

Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger. *Maria Theresa: The Empress in Her Time*. Princeton University Press, 2021. 1046 pages. Hardcover, \$39.95.

This book is the story of Maria Theresa, a young woman who inherited an enormous, rundown, old empire at the age of twenty-three. Maria Theresa was born on May 13, 1717, and died on November 29, 1780. Maria Theresa was the eldest daughter of Charles VI and Elizabeth of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel. Charles was the only living male in his line. This triggered Charles to issue a royal act whereby a female child is entitled to inherit the throne of Habsburg.

Upon her accession to the throne, the war of the Austrian Succession erupted, challenging Maria Theresa's legitimacy and inheritance to the Habsburg throne. With aid of a band of warriors she gathered together, she defended her ancestral throne against her enemies that surrounded her empire.

In this comprehensive, thousand-page biography, Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger narrates the story of Maria Theresa. Drawing from a wealth of archival research, Stollberg-Rilinger paints Maria Theresa's biography to read like a fairytale. This is due to the unexpectedly happy ending of her reign. The book makes a fascinating read because the protagonist is a woman in the eighteenth century, with steadfastness, courage, and resolve. What she accomplished as the keeper of her inheritance is not what was expected of a woman during her time.

Maria Theresa has become a source of endless fascination because she is not only an empress but a faithful wife with sixteen children. She infuses the qualities associated with both men and women of her time into a single person. Consequently, "masculine heroism" resides in her, and "feminine virtue" is also a trait. Maria Theresa therefore can be described as an empress who possesses virile leadership because she demonstrates an exceptional figure with extraordinary qualities. When comparing famous women such as Cleopatra, Elizabeth, and Catherine II in world history, Maria Theresa's status is beyond even exceptional expectations.

Whereas other monarchs had neglected their roles as spouses and mothers (they were unmarried or childless), Maria Theresa alone combines wise governance, conjugal fidelity, and impeccable morality, seeing herself as the mother and protector of her regime.

The book proper is about the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Habsburg world in which Maria Theresa is the superstar. The book was first published in German in 2017 and translated into English by Robert Savage. The objective of the author is three-fold: 1) To tell the details and exhaustive story of Maria Theresa from cradle to grave, 2) To understand Maria Theresa in her time and the expulsion of Jews from Bavaria or Protestants from Styria; and 3) to bring Europe's age of empire building of an uncompromising leader who defeated all her invaders. Maria Theresa's biography explores such topics as alliance building, religious life, family, medicine, government, and the impact of the Holy Roman Empire; the result is a rich, multidimensional portrait of the rapidly changing world that sees the Holy Roman Empire being challenged by Frederick the Great.

The hallmark of Maria Theresa's foreign policy is beset by "inserting her progeny as wives or husbands within the great dynasties of Europe." This book is a middle road between history and international relations. The book crosses many disciplines, and each chapter is thematic. For this reason, the book is recommended for Political Science, Public Administration, International Relations, Diplomacy, and Gender Study.

Stollberg-Rilinger's narrative is spectacular, insightful, and well-researched. Maria Theresa's will make an excellent addition to the library.

Kofi Johnson, Ph.D.
Department Intelligence Studies, Geospatial Sciences, Political Science, and History
Fayetteville State University
Fayetteville, North Carolina, 28311.