian, Carinthian, and Gorizian countryside was Slovene. Istria spoke Croatian, while Italian was the dominant tongue in both Trieste and the southern Tyrol. More eccentric Romance languages could also be found along the western fringes of the Tyrol (Romansch) and Vorarlberg (Ladin). It would be misleading to suggest that this linguistic diversity somehow exacerbated the political, economic, or cultural divisions within the hereditary lands. The ruling elites and towns invariably spoke German, except in those areas where Italian dominated. Even then, language was of incidental significance unless it somehow reinforced a greater historical or political identity within the country's ruling class. This was not the case in the hereditary lands. It was, however, in Bohemia and Hungary.

Both Bohemia and Hungary had been established kingdoms for over five hundred years when the Habsburgs acquired them in 1526–7. Each was the creation of a conquering tribe: the Slavic Czechs, who may have arrived in Bohemia as early as the sixth century, and the Magyars, a Finno-Ugric people who subjugated the Slavic and other peoples of the Hungarian plain at the end of the tenth century. Though both nations' native dynasties had died out at the beginning of the fourteenth century, they had continued to prosper under a series of elected foreign rulers, culminating with the personal union of the two kingdoms under the Jagellon Kings Ladislas (1491–1516) and the ill-fated Louis II (1516–26). Indeed, as one of Germany's most prominent states and its only sovereign kingdom, Bohemia had played a major role in imperial affairs. Hungary had likewise been in the vanguard of the Christian defense against the Ottoman threat right up to the catastrophe at Mohács. Thus the two kingdoms already enjoyed a well-defined historical identity when their constituent nobilities elected Ferdinand of Habsburg king. Yet, as in the case of the *Erblande*, their natural configuration was somewhat more complex than their national histories might suggest.

Lying immediately north of the *Erblande*, the Bohemian crownlands consisted of five principalities, but are better visualized as two discrete regions. A series of heavily forested mountains encased the hilly terrain of the kingdom of Bohemia and its eastern neighbor, the margravate of Moravia. Only by proceeding north through the passes of the Sudeten Mountains was it possible to reach the largely flat, northern European plain and the other three Bohemian crownlands, the duchy of Silesia and the much smaller margravates of Upper and Lower Lusatia. The mountainous insularity of Bohemia and Moravia had rendered them a relatively homogeneous region, especially by the standards of the rest of the monarchy.

Silesia was somewhat more diverse, composed as it was of no fewer than sixteen feudal principalities, only six of which were ruled directly from Vienna. Meanwhile, a half dozen princely families enjoyed substantial lawmaking and judicial privileges that afforded them varying degrees of independence from Habsburg rule. Nearly half of northern, Lower Silesia was ruled by two largely autonomous native dynasties, the Piasts of Liegnitz, Brieg, and Wohlau, and the Podiebrads of Münsterberg and Öls; in the south a junior branch of the Hohenzollern dynasty ruled the Upper Silesian duchy of Jägerndorf with the full status of imperial princes.

All five of the Bohemian crownlands were ethnically mixed. A Czech-speaking majority that included almost all of the nobility dominated central Bohemia and Moravia, while a large German minority held sway over the mountainous periphery. By contrast the nobility of Silesia and the Lusatias spoke German, as did the majority of Silesia's population. Southern, Upper Silesia did, however, have a large Polish minority as well as a small Czech population along the Bohemian frontier. If anything the Lusatias were even more distinctive, being the home of the Sorbs, Europe's smallest Slavic nation. The northern principalities' cultural and linguistic distinctiveness was not without political implications. Until 1616 Silesia and the Lusatias had a "German Chancery" at Breslau that enjoyed some autonomy from the Bohemian government at Prague. Even after its elimination the official languages of the northern principalities remained German, as opposed to Czech in Bohemia and Moravia.

What all of the Bohemian crownlands had in common was their human and economic wealth. In 1618 their 4 million inhabitants made them the monarchy's most populous component, as well as one of Europe's most densely populated. Moreover, a dearth of rich soil had inspired the development of manufacturing in all four crownlands. By the beginning of the seventeenth century greater Bohemia was one of central Europe's foremost producers of textiles. The mountains of Bohemia and Moravia were also a major producer of minerals, including iron, silver, and as much as two-thirds of the continent's tin. Prague itself had taken advantage of its strategic location to become a major transit point for the export to Germany of locally produced textiles and minerals, as well as livestock and crops from Austria, Hungary, and Poland, and iron from as far away as Styria. Silesia and the Lusatias were just as wealthy, but their remoteness militated against fuller integration into the monarchy's economy. Although Silesia was Hungary's principal supplier of finer textiles, the greater proximity of the northern European plain and the Oder and Neisse Rivers that ran the length of their territory inclined all three principalities to trade more with Saxony, Brandenburg, and Poland than with the rest of the monarchy.

