Maria Theresa Biography

Maria Theresa, archduchess of Austria, began her rule in 1740. She was the only woman ruler in the 650yr history of the Hapsburg dynasty. She was also one of the most successful Hapsburg rulers while bearing sixteen children between 1738 and 1756. Faith also played a major role in Maria Theresa’s reign, as she was a devout Catholic.

Maria Theresa born on May 13, 1717, and was the eldest daughter of Emperor Charles VI. Early in Maria’s life, Charles VI found himself the sole remaining male Hapsburg. An old European law prohibited a woman from inheriting her father's kingdom. Concerned that he may not father a son, Charles VI issued a decree guaranteeing the right of succession to his daughter. After the death of Charles VI in 1740, challenges to the Hapsburg lands led to the War of the Austrian Succession.

During the last several years of her father's reign, two wars had left the army weakened. Since Charles VI had believed that his daughter would surrender true power to her husband, Francis Stephen, he did not take the time to teach her the workings of the government. Without money, a strong army, and knowledge of state affairs, Maria Theresa knew she had to rely on her judgment and strength of character.

King Frederick II of Prussia was her first challenger, occupying Silesia. Frederick’s actions began the War of Austrian Succession. This challenge became the dominating element of Maria Theresa's long reign. The archduchess was determined that her internal and external policies would focus on the strengthening of her state in order to defeat the Prussian monarch. She began by initiating reforms. Maria Theresa strengthened the army by doubling the number of troops and reorganized the tax structure in her country. This would ensure a predictable annual income to support the costs of the government and army. Economic reform fueled prosperity for her empire. The war ended with the loss of Silesia, but her empire intact.

Two years after fighting another war with Prussia, Maria Theresa suffered a great personal loss, the death of her husband, Francis Stephen. Her love for him was so deep that from the day of his death until her own death in 1780, she dressed in black. After Francis Stephen's death, Maria Theresa changed her foreign policy to maintaining peace. After fifteen years of war and frustration, Maria Theresa was reluctant to get involved in conflicts that might prove unsuccessful. She also recognized the eldest of her sixteen children, Joseph II, as emperor and co-ruler.

Maria Theresa was courageous, generous and kind. In the later part of her rule, she focused more on human concerns and less on financial improvements. She became increasingly involved with the problem of serf reform. Throughout the empire, the peasants were obligated to pay monetary and work dues to their lords. In 1771, Maria Theresa issued a serfdom reform designed to regulate the peasants' labor payments in all of the Hapsburg lands.

The empress had a long reign which spanned forty years. She died on November 29, 1780. Some historians have termed Maria Theresa as the savior of the Hapsburg Dynasty. Her efforts to transform her empire into a modern state solidified the Hapsburg rule. Although when she came to the throne, her state appeared to be falling apart, Maria Theresa provided a strong foundation for the continuation of the Hapsburg Dynasty into the modern era.
Frederick the Great Biography

Frederick II, more often called Frederick the Great, brought Prussia from a state of general weakness to that of great power and wealth. His motto throughout his life simply stated that he was the "first servant of the state." Not only did he increase its military strength, but Frederick doubled the land holdings of Prussia. King Frederick II’s people loved him so greatly they classed him as an “enlightened monarch”.

King Frederick II was born in Berlin on January 24, 1712. His mother was Sophie Dorothea von Hannover while his father was King Frederick William I, the soldier-king. His family was part of the House of Hohenzollern, the Prussian royal family. He had two sisters and a brother. Frederick the Great, along with his sisters, loved music and poetry. This did not please his father and from a young age, Frederick was pushed into learning the art of war. His father would not hear of Frederick II leading anything but a military life, and he would often beat his son to get his mind back onto subjects of warfare. Once, Frederick II tried to run away from his militaristic life with his friend Hans Hermann von Katte. They were eventually caught and von Katte was executed in front of Frederick II as an example. In this way Frederick II involuntarily grew up with an excellent military education.

Throughout Frederick II’s life he led Prussia through many military victories. Using his great military genius, he took Prussia through many wars with Austria, Russia, and France. The two largest of these wars were the Seven Years War and the War of Austrian Succession. Prussia came out of these wars stronger than when it went in, even considering its small pool of resources. Frederick's work through the war effectively doubled the size of Prussia and earned it respect among the other European powers.

Frederick the Great led a rather musical life once his father died. Throughout his musical career he composed 121 flute sonatas, four flute concertos, and a symphony. Frederick II’s religious views remained hidden throughout his life, and most thought that he was a deist who put his country first in his life. A deist believes that a supreme being created the world, but everything thereafter can be explained through experimentation and observation. He believed that everyone must find his own salvation. With that thought in mind, he spread religious freedom throughout all of Prussia.

Frederick also brought great reform to Prussia. He gave the press much more freedom and established more respect for the law. King Frederick also established a pride in one’s job. The people loved him for his efforts, and looked up to him as a role model. Frederick II knew that to make a strong country you must first have reform. He died peacefully on August 17, 1786.

Overall Frederick the Great was an excellent monarch who had the love of his people backing him up. Throughout his reign Frederick II brought great prosperity and land to Prussia. Prussia also was given great religious freedom throughout the reign of Frederick II. In the end, Frederick the Great dramatically changed Prussia for the better, and his efforts were still visible in the 20th century.