

11-2019

Making Peace in an Age of War: Emperor Ferdinand III (1608–1657)

Mark Hengerer

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MAKING PEACE
IN AN AGE OF WAR

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MAKING PEACE IN AN AGE OF WAR

EMPEROR FERDINAND III (1608–1657)

MARK HENGERER

TRANSLATED BY ELKE SOLIDAY

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Cataloging-in-Publication data is on file at the Library of Congress.

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-55753-844-4

ePub: ISBN 978-1-61249-592-7

ePDF ISBN: 978-1-61249-593-4

Originally published in German as *Kaiser Ferdinand III. (1608-1657)*
Eine Biographie by Mark Hengerer. © 2012 Böhlau Verlag GmbH & Co.
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This book was made possible with support from the University of
Konstanz's Cluster of Excellence, "Cultural Bases of Integration,"
established within the framework of excellence initiatives by the German
federal and state governments.

Cover image: Ferdinand III, oil painting by Jan van den Hoecke.
Courtesy of Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

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INTRODUCTION

Emperor Ferdinand III ended the Thirty Years' War, saved the Habsburg Monarchy from peril, and consolidated a confessionally pacified as well as constitutionally stabilized Holy Roman Empire. However, unlike the “heroes and villains giving life to the opening phases” of this terrible war, he belonged quite a while to the “figures ignored by posterity” (Peter Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy*, 2009, xxiii), those who did not spectacularly start but who laboriously solved the seemingly indissoluble commixture of inherited civil and international wars. On the occasion of the fourth century of the later emperor's year of birth, Lothar Höbelt published a biography of Ferdinand III in 2008 (*Ferdinand III. (1608-1657) Friedenskaiser wider Willen*). The original version of this book (*Kaiser Ferdinand III. (1608-1657) Eine Biographie*), completed in the same year, appeared only in 2012 because the recording of music for Ferdinand III attached to the book had to go through a legal odyssey. Meanwhile, important German experts have, on the occasion of the fourth century of the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War, published studies on this conflict, such as Johannes Burkhardt's *Der Krieg der Kriege. Eine neue Geschichte des Dreißigjährigen Krieges* (2018), Georg Schmidt's *Die Reiter der Apokalypse. Geschichte des Dreißigjährigen Krieges* (2018), Heinz Duchhardt's *Der Weg in die Katastrophe des Dreißigjährigen Krieges. Die Krisendekade 1608-1618* (2017), and Herfried Münkler's *Der Dreißigjährige Krieg. Europäische Katastrophe, Deutsches Trauma 1618-1648* (2017). However, Peter Wilson (*ibid.*) is still right when he points out that the last thirteen years of the war—a period that largely coincides with the reign of Ferdinand III—is generally “compressed into a quarter of less of the text, much of which is devoted to discussing the peace and aftermath.” If Wilson's *The Thirty Years War* and Joachim Whaley's *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire* (2012) still stand out as fundamental works, and if Robert Bireley's *Ferdinand II, Counter-Reformation Emperor, 1578-1637* (2014) does indeed “fill the gap for this influential Austrian Habsburg Ruler” (viii), there is place for an English biography of this emperor's pathbreaking yet overshadowed successor.

Older publications on Ferdinand III are rare. The first historical account, the *Historia Di Ferdinando Terzo Imperatore*, a comprehensive volume in folio, was published in 1672 by Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato in Vienna and deals primarily with the reasons for the Thirty Years' War and with Ferdinand II, with whose death in 1637 it ends. Matthias Koch released a history of the Empire under the reign of Ferdinand III in two volumes (*Geschichte des Deutschen Reiches unter der Regierung Ferdinands III, 1865–1866*) that draws a rather positive image of the emperor; as it was still common, the focus lay on military and political events and deeds. Only in the last third of the twentieth century, several series of editions of sources—especially the *Documenta Bohemica Bellum Triennale Illustrantia*, the *Acta Pacis Westfalicae*, and the *Briefe und Akten zur Geschichte des Dreißigjährigen Krieges*—as well as a seminal series of (mainly) monographs on the Peace of Westphalia (*Schriftenreihe der Vereinigung zur Erforschung der Neueren Geschichte*) enabled researchers to reconsider the setting of Ferdinand III's life.

Konrad Repgen's call for the exploitation of private material, made in a balanced biographical article on Ferdinand III in an influential compendium (*Die Kaiser der Neuzeit 1510-1918*, 1990), led me to the *Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv* in Vienna, where I started reading the emperor's calendars in 1994, and to Rome, where I consulted young Ferdinand's pieces of homework on Aristotle, the *Mirror for Princes* dedicated to him, and other sources, mainly on the Court. Inspired by Robert J. W. Evans' pioneering *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1550-1700*, by approaches of cultural history as well as systems theory, I focused on the social and organizational transformation of the Imperial court in the sixteenth and mainly seventeenth centuries (*Kaiserhof und Adel. Eine Kommunikationsgeschichte der Macht in der Vormoderne*, 2004) before coming back to the person of Ferdinand III. As is Robert Bireley's book on Ferdinand II, this book on Ferdinand III is based mainly on archival sources from Rome, Vienna, Munich, and Stockholm. Höbelt's biography dwells on a wide range of primary sources, too, and provides a detailed history of events, but it makes use of metaphors and hyperboles to such a degree that a serious discussion seems unexpedient, even if he is comprehensive in the field of military history (see also his book *Von Nördlingen bis Jankau. Kaiserliche Strategie und Kriegführung 1634-1645*, 2016).

