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CORONA'S ANCESTORS

Masks and Epidemics at the Viennese Court 1500-1918

18 DEC. 2020
TO 26 SEP. 2021

The Corona pandemic has been unexpected and unfathomable in equal measure for the people of Europe. That is the case not least because we have long since forgotten that our ancestors lived in fear of epidemics for centuries. The exhibition *Corona's Ancestors – Masks and Epidemics at the Viennese Court 1500–1918* is set to contribute to our wider understanding of the incisive experiences we are currently undergoing by casting a look at the past. The objects on show are largely taken from the collections of the Kunsthistorisches Museum and the Theatermuseum in Vienna and address a wide range of topics: tournament and carnival masks of the Viennese court join objects bearing witness to the great epidemics and documents on the history of vaccination as well as the Habsburgs' impressive garments of mourning.

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THE GREAT EPIDEMICS

The epidemics that terrified emperors and people alike for the longest time included first and foremost the bucolic **plague**, which spread in Vienna nine times during the early modern era. Some rulers, such as Leopold I, fled to the countryside in fear of infection. Others, like Charles VI, remained in Vienna in order to reassure their subjects. Even then did the most important means of fighting the pandemic include quarantine and the closing of borders. Beyond that, the Habsburgs primarily trusted in God in their efforts to eradicate this terrible disease: it was believed that votive offerings would help end the scourge. This is how the Plague Column on Graben and Karlskirche (St Charles Church) came to be erected in Vienna. The engineer of the imperial theatre, Lodovico Ottavio Burnacini, who provided the initial design for the Plague Column, created beautiful drawings for the column that are still extant. Charles VI founded Karlskirche in dedication to St Charles Borromeo, revered as a saint for sufferers of the plague, in order to hasten the end of the bucolic plague epidemic of 1713. It proved to be the last epidemic of its kind to ravage Vienna.

However, dangerous illnesses were still not in check even after the bucolic plague had been defeated: **smallpox** now became the greatest scourge of the city. This viral infection was not necessarily fatal, but survivors remained scarred for life. In contrast to the plague, smallpox was a disease that also beset the highest circles: King Ferdinand IV and Emperor Joseph I died of this illness, as did both wives of Emperor Joseph II and several of Empress Maria Theresa's children. After the latter monarch had herself survived a severe bout of the smallpox in 1767, she decided to have her youngest children vaccinated. Great hopes had been placed in this prominent example, but the Austrian population was not convinced by vaccination with a human serum. It was not until a vaccine with bovine serum was developed in around 1800 that people were increasingly ready to be vaccinated, so that the smallpox eventually disappeared altogether.

In the nineteenth century, the plague and the smallpox had largely been eradicated in Europe, but the arrival of **cholera** brought about a new, threatening epidemic. The link between epidemics and hygiene had been recognized by this time. A long-term effect of the cholera epidemic was therefore the improvement of the Viennese

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sewer system: the first comprehensive sewer system of the city was given the byname of cholera sewers. Cholera nevertheless remained a dangerous threat to the Viennese population for about a century. Even the imperial collections were affected, as apparent from the cholera regulations for imperial buildings that were published in 1892.

The **Spanish flu** claimed enormous sacrifices throughout the world in 1918; it is the disease that bears greatest similarity to the current situation. In Austria, the fight against the Spanish flu was entrusted to the Ministry of Public Health (Ministerium für Volksgesundheit), which had only been established that very year. One of its uniforms is on show from the Department of Court Uniforms. The measures taken at the time are familiar to us today, ranging from the creation of dedicated hospital stations to the closure of theatres and schools. The legality of these measures rested on the epidemic law of 1913, which the current Corona laws are also based on.

PROTECTED BY MASKS

The most obvious and probably most fiercely discussed feature of the Corona pandemic is the mask that we use to cover mouth and nose in order to protect ourselves and those close to us from infection. Masks have played a varied role throughout the history of humanity, with medical use being only a very minor aspect.



Two exchangeable visors for Archduke Ferdinand II's Hussar Tournament (1557)

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Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Imperial Armoury, © KHM-Museumsverband

The Habsburg court encountered masks at tournaments as well as at the theatre and at boisterous dances. Numerous members of the imperial court, including Maria Theresa, had their portraits painted with this attribute. As late as the mid-nineteenth century, the Viennese journals regularly published the newest models of carnival masks during the season. There is, however, no evidence that 'plague masks' were used in the German-speaking sphere as they were elsewhere in order to protect doctors from infection. A special version of the face covering appeared at the court in the second half of the nineteenth century, when Empress Sisi covered her face behind an elaborate, richly decorated mask at funeral services. This served to express her grief as well as to shield her ageing face from being seen by nosy onlookers.

