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### Title

: Maria Theresa: The Habsburg Empress in Her Time

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1sg7g907>

### Journal

Early Modern Women An Interdisciplinary Journal, 18(2)

### ISSN

1933-0065

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### Publication Date

2024-03-01

### DOI

10.1086/728604

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Peer reviewed

The fifth chapter draws attention to social and economic diversity among the patrons of Bologna's women artists. The situation was perhaps not so different in Florence, where, in the early seventeenth century, Artemisia Gentileschi and Arcangela Paladini worked for the highest echelons of patrons, while the nuns trained by Nelli at Santa Caterina da Siena churned out inexpensive devotional works of a rustic nature for a humble (or voluntarily ascetic) clientele. Women's self-referentiality in art, either with visible signatures or self-portraiture, is the focus of the sixth chapter, and here Bohn discovered a remarkable discrepancy with patterns among male artists. She notes that the trend may have been instigated by the woman artist's need to defend her own accomplishments in the face of skepticism, but a woman artist's signature could also enhance the value of the work for its owner. The seventh chapter examines the cerebral implications of drawings—praise for which early authors heaped on Sirani. We are reminded that women were excluded from life-drawing classes involving the male nude, but it bears recalling that Patrizia Cavazzini has shown that male academicians were sometimes prohibited from drawing the female nude.

The pan-Italian perspective that Bohn brings to these chapters and the pleasing clarity of the writing make her volume an optimal choice for required reading in courses on early women artists and on Italian baroque art more generally. The volume furnishes a superb foundation for new investigations of early women artists anywhere; yet in the case of Bologna, its wide-ranging, stimulating, and exhaustively researched portrayal of the causes, conditions, and commonalities of women artists is truly an achievement for the ages. One can only hope that similarly erudite studies on women artists of other Italian cities will soon appear to fill out the picture.

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*Maria Theresa: The Habsburg Empress in Her Time.* Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger. Translated by Robert Savage. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021. 1,104 pp. \$39.95. ISBN 9780691179063.

If asked to name the most important female monarch in European history, who would you say? Elizabeth I or Victoria of Britain might come to mind first, especially to readers in the Anglophone world. Others might propose Marie Antoinette of

France or Catherine the Great of Russia, since each has attained fame beyond her historical value to become part of popular culture. Further down the list of possible answers, if on it at all, would be Empress Maria Theresa (1717–1780). Born an Austrian archduchess, she ruled over the multilingual and multicultural Habsburg Empire for forty years, during which time she guided the transformation of multiple states into their modern forms and played a major role in international politics, all while becoming an inspirational symbol of idealized womanhood and giving birth to sixteen children. Few women have exerted influence in politics and culture as profoundly as she. Maria Theresa is a centrally important figure in Austrian history, but her influence can be traced across the European continent far beyond that nation's modern borders. Despite this, her achievements remain less well recognized outside of specialist circles than any of the monarchical women mentioned above, not least Marie Antoinette, her youngest daughter.

Who was this woman whose statue graces one of the most prominent squares in Vienna and who gives her name to Austria's most prestigious school, the Theresianum? What did she do to warrant such veneration? Scholars who have written about Maria Theresa, myself included, have long proposed that she deserves greater prominence in our picture of European history. Yet challenges involved in studying her have prevented this, particularly among English-speaking scholars. One major hurdle is linguistic. Understanding Habsburg history requires knowledge of German, but important scholarship also appears in Czech, Hungarian, and other central and eastern European languages not easily learned. Maria Theresa has been abundantly mythologized since her reign, with much inaccurate information about her life repeated in the historical record as if fact. Scholars have also projected political agendas onto her, nowhere more so than in Austria. Historians there styled her as that nation's *Landesmutter*, the idealized mother of her people, in an overtly nationalistic and celebratory manner. The major source on her life and reign, Alfred Ritter von Arneth's ten-volume *Geschichte Maria Theresias*, which appeared between 1863 and 1879, is only the most prominent of many studies that narrativize Maria Theresa's life to celebrate it as the golden age of Austrian greatness.