My focus lies on education, mindset, knowledge, and cultural and social patterns while I try to describe what life and being a ruler meant to an emperor in the now very distant seventeenth century; it is primarily from this perspective that I deal with Ferdinand's colossal challenge, the Thirty Years' War and the Peace of Westphalia. Thus, the private correspondence reveals a maudlin man: an emperor who was aloof toward his presumably best allies

and lamented that the death of a Spanish Habsburg prince, who had helped him win the important battle of Nördlingen in 1634, would prevent him from hunting because of the obligatory mourning ceremonies; a man who disgustingly detailed the horrors of war as well as the abject crimes committed by his own troops, and who tried in vain to prohibit them by establishing military discipline; and a fervent Catholic who, nonetheless, chose an exceedingly moderate confessor, fell out with subsequent popes, and dropped the intransigent Catholic Imperial Estates in order to make peace in the Empire—a peace that freed his own hands to impose Catholicism to his Austrian and Bohemian subjects. But again, shades of gray nuance the picture, with Ferdinand III honoring a multiconfessional state in Hungary and additional exceptions for Silesia, the Lower Austrian nobility, the army, and his court.

In fact, Ferdinand III wanted peace from the beginning, but he did not “want” to accept the essential French condition that he forsake not only his stirrups but also his Spanish ally to boot. The turn became possible not just because of political pressure from his equally desperate allies and because of military destitution, and not just because of the death of his Spanish wife in 1646 and the resulting decline of Spanish influence, but also as an application of a procedural element in policymaking deeply rooted in a dynasty whose members had learned for a long time to compromise on the very principles that seemed to assure their rule. Ferdinand III’s first lesson in compromise with what was called a clear conscience was his swearing in 1625 to maintain the multiconfessional order in Hungary rather than risk losing it for his dynasty and leaving all its people in the clutches of various Protestant denominations; his Catholic clerics formally consented. This procedure had allowed for Ferdinand’s father to compromise on his own principles a decade later at the Peace of Prague in order to pacify almost all of the Imperial Estates. Alas, the bloodshed lasted until 1648 mainly because of the intransigence of both Ferdinand II and the landgrave of Hesse-Kassel in their dispute over Hersfeld Abbey, a dispute that undermined the—almost successful—pacification within the Empire in 1635; this kind of conflict between the emperor and a few Protestant German princes gave leverage to Habsburg’s determined foreign enemies so that, when Ferdinand III had become emperor in 1637, he inherited a war that combined interests of Imperial Estates as well as of European countries. Caught in the midst of a terrible military crisis in 1645, Ferdinand III himself recognized the need to accommodate their demands. A strategy of seeking compromise by raising the stakes to such heights may seem criminal to modern observers. Yet, it seemed fair to contemporaries, whose human identity revolved around the soul, and whose salvation was not just important but essential. Furthermore, even if the Swedes abhorred Catholicism, they shared the emperor’s insistence on the right to determine his subjects’ faith,

as they, too, considered multiconfessionalism a deadly threat to any state's stability. What is more, besides the cession of Habsburg territories in the east of France, Ferdinand's highest stake was the Spanish alliance, which was a very political matter, not only a religious one. The end of the Austro-Spanish Habsburg alliance was, however, the last unmet requirement of the victorious French. This break would not only give France a free hand in its war against Spain but raised the chance that Louis XIV could, after victory in the Franco-Spanish War, marry the Spanish King's firstborn daughter and thereby acquire a hereditary title to the Spanish Empire. It was characteristic of Ferdinand's decision-making that it was an ultimatum of his Bavarian ally that seemingly forced him but in fact helped him to make this final concession, though it was his negotiators who used the emperor's 1645 declaration of a state of emergency the condition to capitulate to France's demand. His younger brother had earlier diagnosed this necessity, urging him that no cleric or councillor could, while upholding the principles of Catholicism or dynastic unity, advocate for the total military and political ruin of the Austrian Habsburgs.

The biographic approach also helps to apprehend an important reason why the Thirty Year's War took so long and was finally won by France, Sweden, and their German allies. In his very first military campaign in 1634, Ferdinand III and his Bavarian and Spanish allies won the battle of Nördlingen that pushed the Swedish army back into northern Germany for years and led to the nearly successful Peace of Prague in 1635. Thereafter, Ferdinand III tried to compel Sweden to conclude peace directly with him, thus separating it from its French ally, much as the French tried to get him to conclude peace without his Spanish allies. In the end, the emperor's own army was too weak to lead a war on the multiple fronts in France and northern Germany while simultaneously guarding its southeastern flank against looming threats to Hungary from Transylvania and the Ottoman Empire. In this situation, Ferdinand III (though he feared decisive losses) bet on decisive victories in battles. In his wishful thinking, such a battle would secure peace with Sweden, set the army free to fight France, and achieve an acceptable second peace with the Bourbons. Focusing on campaigns and battles, the emperor understood too late that the Swedish army was highly resilient and, more importantly, that wintering grounds secured by fortified places in conquered enemy territory were the key to victory, a key that the Swedish got into their hands very early. Ferdinand's first political success, the pacification of the vast majority of Imperial Estates since 1635, backfired on a military level: his army could not prey on wintering grounds of pacified or allied estates. Ferdinand III's misperception of the relevance of battles and provision was aggravated by his fear of a single strong Imperial Army with a powerful military leader. That had been the legacy of his father's struggle with the seemingly omnipotent commander Wallenstein,

whom Ferdinand II did not dare to discharge and, thus, had killed in 1634. Instead, Ferdinand III relied on the armies of his allied Imperial Estates, whose greater proximity to the French and Swedish invaders exposed them one after another to defeat and capitulation. His own field army was rather small and divided despite occasional and desperate rather than heroic efforts to strengthen them on the eve of battle. It was led by officers who were willing to accept that they could not deliver victory with the tight political strings put on them and without sufficient funding and provision.

