

Sisi Museum

EXPERIENCE THE IMPERIAL HOFBURG

Sisi Museum

In April 1854 the sixteen-year-old Duchess Elisabeth in Bavaria travelled to Vienna to marry her cousin, Emperor Franz Joseph. After the wedding she moved into her suite of rooms in the Hofburg and entered the rarefied world of the Austrian imperial court. You are now entering the Sisi Museum. The displays in the following six rooms will allow you to explore myth and reality of the empress’s life.

May we remind you that no photography is permitted from this point onwards.

31 Death

On 10 September 1898 Europe was shaken by the news that Empress Elisabeth of Austria had been assassinated. Elisabeth’s tragic death brought the troubled and unhappy life of a highly unusual and often misunderstood personality to an end. However, it also contributed to the forming of an enduring myth that Elisabeth herself had fostered through her unconventional lifestyle. How did this myth arise? The exhibition you are about to see tries to answer these questions by exploring the personality of the empress.

32 The creation of a myth

The newspaper cuttings in the displays in front of and behind you give some idea of how Elisabeth was seen by contemporary journalists. It is evident that during her lifetime Elisabeth did not dominate the front pages of the press as the beautiful, popular and acclaimed empress – in fact there were very few reports about Elisabeth, as she withdrew from her public role as empress at a very early stage and during the last few years of her life was seldom in Vienna. Since the newspapers published within the empire were also subject to strict censorship, critical reports of the empress were unlikely to appear. It was Emperor Franz Joseph who assumed the far more important role here: as the “good old emperor“ he had a place in his peoples’ hearts and was universally liked. This is borne out by newspaper reports following the death of the empress, in which sympathy was expressed for the emperor as the victim of yet another heavy blow of fate. It was not until after her tragic death that Elisabeth became stylised as an empress revered for her selflessness and goodness – thus establishing yet another false image.

33 The icon

During Elisabeth’s lifetime little public interest was shown in the reclusive and rather “odd“ empress – it was not until after her death that the commercial possibilities of marketing the image of the beautiful but unhappy empress who had suffered a tragic death were recognised, exploited and thus reinforced. Soon there was a rash of memorial pictures, commemorative coins and other memorabilia of the empress in circulation.

34 Monuments

After Elisabeth’s death numerous monuments to her were erected. Even before Vienna had initiated any memorial projects, two competitions for a commemorative monument were held in Budapest in 1901 and 1902. These activities and similar projects in Salzburg led to the forming of a memorial committee in Vienna. The search for a suitable site was marred by dissensions which ended only when the emperor decided in favour of the Volksgarten.

35 The Klotz statue

The simple standing figure made for the Salzburg monument inspired the Viennese sculptor Hermann Klotz, who added an element of movement to his interpretation. His majestic figure, portrayed in mid-stride, was made as a statuette and a life-size figure. His work was greeted with great acclaim, and a copy of the statuette graced the emperor’s study at Schönbrunn Palace. The life-size figure displayed here was made as a gift to the Republic of Austria by Archduke Franz Salvator, the empress’s son-in-law.

36 Elisabeth and the movies

It was the movies that made the figure of “Sissi“ known and admired all over the world, in particular the trilogy of films starring the young Romy Schneider and directed by Ernst Marischka in the 1950s. They created the

image – still powerful today – of the young, sweet, unaffected “Sissi“, which corresponds only partially with the empress’s actual personality. Let’s take a closer look at the historical figure of Elisabeth:

37 Childhood in Bavaria

Elisabeth was born in Munich on 24th December 1837 to Duke Maximilian in Bavaria and Ludovika, the daughter of the Bavarian king. Sisi – as Elisabeth was always called in her family – took after her father in many respects: the duke had the common touch, loved the outdoor life and was a keen horseman and traveller. Together with her seven brothers and sisters, Sisi enjoyed a carefree childhood in Munich and at the family country estate of Possenhofen on Lake Starnberg, a world far removed from etiquette, ceremonial and the constraints of courtly life. All her life, Elisabeth was particularly close to her brother Karl Theodor, two years her junior, who was nicknamed “Gackel“. In the case on the left is a watercolour showing brother and sister. A replica of the dress Elisabeth is wearing in the portrait is displayed in this room.