To rectify this situation, scholars now have Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger's impressive and important book, first published in German in 2017 and newly translated into English. It provides a grandly scaled, deeply researched, and meticulously analyzed account of Maria Theresa's life that will do much to dispel tenacious misconceptions about this important woman. Much of the book is devoted to eradicating myth and fiction from Maria Theresa's life story, since these have long influenced

writing on her. An important basis for Stollberg-Rilinger's approach is that Maria Theresa's actions are easily misunderstood when viewed through nineteenth- and twentieth-century conceptions of femininity. A major dimension of the book, then, is examining what Maria Theresa's actions meant within the social and cultural systems of the eighteenth century, which are less familiar today than many of the more accessible myths. This explains the book's title, which seeks to understand Maria Theresa in her time and redefine her significance within current knowledge of that historical period.

The book is structured chronologically. It begins with the political conditions that brought Maria Theresa to power, not as a queen, wife, or regent, but as a sovereign ruler and genetic link in the hereditary line of succession. The remarkable story of her accession to the throne, a rare event in European history and unprecedented in the Habsburg context, has been retold many times, but here receives a detailed and intelligible analysis. Subsequent chapters treat the wars in which the empire was involved—the War of Austrian Succession that brought her to power, the Seven Years' War that reshaped European power alliances—and various other aspects of her life. Several chapters deal with policy decisions enacted with her support; these are perhaps not the most exciting dimensions of her story but are crucial to understanding her influence. Other chapters center more closely on the empress as a person and discuss her body, her daily activities, her conception of family, her religious beliefs, and the court culture in which she participated. Chapter 6, "Body Politics," has broad applications beyond Maria Theresa specifically, since it deals with the idea of the imperial body as a metaphor of state, a subject much analyzed among historians and recently approached from feminist perspectives. In other chapters, Stollberg-Rilinger takes the reader far from the empress herself with the intent of explaining the world in which she operated. There are lengthy discussions of the structure of the Habsburg court (chap. 7) and of what it meant to be a royal subject in this era (chap. 13). Rather than being diversions, such deep dives into historical context illuminate both Maria Theresa's motives and their effects in gratifyingly precise terms. I could imagine chapters of this book being required reading for students interested in understanding the mechanics of governance in early modern Europe, the structure of European society, or (in the compelling discussion of vampires in chapter 11) how monarchs managed their subjects' folk beliefs. At every point Stollberg-Rilinger differentiates the historical conditions and ideological systems that Maria Theresa knew from subsequent historical estimations of her.

In some respects, the book's greatest achievement is its scope. As its title suggests, the picture that emerges here is of a powerful monarch but also very much a human being embedded in a specific social and ideological setting. One gets a vivid picture of the eighteenth century from reading it: the challenges involved in the day-to-day activities of governance, the peculiar combination of centralization and decentralization that characterized absolutist rule, the experiences of court ceremony, letter writing, and elite child rearing all come alive in its pages. The translation is readable, with only a few odd word choices to occasionally interrupt its rhythm. This book repays the commitment involved in reading it by offering generous insight into an important life, and for that Stollberg-Rilinger deserves our praise.

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*Household Goods and Good Households in Late Medieval London: Consumption and Domesticity after the Plague.* Katherine L. French. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021. 314 pp. \$65.00. ISBN 9780812253054.

How did peoples' lives change after the experiences of the Plague? Katherine L. French starts her book from a strikingly current question given our efforts to handle the recent COVID-19 pandemics. However, this is not one of the many books that were initiated by the current situation. French conceptualized the book in 2011 when she was renovating her house and began to think about how different owners had lived in that building and adapted it to their needs. It was only in the last two years of her work that the experience of the pandemic influenced the book.

The thesis the author presents is that the years following the experience of the Great Plague pandemic of 1348 brought about major changes to domestic culture. Her focus is the city of London with its merchants and artisans during the period 1300–1540, with particular attention to the years following the Plague. People changed how they furnished and organized their houses as well as the things they produced and bought and the meanings that they ascribed to them. These changes in material culture were also reflected in transformations in gender roles. The late Middle Ages have already been identified as associated with two revolutions: the so-called consumer revolution that provides an essential frame for the book, and a second revolution that plays a lesser role and is mostly considered only indirectly, the revolution in writing (and archiving).