Despite his forlorn political and military strategy and the inability to win a European war on the terms of the imperial Peace of Prague that his father had struck, Ferdinand III still shaped the constitution of the Empire. In 1640, he called an Imperial Diet (which had not met since 1613), struck the Peace of Westphalia, thereby changing the Empire's constitution, and worked with the postwar Imperial Diet to resolve residual issues left open by this peace. From negotiating experience gained from multiple Hungarian Diets, he stoically acquired a taste for confessional and even political diversity, so long as it could be contained within the distinct confines of his diverse dominions; he even accepted the definitive secularization of several imperial ecclesiastical principalities that his father Ferdinand II had tried to restore to the Catholic church. The new constitution settled the confessional and territorial disputes and guaranteed religious freedom in the private sphere—except for the Austrian hereditary lands, where Ferdinand insisted on the invariable right to determine his subjects' confession. It is fair to say that this new order finally resolved issues that had festered for a century following the Peace of Augsburg of 1555. Although Ferdinand III could still not establish a truly Imperial Army, he maintained his judicial rights as emperor. He could not implement majority voting in the Diet, which would have been beneficial as Catholic polities were in the majority, but was able to preserve juridical and political privileges. What is more, and decisive in the ending of interconfessional war in the Empire, was a procedural invention, the *itio in partes*, which pacified the Diet and the Empire by requiring that the Protestant and Catholic Estates meet separately to discuss and vote on all disputes involving religion, thereby assuring a majority consensus of *both* parties. Of capital importance for Ferdinand was that the peace and stability that issued from such a balanced constitution would enable him to have his son designated as the next emperor.

This was quite a success for a distressed and often defeated ruler. Happily for his territories, Ferdinand III bore the terrible lessons in mind after the Thirty Years' War. Even when he tried to reestablish the alliance with the Spanish branch of his Habsburg dynasty, he did so within the legal terms of the Westphalian peace. Given the constant specter of war, Ferdinand initiated the strengthening of fortifications, especially in the regions exposed to Swedish

and Ottoman invasion, and retained a peacetime army, thereby creating the monarchy's first standing army. Yet, under no circumstances was he willing to tolerate another war. This was a difficult task when his support was sought in the ensuing Russo-Polish War, the Nordic War, and Franco-Spanish War. But by then, the gouty, corpulent, and often melancholic forty-year-old emperor was no longer a young, high-flying prince instilled with late-medieval and alleged Roman ideals but rather a tenacious moderate (Figure 1).

The faith of a man who had lost his mother as a young boy focused early on Mary and did not vacillate in a difficult life that was shaped by war and the loss of two truly beloved spouses and many of his children, both young and adult. Though he was fond of music and

painting, and in no way contemptuous of joy, he upheld his princely *gravitas* to his last breath, much as he embraced to the end a view of this world that he shared with so many in the dark decades of the Thirty Years' War: *vanitas*.

This English version of Ferdinand's biography has been considerably shortened. This pertains in part to the narrative where several passages have been cut out, mainly descriptions of ritual and ceremonial that structured a princely life at court as well as some subtleties of military history and political negotiation. It pertains massively to the scientific apparatus, which has almost 200 pages in the original version.

As the original version is available online (publisher's link: http://www.boehrlau-verlag.com/download/160420/978-3-205-77765-6_OpenAccess.pdf university's link: https://epub.uni-muenchen.de/17491/1/Hengerer_Ferdinand_17491.pdf), it is possible to get the complete information by referring to the detailed notes. Thus, in the notes of this abridged version, the abbreviation PH, meaning *paragraph Hengerer*, points to the page of the apparatus and the number of the note or notes that provide sources, discussion, and further literature for the relevant paragraph in the original version. In order to



FIGURE 1 Medallion cameo with a portrait of Emperor Ferdinand III, ca. 1640/50. Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Collection of Antiquities XII 67.

credit other authors, the notes in this version identify more important scientific publications; they also identify the sources for literal quotations but not the signatures or pages of further archival or edited sources. Quotations in Italian and some in Latin have been conserved as well as some particularly interesting quotations in German, mostly from unpublished material and herein mainly from Ledel's useful but unpublished thesis on the letters from Ferdinand III to his brother. This is why the list of archives, edited sources, and cited literature is shorter than in the original version. The English translation was completed early in 2016, so I made use of later publications only exceptionally.

It is a pleasure to include in this list all those who made this version possible.¹ I am grateful to many for their support. Elke Soliday astutely translated the text. University of Konstanz's Cluster of Excellence "Cultural Bases of Integration," led by the eminent historian Rudolf Schlögl, generously financed the translation. Stefan Mayr vigorously abbreviated the text, and Volker Schniepp provided an English version of his genealogical tree and map. Alexandra Sophie Popst procured the copyright permissions. Daniel Mahla increased the comprehensibility of the Introduction. Ryan Crimmins and Alexandra Röckel shared very interesting material from their research. Daniela Friedrich assisted with the proofreading of the volume.

The contribution of the distinguished Charles Ingrao was fundamental. It was under his direction that the series took up this project. He constantly supported the process, most amicably revised the translation, and persevered when my own revision took, due to a new appointment, more time than expected. The new Series Editor Howard Louthan kindly helped in the final stage as did Katherine Purple and her colleagues with whom it was a pleasure to cooperate.

