Women, Royal Power, and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Europe

The Case of Maria Theresa

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Abstract

In 1741 Maria Theresa became the first and only woman to ascend the throne to the Holy Roman Empire. This article discusses the challenges Maria Theresa faced as a female ruler and how she strengthened her power through the use of art as propaganda. The article traces how her image evolved over time and also examines her prolific use of her son and heir Joseph II in art.

Article

In 1741 the Austrian Empire was in the middle of the Austrian War of Succession. It was a difficult time for Empress Maria Theresa; her father had died only a short time ago, and she ascended the throne with little instruction on how to navigate her new position. While the majority of European powers had previously accepted Maria Theresa as her father's successor, her gender was perceived as a weakness that could be taken advantage of.[1] With the support of France, Charles VII of Bavaria claimed he should be in possession of her title.[2] Around the same time, Frederick of Prussia took the opportunity to invade Silesia, a precious territory he had long desired to add to his kingdom.[3] Maria Theresa desperately needed the help of the Hungarian army to defend her title and keep her empire together.

During this time, a story emerged about a meeting between Maria Theresa and an assembly of Hungarian nobles. According to contemporary accounts, she approached them carrying her infant son and future ruler Joseph II close to her chest.[4] The scene, later imagined in a book written by Voltaire, was apparently very moving to the nobles. According to Voltaire's

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[1] Karl Vocelka, "Many defeats, few victories. Maria Theresa's foreign policy," in *Maria Theresa 1717-1780: Strategist, Mother, Reformer*, eds. Elfriede Iby, Martin Mutschlechner, Werner Telesko, and Karl Vocelka (Vienna: Amalthea, 2017), 82-84.

[2] Vocelka, "Many defeats, few victories," 82-84.

[3] Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia: Die Kaiserin in Ihrer Zeit* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2017), 76-77.

[4] Hanne Egghardt, *Maria Theresias Männer* (Vienna: Verlag Kermayr & Scheriau GmbH & Co. KG), 36.

account, by the time Maria Theresa had finished speaking, the men were crying and pledging their loyalty to their new ruler.[5] He wrote:

> [Maria Theresa] quitted Vienna and threw herself into the arms of those Hungarians…Having called an assembly of the four orders of the State, she appeared there, holding in her arms her eldest son, who had hardly left his cradle, and addressing them in Latin…she spoke to the following purpose: *abandoned by my friends, persecuted by my enemies, attacked by my nearest relations, I have no other source but in your fidelity…I deliver into your hands the daughter and son of your kings, whose safety depends on your conduct.* Sensibly affected by these words, the Hungarians drew their sabres and cried with one voice…"we will die for Maria Theresa"…[W]hile they were protesting their readiness to lay down their lives in her defence, she was the only person who refrained from tears.[6]

It is significant that Voltaire emphasizes the presence of her son, Joseph. According to Voltaire, Maria Theresa's appearance as a mother who wanted to assure the safety of her son was what made her plea for aid successful. When Maria Theresa had first come to power, many worried that it would be a challenge for a female leader to effectively assert her authority. However, this story shows that Maria Theresa was adept at turning a potential weakness into a valuable strength early in her reign.[7] The story of Maria Theresa appearing before the Hungarian nobles demonstrates not only her effectiveness as a ruler but her skill at using her gender as an advantage for her public image. She used this strength effectively throughout her reign. However, her image as a monarch underwent changes as she got older and her role within her family changed. Maria Theresa's image as a monarch can be divided into three eras: in the first era she was represented as a virtuous young woman, in the second as a vigilant mother, and in the third as a devoted widow. Throughout her life, she perfected her image as the ideal woman, whose virtues justified her position as ruler.

When Maria Theresa came to power in 1740, the idea of a female ruler was fairly new in Habsburg history. For centuries of Habsburg rule, it was not possible for a woman to inherit the family's territories. However, that changed when Charles II, the last male in line of Spanish Habsburg, died in 1700, and Leopold I, an Austrian Habsburg, inherited his kingdom and title.[8] Leopold I decided that his son Charles would take the Spanish throne, but Charles II's death prompted Leopold and his two sons to agree on a change of inheritance laws, which would prevent a future break-up of the Habsburg territories.[9] Leopold I, Joseph, and Charles signed an agreement called the *pactum mutuae successionis*

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[5] Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia*, 91-92.

[6] Voltaire, *The Age of Louis XV. Being the Sequel of the Age of Louis XIV. Translated from the French of M. De Voltaire* (Glasgow: Printed for Robert Urie, 1771), 60-61. Emphasis in the original.

[7] Michael Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 27.

[8] Irmard Pangerl, "The Pragmatic Sanction and its consequences. The succession policy put to the test," in *Maria Theresa 1717-1780: Strategist, Mother, Reformer*, eds. Elfriede Iby, Martin Mutschlechner, Werner Telesko, and Karl Vocelka (Vienna: Amalthea, 2017), 57.

