

MEDIA INFORMATION, VIENNA, NOVEMBER 2018

Rupture and Continuity: The fate of the Habsburg inheritance after 1918

An exhibition marking the commemorative centenary 1918/2018 at the Hofmobiliendepot · Imperial Furniture Collection

The fate of former imperial estates and holdings of art after the end of the Habsburg Monarchy is the focus of a new exhibition at the Hofmobiliendepot running from 5 December 2018 to 30 June 2019. With the end of Habsburg rule in 1918 the question arose not only of how the political legacy of the Monarchy was to be dealt with but also what should happen to the material inheritance of the Habsburg-Lorraine dynasty and the imperial court.

The exhibition uses concrete objects to relate how the imperial residences together with their furnishings, the art collections and the assets of the court passed into the ownership of the new Republic, and what their subsequent fate was. At first the exhibition explores various facets of the historical and social upheavals of the time. It explains the highly complicated nexus of Habsburg properties and collections in order to clarify the various ways in which this inheritance was appropriated and exploited by the Republic.

What belongs to the emperor? What belongs to the state?

'The Republic of Austria is the proprietor of the entire movable and immovable property on its territory of the Court Exchequer as well as properties tied to the previously reigning House or a branch thereof.' Section 5 of the Habsburg Act of 10 April 1919

With this brief statement the young Republic laid claim to the ownership of the material legacy of the Habsburg Monarchy in the spring of 1919. However, the actual appropriation of the former imperial court offices, art collections, palaces and estates proved to be considerably more complicated, as the exhibition shows. The winding-up of the court administration, for example, took three years. Until November 1921 the 'court without an emperor' continued to exist under republican auspices.

At first the focus lay on securing and communalizing the imperial properties. The claims of the new Republic had to be asserted against the demands of the other successor states and the victorious powers. Claims by the former ruling dynasty also had to be warded off.

Legal grey areas concerning the ownership of former imperial property

Appropriation was complicated among other factors by legal grey areas concerning the ownership of former imperial property. Not everything that the emperor possessed and used actually belonged to him personally. The various palaces, art collections and estates that were commonly referred to as 'imperial' were in fact classified in different proprietary categories. By the end of the Monarchy a distinction was made between three main groups, namely between the Court Exchequer of state (state property), the family assets of the Habsburg-Lorraine dynasty (tied assets), and the private property of individual members of the ruling house. After 1918 the category to which particular palaces and assets were assigned determined their

subsequent fate. The Habsburg Acts of April 1919 laid down the appropriation by the Republic of the Court Exchequer and the so-called tied assets.

The famous 'affair' of the crown jewels also had its roots in these complex issues of ownership. In the final days of the Monarchy, Emperor Karl ordered them to be removed from showcases XII and XIII of the Secular Treasury in the Hofburg and taken to Switzerland, some of them in their cases, but some of them simply wrapped in paper. Among these so-called 'crown jewels' were the world-famous Florentine, a 133-carat diamond once owned by Franz Stephan of Lorraine, and the celebrated emerald and ruby garnitures associated with Maria Theresa, Marie Antoinette and Empress Elisabeth.

The following years saw disputes about the lawfulness of the jewels' removal and discussion of the issue of their ownership. The 'affair' also caused a sensation in the press. In 1921 the Republic abandoned its demand for the return of the jewels. The 'affair' of the crown jewels is still occasionally the subject of reports in various publications. There are several versions of the subsequent fate of the jewels, none confirmed to this day.

The original showcase XIII has been recently identified among the holdings of the Hofmobiliendepot, together with the abandoned jewel cases in the Treasury, revealing for the first time the gaps left by the legendary dynastic treasure.

Claims by successor states and victorious powers

Claims by other successor states and the victorious powers also had to be considered. Immediately after the collapse of the Monarchy in November 1918 they attempted to secure these assets for themselves. The individual successor states appropriated the residences and palaces belonging to the Court Exchequer and the tied assets that stood on their territories. The art collections constituted a special case: the majority of the art treasures were held on the territory of the Republic of Austria, and particularly in Vienna as the former imperial residence and capital. The successor states and victorious powers also demanded their share of the collections.

Using photographs and documents, the exhibition shows the radical course of action taken by Italy. The victorious power ordered the confiscation of sixty-six paintings from the Kunsthistorisches Museum. In their eyes, these had been unlawfully transferred to Vienna in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, when large parts of northern Italy had come under Habsburg dominion.