38 Engagement at Ischl

In the summer of 1853 Sisi accompanied her mother and elder sister Helene – called Néné – to Bad Ischl in order to celebrate the 23rd birthday of her cousin, the young Emperor Franz Joseph. The real reason for this journey, however, was the marriage plans being hatched by the two mothers, who were sisters. However, it all turned out quite differently. Franz Joseph fell head over heels in love with the 15-year-old Sisi. The formal betrothal ceremony took place on 19th August. Sisi is subdued, overawed by all the attention being paid to her. Franz Joseph is overjoyed. His mother, Archduchess Sophie, takes pity on the timorous Sisi. Contrary to popular legend, she is not opposed to her son’s choice and is glad to see him so happy.

39 Ballgown

After the betrothal in Ischl, Sisi returns to Bavaria, where preparations for the wedding begin immediately. Among other things, Sisi is prepared for her future role as Empress of Austria. Her fears and apprehension of the Viennese court start to grow. She feels that with her engagement at Bad Ischl she has set foot on the stage of world history and relinquished her personal freedom. Very few of Elisabeth’s dresses have been preserved. The ballgown here is a copy of an original held in the Kunsthistorisches Museum which is now too fragile to be displayed. There is evidence to suggest that Elisabeth wore this unusual gown at the farewell ball given just before her departure for Vienna. A particularly interesting detail is the oriental ornamentation on the stole of the gown: beside a sultan’s mark is an embroidered Arabic inscription, which translates as Oh my lord, what a beauteous dream.

40 The wedding

Elisabeth’s wedding on 24th April 1854 marks the beginning of a new stage in her life. She is overtaxed by the elaborate formal ceremonies in which she is the focus of attention, and by the huge burden of expectation placed on her. In the middle of her first reception as the new empress she bursts into tears of exhaustion and leaves the room.

Elisabeth initially tries to fulfil the expectations placed on her. The imperial couple have four children, but the eldest child, Sophie, dies at the age of two. Elisabeth is desperate but is compelled to suppress her feelings, as her official position and duties as empress have to take precedence over personal sensibilities.

41 Raab

On the wall is a painting by Georg Raab potraying the empress on the occasion of her silver wedding anniversary in 1879. In the portrait she is wearing the famous set of ruby jewellery, part of the Habsburg crown jewels which no longer exist today. A replica of this famous jewellery is displayed in the stele beside the painting.

42 Winterhalter

The young empress begins to suffer from insomnia, a lack of appetite and a persistent cough. As a preventative measure against lung disease her doctors recommend that she is sent to Madeira. For the first time Sisi is again free of any obligations and can enjoy life far from the stifling constraints of the court. When Elisabeth returns to the Viennese court after an absence of two years, a profound transformation has taken place. The once graceful but shy and melancholic young girl has become a self-confident, proud beauty. This is the period in which the famous portraits by Franz Xaver Winterhalter were painted. The most famous of this series, painted in 1865, is without doubt the portrait displayed here which shows Elisabeth wearing a ballgown known as the “star dress“ together with the famous

diamond stars in her hair. Elisabeth owned a set of 27 diamond stars, some of which she later bequeathed to her granddaughter, Archduchess Elisabeth, daughter of Crown Prince Rudolf. The glass stele contains a replica of these diamond stars. .

43 Queen of Hungary

Elisabeth increasingly makes deliberate use of the power of her beauty to achieve her own ends. She has little interest in active politics and interferes in her husband’s affairs of state only once, in aid of the Hungarian cause. Elisabeth feels a great affection for the proud and temperamental Hungarian people, who have been subject to absolutist rule since the suppression of the revolution in 1849. She becomes the fervent champion of Hungarian interests and has close contact with leading Hungarian representatives. It is without doubt due chiefly to her efforts that Franz Joseph eventually signed the Compromise of 1866 which recognised Hungary’s historical rights and established the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. In 1867 the coronation of Franz Joseph and Elisabeth as King and Queen of Hungary takes place in the Cathedral of St Matthew in Budapest.