PART I

THE WAY TO THE THRONE, 1608–1637

1.1

PATH TO THE IMPERIAL THRONE, 1608–1636

Heir and Spare

In mid-May of 1608, people in Graz expected Anna Maria, wife of Archduke Ferdinand, to give birth within a few days, and they fervently hoped for a son. Since her marriage in 1600, she had already borne three children; only one son had survived. At the beginning of June, the birth was still thought to be imminent, and when it had not happened by the beginning of July, it became apparent that there had been an error in the calculation of the due date. It was not until two weeks later, around twelve o'clock at night from July 12 to 13, that the archduchess delivered a son. The birth, so eagerly awaited, went smoothly; both mother and child survived. As infant mortality at the time was extremely high, the papal nuncio at the court of Graz was rushed to the castle the same day. On Sunday, July 13, he baptized the boy with the name Ferdinand Ernst.¹

Archduke Ferdinand Ernst was born into a widely extended dynasty that had also produced the reigning Emperor Rudolf II, who, like the newborn's father, was a grandson of Emperor Ferdinand I. Behind him stood an illustrious ancestral line: Queen Joanna of Castile and Aragon and her husband Philip the Handsome, whose mother Maria was heir apparent of Charles the Bold of Burgundy and whose father was Emperor Maximilian I. He, in turn, was a son of Emperor Friedrich III, who had commissioned the imperial palace at Graz. The first king of the Romans from this dynasty had been Rudolf I, born in 1218.

There were European dynasties who could boast longer rule, but none controlled so many lands worldwide. Joanna's and Philip's children had divided this immense inheritance between a Spanish and an Austrian line; the latter, in turn, was split into an Imperial and a Styrian line. As head of this last lineage, the newborn's father reigned over the duchies of Styria, Carinthia, and Carniola, the county of Gorizia (Görz), and some coastal regions around Trieste and Fiume (Rijeka). The Spanish line ruled large regions of South, Central, and North America, the Iberian Peninsula, Sicily, Naples, the duchy

of Milan, and several enclaves in North Africa. The Burgundian lands, which included the Franche-Comté and those ten provinces of the Netherlands loyal to the Habsburgs, had come to them as inheritance via Mary of Burgundy and was often governed by Austrian Archdukes; the French were aware that her ancestors belonged to a cadet line of the French royal family and considered the Habsburg succession in Burgundy as damage to be repaired. Besides the kingdom of Hungary and neighboring Croatia and Slavonia, the Imperial line ruled the kingdom of Bohemia (including Moravia, Silesia, and Lusatia) as well as the two Austrian territories above and below the river Enns—a “monarchical union of monarchical unions of states formed by estates” (Winkelbauer).² The county of Tyrol along with a number of Swabian, Alsatian, and Upper Rhenish regions, collectively known as Further Austria, were administered by an archduke serving as viceroy; there, the Imperial and Styrian lines ruled by turns.

As diverse as this giant dominion was, it appeared oppressive to some, such as the king of France, say, or the many imperial princes, and especially the many knights, barons, and counts in the Austrian Habsburg territories who stood in opposition to the dynasty. In the Holy Roman Empire, there was little authority in the narrower sense, and there were problems with the Estates as well, especially concerning the confessional and ecclesiastical aspects of rulership. But precisely here was the the newborn assigned a role: after the baptism, his father asked the nuncio for the pope’s blessing for himself, the mother, and the little boy, who was born a “new servant of His Holiness and the Holy See.”³ Thus, Archduke Ferdinand Ernst, later Emperor Ferdinand III, was, from the day of his birth, a party in the confessional conflict that would soon embroil the Empire in war.

Let us look briefly at this Empire. It was composed of a multitude of estates—privileged holders of feudal rights constituted in corporations that guaranteed political participation—with very different rights of dominion or lordship. Seven electors—the archbishops of Mainz, Cologne, and Trier, the margrave of Brandenburg, the duke of Saxony, the count Palatine, and the king of Bohemia—selected the king of the Romans, who was heir apparent to the emperor. Immediately under the emperor were several hundred other territorial rulers, including clerical and secular princes; Imperial abbots, counts, barons, and knights; a number of Imperial villages; and, finally, the Imperial cities, which frequently had considerable extramural rights and even territories that they governed almost independently. The electors (though not the king of Bohemia), imperial princes, and Imperial cities had voting privileges in the Imperial Diet (*Reichstag*), which met every few years, generally in Regensburg. Deputations of the Imperial Estates addressed problems between Diets, though the electors often regulated matters at special electoral conferences (*Kurfürstentag*) without input from the other Imperial

Estates. The two highest judicial instances were the Imperial Chamber Court (*Reichskammergericht*), dominated by the Imperial Estates, and the emperor's Aulic Council (*Reichshofrat*). In addition, the Empire was divided into ten Imperial Circles, especially important for military affairs. The Imperial Circles were also organized by the Estates; even counts and knights were represented in their corporate units.

The year of Ferdinand III's birth marked a profound turning point in this Empire's history. Its institutions collapsed and were replaced by armed confessional alliances of the Imperial Estates. In 1608, for the first time, the Imperial Diet was unable to arrive at a final agreement because of religious differences. The Peace of Augsburg (1555), which had calmed a religiously divided Empire by promoting coexistence for Catholics and Lutherans, had run its course; now the principal dispute was over the legal status of properties taken after 1552 from the Catholic Church by Lutheran and, especially, Calvinist rulers. Although the secularizations carried out before 1552 had been ratified in 1555, many questions remained open. Could the city councils of Imperial cities determine their citizens' religion? Could secular princes confiscate church property surrounded by their own territories? Could clerics who became Lutherans or Calvinists retain, as their personal secular property, territories entrusted to them by the Church? Catholics regarded the interdiction of this practice in 1555 and termed the ecclesiastical reservation (*Geistlicher Vorbehalt*) as protection from further loss of ecclesiastical territories. Protestants, on the other hand, saw it as an unacceptable restriction of the princes' right to religious authority, and they continued their confiscation of church property. Nor did the Imperial Chamber Court function any longer as it was meant to.