Eventually the peace treaty of Saint-Germain imposed the territorial principle: the assets were assigned to the state on whose territory they were located. For Austria, this meant that the Republic was now confirmed unequivocally as the owner of the imperial collections. Nonetheless, the Republic was obliged to hand over objects that belonged to the cultural heritage of a successor state. This mainly involved archival materials and holdings of books.

The exhibition not only shows the sometimes tortuous paths by which former imperial property and art objects came into the possession of the fledgling Republic. It also demonstrates how the Republic went about taking possession of its new property: by exchanging symbols and names, and re-inventorying and reorganizing the art treasures, but also by means of active appropriation. The prevailing revolutionary mood expressed itself for example in the numerous claims made on Schönbrunn Palace as a symbol of Habsburg rule. There were scenes of unrestrained appropriation. Groups of disabled war veterans, for example, who saw themselves as the victims of Habsburg injustice, forcibly occupied parts of the palace complex.

Exploiting the imperial inheritance for profit

After the communalization of the imperial estates, the young Republic was confronted with huge maintenance costs. In addition, they were liable for reparation payments to the successor states and obliged to take over the Monarchy's sovereign debt. Therefore innovative concepts had to be found to exploit the imperial inheritance so that it would bring in revenue. In this 'democratization' of the imperial holdings, palaces and art collections were opened up to the general public. Whole palace complexes together with their furnishings were turned into museums. The exhibition takes the two examples of Schönbrunn and the Hofburg, the symbolic centres of power, to showcase the many plans for use that sought to profitably exploit this imperial legacy. Many of these schemes were swiftly rejected, while others live on to this day.

Schönbrunn: from imperial palace to palace museum

While the end of the monarchy brought about a caesura in the history of the palace, it having lost its function as the monarch's residence, the resumption of public tours of the palace represents an interesting continuity. This had been allowed under imperial administration, albeit with restrictions, and was now extended to the palace as a whole.

In the search for financial means to maintain the gardens the suggestion was repeatedly made to charge an admission fee to the park. Plans to that effect were, however, soon dropped. Instead, the park at Schönbrunn, as during imperial times, was increasingly used as the setting for festive events. However, increasing damage from overuse and occasional acts of vandalism soon led to restrictions being imposed.

As part of the exploitation of new, urgently needed sources of revenue, the ancillary buildings of the palace were rented out as residential apartments or leased to catering businesses. It was planned to establish sports facilities in the peripheral areas of the park, but these projects ultimately came to nothing due to lack of money.

Hofburg: museum and events centre

The Vienna Hofburg had a special position in the structure of the city: having grown over a period of more than six hundred years, the complex of buildings was not only the main residence of the emperor but also the seat of a whole range of offices belonging to the court administration. In October 1919 the former imperial apartments in the Hofburg were opened to the general public. The emperor's state rooms had been accessible to the public even before 1918 as long as they were not required by the court for its own purposes.

The ceremonial halls of the Hofburg were leased for large-scale events. At first only a provisional arrangement, this idea proved to be a lucrative gap in the market: high rental income could be generated with comparatively little outlay. To start with, only the outer areas of the ceremonial apartments in the Swiss Wing of the old palace were available for hire, since the suite of ceremonial rooms in the Neue Burg had remained uncompleted. The commercial success of the leasing operation eventually provided the necessary impetus to complete these extensive rooms, which today are still in use as a conference centre.

Hofmobiliendepot: from depository to museum

Founded in 1747 by Maria Theresa as the 'Inspectorate of Court Movables', the task of the Hofmobiliendepot until the end of the Monarchy was the acquisition, inventorying, upkeep and distribution of the furnishings of the imperial palaces and court offices. After the end of the Monarchy showrooms were created at the Hofmobiliendepot in which the furniture of the former imperial court was displayed. Part of the furniture and other furnishings belonging to the Court Exchequer were earmarked for the furnishing in appropriately formal style of the newly created

federal offices and embassies. The holdings were also used to furnish the former imperial residences or to supplement existing furnishings so that the state rooms could be opened to public view. In May 1923 a permanent exhibition was set up in the Hofburg using the holdings of the former Court Silver and Table Room, which had been taken over by the Republic as a part of the assets of the Court Exchequer.