44 The Hungarian coronation robes

Displayed in front of the portrait of Elisabeth as Queen of Hungary is another dress. This is a replica of the gown she wore at the Hungarian coronation. It was made for her by Worth, the famous couturiers in Paris. When Franz Joseph and Elisabeth emerged from St Matthew’s after the coronation ceremony they were hailed by cheering crowds. Elisabeth withdrew as soon as possible to exchange her heavy gown with its train for a simple tulle dress. The stele beside the dress contains a reconstruction of the Hungarian coronation jewellery, which no longer exists today.

45 Pomp and circumstance

Elisabeth fulfils her duties as empress with increasing reluctance. She dislikes pomp, finds court ceremonial tedious and despises the rigid hierarchical structures and intrigue at the Viennese court.

46 Riding

The empress takes refuge from the court in sporting activities, the cult of her own beauty and in travelling. One of Elisabeth’s greatest passions since childhood has been riding. Her father had taught her acrobatic riding as a child, and now the empress trains intensively, becoming one of the best and most daring horsewomen in Europe. Her exploits when out hunting to hounds go to the bounds of what is humanly possible. Here for the first time we encounter a side of Elisabeth’s personality that consciously seeks to challenge her own limits, among other things in extreme sporting achievements where she deliberately exposes herself to risk.

47 Beauty

Elisabeth was regarded as one of the most beautiful women of her time and was conscious of her reputation. The major part of her daily routine was devoted to her beauty regime. Elisabeth was particularly proud of her thick, ankle-length hair, the dressing and styling of which occupied two to three hours each day. In order to preserve her much-admired beauty Elisabeth tried out countless recipes for cosmetic preparations. Here you can see some of the original recipes. Elisabeth swore by such bizarre methods as raw veal worn overnight underneath a leather face mask. Elisabeth was especially concerned to preserve her slender figure. She was about 5 feet 8 inches or 172 centimetres tall and weighed between 99 and 103 pounds or 45 and 47 kilos, and her waist measured an incredible 20 inches or 51 centimetres. Elisabeth tried numerous different diets to maintain her weight. Her personal weighing scales played an important role in her routine: Elisabeth weighed herself daily and with advancing age tried ever more excessive diets. The rumours that she drank raw meat juices are, however, false – the raw veal was tenderised in a meat press and the resulting juices seasoned and boiled before Elisabeth drank them. The story that the empress consistently starved herself in order to remain slim should also be consigned to the realm of legend; receipts from various pastry shops show that Elisabeth was extremely fond of confectionery and ice-cream.

48 Health

Though fit and aware of her health, the empress was also under constant medical supervision. She knew that dental hygiene was essential to both her health and beauty. The dental instruments belonging to her personal dentist and letters from her close friend Countess Ferenczy provide evidence of regular treatment.

49 Centre

After the tragic suicide of her only son, Rudolf, in 1889, Elisabeth becomes

increasingly bitter, withdrawing more and more into herself, becoming reclusive and unapproachable and wearing only black.

50 Display case with fans and mourning jewellery

Fans, veils and parasols become indispensable accessories for the empress from an early stage, enabling her to conceal her face from the gaze of curious strangers. Elisabeth hated being stared at. Aged fifty she wrote: “Perhaps later on I will go around in a veil all the time, and not even those closest to me shall see my face again.“ To go with her mourning dress, the empress wore jewellery made of black paste stones and jet. It was customa-ry to avoid using precious gems for mourning jewellery, the plainness of the material serving to emphasise retreat from the world during the mourning period.

51 Refuges

With time, Elisabeth learns to defend her interests at court and begins to lead a life in line with her own ideas. She now does exactly what she wants and increasingly refuses to fulfil her offical obligations as empress. Franz Joseph and Elisabeth have become estranged. Elisabeth finds the lure of the infinite ocean irresistible and dreams of soaring free like a seagull: I am a seagull, from no land... In order to distract herself Elisabeth goes on long journeys and seeks out refuges, places where she can live in freedom. These include the Hungarian chateau of Gödöllő near Budapest, the Hermesvilla in the Lainzer Tiergarten on the outskirts of Vienna as well as the Achilleion on the Greek island of Corfu. Here she has a magnificent villa built in Pompeian style and named after her favourite figure from Greek mythology, furnishing it with valuable antiques. But only a short time afterwards the increasingly restless empress loses interest in the Achilleion too and has it put up for sale. In the event, it remained unsold until afer her death..