This massive functional disruption of two central Imperial institutions was exacerbated in 1608. Mere days after the breakup of the Imperial Diet, several Protestant Imperial Estates formed a military alliance, the so-called Evangelical Union, headed by the Calvinist count Palatine who resided in Heidelberg. The ecclesiastical electors of Mainz, Cologne, and Trier, several Catholic bishops, and the duke of Bavaria did not believe the *Union* to be a defensive agreement, and in 1609, they founded their own military alliance, the Catholic League, under Bavarian leadership. The crisis engulfing Imperial institutions and the military buildup were decisive factors for the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War.⁴

The year of Ferdinand III's birth also marked a profound turning point for the Habsburg lands. In 1608, two territories saw the deposition of their ruler in the interest of the Protestant Estates. Because of military resistance to his re-Catholicization policy, Emperor Rudolf II had to abdicate as king of Hungary. The Hungarian Estates replaced him with his younger brother,



FIGURE 2 Mary Anne of Bavaria, mother of Ferdinand III, oil painting by Joseph Heintz the Elder. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

Archduke Matthias, who was more open to compromise where religious rights were concerned. In Moravia, Rudolph II attempted to enforce the prince's disputed right of reformation, and there, too, the Estates deposed him, choosing Archduke Matthias as their new ruler. Rudolph II was able to save his Bohemian crown (though only for a few years) by granting the Estates, in a so-called Letter of Majesty (*Majestätsbrief*), religious freedom as well as far-reaching governmental participation.

The two depositions make clear why Ferdinand II and Ferdinand III fought so tenaciously for their territorial dominion and for the right, granted in principle to all secular imperial princes in 1555, to determine the religious confession of their subjects, including the nobility. In the sixteenth century, the Habsburgs had not been able to realize this Right of Reformation because of their geographical situation. Defense against the Ottoman Empire's war of conquest demanded constructing and maintaining a line of fortresses from the Adriatic Sea far into northeastern Hungary. Though the Holy Roman Empire provided financial assistance, the Habsburgs needed additional tax revenues from their own territories. These were approved and raised by the Estates, which in return demanded and received religious autonomy that included confessional freedom and their own churches, clerics, schools, and printing presses. Thus, there developed at the manorial level a Protestant ecclesiastical organization that the nobility shaped into a territorial church led by the Estates but also including urban populations and peasants. The territorial churches headed by Protestant princes in the Empire served as their model. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Protestant nobles were fully aware of the political implications of this process and formed protective alliances beyond their borders. From the Habsburgs' point of view, this amounted to a kind of state within a state or—as in the Netherlands, Hungary, and Moravia in 1608—the end of the rule for those Habsburgs who found themselves in serious conflict with the Protestant Estates.⁵

Early Years

Ferdinand III's mother Maria Anna was a daughter of the Bavarian Duke Wilhelm V and Princess Renata of Lorraine (Figure 2). Born in 1578, she was married off in 1600 to Inner Austria in order to strengthen the alliance of two princes of the Counter Reformation. Historical research deems her marriage “exceedingly happy” (Albrecht).⁶ After Ferdinand's birth, she remained, as custom decreed, in the same room for over a month. There, the Graz nuncio presented her with letters of congratulations from the pope and the Cardinal Secretary of State Borghese. She returned her thanks and commended “her husband, children, and her entire Most Serene House”⁷ to the Holy Father.



FIGURE 3 Archduke Charles of Austria, elder brother of Ferdinand III (died in 1619), oil painting, artist unknown. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

Though the children of the Habsburgs were usually suckled by wet-nurses, during their early years, they remained with their mothers, who had their own households dominated by women within the framework of the general court. No picture of Ferdinand III as a small child survives, but like his elder brother (Figure 3) and later his own children, he probably took his first steps

in a dress and was draped with lucky charms and religious trinkets. An early, somewhat more elaborate notice concerning the future emperor reports that in 1615, during a visit by the archducal family to the nuncio's Graz residence, he assiduously devoted himself to the Italian pastries. It is likely that he saw his maternal grandfather, Wilhelm V of Bavaria, when the duke visited Styria in 1612 on a pilgrimage to Mariazell with all the princes and his daughter.⁸

Throughout these years, Ferdinand III's mother served as a link between Inner Austria and Bavaria. She kept informed about political, dynastic, and court matters and, in turn, informed her Bavarian relatives. Thus, in 1611, she commented on the financial needs of the Counter Reformation as well as on two Graz personalities who were later to assume importance in Ferdinand III's life. She described Eggenberg, her husband's main counselor, as an "upstanding man" and justified his financial conduct. Of her husband's younger brother, the twenty-five-year-old Bishop Leopold of Passau and Strasbourg, she noted that he had "little taste for the ecclesiastical state."⁹ This was apparent to everyone as he, evidently in quest of a crown, had interfered militarily in the dispute between Rudolf II and King Matthias.