Using the past as a film set – exploiting the holdings of the Court Exchequer in the movie industry

The exhibition also clearly shows how important the film industry was for the profitable exploitation of the imperial inheritance. The continuing currency crisis and concomitant inflation meant that film production costs were comparatively low. By 1921 there were forty-two film companies in Vienna, and on average one film was shot every two weeks. In particular, Vienna provided favourable conditions for historical films, which required elaborate sets and costumes and large numbers of extras. Through cooperation with film companies and the hiring out of props the Republic had opened up an extremely lucrative new source of income. The singularly rich stock of former court holdings enabled the sets to be elaborately dressed with authentic historical furniture, and the former imperial palaces and gardens provided the perfect backdrops for historical films. However, the use of former court furnishings and household goods as film props was frequently criticized as a 'sell-out of the past'. Critical comments were also made about damage caused to buildings and objects. Nonetheless, the hiring out of props remained a profitable form of utilizing the holdings of the Bundesmobilienverwaltung until well into the 1970s.

The Red Archduchess

A whole section of the exhibition is devoted to the 'Red Archduchess', the daughter of Crown Prince Rudolf. It would take until 1926 before all the objects inherited by Elisabeth Windisch-Graetz from the Hofburg and Schönbrunn Palace were handed over to her. A professed Social Democrat, she bequeathed her inheritance – works of art from the private ownership of Empress Elisabeth and her father – to the Republic. Following her death in 1963 the objects she had specified – furniture, pictures, sculptures and family mementos – were divided up between the Albertina, the Kunsthistorisches Museum, the MAK (Austrian Museum of Applied Arts), the National Library and the Bundesmobilienverwaltung. In accordance with her wishes, a large part is displayed at the Hofmobiliendepot and in the Imperial Apartments of the Vienna Hofburg.

Location: Hofmobiliendepot · Imperial Furniture Collection
Andreasgasse 7, 1070 Wien
www.hofmobiliendepot.at

Duration of exhibition: 5 December 2018 – 30 June 2019

Opening hours: Tuesday – Sunday, 10 am – 6 pm. Additionally
open on Monday, 24/12/2018, 31/12/2018,
22/4/2019, 10/6/2019

Curators: Dr Ilsebill Barta
Martin Mutschlechner

Exhibition architecture/design: Checo Sterneck

Graphic design:	Thomas Reinagl	
Organisation:	Markus Laumann	
Marketing:	Josefa Haselböck	
Admission to 31/3/2019:	Adults	€ 9.50
	Students (age 19–25)	€ 8.50
	Senior citizens (60+)	€ 8.50
	Children (age 6–18)	€ 6.00
	Families (2 adults + 3 children)	€ 22.00
Admission from 1/4/2019:	Adults	€ 10.50
	Students (age 19–25)	€ 9.50
	Senior citizens (60+)	€ 9.50
	Children (age 6–18)	€ 6.50
	Familiea (2 adults + 3 children)	€ 23.00
Supplement for guided tour:	Adults	€ 2.00
	Children (age 6–18)	€ 1.00

For further information and images click [here](#).

Schloß Schönbrunn Kultur- und Betriebsges.m.b.H. (SKB) administers the most important attractions of Austria's imperial heritage, including Schönbrunn Palace, the Hofmobiliendepot · Imperial Furniture Collection, the Imperial Apartments in the Vienna Hofburg with the Sisi Museum and Silver Collection as well as the Schloss Hof Estate and Schloss Niederweiden. SKB is tasked with the maintenance and revitalization of the cultural assets with which it has been entrusted. The funds required for this purpose are raised wholly from the revenues generated by the SKB itself.

Further information and pictorial material can be found at www.schoenbrunn.at | www.schlosshof.at | www.hofburg-wien.at | www.hofmobiliendepot.at | www.kaiserkinder.at | www.schoenbrunnmeetings.com

For further inquiries please contact:

Evelyn Larcher
 Press and public relations, product marketing
 Schloß Schönbrunn Kultur- und Betriebsges.m.b.H.
 Tel.: +43 1 811 13 340
 Email: larcher@schoenbrunn.at

Petra Reiner
 Corporate communications and spokesperson
 Schloß Schönbrunn Kultur- und Betriebsges.m.b.H.
 Tel.: +43 1 811 13 461
 Email: reiner@schoenbrunn.at