52 Titania

Elisabeth, who has written poetry since her youth, increasingly uses her romantic versifying as a means of escape. She worships Homer, and writes numerous poems inspired by her great idol, the German poet Heinrich Heine, which reveal not only her disappointment, melancholy and longings but also her misanthropy and increasing isolation. She begins to identify with Titania, the fairy queen from Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream. In order to please his wife, Franz Joseph even has her bedroom at the Hermes Villa in the Lainzer Tiergarten in Vienna, which she calls “Titania’s enchanted castle“, decorated with scenes from A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

53 Travels

“Never stay in one spot for long“, writes Elisabeth. Elisabeth’s wanderlust becomes increasingly intense – the further away she is from Vienna the more at ease she feels. With the excuse of seeking relief for her poor health, the empress goes on long journeys, eager to encounter foreign lands and cultures. Above all she loves travelling by ship, especially when the sea is rough, so she can feel close to the elements. On the deck of her yacht is a glass pavilion from where she has an unobstructed view of the ocean. Here she has herself bound to a chair when storms rage, when the crew fear for their lives, declaring: “This I do like Odysseus, because the waves lure me“.

54 Travelling medicine chest

This 63-piece medicine chest was part of the empress’s luggage. As well as numerous mustard plasters, bandages, salves and vials it also contains a syringe filled with cocaine. At that time opiates were used differently to the way they are now in modern medicine. Cocaine was valued for its antispas-modic and antidepressant effects, and it was administered intravenously in the case of menstrual pain and during the menopause.

55 Court saloon car

In contrast to the simple living conditions on board ship, the saloon car built specially for her journeys across Europe is luxuriously appointed. You can enter and explore the reconstruction of the carriage here. The original imperial saloon car can be visited at the Technisches Museum Wien, the Austrian National Museum of Science and Technology.

56 Destinations

“Destinations are only desirable because a journey lies in between. If I arrived somewhere and knew that I would never leave again, even a sojourn in a paradise would turn into hell for me“, wrote Elisabeth. Her restlessness increases, and family and confidantes grow ever more worried about the melancholic empress. In 1897 her daughter Marie Valerie writes in her diary: “Unfortunately Mama wants to be alone more than ever ... and only talks of sad things“. And an entry in May 1898 reads: “... the deep sadness that used to descend on Mama only for periods at a

time now never leaves her. Today Mama said again that she often longs for death ...”

57 Assassination and funeral

In September 1898 Elisabeth is taking a four-week health cure at Territet near Montreux. On 9 September, accompanied by her lady-in-waiting, the Countess Irma Sztáray, she makes an excursion to Pregny in order to visit Baroness Julie Rothschild. In the evening she travels on to Geneva, where she spends the night, intending to return to Montreux the next day. To keep her identity secret, she uses her usual incognito of the “Countess of Hohenembs” when registering at the Hotel Beau Rivage. Despite this precaution, the next morning a Geneva newspaper carries a report that the Empress of Austria is staying at the hotel. This report is also seen by Luigi Lucheni, an Italian anarchist who has come to Geneva intending to assassinate the Prince of Orléans. However, the prince has changed his itinerary at the last moment and will not be visiting Geneva. Lucheni is far from being disappointed – he now has a far more prominent victim in his sights.

On the morning of 10th September Elisabeth goes shopping and pays a visit to her favourite patisserie, intending to take the ship back to Montreux in the early afternoon. On the way to the landing stage Luigi Luccheni is lying in wait for the empress. He rushes up to her, stabbing her in the breast with a file. Elisabeth falls to the ground, but believing she has simply been knocked over she gets to her feet in a daze and makes her way on board, not wanting to miss the boat. Shortly afterwards the empress collapses. When her bodice is opened a tiny, inconspicuous stab wound is discovered. The ship returns to shore immediately and the empress is carried back to the hotel, where she dies shortly afterwards. When Franz Joseph receives the news his only words are: “You do not know how much I loved this woman”.