[9] Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia,* 16.

(Mutual Pact of Succession), which made it possible for a female child to inherit the Habsburg lands when neither brother produced a male child. When Leopold I passed away in 1705, Joseph I became emperor, and when Joseph I passed away in 1711, Charles came to power as Charles VI. Joseph I left behind two daughters who were in line to inherit if Charles VI passed away without a male heir. However, Charles VI wanted his children— whether they were sons or daughters—to inherit the Habsburg Empire after him.[10] To ensure his offspring would be first in line for the throne, Charles VI implemented the Pragmatic Sanction.

For the Pragmatic Sanction to take effect, Charles VI needed the approval of the Habsburg territories of Bohemia, Hungary, and Italian territories, as well as the kingdoms of Prussia, Spain, Russia, England, Denmark, and the Netherlands. Over many years and through various methods, all of the Habsburg territories and almost all foreign powers had agreed to acknowledge the Pragmatic Sanction.[11] However, as previously noted, this acceptance did not stop various nations from attacking Austria when Charles VI's death left it in a state of weakness. The Pragmatic Sanction was not enough to make Maria Theresa's government strong—she needed precise and powerful propaganda that would support her claim to power and assert her authority in the Austrian Empire and Europe.

Representation of Women and Maria Theresa in the Habsburg Family
Initially, Maria Theresa's gender presented a problem to Habsburg tradition. The Habsburgs' method of representing a monarch was a finely tuned propaganda machine that had been developed over hundreds of years of rule to suit male rulers. Maria Theresa, as the dynasty's first female ruler, did not fit the precedent set by her ancestors. Such a drastic change in the history of the Habsburg rulers required a change in representation.[12] Maria Theresa's importance to her nation and to her family lineage was different and had to be represented as such. To bolster her strength as a ruler, Maria Theresa used paintings, medals, and other media traditionally employed by Habsburg rulers. However, unlike her predecessors, she used them to emphasize the virtues of Habsburg women within the context of ruling. The traits she emphasized were fertility and motherhood. After her husband passed away, she also used the virtues of a devoted and devout widow.

There had been virtually no attempt to define Maria Theresa's image as future monarch before her father passed away. This was due to continued hope that a male heir would be born to either Charles VI's wife Elisabeth or to Maria Theresa.[13] Prior to Charles VI's death, Maria Theresa was portrayed as the traditional, ideal Habsburg woman. As Michael Yonan observes in his analysis of Maria Theresa's use of art, "the commonplace Habsburg conception of femininity…[was]…predicated upon piety, modesty, and more than anything the ability to bear children."[14] Before she was married, she was portrayed as a good future wife, since the central purpose of paintings of women before marriage was to portray them

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[10] Pangerl, "The Pragmatic Sanction and its consequences," 57.

[11] Pangerl, "The Pragmatic Sanction and its consequences," 59-63.

[12] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art*, 15-16.

[13] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art*, 19-20.

[14] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 19.

as desirable, fertile, and devoted wives.[15] Early portraiture of Maria Theresa largely adhered to these standards.

Male Habsburg rulers were subject to their own rules of portrayal. There were many traditions of representation that they could draw from when creating their propaganda. The virtues traditionally attributed to Habsburg rulers were piety and military prowess, which could be displayed through various media such as paintings, monuments, and coins.[16] The cult of the image of the king reached new heights under Maria Theresa's father Charles VI, whose works include Karlskirche (St. Charles's Church), which still stands in Vienna. Works like Karlskirche emphasized the ruler's piety. Here, it was specifically made as a reminder of the role Charles VI's devotion played in saving the city from the plague.[17] Charles also created a monument with a specific emphasis on the earthly rewards for piety. In an allegorical altar painting in the Augustinerkirche (The Augustinian Church), Charles VI asked God to provide him with a son.[18] Displays of piety were important for rulers. This one was particularly important because it asked for a male heir and because the possession of a male heir was viewed as a sign of God's favor.[19] The hope for a male heir and that goal's representation in art and other works remained central to Charles's reign.

Family genealogy was another important propaganda tool for the Habsburgs. For centuries, their rulers had constructed extensive family trees which connected them to various great mythological, historical, and biblical figures.[20] The purpose of these family trees was not to be accurate but to link the current ruler to ancestors who would justify or consolidate their power.[21] They were often used to justify a claim to the kingdom of Rome. In these trees the Habsburgs presented themselves as the descendants of important people, in order to assert that they were the rightful heirs to the Holy Roman Empire.[22] Charles VI commissioned an interesting genealogical work. This was a large, colorful book chronicling his family lineage called *Genealogia Habsburgicae.*[23] Researching and displaying the royal family's genealogy was an effective tool in strengthening a monarch's claim to power, as it presented one's ancestry and ancestral virtues as justification for the current monarch's right to rule. Charles VI needed to bolster his standing because his lack of a male heir weakened his image. Published in 1737, *Genealogia Habsburgicae* used lavish illustrations and extensive family trees to display an impressive and largely mythical family history and generate the

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[15] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 19.