During the sixteenth century Ferdinand and his successors had come to

rely on the superior wealth of their Bohemian lands for the bulk of their revenue. In return they deemed it wise not to disturb its political autonomy. They left untouched the autonomous treasuries that collected the revenues of each crownland. They also honored the indigenous nobility's right to fill government positions with native-born officials. Its central executive office, the Bohemian Court Chancery, was staffed by Czech-speaking nobles who answered to the estates and resided in Prague's Hradcany Castle, even if the residence of its Habsburg king was two hundred miles away in Vienna. Meanwhile, the estates enjoyed more than the extensive legislative and administrative powers found in the *Erblande.* Most notable among them was the traditional right of Bohemia proper to elect a king for all of the crownlands upon the death of each monarch, generally after he had confirmed their rights and privileges. This was no idle instrument in the hands of the estates. During the Hussite religious revolt of the early fifteenth century Bohemia had refused to elect its late king's heir, and had prevented him from assuming the throne for seventeen years, until he and the pope had recognized its demands for special concessions. Two centuries later the country's Hussite past and the survival of the Czech language within the Bohemian and Moravian ruling elite reinforced the kingdoms' sense of distinctiveness and independence from the Austrian and Hungarian dominions, as well as from the German Habsburgs themselves.

Nowhere within the Habsburg dominions was the spirit of independence and tradition of opposition to the crown stronger than in Hungary. Located along the eastern borders of the Austrian and Bohemian lands and just outside the Holy Roman empire, Hungary consisted of three distinctive political entities, each with its own estates, laws, and variety of language groups. In the center stood Hungary proper. Most of the central kingdom comprised a rich plain formed by the Danube and several major tributaries. The one notable exception was northern, Upper Hungary (modern-day Slovakia) which was traversed by the western Carpathians. At the beginning of the seventeenth century the central kingdom held about 1.7 million inhabitants. In so far as generalizations are possible, the countryside spoke Magyar in the Danubian basin, Slovak and Ruthene in the Carpathians, and most frequently German in the towns. To the southwest, between the Drava River and the Adriatic, lay the closely associated Croatian-speaking kingdoms of Croatia and Slavonia, a land of perhaps 250,000 people that had been bound in personal union with Hungary since the end of the twelfth century. To the east of the Danubian plain, beyond the curved eastern spur of the Carpathians, stood the hilly, but fertile principality of Transylvania. Transylvania was easily the most ethnically complex crownland. Its roughly 750,000 inhabitants comprised a Romanian peasant majority, together with the three politically enfranchised "nations" represented in its diet: the

Magyars; the closely related, Magyar-speaking Szekler; and the "Saxons," descendants of Rhenish-German settlers who, like the Szekler, had helped the Magyar kings defend the Transylvanian frontier during the middle ages.

As was the case in Bohemia, Habsburg rule in Hungary was circumscribed by extensive constitutional liberties that were defended by a proud and fiercely independent indigenous nobility. The institutional focus of their freedoms was the kingdom's bi-cameral diet and its independent Chancery, both of which claimed jurisdiction for the entire kingdom. Although the nobility as a whole enjoyed a virtual monopoly over all government positions, it was the great aristocratic landowners, or magnates, who held most of the key executive offices in all three crownlands. Chief among them was the palatine, whom the diet elected to preside over both the Chancery and its own upper chamber of magnates and high church officials. Within Hungary proper and Transylvania the nobility was dominated by the descendants of the original conquering nation. Although Romanian was still spoken by a few of Transylvania's generally landless, lower nobility, all of the Slovak nobility of Upper Hungary had long since become Magyarized. After five centuries of union with Hungary, it was also possible to find Magyarized Croatian aristocrats who had adopted their dominant partner's language and culture. Nevertheless, under the leadership of their viceroy, or *ban,* a united, Croatian-Slavonian diet jealously guarded its kingdom's separate identity and autonomy within both Hungary and the monarchy as a whole.

