

Abstract

Throughout many centuries the Habsburg left their mark on European history, in their roles as kings or emperors of the Holy Roman Empire and from 1804 onwards, as the emperors of Austria. The portraits of the Habsburg rulers as well as the strategies of showing power by means of portraits of rulers are the central subject of this study. A survey of the origins and the cultural-historical aspects of the portraiture serve as the theoretical basis for this study. The methodical orientation can be found in the field of political iconography. Semiotic elements have also strongly been taken into account.

This paper concentrates on portraits of the Habsburg rulers at the time when the new king/emperor took over. Until the 18th century, painted portraits of rulers were particularly aimed at an elitist audience, e.g. the Electors of the Holy Roman Empire and other powerful European courts which fought for supremacy against the Habsburgs. Only from the 19th century onwards was the image of the ruler conveyed to a wider audience by means of paintings.

In the analysis of the individual portraits from Rudolph I (13th century) to Karl I (20th century), the authenticity as an historical source was thematized. Special attention was paid to the role of the artist and the question of his independence from the client. When sovereigns noticed that they had been portrayed in an unbecoming way, they did not necessarily react with censorship, since their sense of mission was often large enough to handle their own »ugliness« in a confident way. However, the image of the ruler was a very delicate subject, as the painting had a representative function. Sometimes court painters even had to check and censor portraits of rulers that were drawn outside the court.

The need to legitimize oneself through pictures is a constant, the argumentation, however, changed in the course of 700 years. In 1740 a break came with the death of Emperor Karl VI, with whom the male line of the dynasty died out. With the enforcement of the »Pragmatic Sanction«, his daughter Maria Theresia was able to inherit the Austrian provinces as well as Hungary and Bohemia, but could not be elected Empress of the Holy Roman Empire. By marrying Franz Stephan from Lorraine, who later became Franz I Stephan, the line Habsburg-Lorraine

was founded. A further break resulted from the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in the year 1806. Thus the portraits of Franz II (I) as Roman-German and as Austrian Emperor with different insignia can be compared. This study shows in which fields innovations in the iconography of the Habsburg rule were introduced and to what extent continuity was maintained.

Resumé

La dynastie des Habsbourg marqua l'histoire de l'Europe pendant de nombreux siècles – d'abord comme rois ou comme empereurs du Saint Empire romain germanique, et dès 1804 à titre d'empereur d'Autriche. La présente étude entreprend l'analyse des portraits des souverains habsbourgeois et des stratégies qu'ils ont employés pour visualiser leur pouvoir à travers les portraits. Un aperçu de l'origine et de l'histoire de la peinture du portrait servent de base théorique. La méthode utilisée base sur l'iconographie politique, avec un appui sur la sémiologie.

L'étude se concentre sur les portraits des souverains habsbourgeois au moment de leur arrivée au pouvoir, tout en prenant en considération les conditions historiques. Jusqu'au 18^e siècle, les portraits royaux peints s'adressent à un public élitiste, c'est à dire aux princes électeurs du Saint Empire romain et aux différentes Cours européennes. Celles-ci disposent elles memes d'un grand pouvoir et luttent avec la dynastie Habsbourg pour la prééminence en Europe. Ce n'est qu'à partir du 19^e siècle que l'image du souverain sera propagée à un grand public par la peinture des portraits.

L'analyse des portraits des souverains habsbourgeois, commençant par Rudolphe Ier au 13^e siècle et allant jusqu'à Charles Ier au 20^e siècle, pose la question sur l'authenticité du tableau comme source historique. Une attention particulière a été attribuée à la position du peintre et de son indépendance envers le donneur d'ordre du portrait. Si un souverain se rendait compte qu'il n'avait pas été peint de manière favorable, il ne réagissait pas nécessairement avec une censure: parfois-même il possédait un sentiment de propre valeur si fort, qu'il savait très bien manier sa propre »laideur«. Mais le portrait du souverain, vu sa fonction représentative, risquait aussi de poser des problèmes, et les peintres officiels de la Cour étaient chargés de contrôler l'image représentatif du souverain, en censurant les portraits produits hors de la Cour.