[16] Franz Matsche, *Die Kunst im Dienst der Staatsidee Kaiser Karls VI.: Ikonographie, Ikonologie und Programmatik des "Kaiserstils"* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1981), 64.

[17] Matsche, *Die Kunst im Dienst der Staatsidee Kaiser Karls VI,* 64.

[18] Ilsebill Barta-Fliedl, *Familienporträts der Habsburger: Dynastische Repräsentation im Zeitalter der Aufklärung* (Vienna, Böhlau, 2001), 66.

[19] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 19-20.

[20] Marie Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aneas: The Hapsburgs and the Mythic Image of the Emperor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 103.

[21] Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aneas,* 105-107.

[22] Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aneas,* 105-107, 137.

[23] Andrew Wheatcroft, *The Habsburgs: Embodying Empire* (London: Viking, 1995), 217.

public's interest in their ruler and his ancestors.[24] However, since the book emphasizes family lineage, it draws one's attention to Charles's lack of a male heir. Although Maria was Charles's likely successor at this point, she was not incorporated in the traditional Habsburg imagery the way a male might have been.

As a woman, Maria Theresa's role in Habsburg family history was to produce children. *Genealogia Habsburgicae* chose to utilize Maria Theresa's image in this tradition. Instead of being presented as Charles VI's heir, she was presented as the source of a possible male heir. If Maria Theresa gave birth to a son before Charles VI died, he would inherit the throne instead of her. Therefore, she appears in *Genealogia Habsburgicae* as a bridging figure between Charles VI and a yet unborn male heir among Maria's children. She appears in a less precise and specific way in the book than any of the male Habsburgs. Charles VI and a number of his male predecessors appear in an illustration near the beginning of the book. They are drawn in a row of busts, whose faces are precisely made to represent past monarchs and whose names are written at their bases. In contrast, Maria Theresa's appearance in the book is as an allegorical figure rather than as a specific person. The female figure who represents Maria Theresa is unnamed, with generic, idealized female features (Figure 1).[25]

Figure 1: Unpaginated illustrations in *Geneaologia Habsburgicae*

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[24] Marquart Herrgott, *Genealogia diplomatica Augustae Gentis Habsburgicae: Qua continentur vera gentis hujus exordia, antiquitates, propagationes, possessiones [et] praerogativae, chartis ac diplomatibus ....*(Vienna: ex typographia Leopoldi Joannis Kaliwoda, 1737).

[25] Unpaginated illustrations in Herrgott, *Genealogia diplomatica Augustae Gentis Habsburgicae.*

An illustration on one page shows a woman standing in a chariot pulled by two lions, accompanied by two putti—one holding a cornucopia, symbolic of prosperity, and the other holding a two-faced bust, accompanied by a book and medals. The woman is holding an imaginary baby who represents the future archduke of Austria.[26] The picture predicts a prosperous future where the dynasty is continued by the probable birth of a male grandchild. Therefore, the strength and hope of Maria Theresa during her father's lifetime was to provide a male heir for the family.

Hopes for a male heir were bolstered when Maria Theresa married Francis Stephen of Lorraine. Their marriage has drawn much interest from biographers and the general public since it was a love marriage, which was uncommon for the time. However, the marriage also had political implications. Francis was from the House of Lorraine, which had a long history with the Habsburg Monarchy as well as the Bourbons in France.[27] Francis's father, Leopold of Lorraine, was the grandson of Habsburg and Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II.[28] The Lorraine family wanted to marry one of their sons to one of Charles VI's daughters to solidify the two families' relationship and to bolster the Lorraine family's status.[29] He planned to send their son Clemens to visit the Habsburgs in Prague during Charles VI's coronation as the King of Bohemia to further his marriage plans. However, Clemens passed away unexpectedly and it was quickly decided that Francis Stephen would go in his place.[30] Once Charles met Francis Stephen in 1723, he agreed to the marriage of their children, although the decision was not yet made known to the public.[31] Maria Theresa and Francis Stephen were finally married in 1736.[32]

After her marriage, Maria Theresa's pregnancies were highly anticipated events.[33] During Charles VI's lifetime, Maria Theresa was pregnant several times. Each birth was eagerly awaited, but to the disappointment of the nation and the royal family, all resulted in a female child.[34] Despite the disappointment in the gender of the babies, it had at least become obvious that Maria Theresa was fertile, so there was much hope around her fourth pregnancy.[35] When Charles VI passed away in 1740, they were still without a male heir, and Maria Theresa became the ruler. However, the birth of a male heir was not far off. In

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[26] Herrgott, *Geneaologia Habsburgicae.*

[27] Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia,* 27.