Beyond greater Hungary's magnate class stood the country's lower nobility, or gentry. Although much of the gentry was relatively poor and often landless, it too exercised considerable power, both as the dominant force in the Hungarian diet's lower chamber and at the local level through its control of all three crownlands' county governments. Moreover, the nobility as a whole enjoyed extensive individual privileges, including exemption from all taxes and the *jus resistendi,* its right to use force to resist any royal violation of its constitutional liberties. Finally, the noble-dominated diets of both Hungary and Croatia enjoyed the right to elect their king, once again generally after a redress of grievances. And, as in Bohemia, this was no empty prerogative.

The Habsburgs had learned this first hand shortly after Mohács, when the Magyar nobility split over the choice of a successor to the fallen Louis II. Whereas a Hungarian diet summoned by his Habsburg widow Mary had turned to her brother Ferdinand for protection against the Turks, a rival conclave had rejected the choice of a foreigner, choosing instead the native Magyar governor of Transylvania, Janos Zápolya. A similar division developed west of the Drava, where the Croatian nobility elected Ferdinand, while a Slavonian diet sided with Zápolya. Although Ferdinand soon drove

Zápolya from the kingdom, his rival made the fateful decision to enlist the aid of the Turks, who returned to Hungary in 1529, this time to stay. By mid-century the sultan had used his support for Zápolya's candidacy as a pretext for occupying more than half of the country, including its historic capital at Buda. The situation had changed little over the past fifty years, despite Habsburg efforts to reconquer Hungary in the so-called Fifteen Years' War (1593–1606).

Hence, Hungary at the beginning of the seventeenth century was not only a diverse land, but a divided one as well. The rich Danubian plain that stood at its center was almost wholly in Turkish hands. The Habsburgs retained only Upper Hungary, together with a slender corridor along the Austrian frontier where they established their new capital at Pressburg (Bratislava; Pozsony). Across the Drava only the western third of the Croatian-Slavonian kingdom, including its capital at Agram (Zagreb), remained under Habsburg control. To the east Transylvania was technically a Turkish protectorate, but managed to preserve a tenuous independence, thanks to its relative remoteness and its princes' ability to play off competing Habsburg and Turkish ambitions. It soon assumed the trappings of a sovereign principality by forming its own legislative diet and electing princes who quickly evolved from their former position of royal administrators to major players in east European politics.

The Turkish invasion and occupation had a devastating effect on the country. Even in the best of times the Hungarian crownlands constituted a modest economic unit that depended heavily on the raising and westward export of grain, wine, and livestock through the *Erblande*, Bohemia, or the Istrian Adriatic port of Fiume (Rijeka). The only significant exception to the country's agrarian profile was, once again, mountainous Upper Hungary, where the German-speaking mining towns of the Carpathian Ore Mountains produced most of Europe's copper, as well as silver, gold, and salt. Yet the kingdom's partition and the intermittent warfare that followed disrupted trade and the development of the towns that depended on it. As a result, by 1600 the sixteen royal towns that remained under Habsburg control contained only 40,000 people. The incessant warfare also drove tens of thousands of peasants from agriculture. Many became armed frontiersmen, or *hayducks*, for whom a nomadic lifestyle of animal husbandry and soldiering provided the only viable alternative to flight or starvation. It was a measure of the hardships confronting Hungary that a large portion of the population migrated from the areas under Turkish control, as well as from the most exposed areas on either side of the Habsburg-Ottoman frontier.

Even with migration from the Turkish south, the Habsburgs retained little more than a million of their Hungarian subjects at the beginning of the seventeenth century. What modest contribution a united kingdom might

have made to the monarchy was more than canceled by the Turkish conquest. Truncated Royal Hungary was now hardly in a position to attend to its own defense and needed to rely on assistance from the other Habsburg lands. By mid-century the Bohemian crownlands had essentially assumed financial responsibility for defending nearby Upper Hungary. Meanwhile, what was left of Croatia-Slavonia was so weak that its diet reluctantly authorized Ferdinand to carve out a military border zone (*Militärgrenze*) along the Turkish frontier for resettling Serbian Christian refugees from the Balkans and employing them as soldiers for defense against Turkish incursions. Unfettered by the liberties or restrictions of the local estates, this unique institution and the *Grenzer* who served it were destined to provide the Habsburgs with a major portion of Hungary's overall military contribution over the next two centuries.