After Rudolf II's death in 1612, the obligations for Ferdinand III's father increased. As Rudolf II's successor, the electors chose Matthias, who charged his Graz cousin with various representational functions. So, for two months during the winter of 1612/13, the four-year-old Archduke Ferdinand Ernst traveled to Vienna with his parents and elder brother. In order not to cause the little princes any discomfort, the journey proceeded at a leisurely pace and took eight days, from December 11 to 18, for the distance between Graz and Vienna. After their return to Graz, Maria Anna reported that the imperial couple had been inordinately fond of her children and had taken "great pleasure in them; praise God the Almighty that everything went so well."¹⁰ She was probably also referring to the esteem the Inner Austrian ruling family had enjoyed in Vienna. The emperor had presented them with rich gifts, and some people already hailed the archduke from Graz as the future king of the Romans.

In 1613, Archduke Ferdinand again represented Emperor Matthias at the Imperial Diet in Regensburg. Because the imperial couple could no longer be expected to produce children, the emperor discussed the issue of succession with his cousin from Graz. Already at this time they included the Spanish ambassador, as King Philip III also had a claim to the Imperial inheritance. In August of 1613, the archducal family went from Graz to Lower Austria. Because plague raged in Vienna, they stayed in Wiener Neustadt. Here was Maximilian I's grave as well as a Gothic Hofburg where Ferdinand III would later reside from time to time. And it was here, on January 5, 1614, in the hour before midnight, that his younger brother Archduke Leopold Wilhelm

was born. Thus, Ferdinand III spent the fifth year of his life first in Wiener Neustadt and then in Vienna. Only in July of 1614 did he travel back to Graz with his mother and siblings; his father went on to the Moravian Diet in Olomouc (Olmütz).¹¹

At this time, Maria Anna, in her letters, referred to her growing sons as her “little fellows” and her sons and daughters as “my little troop.” She was happy that the children had withstood the journey from Vienna to Graz in good form: “Travel has not harmed my little troop.”¹² Only Archduke Leopold Wilhelm had been a bit off-color, and the eldest, Johann Karl, had developed a growth on his right cheek that had soon improved. In Graz, the family was given a splendid reception. Noble students had dressed as nymphs, “surrounded the carriage and accompanied it through twenty-four gates decorated with fresh foliage and wreaths. On arrival they were met by more students disguised as goddesses, singing and playing music, and showering the carriage with good wishes and fragrant flowers.”¹³ This surely must have impressed the six-year-old Archduke Ferdinand Ernst.

But Maria Anna had to leave her children for good in 1616, and Archduke Ferdinand Ernst lost his mother at the age of seven. In December of 1615 she became so ill that her brother in Munich ascribed her recovery to divine omnipotence after the doctors had already despaired of her life. But joy at her improvement was short-lived. During the night of March 7, 1616, she had severe seizures and became so weak that the doctors gave her mere hours to live. She died at dawn on March 8. After being laid out for three days in a castle chamber, where the archduke’s portable altar had been erected for the reading of masses, she was buried provisionally in a nunnery at night. The final interment would take place when a new mausoleum was completed.¹⁴

Her husband’s reaction throws light, albeit surely somewhat idealized, on his children’s experience; after the mass read immediately after his wife’s death, he spoke “with the strongest emotion of the great mutual love” that had remained without the least shadow of antagonism through sixteen years of marriage. This corresponded to the ideal of a Christian marriage but was not taken for granted in princely houses. The nuncio further recorded the archduke’s expressing “sorrow that the three little princes and two little princesses would now be left without the guidance of this excellent mother” but also described a successful socialization. The children “truly had the looks and behavior of angels, so well had they been brought up by their outstanding mother.”¹⁵ This nuncio was not overly sentimental but rather sober, as befitted his diplomatic calling, so his description may be taken at face value.

The reigning Archduke Ferdinand became ill and was so distraught that the doctors were called. Ferdinand III’s father wrote to Duke Maximilian that he was of the firm conviction that “my dearest wife’s sainted and pious soul has

gone from her mouth straight to heaven, there to gaze upon her maker's countenance for eternity, although I would have sorely needed her for my own comfort and the upbringing of my small children. But as God's decree is unfathomable, we are resigned to submit to the divine will, even though it is very hard."¹⁶

Years without Parents

After his mother's death, Archduke Ferdinand Ernst did not grow up in his father's presence for two reasons. First, Archduke Ferdinand stayed in Graz only briefly between long journeys. In 1617, he was elected and crowned king of Bohemia; in Wrocław (Breslau), he accepted homage from the Silesian and in Prague (Praha) from the Moravian Estates, and he traveled to Dresden to discuss his election as king of the Romans with the elector of Saxony. In 1618, he spent much time in Hungary in order to have himself elected and crowned king there as well, and 1619 saw him in Frankfurt for his election as king of the Romans.

The second reason was the formation of small households, ancillaries of the general court, for the archducal children. Since 1615, Archduke Johann Karl, the elder brother, had already lived with his own court, including a grand steward, a tutor and teachers, noble courtiers, valets, masters of wardrobe, and other servants. It is possible that Archduke Ferdinand Ernst, nearly eight years old, shared this court with his brother after 1616. But it is also possible that he still remained for a time in the shelter of the household his father had established for the younger siblings: two-year-old Archduke Leopold Wilhelm, five-year-old Archduchess Cäcilia Renate, and six-year-old Archduchess Maria Anna. Over this court presided an aristocratic widow who raised the children with the aid of a large number of women, ranging from ladies-in-waiting to a nurse's aide in the infirmary. The establishment also included men such as the master of the household, a chaplain, valets, stokers, and someone to lay the table for the children's nurse. But by 1618 at the latest, Archduke Ferdinand Ernst had joined his elder brother's household and was now assiduously prepared for his future role as prince.¹⁷

An illustration from a mourning and memorial book, compiled on the occasion of his mother's death, shows what his role might have been (Figure 4). It demonstrates with what self-assurance and steadfastness Archduke Ferdinand Ernst and his siblings, like all other children of this time, were prepared for strictly codified functions, roles, and identities. In the early modern period, education was deemed successful if children accepted and lived out the destinies and roles ascribed to them.