[28] Renate Zedinger, "Francis Stephen of Lorraine and Maria Theresa. The fight for inheritance in the European Power Struggle," in *Maria Theresa 1717-1780: Strategist, Mother, Reformer*, eds. Elfriede Iby, Martin Mutschlechner, Werner Telesko, and Karl Vocelka (Vienna: Amalthea, 2017), 94.

[29] Stollberg-Rilinger *Maria Theresia*, 28-29.

[30] Egghardt, *Maria Theresias Männer,* 8-9.

[31] Zedinger, "Francis Stephen of Lorraine and Maria Theresa," 94.

[32] Karl Vocelka. "Maria Theresa. Strategist—Mother—Reformer. Key biographical information," in *Maria Theresa 1717-1780: Strategist Mother Reformer,* eds. Elfriede Iby, Martin Mutschlechner, Werner Telesko, and Karl Vocelka (Vienna: Amalthea, 2017), 28.

[33] Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia*, 292.

[34] Egghardt, *Maria Theresias Männer,* 23.

[35] Stollberg-Rilinger*. Maria Theresia*, 291, 297.

1741 her first son, the future Joseph II, was born. This long-anticipated event was celebrated with great excitement and pomp.[36]

Representing the Monarch as a Mother

Joseph's birth caused an immediate change in the way Maria Theresa and her family were represented in royal propaganda. Joseph was suddenly introduced as a vital part of Maria Theresa's image as a monarch. She was now the mother of a future male monarch. In addition to the events around Joseph's birth, the day was commemorated in coins. Coins were important to a monarch's image and were considered one of the most enduring medium of royal propaganda.[37] They were produced for a variety of events, including royal births, marriages, and deaths. They were distributed to nobility, many of whom were avid coin collectors.[38] Maria Theresa's daughter, Maria Anna, was interested in coins and produced a book with an extensive record of the various coins released under Maria Theresa's reign.[39] A large section of the coins featured in Maria Anna's book commemorated the births of her brothers and sisters, including a large number of coins for Joseph II. The use of coins remained important each time Maria Theresa gave birth to a son during her reign, helping to show the ever-strengthening line of possible heirs she was creating. Several coins commemorating Maria Theresa's sons' births are interesting. On one coin, Joseph is already described as the future king of Austria, Hungary, and Bohemia.[40] The medal features a picture of baby Hercules—a traditional male allegorical figure that could not be applied to Maria Theresa—strangling a snake. Joseph's birth was important because it allowed for these historically powerful and masculine representations to be used by the monarchy again. They were also comforting, since they reminded Austrians that Joseph's birth meant a male heir was prepared to rule over the next generation.

Even more powerful than the image of Joseph alone was the image of mother and son together. Maria could now assume the role of mother and bridging figure in the Habsburg family imagined in *Genealogia Habsburgicae*. There were many portraits created of Maria Theresa and Joseph together. One that is particularly interesting places Joseph and Maria in separate spaces. In it, Maria occupies the central, large portrait space while Joseph hovers above in a small circular space under a crown.[41] It is a strange image and one wonders why the two are pictured separately. This is a question Michael Yonan asks in his analysis of the art of Maria Theresa: why is Maria Theresa not cradling or playing with her baby?[42] I argue this is to emphasize their individuality. Maria Theresa is presented as the current ruler and Joseph as the future ruler. Rather than a typical mother-son portrait, this portrait relates to

[36] Stollberg-Rilinger. *Maria Theresia*, 311.

[37] Matsche, *Die Kunst im Dienst der Staatsidee Kaiser Karls VI,* 67.

[38] Barta-Fliedl, *Familienporträts der Habsburger*, 83.

[39] Maria Anna, *Schau- und Denkmünzen welche unter der Regierung der Kaiserinn Königinn Maria Theresia geprägt worden sind. Medailles frappees sous le regne de l'imperatrice Marie Terese.* (Vienna: Krauß, 1782).

[40] Maria Anna, *Schau- und Denkmünzen welche unter der Regierung der Kaiserinn Königinn Maria Theresia,* 25.

[41] Martin van Meytens, *Double Portrait of Empress Maria Theresa and Archduke Joseph as a Child*, ca. 1744, oil on canvas, Wien Museum, Vienna. The image is reproduced in Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 26.