The creatively designed masks used by the Habsburgs may not have served a medical function, but can still be considered the forerunners of the face masks currently in use. After all, a proper fashion in mask styles was quick to develop during lockdown.

COURT MOURNING

Diseases, epidemics and childbirth complications carried off many Habsburgs at a young age. As the death toll mounted, endless periods of mourning ensued, plunging the court into deep black for extensive periods. Carriages were painted and fitted out in black, the servants wore black liveries and even the nobility had to dress accordingly. For the first few weeks, simple materials were also prescribed. Ladies wore black wool dresses with black accessories and black jewellery. Men appeared in mourning tailcoats made of rough cloth with melee weapons made of blued steel. Normal swords were also permitted, provided the metal parts were covered with black cloth. In the second phase of mourning, more refined materials were allowed as a sign that the most stringent mourning period was over: Ladies were now allowed to wear silk dresses and men tailcoats made of fine fabric. Accessories however remained black. Only in the last phase of mourning were small dashes of colour allowed. Ladies were allowed to wear garments trimmed with white lace and real jewellery, and gentlemen could carry their usual swords.

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Imperial gala coach for court mourning, Austria, undercarriage c.1690, body c.1730/35, rearranged in the 19th century, Imperial Carriage Museum Vienna, © KHM-Museumsverband
Here with black panels for court mourning, specially reconstructed for the exhibition.



Empress Elisabeth's Mourning Mask and Veil (c.1880)
Imperial Carriage Museum Vienna, © KHM-Museumsverband

Empress Elisabeth's Mourning Mask and Veil

At the funerals of senior members of the imperial household, the ladies following the coffin wore veils made of black gauze (*cloches*) that covered them from head to toe. Empress Elisabeth, who never let fashion dictate her wardrobe, had a magnificent mask made of

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black velvet with jet-bead decoration and lace trim to wear on such occasions. This mask featured a lace bonnet with ostrich feathers and an asymmetrical veil extending down to her hips. Elisabeth's funeral mask is unique – nothing comparable is known either in Vienna or at other courts.

The Hearse – a Product of Disease Prevention

For centuries, the members of the imperial household went to their graves on a bier carried by courtiers. At the funeral of Ferdinand IV († 1654), who died of smallpox, the responsible chamberlains had complained about the unbearable stench in the air they had to breathe. But it was only when people realized that the smell was associated with the risk of infection that the court ceremonial changed. In 1762, Empress Maria Theresa ordered that for safety reasons a carriage be used for the burial of her daughter Johanna Gabriela, who had also died from smallpox. A carriage previously used for ambassador audiences was quickly converted and subsequently regularly used for court burials. In the second half of the nineteenth century it was replaced by the magnificent black hearse shown here.



Black Hearse (1876/77), Imperial Carriage Museum Vienna, © KHM-Museumsverband

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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Leopold Bucher
Allegory: Austria and the Cholera
1835
Belvedere, Vienna
© Photo: Johannes Stoll

This picture is shown virtually as part of a specially designed multimedia installation.



Exchangeable visor for Archduke Ferdinand II's Hussar Tournament
Wolfgang Kaiser and Melchior Pfeiffer, Prague 1557
Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Imperial Armoury
© KHM-Museumsverband



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Wolfgang Kaiser and Melchior Pfeiffer, Prague 1557
Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Imperial Armoury
© KHM-Museumsverband



Two exchangeable visors for Archduke Ferdinand II's Hussar Tournament
Wolfgang Kaiser and Melchior Pfeiffer, Prague 1557
Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Imperial Armoury
© KHM-Museumsverband



**Hussar tournament in Prague 1557:
Andre Teufl in the costume and mask of a hussar**
Tournament book of Archduke Ferdinand of Tyrol Austria, after 1557
Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Kunstammer
© KHM-Museumsverband

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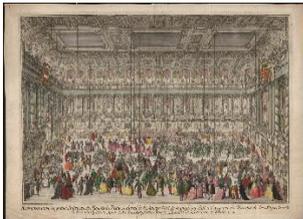
**Archduchess Maria Amalie (1701–1756)
wearing a ball gown and Carnival mask**