The elder brother was the designated future ruler. The scepter, embellished with the Eye of God and scales, emphasize his role as judge; helmet, scimitar, Turkish shield, and trumpet symbolize warfare; plummet and



FIGURE 4 Allegory of Spring (“Ver”) with the children of Mary Anne of Bavaria and Archduke Ferdinand, unmarked copper plate etching out of the remembrance book of the Jesuits of Graz for Mary Anne. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München, Res 4 L. eleg. misc. 132.

compass, the advancement of trade; globe, sundial, and celestial sphere, that of the sciences; books and the Eye of God, that of religion; and hunting horn and musical instruments, princely leisure. The younger brother, Archduke Leopold Wilhelm, was to become a prince of the Church. This is shown by

attributes like the miter and crosier; monstrance and Eucharist; the cross and, on the right, next to his archducal hat, the crown of thorns. The sisters were to devote themselves entirely to religion, as demonstrated by the attributes of Christ's passion: the thirty pieces of silver and the purse; the scourge and fasces; hammer, nails, and tongs; the Roman soldiers' dice; and the Bible. Yet, this depiction ignores their dynastic function, marriage. Future husbands, though quite virtuous, are difficult to portray.

It may come as a surprise that Archduke Ferdinand Ernst is shown as a secular prince. He too is shown with armor but no helmet, merely protection for his arm, which, according to a popular conceit, was a body part serving the head. Pen and inkwell represent political correspondence and thus suggest a role as governor of a Habsburg territory, possibly the Netherlands or Tyrol with Further Austria. As a regent thus serving the dynasty, Ferdinand Ernst was to advance trade, traffic, and science; this is indicated by the delphinium-encircled anchor, compass, numerical tablet, and mechanical clock. The latter, symbol of the vanity of all things, may underscore the religiosity also represented by the book. The small picture is a depiction of the Virgin Mary with the body of Christ, a Pietà. His father's special piety toward the Virgin has been transferred to the son as a guide for his mode of life. May we go this far in interpreting the engraving? We may, as the Graz Jesuits had produced the work. They knew the court and the reigning archduke very well, having supplied his confessor.¹⁸

His education was to transform Archduke Ferdinand Ernst into the human form of the ideal chivalrous, pious, and cultivated secular prince. A baron from the ancient Austrian nobility, Christoph Simon Freiherr von Thun, administered his and his brother's household. He was responsible for the retinue as well as the princes' education; he was the central reference person in their everyday lives and, as Knight of the Order of St. John, the embodiment of the mythically exalted Christian knight (*miles christianus*). The period around 1600 was not only an era of confessional conflict but also a time in which Venice defended the remaining Christian territories in the eastern Mediterranean region, while the Habsburgs (with financial and military aid from the Imperial territories) defended the Hungarian territories east of the Adriatic Sea against the sultan. In this conflict, the Habsburgs were satisfied just to be able to beat back Ottoman incursions and to maintain the military borders in Croatia, Slavonia, and Hungary with fortifications at Karlovac (Karlstadt), Petrinja, Varaždin, Veszprém, Győr (Raab), Leva, Fülek, Tokaj, Szatmár, and elsewhere.

This situation had practical ramifications for Archduke Ferdinand Ernst's daily routine, beginning with the riding lessons that were of fundamental importance for his future lifestyle. Soon he would be training for tournaments as well. A first step was an exercise of skill in which a small ring, suspended above or near the course, had to be speared in full gallop with a type of dagger.

The next step consisted of lengthening the dagger to the size of a small lance. The sometimes-deadly tournaments in which two knights charged each other with long lances had been abandoned in the sixteenth century, but charging wooden or cardboard figures had been retained. Another exercise consisted in beheading such figures with sword or saber from horseback. The figures often resembled Turks, who had come to symbolize the essential enemy, conquering most of Hungary and frequently invading the rest, abducting Christians there and especially from the Ukraine, pressing them into slavery, and forcing children into military service for the sultan.¹⁹

The forms of courtly dance of the period derived their basic steps and foot positions from fencing. Thus, Archduke Ferdinand Ernst learned dancing and fencing at the same time. The dancing master at the Graz court, Ambrosio Bontempo, drew a remarkably high salary and was ennobled in 1623. Dancing was not primarily regarded as a pleasure but as expressing, in a representational manner, how human social intercourse was perceived. Court dances brought all participants into a well-ordered relationship with one another. They showed the individual, the couple, and the group as components of a general social network organized according to aesthetic, numerological, mythological, and societal principles. Dances based on free movement were not customary. The introduction of the waltz in the nineteenth century was a scandal to many because it disengaged the couple from the strictly proscribed movement of the group and demonstrated how much the social order had changed.²⁰

In the courtly world as Archduke Ferdinand Ernst knew it, relaxation was found mainly in certain forms of the hunt. For it, too, the princes practiced how to handle weapons from an early age. As soon as they were old enough and had learned to ride well, they were allowed outside the castle with a small retinue and could—throughout their lives, but only in pursuit of game and in war—follow paths that had not been laid down in advance by societal regulations. When they were hawking, falcons and other birds of prey determined the course, and in single combat, it might remain uncertain whether a falcon or a heron was the victor. This made the chase unpredictable. When they were stalking, their quarry, mostly stags but sometimes hares pursued by a pack of hounds, led the way. Boar hunting was dangerous, especially when conducted with a lance from horseback. In the winter of 1620/21, Ferdinand Ernst's father was thrown by a horse that shied away from a wild boar; only by great good luck did he sustain no injuries.