[42] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 27.

another tradition of early modern portraiture, in which male and female family members are pictured inhabiting separate, gendered spheres. Kate Retford analyzes such portraits within the context of eighteenth-century England. She analyzes a family portrait where a mother, father, three daughters, and two sons are all pictured. However, not all family members are present in the room.[43] The room is at home in a private, familial, female space where the mother and three daughters are present. The three males included in the portrait do not all inhabit the same space. The eldest son and father are not present in the room. The father is pictured in a portrait on the wall, and the eldest son is present in a painting being held by one of his sisters. The youngest son is present in the room, interacting with the four women. Retford argues that this represents the various distances of the men in relation to the women and their space. The father is entirely removed. The eldest son is removed to a lesser degree, as he is not in the room but is being held by his sister. The youngest son is still entirely in the female realm, but looks up to his father, in anticipation of a future where he too will join him in the public sphere.[44]

The portrait of Maria Theresa and Joseph is not as straightforward as the portrait analyzed by Retford. Instead of picturing the mother in a domestic realm, it places her in the public realm. Unlike the women in the English painting, Maria Theresa is a female ruler who must inhabit a public, male space. I argue that this painting attempts to establish Maria Theresa firmly as a ruler, who represents a temporary female entry into the public realm. However, the presence of Joseph in the portrait reminds the viewer that her time in the male sphere is limited, and that someday her son will restore order and male, monarchical tradition by taking over the public space inhabited by the ruler. The smaller portrait of Joseph is separate from, but also joined with, the larger portrait inhabited by Maria Theresa. He is neither fully independent of nor fully attached to his mother. The double portrait represents both his present and future status. In the present, he is still a child who is very connected to his mother as a son. However, his distance from her also reminds the viewer of his future, when he will be entirely separate from his mother's influence. The portrait almost seems to hint that someday Joseph will come down from the smaller, higher portrait and occupy the center of the portrait inhabited by Maria Theresa. In the future, it is implied that Joseph will take his mother's place as the focus of the portrait and reclaim the position of the monarch for the male sphere. However, Maria Theresa is still clearly the power figure of this portrait. As Yonan points out in his study of the painting, Joseph's portrait acknowledges his power as a future male monarch, but his connection to Maria Theresa in this portrait reminds the viewer that it was Maria Theresa who gave birth to Joseph and provided a male heir for the next generation.[45] The painting points to a hopeful future and emphasizes Maria Theresa's virtue as a mother and her role in creating a hopeful future for the dynasty and nation.[46]

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[43] Antonio di Bittio, *Elizabeth Countess of Bristol with her Children,* 1773, oil on canvas, Courtauld Institute of Art, London

[44] Kate Retford, *The Art of Domestic Life: Family Portraiture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 105-106.

[45] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 28.

[46] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 28.

Now that Maria Theresa had a male heir to continue the Habsburg line, their relationship became a powerful image in assuring people of Austrian strength and inspiring them. This can be seen in the use of this portrait to motivate soldiers. While they were in the field, Austrian General Khevenhüller showed the troops a portrait of Maria Theresa holding her son Joseph. According to a contemporary account, the soldiers were visibly moved and motivated by the image: "They have defied their sorrows...[they] threw kisses to the portrait, and swore there, to forever stay true to the Queen, then filled the air with the oft-repeated cry of 'Long live Queen Maria Theresa!'"[47] The image of their monarch with their child was an inspiring image; it reinforced the importance of defending the country for their current and future rulers.

Maria Theresa's large family also became an important part of her image as monarch. This marked a divergence from what past monarchs had emphasized. Her father in particular avoided family portraits, because they emphasized the absence of a son in the family.[48] However, unlike her father, Maria Theresa had an unusually large number of children, and it was a powerful and frequently used visual practice to present them situated around her.[49] One portrait where this effect is especially evident is by Martin van Meytens that places the family at an imaginary terrace (Figure 2).[50]

Figure 2: Martin van Meytens, *The Imperial Family*, 1754, oil on canvas, Schönbrunn Palace, Vienna.

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[47] Anonymous, *1743/45, Volume I* (1743), 660, quoted in Barta-Fliedl, *Familienporträts der Habsburger*, 72.

[48] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 19.

[49] Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia*, 292.

[50] Martin van Meytens, *The Imperial Family*, 1754, oil on canvas, Schönbrunn Palace, Vienna.