Imperial Apartments

58 Trabantenstube

From here you now enter the historic residential apartments of the imperial couple. First you will see the suite occupied by Emperor Franz Joseph which then leads into the private apartments of Elisabeth.

59 Audience Waiting Room

Emperor Franz Joseph chose the Imperial Chancellery Wing for his apartments, which contained both the official state rooms and his private suite, and which he used until his death in 1916. The emperor held audiences twice a week. The times were announced in the Wiener Zeitung, and after one had received an appointment, one climbed the magnificent Emperor’s Staircase and entered this room in which one waited to gain admittance to the Audience Chamber. The special feature of these audiences with Emperor Franz Joseph was that any of his subjects, irrespective of their birth or rank, could ask to speak to their sovereign. As there were only limited rules of dress, one would have seen national costumes alongside tailcoats and military uniforms decorated with orders and medals as well as the silk dresses with trains worn by the ladies present, giving a colourful illustration of the regional and ethnic variety of the Habsburg monarchy. The walls are decorated with three monumental mural paintings by Johann Peter Krafft. They were painted in 1832 and depict important events from the reign of Emperor Franz I, the grandfather of Emperor Franz Joseph.

60 Audience Chamber

Here the emperor stood to receive people who had sought an audience with him, and would initiate the conversation himself. On the standing desk lay the audience schedule which listed the people who had been given an appointment for an audience as well as the reason they had come. Here one could introduce oneself to the emperor, thank him for an honour, plead for clemency for oneself or one’s relatives, or present a private matter. Since Franz Joseph received up to a hundred persons in one morning these audiences usually lasted only a few minutes. The emperor ended the audience by inclining his head slightly.

61 Conference Room

In this room the conferences of ministers took place which were always chaired by the emperor himself. The marble bust and the sword of honour on the right beside the far wall niche recall Field Marshal Radetzky, one of the most renowned military leaders of the monarchy. He was immortalised in the Radetzky March composed in his honour by Johann Strauss the Elder. The paintings show battle scenes from the Hungarian revolution of 1849.

Through the open door in the background you can take a look at the “Emperor’s Wardrobe” which during Franz Joseph’s era contained wardrobes and chests of drawers in which the emperor’s clothing was kept. Franz Joseph invariably wore military uniform. Only on private journeys did he wear civilian dress; when out shooting he wore Lederhosen, a green waistcoat, walking boots and a Styrian hat.

62 Study

Emperor Franz Joseph took his responsibility as the emperor of a multi-national empire very seriously and saw his role not in the pomp of official receptions but rather as the “foremost official” of his empire, which numbered 56 million inhabitants. He thus spent most of each day in his study scrutinizing all the official documents that required his signature. His working day began before 5 am and did not end until late in the evening after attendance at official dinners, receptions or ballroom festivities. Behind the writing-desk and on the left-hand wall are portraits of Elisabeth by Franz Xaver Winterhalter showing the empress with her hair loose. These paintings were his favourite portraits of his “Angel Sisi”, as Franz Joseph called his beloved wife. The open “jib” or concealed door in the background leads into the room of the emperor’s personal valet-de-chambre, Eugen Ketterl. Responsible for Franz Joseph’s personal welfare, he was at the emperor’s beck and call at all times and served him his breakfast as well as light meals at his desk.

63 Bedroom

When the imperial couple moved into separate sleeping quarters, this room became the emperor’s bedroom. Franz Joseph slept on this simple iron bed, a habit reflecting the rather Spartan lifestyle preferred by the emperor. He began his day long before daybreak, as a rule at half-past three in the morning. Only if he had attended late-night functions the night before did he allow himself another hour’s sleep. First the emperor was bathed by an attendant in a rubber tub which was set up in his bedroom every day. The simple dressing-table for his daily toilette that you can see by the bed indicates not only that Franz Joseph preferred the modest furnishings of his private chambers but that he rejected any kind of luxury as superfluous. After he had dressed, he knelt at his prayer-stool to say his morning prayers. Afterwards breakfast was served to the emperor in his study.