Significantly, the Military Border was primarily funded, supplied, and governed not by the emperor, but by the Inner Austrian regime at Graz, which stood in the greatest immediate danger from a Turkish thrust through Croatia. This delegation of Hungary's regional defense illustrates the decentralized nature of Habsburg authority at the beginning of the seventeenth century. During his reign Ferdinand had indeed established the skeletal outlines of a central government in Vienna. Policy-making had been entrusted to a group of the emperor's closest advisors, known as the Privy Council, or *Geheimrat*. The administration of ordinary, "cameral" revenue from crown domains, tolls, and mineral rights had become the responsibility of the Court Chamber, or *Hofkammer*. Meanwhile, the Court War Council, or *Hofkriegsrat*, had been set up to handle military matters, including the collection of extraordinary taxes such as the Contribution that the estates voted to support the army. But, with his subsequent subdivision of the hereditary lands and the extensive autonomy of the Bohemian and Hungarian regimes, both the *Hofkammer* and *Hofkriegsrat* were compelled to share functions with their counterparts in Graz, Innsbruck, Prague, and Pressburg. The only central organ that could claim competence for the entire monarchy was the Privy Council, but it was merely a consultative body without any bureaucracy to enforce its decisions. Moreover, all three bodies assumed a conciliar organization that was popular in the Spanish system of government but which suffered from the resulting diffusion of responsibility and power among their members.

Of course the monarchy's lack of unity manifested itself in many ways. One was in the total absence of a single, general assembly of the monarchy's peoples. By the middle of the sixteenth century the immediacy of the Turkish threat had enabled Ferdinand to reach an understanding with both the Bohemian and Hungarian estates by which they agreed to elect Habsburg kings so long as the dynasty could provide a legitimate male heir.

Their pretensions to independence were sufficiently strong, however, that they resisted attempts to assemble outside their own kingdoms. Thus, on only three occasions did representatives of as many as two Habsburg crownlands ever meet together: in 1530, when the Austrian and Hungarian estates convened at Linz; in 1541, when delegates from Bohemia and most of the Austrian lands assembled in Prague; and in 1614, when the Austrian and some of the Hungarian estates gathered again in Linz. However imperfectly attended these meetings may have been, they represent the only attempt at a general gathering of the monarchy's peoples until a truly comprehensive body convened for the first time in the middle of the nineteenth century.

The monarchy's lack of focus was also reflected by the ambiguous position of Vienna itself. The Habsburg dominions had no dominant administrative, economic, or population center. Prague, Pressburg, Graz, and Innsbruck all shared major governmental functions with Vienna. With 65,000 inhabitants, Prague was roughly the same size as Vienna. Even within the archduchies, Linz was a serious competitor to Vienna by virtue of its superior commercial position. Emperor Rudolph II (1576–1612) had actually moved the imperial residence to Prague for the last thirty years of his reign. Although his successors permanently reestablished the capital at Vienna, they did so principally because its central location between Prague, Graz, Innsbruck, and especially Pressburg (which was only forty miles down river) afforded it easier access to the dynasty's other capital cities.

The Habsburg monarchy and Germany

Finally, the monarchy lacked not only a common diet and administrative center, it shared no single crown or royal title. The Habsburgs of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries wore a royal crown for Bohemia, another one for Hungary, and a series of lesser diadems for their various Austrian dominions. But their dignity of choice was the German imperial crown and the title of Holy Roman emperor. Which brings us to the final, and most complex piece of a very diverse puzzle. The Austrian and Bohemian lands belonged not only to the monarchy but to the Holy Roman empire, and the Habsburgs themselves were its undisputed leaders. By the beginning of the seventeenth century the dynasty had held the imperial title without interruption for nearly two centuries since the election of Albert II in 1438. But the new Austro-Bohemian-Hungarian monarchy that Ferdinand had brought together was far different from its fifteenth-century forebear. Through its control of the Austrian and Bohemian lands, the dynasty now directly ruled a third of the empire. Yet the acquisition of Hungary and subsequent Turkish invasion had saddled it with separate, extra-German commitments that increasingly forced it to divert some of its attention and resources from imperial affairs. The monarchy was, in fact, no longer an exclusively German state but an international combination facing both east and west. At the same time, however, the Habsburgs were determined to hold on to the imperial crown. At the beginning of the seventeenth century the imperial office still enjoyed some limited prerogatives, revenue, and prestige. More important, the Habsburgs prized their undisputed position as the leading German dynasty and continued to take their dominant role very seriously. Hence they continued to seek and uphold the imperial office as tenaciously as they did their rights in their own Austrian, Bohemian, and Hungarian crownlands.