There were other more representational forms of hunting, in which game, rounded up from a large area in great numbers, was shot from a platform or, when surrounded, speared from horseback. During the representational hunt or ceremonial court events, princes of the era experience an ideal of rule as they conceived it: actual personal domination as an organic element in the natural order of the cosmos.²¹

Immeasurably more regimented was life in the Hofburg. At court, going to bed and rising, dressing and undressing, washing, brushing teeth, bathing, drinking, and relieving oneself were all codified events subject to strict rules under the supervision and with the help of aristocratic courtiers, valets, masters of the wardrobe, barbers, stokers, and, where riding was involved, equerries, bootblacks, pages, and others. Besides private meals, there were public banquets; they, too, were proscribed and regulated in every detail. The princes had to learn all this gradually from their attendants. They could not dress themselves or close and undo their many buttons; they needed someone to comb their shoulder-length hair. In 1619, Archdukes Johann Karl and Ferdinand Ernst had, among others, a personal master of wardrobes, door keeper, janitor, gardener, two servants for the silverware, and one servant to lay their table and oversee that of the courtiers. By 1619, the princes already had six chamberlains. They, together with the valets, not only formed the main body of attendants for this extremely sheltered intimate existence but, hailing from noble families of various Habsburg territories, also acquainted the princes from infancy with the heterogeneous and multilingual world of the aristocracy.

Language acquisition, knowledge of the aristocratic world, and further training in social behavior were also fostered by the princes' noble pages, who were approximately of their own age. Because they were unpaid, we generally do not know their names as we do those of their chamberlains, teachers, valets, fencing instructor, tailor, and laundry woman. From other sources, we learn that the pages came from different countries and so familiarized the princes with their own languages and cultural characteristics and that they were their study companions and, within the very narrowly defined boundaries of strict courtly conduct, playfellows.²²

In addition, the princes had a language master with a doctorate, which was rare for this time. From him and the noble courtiers, Archduke Ferdinand Ernst learned quite a number of languages: besides a probably heavily Styrian-Bavarian-inflected German, certainly Italian, Latin, and Castilian Spanish as well as some Czech and Hungarian. These were the principal languages spoken in the Habsburg-dominated lands, if one disregards native languages, especially those in the Americas. Around 1600, every aristocrat whose parents were not thoroughly unaware of the trend toward an academic education spoke Latin, the language of the Church, law, the sciences, and the classical Roman writers. Latin was also the official spoken language in multilingual Hungary, where it was used as the common vernacular by the nobility, clergy, and municipal elites. The bourgeoisie in Upper Hungary and the western Hungarian free cities spoke German. Already in 1620 Archduke Ferdinand Ernst had two Hungarian chamberlains and probably picked up some Hungarian from

them. From 1622 on he had Bohemian chamberlains, and one, Maximilian von Waldstein, with whom he maintained a lifelong close relationship based on mutual trust, must have taught him enough Czech to make a good impression on the Prague aristocracy. Spanish may have been added somewhat later, possibly at the beginning of the 1620s, when his marriage to a Spanish *infanta* was in the cards. As an adult, Ferdinand III regularly spoke four languages: “perfect Italian, fluent Latin, sufficient Spanish, and of course German.”²³

Like his elder and later his younger brother, Archduke Ferdinand Ernst learned the advanced skills of pen and ink from Dr. Elias Schiller, who like their father had studied with the Jesuits in Ingolstadt, whence he imported new didactic methods. He taught the boys to write poetry in foreign languages, something they liked and continued to do. Archduke Ferdinand Ernst was educated with the tenets of reformed Catholicism. The ruling family attended mass every morning, observed feast days and Lent, and celebrated the high holy days of the ecclesiastical year as well as the name days of numerous saints, especially the new saints of the Counter Reformation and the patron saints of the dynasty and its various realms. The princes’ religious education was in the hands of the Jesuits, who also furnished their confessors.²⁴

Already at the age of eleven, Archduke Ferdinand Ernst assumed duties of princely and ecclesiastical representation. On December 1, 1619, at the Jesuit University in Graz, he and two bishops attended festivities for St. Francis Xavier, especially revered in the time of the Counter Reformation and chosen by the philosophical faculty as its patron saint. In 1621, the archduke attended a theatrical play there, dedicated to him and his siblings, about the persecution of Christians in Japan. Using the example of two Catholics martyred for their faith, it also extolled the virtues of bravery and steadfastness. In 1619, Archdukes Johann Karl and Ferdinand Ernst, together with their father, took part in the forty-hour prayer during Lent and attended public communions, hourly prayers, and processions. With the sons carrying candles, the three Habsburgs accompanied the Host, something that greatly impressed the aristocratic students. The piety legitimizing their authority was meant to reassure their subjects and was thus part of princely representation itself.²⁵

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Hengerer studied history and Latin at the Universities of Münster, Westphalia, where he graduated in 1996, and Vienna, Austria. From 1996 to 2002, he worked at the University of Konstanz in a position that combined teaching and research for his doctoral thesis on the imperial court in the seventeenth century (“Kaiserhof und Adel in der Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts. Eine Kommunikationsgeschichte der Macht in der Vormoderne”). From 2002 to 2012, he continued working in Konstanz. Hengerer published a number of papers on the history of courts, on financial administration, and on the cultural history of European monarchies. Since 2013, he has been a professor of early modern history at the University of Munich (LMU).