David Richter the Elder

Vienna 1709

Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Picture Gallery

© KHM-Museumsverband



Masked ball on 12 February 1744 at the Vienna Winter Riding School

Celebrating the marriage of Archduchess Maria Anna
and Prince Karl von Lothringen

Giuseppe Galli Bibiena and Johannes Andreas Pfeffel, 1744

Theatermuseum, Vienna

© KHM-Museumsverband



'The latest masks from Vienna'

Fashion picture in the Vienna Theatre Magazine

10 February 1844

Theatermuseum, Vienna

© KHM-Museumsverband



Empress Elisabeth's Mourning Mask and Veil

Fanny Scheiner, Vienna c.1880

Imperial Carriage Museum Vienna

© KHM-Museumsverband

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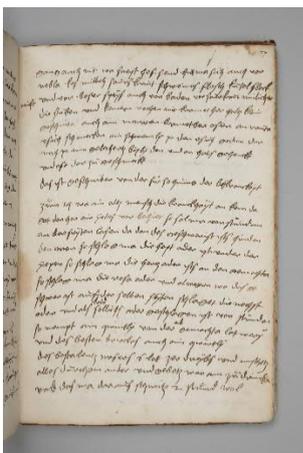
Imperial gala coach for court mourning (exhibition view)
Austria, undercarriage c.1690, body c.1730/35, rearranged in the 19th century
Imperial Carriage Museum Vienna
© KHM-Museumsverband



Black Hearse
1876/77
Imperial Carriage Museum Vienna
© KHM-Museumsverband



Gala livery of a coachman or lackey during court mourning
Imperial Carriage Museum Vienna, Department of Court Uniforms
© KHM-Museumsverband



Philippine Welser's pharmacopoeia
Anna Welser
Bresnitz, Bürglitz, Innsbruck, c.1560–1570
Ambras Castle Innsbruck
© KHM-Museumsverband

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Saint Aloysius Gonzaga (1568–1591) visiting plague patients
Rome, first quarter of the 18th century
Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Picture Gallery
© KHM-Museumsverband



Lodovico Ottavio Burnacini
The plague hospital in Vienna
Vienna, c.1680
Theatermuseum, Vienna
© KHM-Museumsverband



Lodovico Ottavio Burnacini
People suffering and dying from the plague in a suburb of Vienna
Vienna, c.1680
Theatermuseum, Vienna
© KHM-Museumsverband

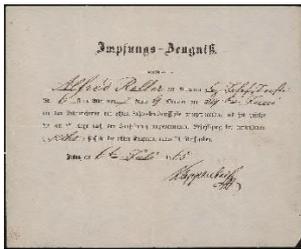


Lodovico Ottavio Burnacini
Tented camp for plague refugees at the gates of Vienna
Vienna, c.1680
Theatermuseum, Vienna
© KHM-Museumsverband

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Vaccination certificate of Jacob Lohner (1821–1892)
Vienna, 1822
© Lohner Archive Vienna



Vaccination certificate of Alfred Roller (1864–1935)
Brno, 1865
Theatermuseum, Vienna
© KHM-Museumsverband



'Under the influence of the flu'
Caricature of the closure of entertainment venues in Vienna
Die Muskete, 7 November 1918
© Austrian National Library, Vienna



'Chess with the flu'
Caricature for wearing masks as protection against infection
Supplement to Die Muskete, 31 October 1918 (facsimile)
© Austrian National Library, Vienna



'Portrait of a cholera prevention man'
Illustrated supplement to Saphir's magazine 'Der deutsche Horizont'
1831
© Wien Museum / Vienna Museum

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Gala uniform of an official of the Ministry of Public Health
Moritz Tiller & Co.
Vienna, 1918
Imperial Carriage Museum Vienna, Department of Court Uniforms
© KHM-Museumsverband

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OPENING HOURS AND ENTRANCE FEES

Imperial Carriage Museum Vienna Schloss Schönbrunn 1130 Vienna	Adult* Reduced admission* Vienna City Card Child/young person (0-19)	€ 10 € 8 € 9 free
Dec. 1 to March 14 Daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.	Annual ticket Annual ticket U25	€ 44 € 25
March 15 to Nov. 11 Daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.	NEW: Annual Family Ticket For 2 adults and up to 3 children or teens under 19; for more information please visit: www.khm.at/familie	€ 79

**Price change from March 1, 2021: adult € 12, reduced admission € 9*

Online tickets are available at:
<https://shop.khm.at/de/tickets/>

For **information** on the Imperial Carriage Museum please visit:
<https://www.kaiserliche-wagenburg.at/>

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