The dynasty's Janus-faced attempt to manage both its own lands and German affairs was understandable, but ultimately beyond its resources. Its own diverse and disordered dominions were difficult enough to govern, especially in the face of foreign threats. By comparison it was impossible to rule the Holy Roman empire. Germany's constitutional and institutional framework was part of the problem, though they were not much worse than what the Habsburgs confronted in their own dominions. Each emperor's power was limited by his need to court the favor of those German princes who actually chose each new emperor. There were seven such electors at the beginning of the seventeenth century: the prince-archbishops of Mainz, Trier, and Cologne, the lay princes of Saxony, Brandenburg, and the Palatinate, and the emperor himself as king of Bohemia. In practice the electors enjoyed considerable leverage over each emperor, both at the time of his candidacy and near the end of his reign when he was eager to secure his designated heir's election as heir apparent with the title of King of the Romans.

Once elected, the emperor's constitutional prerogatives were virtually indistinguishable from those of many other monarchs. At the center of the government was the Imperial Court Chancery, which dispatched German policy in much the same way that the Bohemian and Hungarian Court Chanceries administered the business of those two kingdoms. A tri-cameral Imperial Diet, or *Reichstag*, served as the empire's legislative body, with the usual power to pass laws, raise taxes, and declare war. It was, in fact, only necessary for the emperor to obtain majorities in the College of Electors and the over two-hundred-strong College of Princes, but not in the essentially impotent College of Imperial Cities. The imperial judiciary was divided between two often competing courts. An Imperial Chamber Court (*Reichskammergericht*) was so hopelessly underfunded and paralyzed by princely rivalries that it could take over a century to decide some cases. By contrast, the relative efficiency of the emperor's own Imperial Aulic Council (*Reichshofrat*) afforded him more than a measure of power through its ability to adjudicate a wide range of legal matters. Finally, the empire's police and

military functions were generally entrusted to a regional system of ten imperial circles, each with its own director and local assembly of princes belonging to that circle.

This was a complex, but not intrinsically unworkable system of government. The real trick to ruling the empire was not in winning majorities in the diet or judgments in the courts, but in enforcing their decisions at the regional and local level. Admittedly the smaller imperial principalities were more likely to comply with imperial directives, both because they were too weak to resist and because they relied on the emperor and the sanctity of imperial law to protect them against their more powerful neighbors. But the empire's great princes were capable of openly defying and acting virtually independently of the central authority. Many maintained their own armies and unofficial diplomatic relations with foreign powers, including the emperor's enemies. Hence, when they agreed with or were indifferent toward the emperor's directives, imperial government worked reasonably well. But, when they were in opposition, the emperor was powerless to compel compliance short of the use of force.

The power of the princes to defy and oppose the emperor eliminated any possibility that the empire itself would ever evolve into a governable state comparable to other European monarchies. By 1618 two turbulent centuries at the imperial helm had instructed the Habsburgs in the hopelessness of ever doing so. Hence they never really contemplated any attempt at "German unification" under a truly sovereign or hereditary ruler. Instead, as time wore on and the German princes grew stronger, the Austrian Habsburgs were increasingly compelled to deal with them more as allies and less as feudal vassals. In the process they realized that if they were to have a future as a great European dynasty it lay not in Germany but in its own, admittedly disparate crownlands. And it was there that they focused their attention. Although the Habsburgs continued to identify closely with Germany and to seek continued leadership through the imperial crown, they increasingly used it as a tool for serving the interests of the dynastic state that they had formed along and across the empire's southeastern border. Indeed, the dynasty – and many of its German-speaking subjects – retained this dual, though unequal identity well beyond early modern times until Bismarck expelled them from Germany in 1866.

Conflict or consensus?