Maria Theresa is surrounded by her husband and numerous children. In a break with tradition, the male children are situated around Maria Theresa, and the female children are around Francis Stephen. Francis Stephen and all the boys are gesturing toward Maria Theresa, showing that the power belongs to her.[51]

Representing the Monarch as a Widow
In 1765, Maria Theresa was forced to revise her image entirely. Her husband Francis Stephen passed away suddenly while the family was attending a wedding in Innsbruck. This left the family and Maria Theresa in shock. Following Francis Stephen's death, Maria Theresa went into deep mourning. She immediately changed her image to suit that of a widow. There were strict rules as to how early modern widows, particularly royalty, could be represented. The transformation started with the Maria Theresa herself. She wore all black and a widow's hood, and she cut her hair. The only color in her clothing that remained was her Sternkreuzorden (Order of the Starry Cross) insignia, which she wore on her chest.[52] Widowhood impacted her daily life as well. At that time, women were expected to conduct themselves differently during widowhood. According to the Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives, the "ideal widow" remained loyal to her deceased husband. They were to focus on "chastity," "obedience," and "self-control" in the years before their own deaths.[53] Widows were expected to become more reclusive and reflect on their own lives and preparing to die themselves. Women often secluded themselves to a place called a *Witwensitz* (dowager's residence) for this purpose.[54] In widowhood, every aspect of a woman—her clothing, her daily habits, her identity—became connected to her deceased husband.

At first it might seem like a widow's individual power was diminished in the wake of her husband's death, since much of her life and identity had to center around him. However, widowhood came with powerful virtues and imagery that could bolster a woman's personal authority.[55] The image of a chaste widow dedicated to raising her children and preserving her husband's memory was used by many female rulers who came to power upon their husbands' deaths. As a widow-ruler, Maria Theresa became a more familiar figure to early modern Europeans. Her position was now very similar to that of a female regent, that is, someone who ruled in place of their deceased husband while they waited for their son to become old enough to wield power. One example of a prominent female regent is Caterina Sforza, whose representation as a widow regent has been analyzed by Joyce de Vries.[56] Caterina Sforza came to power as her son's regent when her husband, Giralmo

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[51] Barta-Fliedl, *Familienporträts der Habsburger,* 92.

[52] Stollberg-Rilinger, *Maria Theresia*, 521-522; Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 46-48.

[53] Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner, "Introduction," in *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe,* eds. Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner (London: Pearson Education Limited, 1999).

[54] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 89.

[55] Joyce de Vries, "Casting Her Widowhood: The Contemporary and Posthumous Portraits of Caterina Sforza," in *Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Allison Levy (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), 80.

[56] de Vries, "Casting Her Widowhood," 78.

Riaro, was assassinated in 1488. de Vries argues that Caterina Sforza used her image as a widow and her connection to her deceased husband, as well as her son, to assert her own rule in sixteenth-century Italy.[57] Unlike an actual widow-regent, Maria Theresa had ruled long before her husband's death. Additionally, her son Joseph had already been crowned Holy Roman Emperor and was old enough to take over the throne when his father died. However, Maria Theresa maintained power, and in many ways, widowhood amplified the positive feminine qualities that Maria Theresa had cultivated during her husband's lifetime. As a widow-ruler, Maria Theresa emphasized her dedication to her late husband, and her influence on her children.

Maria Theresa's portraiture adapted to assert her power while still adhering to the traditional portrayal of widows. By looking at the portraits that she commissioned, and by looking at which ones she decided to display and which ones she did not, we can get a sense of the exact image she was trying to present. In one portrait commissioned but never displayed by Maria Theresa, it is possible to discern what she did not want to convey to her subjects (Figure 3). [58] In this portrait, Maria appears as a very powerful and active figure and there is an emphasis on her personal impact as a ruler. In a way, it is one of the most masculine imaginings of Maria Theresa. As Yonan points out in his analysis of the portrait, she is pictured holding the plans of Schönbrunn, showing her role in the creation of her summer residence.[59] Maria Theresa played a large part in designing her palace, but it is rarely linked to her in an overt a manner as it is in this painting. [60] Connecting a ruler with the architecture they commissioned is something typically done with male rulers. The portrait also places several books in front of Maria Theresa, signifying knowledge and study. Yonan argues this is partially because reading was an important part of widowhood, but the inclusion also emphasizes her own personal intelligence and work.[61] Overall, the painter's choice to picture Maria Theresa with architectural plans and books transforms her into a more active ruler in the wake of her husband's death. Her decision not to display that picture shows that this is not the way she wanted her subjects to view her rule. This portrait was originally meant to be part of a pair of portraits featuring Maria Theresa and the deceased Francis Stephen. While she never displayed her portrait, she did display Francis's.[62] Rather than emphasizing her independence in her years as a widow, Maria Theresa chose to represent her power indirectly through loyalty to her husband's memory and her commitment to her children and their future roles in the monarchy.

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[57] de Vries, "Casting Her Widowhood," 77-92.

[58] Anton Von Maron, *Portrait of Empress Maria Theresa as a Widow*, 1773, oil on canvas, Kunstistorisches Museum Wien, Vienna, http://www.khm.at/objektdb/detail/2415/?offset=9&lv=list, accessed September 12, 2020.

[59] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 55.

[60] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 55.

[61] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 52.

[62] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 56.

