

## **The 18th Century (until 1790) Historical Background**

The 18th century was a time of continuing power struggles in Central Europe, which were interrupted only by the French Revolution. The main concern was the struggle for dominance of France, England, Austria, Russia and Prussia.

The extinction of the Casa de Austria in Spain in 1700 (death of Charles II) caused a huge power vacuum in Central Europe as well as overseas. During the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714) Austria and France struggled to gain supremacy over the regions and provinces temporarily without a sovereign.

In spite of the glorious victories by the imperial troops which were led by Prince Eugene of Savoy this struggle was finally resolved by England's partisanship. After first supporting the Habsburgs, England feared a Habsburg hegemony and enforced a splitting up of the Spanish heritage between the two belligerent rival powers. Emperor Charles VI obtained the southern part of the Netherlands and all former Spanish properties in Italy, while Philip of Anjou became King of Spain and sovereign over the Spanish overseas territories.

The events on the Balkans were, however, no less fundamental and of serious consequences. Prince Eugene's victories at Peterwardein and Belgrade during the war against the Turks from 1716 to 1718 secured the biggest extension for the Habsburg Monarchy as well as its rise to the status of a major power in Europe. The War of the Polish Succession then followed between 1733 and 1738.

Emperor Charles VI lost almost all of his possessions gained in 1718 during another war against the Turks from 1737 to 1739, which was fought in alliance with the rising power Russia. By means of the Pragmatic Sanction the Emperor tried to protect the right of inheritance of his daughter Maria Theresia against the claims of other European powers, but it was all in vain. During the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748) Maria Theresia had to defend her heritage against almost all neighboring sovereigns.

Her main opponent was King Frederick II of Prussia, to whom - as the only loss of territory - she had to cede Silesia in the end. As a result Prussia also gained the status of a major power in Europe.

A new conflict (the so-called Seven Years' War from 1756 to 1763) between Austria - initially supported by Russia and France - on the one hand and Prussia on the other flared up soon; in the end Frederick II retained his hold on Silesia. This war culminated in a total reverse of the previous system of European alliances, and on top of it had global political consequences, too: during the War of the Spanish Succession England had already replaced France in the trade with America, and later on it captured all former French colonies in India and North America. England thus managed to gain the status of a world power.

The end of this century saw Austria's last war against the Turks from 1788 to 1791, in which Emperor Joseph II - in alliance with Russia - proved to be victorious and in 1789 field marshal Laudon succeeded in recapturing Belgrade.

## The most important items

The exhibition in this hall has been created according to a chronological sequence, and the visitor will see all the objects exhibited by simply strolling in a clockwise direction.

**Section A** covers the period from 1700 to 1740, the year in which Emperor Charles VI died. The first half of the exhibition is dedicated to the War of the Spanish Succession. The most famous imperial field commander during this war was Prince Eugene of Savoy.

Numerous events at different theaters of war and great commanders like the field marshals Count Guido of Starhemberg and Count Leopold of Daun are depicted in the form of paintings and prints, while other pictures show some of the changes within the Austrian army. You will find them on display in the rotating stands. The showcase beneath the window contains a fuse stick, a set of artillery instruments and an ink drawing made by Emperor Charles VI. The end of **section A** is dedicated to the war against the Turks from 1716 to 1718.

Particularly remarkable are a tent belonging to a Turkish prince (probably the audience tent of the grand vizier Dahmad Ali Pascha, who was killed in action during the battle of Peterwardein on August 5, 1716) and the famous „mortar of Belgrade“. In the far left corner of this hall an armory has been arranged, where you will see the development of different arms and firearms of the imperial army during the 18th century.

**Section B** covers the reign of Maria Theresia from 1740 until the death of her husband Emperor Franz I in 1765. At the very beginning of this section a showcase with flags symbolizes the vast number of enemies she had to face during the War of the Austrian Succession. Her extensive military reforms are displayed in the showcase beneath the window. The center of the room is dedicated to the Seven Years' War (1756 - 1763). Paintings of monumental dimensions showing battle scenes accompany two big showcases in which precious Austrian, Russian and Prussian keepsakes and booties are on display. The actual focus point in this section is the round showcase containing seven porcelain figurines representing soldiers of Maria Theresia's army from about 1746. In another showcase, located beneath the central window, a selection of paintings from the so-called „Albertina-Script“ shows uniforms of the imperial and royal army from about 1762.

In its display of the era of Emperor Joseph II (1765-1790) in **section C** the exhibition comes to an end in this hall.

A big oil painting shows the Emperor among his field marshals. A special „commemorative medal of honor“ (predecessor of the „medal for bravery“), donated by the Emperor in 1789, is on display in the showcase in front of this oil painting. In the opposite showcase, just beneath the painting of field marshal Laudon on horseback, which is flanked by valuable flags captured from the Prussians, you will see Laudon's Great Cross and Star of the Military Order of Maria Theresia.

With trophies from the war against the Turks from 1788 to 1791 and mementoes of the early years of the Military Academy, founded by Maria Theresia at Wiener Neustadt in 1752, the tour through this part of the museum has come to an end.

**To continue** please pass the Hall of Honor and the adjacent hall. The tour continues at the opposite end of this building, in **the Hall of the French Wars**.