64 Large Salon

The decoration of the room is largely from the 18th century while the furnishings date from Franz Joseph’s time. Like all the rooms in the Hofburg it was heated by ceramic stoves. These stoves were originally stoked with wood by the “imperial-royal court stove-stokers” from outside the room via a “heating passage” that ran behind the walls of the room to avoid making the rooms dirty. Gradually from 1824 onwards a hot-air heating system invented by an Austrian scientist called Meissner was installed to supply the stoves with hot air.

65 Small Salon/Memorial Room for Emperor Maximilian of Mexico

During Franz Joseph’s time this room was used as a smoking room to which the gentlemen could retire, as it was considered impolite to smoke in the presence of ladies. Today the room commemorates Emperor Maximilian of Mexico, Franz Joseph’s younger brother. His portrait hangs on the right-hand wall. Maximilian was offered the crown of Mexico in 1864 and despite the difficult political situation there accepted it at the urging of his ambitious wife, Charlotte of Belgium, whose portrait hangs on the left-hand wall. Shortly after the couple arrived in Mexico, France withdrew its support, which meant that Maximilian was at the mercy of the revolutionary forces under the command of Benito Juarez. He was taken prisoner and eventually executed in 1867. This is the last room of the emperor’s apartments.

66 Empress Elisabeth’s Apartments: Sitting Room/Bedroom

From 1857 Elisabeth occupied the main floor of the Amalia Wing which was adjacent to the emperor’s apartments. Elisabeth used this room both as her private drawing-room and as her bedroom. The bed stood in the middle of the room and was shielded by a folding screen. At the writing-desk in the far window embrasure Elisabeth attended to her correspondence and wrote some of her numerous poems. Today a facsimile of her Will is displayed on the desk.

67 Dressing Room/Exercise Room

The dressing-cum-exercise room was the empress’s most important and at the same time most personal room and one where she spent most of her time.

On the left you can see the empress’s dressing table where she sat for two to three hours a day while having her hair dressed. The empress utilised

these hours for reading and learning foreign languages. Besides English and French Elisabeth also spoke perfect Hungarian. Above all, she loved Greek antiquity and mythology; on the small chair beside the dressing table sat her Greek Reader, Constantin Christomanos, who read extracts from Homer’s Iliad or Odyssee to Elisabeth while her hair was being elaborately dressed, or checked the Greek exercises completed by the empress, who was also learning Ancient and Modern Greek.

Here in this room – to the horror and incomprehension of the court household – the empress also went through her daily exercise programme in order to preserve her slender figure and keep fit. Facing you are the wall bars she used as well as the horizontal bar and the rings attached to the door frame.

68 Lavatory

From the dressing room you now proceed – as Elisabeth once did – to the empress’s bathroom. On the right in the short passage to the bathroom you can take a look at the empress’s lavatory. The water closet of painted porcelain is in the shape of a dolphin, and beside it is a small washbasin.

69 Bathroom

Beyond her dressing room Elisabeth had a bathroom in the modern sense of the word installed in 1876, the first member of the imperial family to do so. On the left is the empress’s bathtub, made of galvanised sheet copper; unfortunately the original fixtures and the wooden insert she used for bathing have not survived. Here Elisabeth took her baths, often steam or oil baths, sometimes bathing in cold water to stimulate her circulation. It was here, too, that her ankle-length hair was washed with a special mixture of egg yolk and Cognac, a procedure that took a whole day. The authentic linoleum floor-covering is particularly interesting in that it was the latest invention of the times. The door now leads you into the “Bergl Rooms”, which probably served the empress as dressing rooms.

70 The Bergl Rooms

The “Bergl Rooms” are named after the artist Johann Bergl, who decorated these rooms with mural paintings around 1766. Covering all the walls up to the ceiling, the murals transport the visitor into a luxuriant landscape of exotic flora and fauna. Stay a few minutes and give yourself time to discover the myriad details such as tiny birds, butterflies or exotic fruit that give life to this imaginary landscape. From here you now enter the empress’s Small Salon. But before you turn right, take a look on your left at the Large Salon of the empress, Room 71 .

71 Large Salon

Elisabeth used this room primarily as a reception room. The marble statue in the corner by Antonio Canova represents the muse Polyhymnia and was sent to Vienna in 1816 as a gift of the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia to Emperor Franz I. The table set with breakfast things serves as a reminder that the imperial couple occasionally breakfasted together here, a circumstance recorded in the contemporaneous drawing in front of you.