Of course, the insoluble problems that doomed the empire and German unity made it all the more imperative that the dynasty complete the state-building process in its own dominions. If the Habsburgs were going to mold their disparate possessions into a viable state, they needed to reduce existing

political, administrative, and cultural barriers by undermining the autonomy of their Austrian, Bohemian, and Hungarian dominions. They also had to acquire the right to implement taxes and other laws – and then enforce them at the local level, independently of the feudal nobility. That was the approach that most European monarchs took when confronted by similar circumstances. And that was also the path that the Habsburgs pursued from the beginning of the seventeenth century and, intermittently, thereafter. Furthermore, the same central European location that exposed them to aggression from several directions also facilitated their reception of new state-building strategies, especially from Germany and Italy. As we shall see, they did meet with a considerable degree of success. But the same geopolitical factors that had helped Maximilian and Ferdinand to acquire their dominions ultimately prevented their successors from converting them into a highly centralized, absolute monarchy. Elsewhere on the continent, countries like France, Sweden, Brandenburg-Prussia, or Russia could take advantage of opportune periods of peace or remoteness from foreign adversaries to strengthen royal authority and suppress the estates and provinces that opposed them. By contrast, the Habsburg lands' central European location almost always exposed them to at least one foreign power with whom their rebellious subjects might make common cause during a domestic conflict. Foreign intervention, or the threat of it, limited the extent of Habsburg attempts at centralization and absolutism, and left them incomplete.

This failure ultimately led the Habsburgs to pursue their domestic and foreign policies in ways that distinguished them from the continent's other great powers. For example, to the very end of the monarchy successive regimes tinkered with the central administration in the forlorn hope that, by rearranging or reconfiguring it in one way or another, they might attain through finesse what they had failed to gain through genuine reform. A second, still more crucial consequence was the Habsburgs' increasing willingness to govern by consensus. If the emperor could not wholly eliminate the distinctiveness of his dominions or overcome the power of the feudal nobility, then the next best solution was to earn their support by remaining sensitive to their political rights, social privileges, and economic needs. Such an approach mortgaged the central government's ability to integrate its dominions more fully. It also prompted the Habsburgs to strike deals with the most powerful social or national groups at the expense of those they deemed less likely to threaten domestic stability. But the sacrifice was worthwhile if the resulting symbiosis with the monarchy's major territorial and feudal elements eliminated internal unrest and enlisted their cooperation in achieving its most important dynastic objectives.

But the need to gain a consensus of ruling elites reduced more than the

government's ability to pursue domestic reform or social justice. It also limited its freedom to fight wars, because these elites still controlled the financial means necessary to raise a large army. In practice this meant that the Habsburgs were unlikely to launch wars of aggression, both because they were aware of the monarchy's military weakness and because of the difficulties that they would have convincing their various dominions to make the necessary sacrifices. As a result they tended to be somewhat less impulsive or aggressive than the absolute rulers of France, Brandenburg-Prussia, or Russia, who were less dependent on gaining popular domestic support. In any event the monarchy's exposed central European location burdened them with a steady stream of likely attackers who rarely left them free to pursue aggressive designs of their own.

What the emperor *could* do was fight defensive wars that he could justify before the estates. In addition to mobilizing the monarchy's resources he was usually also able to continue the Habsburg practice of forming alliances with other powers that feared him less than his more powerful or aggressive enemies, especially when his attackers posed a threat to the international *status quo* and balance of power. Of course, by participating in such defensive coalitions the emperor was obliged to pursue only those goals that were acceptable to his allies. But that was a price he was generally willing to pay in exchange for the domestic and foreign support he received. Thus a Habsburg state that already depended on a consensus of domestic forces also came to rely on a consensus of other European powers in pursuing its foreign objectives. Indeed, patterns of Habsburg statecraft that later become associated with Clemens von Metternich, such as coalition and balance of power diplomacy and the maintenance of legitimate frontiers, were already evident by the seventeenth century.

The role of the dynasty

Needless to say, governing such a diverse state and enlisting support among domestic elites and foreign allies was far more difficult than ruling one of Europe's highly centralized absolute monarchies. Yet the Habsburgs have sometimes suffered by comparison with other dynasties. Historians have characterized them as a group of highly principled, conscientious, pious, and exceptionally moral individuals who nonetheless often lacked the foresight and decisiveness to bring their patrimony into line with the continent's other great monarchies. As a result they have been blamed for permitting the monarchy to proceed along what many historians see as a gradual, but steady decline extending from the reign of Charles V to its final collapse in the First World War. Even Austrian national historians have occasionally excused the Habsburgs' resort to moderation and half-measures as indicative of a certain "Austrian Clemency" that pervaded their character.