Figure 3: Anton Von Maron, *Portrait of Empress Maria Theresa as a Widow*, 1773, oil on canvas, Kunstistorisches Museum Wien, Vienna

It is useful to compare Maria Theresa's propaganda strategies from her years as a widow to those of Catherine de' Medici, queen of France in the mid-sixteenth century.[63] When her husband Henri II was killed in a jousting accident, it fell to Catherine to rule as her son's regent.[64] In many ways, Catherine de' Medici's position as a ruler was as tenuous as Maria Theresa's was in its early years. Salic law prevented women from inheriting the throne, so France was unprepared for a queen to assume the position of ruler.[65] Additionally, Catherine de' Medici was of foreign birth, so she needed a convincing system of imagery and propaganda to convince France she was the right person to assume rule in her husband's place.[66] A major part of establishing her authority involved emphasizing her

[63] Sheila Ffolliott, "Catherine de' Medici as Artemisia: Figuring the Powerful Widow," in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986), 227.

[64] Ffolliott, "Catherine de' Medici as Artemisia," 228.

[65] Ffolliott, "Catherine de' Medici as Artemisia," 228.

[66] Ffolliott, "Catherine de' Medici as Artemisia," 228.

connection to her husband and children. Rather than trying to project the traits of a good male ruler, she emphasized her virtues as a mother and widow.[67]

Family and Power Represented in the Vieux-Laque Zimmer
The core of Maria Theresa's propaganda strategy in the later years of her reign is represented well by the Vieux-Laque Zimmer. This room, which was Francis Stephen's old study in Schönbrunn and renovated by Maria Theresa as a memorial, masterfully presents Maria Theresa as the creator and supporter of a strong, future family line, and it accomplishes this without displaying a portrait of herself.[68] The Vieux-Laque Zimmer achieves its goal as royal propaganda in a unique way. It combines two types of symbolically important rooms created in early modern Europe. The first and most obvious tradition connected to it is that of the *Gedächtnisraum* (memorial room), which was created to honor a widow's deceased husband.[69] However, the room was especially important to Maria Theresa because she combined this tradition with a second one, which is the royal tradition of creating rooms or other monuments dedicated to the memory of family members. These monuments, called *Ahnengalerien* (galleries of ancestors), were often used by rulers as part of their propaganda and not meant to present a realistic image of the rulers' family history but rather to depict the virtues of their family and to present a coherent claim to power through lineage. Members of the family could be included or excluded depending on the message the ruler was trying to send.[70] Maria Theresa never commissioned a room dedicated to a long family history. Like the creators of *Genealogia Habsburgicae*, Maria Theresa had reached the conclusion that emphasizing her role in the present and future of the family was a better approach than trying to reconcile her rule with the past.

Although Maria was now past her childbearing years, the Vieux-Laque Zimmer shows a continued focus on her role in her family as her central claim to power. The earlier portraits of her family were important because they showed a bright future for the Habsburg family. Now that her children were growing up, marrying, and having their own children, those promises of a bright future were coming true. It conveys Maria Theresa's power by showing her family and her strong connections to it and to its future prosperity. As Yonan argues in his analysis of the Vieux-Lauque Zimmer, Maria Theresa's part in continuing the Habsburg line is displayed in two of the three portraits in the room. In addition to a portrait of Francis Stephen, the room contains the portrait of her two sons, Leopold and Joseph, and the portrait of Leopold's wife Maria Luisa with their children, including their son.[71] The portraits of her children and grandchildren played various roles in Maria Theresa's propaganda and conveyed different things about her to her subjects different things.

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[67] Ffolliott, "Catherine de' Medici as Artemisia," 228, 240.
[68] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 99.
[69] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 99.
[70] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 97-98.
[71] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 118.

The first and most obvious point of the portraits is their emphasis on the long line of possible heirs to the Habsburg throne. This was Maria's strongest virtue and strongest claim to power. She had come to the monarchy due to the absence of a male heir. Now, she was able to proudly display her many sons and grandsons—a solid line of men to draw on for the next generation of rulers. Joseph, Leopold, and Leopold's son were all on display in the Vieux-Laque Zimmer. However, as Yonan notes, Leopold's son was not pictured with him but rather with his mother.[72] According to Yonan, this effectively de-emphasized the father-son relationship and put greater focus on the boy's relationship to his grandmother, Maria Theresa.[73] Maria Theresa is presented as the central, organizing figure responsible for the three men in line for the throne.

By focusing on her two oldest male children in the Vieux-Laque Zimmer portrait of Leopold I and Joseph II (Figure 4), Maria Theresa emphasizes her own personal virtue as a ruler, and their continuation in the next generation.[74] This can be seen in the portrait of her sons that she picked, and how she modified it from its original form.

Figure 4: Pompeo Batoni, *Portrait of the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II and Grand Duke Leopold of Tuscany in Rome*, 1769, oil on canvas, Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Vienna.