72 Small Salon

You are now in the empress’s Small Salon. This room was originally hung with portraits of Emperor Franz Joseph and their children, Gisela, Rudolf and Marie Valerie.

73 Large Antechamber

Via the Eagle Staircase in the adjoining Leopoldine Wing the empress accessed her apartments through the guards’room and the antechamber. The paintings on the wall take us back to the 18th century, to the time of Maria Theresa. It was this epoch that provided the model for the prevailing neo-Rococo style of interiors favoured by the court during the reign of Franz Joseph. Two of the paintings show scenes from the famous operas Il parnasso confuso by Gluck and Il trionfo d’amore by Gassmann performed by Maria Theresa’s children. One of the paintings shows the empress’s youngest daughter, Marie Antoinette, dancing in a ballet.

74 Alexander Apartments

The apartments in the north end of the Amalia Wing (towards Ballhausplatz) were occupied by Tsar Alexander of Russia during the Congress of Vienna between 1814 and 1815, when all the sovereigns of Europe gathered in Vienna to redivide Europe following the defeat of Napoleon. When Empress Elisabeth occupied the Amalia Wing, these rooms were used for the empress’s private functions. Between 1916 and 1918, the last Austrian emperor, Karl 1, used this suite for his official rooms.

75 Red Salon

Last used by Emperor Karl I as a reception room, the Red Salon is decorated

with precious tapestries made by the Gobelin factory in Paris in 1772 and 1776. The medallions in these hangings are based on paintings by François Boucher. The furniture, the screen and the fire screen are also upholstered in tapestry. The ensemble formed a part of the gifts given by the French king, Louis XVI, to his brother-in-law, Emperor Joseph II.

76 Dining Room

In this room you can see a table as it would have been laid for a dinner attended by the emperor’s immediate family during the time of Franz Joseph. Banquets only took place in the great State Rooms of the imperial residence. The table is laid according to the strict guidelines that regulated court ceremonial and which even governed dinners attended by the emperor’s immediate family. The table was always festively decked; in the middle stood gilded centrepieces decorated with flowers, fruit and sweetmeats. On silver cover plates lay elaborately folded damask napkins. Places were only laid for one course at a time. For soup and dessert porcelain plates were used, while all other courses were served on silver plates. The silver cutlery bore the imperial double eagle. Each course was accompanied by a different wine, served in a special glass. The green glasses were used for Rhenish wines. In addition, each person had his or her own wine and water carafes as well as an individual salt-cellar. In order to keep the food fresh and warm, it was transported from the court kitchens to the apartments in heated containers and then kept warm on coal- or later gas-fired warming plates.

The emperor sat at the centre of the table facing his guest of honour, the other guests being seated in order of the degree of relationship or rank. Ladies and gentlemen were seated alternately and conversation was only permitted with one’s immediate neighbours at table. Guests were served at the same time as the emperor, who began to eat straight away. Since the course was regarded as over once the emperor had laid down his knife and fork and plates were taken away immediately afterwards, the emperor always took care not to lay down his knife and fork until all his guests had finished eating. A dinner consisted of 9 to 13 courses and lasted a maximum of 45 minutes. Coffee and liqueurs were served afterwards in an adjoining room, where the gentlemen were permitted to smoke.

This concludes our tour of the Imperial Apartments. If you’d like to know more about the imperial lifestyle at the Viennese court, why not visit the Imperial Furniture Collection where you can see numerous examples of furniture and interior decoration from many of the Habsburg residences.

Opposite the exit of the Imperial Apartments is a station of the U3 underground line: the Imperial Furniture Collection is only three stops and five minutes away. And don’t forget the Imperial Apartments at Schönbrunn Palace, the former summer residence of the imperial family.

After leaving the Imperial Apartments you will find yourself on Ballhausplatz, directly beside the entrance to the offices of the Austrian Federal President and opposite the Federal Chancellery. You’ll find a map giving your position at the exit.

Finally, we’d like to thank you for your visit, which contributes to the upkeep of the Imperial Apartments. We hope you have a pleasant stay in Vienna!