In reality the Habsburgs were temperamentally no less tenacious or aggressive than other rulers. As we shall see, they were capable of acting with the same mixture of determination, arrogance, intolerance, and brutality that has helped to saddle their Spanish cousins with the Black Legend. But, whereas the power and insularity of Spain might embolden its rulers to act with impunity, the Austrian Habsburgs could afford to do so only on the relatively rare occasions when they felt secure against potential adversaries at home and abroad. And, in those instances, immoderation usually proved counterproductive and ultimately compelled them to beat a hasty retreat. In short, "Austrian Clemency" stemmed not from some humane or docile mindset that was unique to the dynasty, but from its pragmatism in seeking to maintain its bridges to those domestic elites and foreign allies who offered the monarchy its greatest security. Indeed, even the few truly common personal qualities that united them, such as their conscientiousness and piety, were acquired traits that had been basically forced on them by the task at hand.

Nor were the Habsburgs necessarily the collective mediocrities of popular perception. Starting with the monarchy's creation in the sixteenth century they confronted the daunting task of governing a new dynastic state that was both diverse and difficult to defend. Instead of merely trying to hang on to what they had, they worked incessantly to strengthen their state and correct the flawed structure that Ferdinand had acquired in the sixteenth century. They succeeded in this role through persistence and hard work, imposing on their dominions integrated policies and a semblance of cohesion that would have otherwise been absent. The continuity that their policies provided did more to determine the development of their dominions than the actions of other sovereigns, whose responsibilities required less imagination and fewer emergency measures. Indeed, although some of the monarchs studied in this book were more talented and successful than others, all of them made a tangible contribution to the monarchy's development, even though they invariably left plenty to be done.

One indication of their pivotal role is the crucial part they played in resolving the great crises that periodically arose in the monarchy's history. It is possible to identify no fewer than eight occasions during its last three centuries when the monarchy faced dismemberment, whether through domestic rebellion, foreign invasion, or both: 1618–20, 1683, 1704–5, 1740–1, 1790, 1809–10, 1848–9, and 1916–18. It is no coincidence that all but two of these crises occurred at the end of one monarch's reign and the beginning of another's. This is because the mistakes or unresolved problems of one ruler tended to grow in importance until his successor was obliged to

deal with them. That the monarchy's rulers quickly and successfully met all but the last of these challenges attests to their competence and – in the last case – to the high stakes that were involved. Nor is it mere coincidence that each chapter of this book is built around the first six of these crises that occurred before 1815. This is because each chapter deals with a major stage in the monarchy's development, and each stage hinged in turn on the resolution of a crisis, a turning point in the monarchy's evolution on which its very survival depended. In the end the monarchy emerged stronger and more secure from the successful resolution of each of these challenges. Indeed, the monarchy's greatest crises tended to precede its greatest achievements.

2 The Thirty Years' War (1618–1648)

The monarchy and the "general crisis"

The difficulties posed by the monarchy's diversity and exposed central European position preoccupied its rulers throughout its history. These problems were, however, compounded by other challenges that confronted it and much of the rest of European society at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Over the past generation most historians have accepted the notion that Europe was then in the throes of a "General Crisis" as it tried to adjust to the dramatic developments that had taken place over the previous century. The economy was changed forever by the dramatic expansion in trade and by the inflation, or "price revolution," caused by the influx of silver from the New World. Europe had heretofore had a predominantly barter- and subsistence-oriented agrarian economy controlled by landowning nobles, but worked by their peasant labor force. It now began slowly converting to a money- and market-oriented economy controlled by the bourgeoisie and other capitalist elements seeking higher profits from trade and industry, as well as from agriculture. International relations were revolutionized by the sudden emergence of the new Habsburg world empire and the almost perpetual wars between it and its two natural enemies, France and the Ottoman empire. The need to feed the resulting arms race transformed domestic politics into a struggle between rulers and their people over the power to tax. Finally, the monarchs' concern for the security of their realms extended to their growing insistence on religious uniformity among their subjects, lest the growth of heresy inspire rebellion or civil war. The Austrian Habsburg monarchy faced all of these problems by the opening decades of the seventeenth century.

The economic crisis

As they entered the seventeenth century the Habsburgs needed to gain greater control over taxation, but first had to decide on whose shoulders the burden would fall. Whatever course they took the monarchy itself was not