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[72] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 118-119.

[73] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 118-119.

[74] Pompeo Batoni, *Portrait of the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II and Grand Duke Leopold of Tuscany in Rome*, 1769, oil on canvas, Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Vienna, http://www.khm.at/en/objectdb/detail/185/?offset=8&lv=list, accessed July 8, 2020.

The painting of Joseph and Leopold, by Italian painter Pompeo Batoni, was not the original version of the painting. It was a later version, made specifically for the room. Two major changes were made to the portrait, both of which, according to Yonan, can possibly be traced back to Maria Theresa. In the second painting, Villa Medici was replaced by Minerva, and instead of handing Joseph a symbol of power, she hands him an olive branch. [75] Maria Theresa was often associated with Minerva, so we can assume that Minerva is meant to represent her in this portrait.[76] The olive branch also symbolizes Maria Theresa's own foreign policy. In the later years of her reign, Maria Theresa placed a greater emphasis on maintaining peace.[77] Additionally, she was particularly concerned about Joseph's continued interest in the military and his admiration for her rival, Frederick the Great.[78] The choice to insert herself and a symbol representing her own foreign policy removes power from Joseph in favor of Maria Theresa.[79] Through this painting, Maria Theresa displays her influence on her sons and her part in shaping a peaceful future for the Habsburg Empire.

The depiction of Joseph II's power as inseparable from her own power is reminiscent of Catherine de' Medici's use of her own son in artwork. In one of the Artemisia tapestries, she and her son appear in front of the Estates-General.[80] Artemisia appears at her son's side. He is in the traditional position as ruler; he sits on the throne and is dressed in Roman attire. Shelia Ffolliott argues that since Artemisia cannot directly appear in the central role of king, she "must rule indirectly."[81] Her son occupies the traditional male throne, but Artemisia looms behind him, guiding and advising his movements as ruler. The viewer knows that, while her son must appear in-charge for visual representations, Catherine de' Medici, as represented by Artemisia, is the true power behind the throne. This is similar to Joseph II's visual position vis-a-vis Maria Theresa. While Joseph II is the Holy Roman Emperor, her positioning of Minerva behind him in the painting is a reminder to the viewer of who holds the real power in the family.

Commonalities in the presentation of Catherine and Maria Theresa and their sons are not confined to these portraits, and in fact the Vieux-Laque Zimmer in its entirety is reminiscent of a structure commissioned by Catherine de' Medici. After Henri II's death, Catherine decided to build a chapel in which his memory would be honored and where Henri, Catherine, and their children would all be buried. While on a surface level, the monument honors her late husband, Ffolliott argues that the Valois Chapel also represents Catherine's own power. It highlights her own virtue as a pious, dedicated widow. It is also built in the Roman style, which reflects her Italian heritage.[82] Like Catherine de' Medici's chapel, the Vieux-Laque Zimmer is a memorial used to subtly display Maria Theresa's virtues. In the painting of Joseph II, as well as the painting of her deceased husband, Maria

[75] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 112.

[76] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 112.

[77] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 112*.*

[78] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 114.

[79] Yonan, *Empress Maria Theresa and the Politics of Habsburg Imperial Art,* 114.

[80] Ffolliott, "Catherine de' Medici as Artemisia," 238-240.

[81] Ffolliott, "Catherine de' Medici as Artemisia," 241.

[82] Ffolliott, "Catherine de' Medici as Artemisia," 236.

Theresa appears in the form of allegory. Maria Theresa effectively used a memorial to her deceased husband to assert her own virtues as a ruler.

Conclusion
From the time of Maria Theresa's birth in 1717 to her death in 1780, her image underwent many transformations. Originally she was portrayed no differently from ordinary female royalty. When she became queen, her image had to change. She approached the problem from several directions, but overall Maria Theresa chose to take the virtues applied to her as a woman and apply them to her new position as ruler. Most importantly, the birth of a male heir allowed Maria Theresa to claim God's approval and to promise a stable future with a male heir. After Maria Theresa's husband passed away, another change in representation was required. Maria Theresa projected the powerful image of a dedicated widow, who indulged little in worldly pleasures and ostentatious pageantry but spent her days in the honorable pursuit of preserving her husband's memory and caring for her large family. Maria Theresa based much of her image as a ruler in her male relations. She put particular emphasis on her son Joseph II. She encouraged her subjects' anticipation of his eventual ascension to the throne, while quietly reminding them that she was their current ruler and he was influenced by her wisdom. To Joseph II's chagrin, his mother's claim to power was not just for appearances. Even after Joseph was named her coregent, Maria Theresa held the power to make all final decisions. Maria Theresa created an effective and long-lasting image of a strong, female monarch whose respective roles as wife, mother, and widow earned her subjects' respect and supported a long, stable reign.