



Austria

by Geoffrey W. Bateman

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Up until the end of World War I in 1918, Austria was a large empire consisting of a number of smaller states and ethnic groups, which was ruled for almost 750 years by the Hapsburg dynasty. Much of central Europe, including Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia once comprised *Österreich*, or the Eastern Empire, until the empire's dissolution. At various points during its history, the Austrian Empire also included parts of Poland, the Ukraine, Romania, and Italy.

Today Austria is a small, German-speaking country in middle Europe. It is a federal republic, governed by two legislative bodies, a National Council and Federal Council. The president is its head of state, who appoints the chancellor, usually the leader of the majority party in the legislature, who serves as head of government. Austria joined the European Union in 1994, and currently it has a population of 8,100,000.

Homosexuality and Early Modern Austrian Nobility

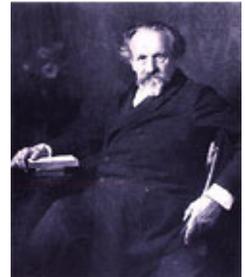
Austrian history prior to the late nineteenth century and the emergence of homosexual identity and culture contains many suggestive traces of homosexuality. From the mid-seventeenth century through the mid-nineteenth century sexual innuendo surrounded a handful of individuals who were members of the Austrian nobility. During this period Austrian imperial law took great pains to define and punish homosexual behavior.

Perhaps most notorious from Austria's early modern period is Prince Franz Eugen of Savoy (1663-1736), a figure whose behavior caused gossip about his sexuality. A Parisian born soldier who had volunteered to help the Hapsburgs protect Vienna from the Turkish invasion in 1683, he led numerous military campaigns in the years following and was instrumental in making Austria a major European power.

Famous for his military prowess, Eugen became equally infamous for his flamboyant gender-bending behavior and his affection for young men. Suspecting her husband of having homosexual affairs, Duchess Elisabeth Charlotte of Orleans wrote that at the French court Prince Eugen was called Madame Lansine or Madame Simone and would often appear with her husband in women's clothes. Referring to them as two common whores, the duchess concluded that Eugen did not "inconvenience himself with women, a pair of handsome pages was much more the thing for him."

During this era, Emperor Charles VI (1685-1740), the father of the Empress Maria Theresa, was also known for his lack of interest in women. His close friendship with Count Michael Johann Althan III was not popular, and his critics judged their emotional relationship harshly.

No record remains of the intimate details of their relationship, but the Emperor lavished palaces on Althan



Top: Austria and neighboring countries.
Center: Adolf Wilbrandt, author of the first gay novel in German.
Above: A fountain in Vienna's Rathaus Park (City Hall Park). The park has been a favorite gay cruising area since the 1920s.
The photograph of Rathaus Park was created by Wikimedia Commons contributor Griffindor and appears under the Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike license.

in Vienna so that the two could remain close. A few years before Althan's death in 1722, Charles wrote to him as "my truest servant, my heart's friend, who loves me as I have loved him for nineteen years in true, profound friendship."

Legal Prohibitions of Sodomy

In the eighteenth century, sodomy was a criminal offense punishable by death. In 1768 Empress Maria Theresa reformed the imperial law; article 74 of the *Constitutio Criminalis Theresiana* defined "sodomitical sins" or the "abominable vice of unchastity against nature" as sex between men, between women, or between men and women who committed sexual offenses against the natural order. The law also prohibited bestiality and necrophilia. The statute stipulated that sodomites were to be beheaded, after which the body and the head were to be burned.

As Napoleon swept through Europe in the early nineteenth century and put into place a new system of law, known as the Napoleonic Code, he temporarily decriminalized sodomy in many European countries.

Although the Austrian law prohibiting sodomy was not lifted, in 1803 Emperor Francis II lessened the punishment for sodomy from death to a prison term ranging from six months to a year. Although in the early nineteenth century, the Austrian state considered sodomy a crime, it no longer targeted it for extreme persecution.

The Rise of Homosexual Identity

As in many European countries, Austria also saw the rise of homosexual identity, and the appearance of a homosexual subculture in the nineteenth century. People began to see sexuality as an important aspect of identity and slowly and tentatively gay and lesbian subcultures began to emerge.

At the same time, and perhaps in response to the appearance of gay and lesbian subcultures, the punishment for sodomy was made more severe. In 1852, sodomy laws were revised, and the punishment was increased to a maximum of five years in prison. Unlike other European sodomy laws, the Austrian statute prohibited lesbian sexual activities as well as sexual relations between men.

Turn of the Twentieth Century Lesbian Culture

Hanna Hacker argues that Austrian lesbian history began in the late nineteenth century. At this time, she notes, many early Austrian feminists eschewed relationships with men and chose other women as their life partners.

Austrian philosopher Helene von Druskowitz (1856-1918), for example, wrote fervently against heterosexuality and encouraged women to consider relationships with other women. In a pamphlet published in 1905, she judged men harshly, calling man the "curse of the world," and pressed women to stand up against them by cultivating relationships with each other.

Hacker also documents how other early Austrian feminists, such as Irma von Troll (1847-1912), a writer who confronted the issue of prostitution in her work; Auguste Fickert (1855-1910), co-founder of Vienna's radical women's moment; and Marie von Najmájer (1844-1904), a Hungarian-descended apologist for lesbian love, all contributed to the emerging lesbian culture in Austria at the turn of the twentieth century.

As in the United States and other European countries, feminism and lesbianism, although distinct, were closely related, both fostering women's culture and politics.

According to Hacker, after World War I, lesbians began to form their own organizations distinct from feminist groups. Identifying as women of the third gender, Austrian lesbians helped create local chapters of

the *Deutscher Freundschaftsverband* (German Friendship Association) and *Bund für Menschenrecht* (Union for Human Rights).

Lesbian publications from Germany such as *Frauenliebe* (Women's Love) and *Die Freundin* (The Female Friend) also become popular among women of the lower middle class, as did early lesbian novels such as *The Scorpion* by German writer Anna Weirauch (1887-1970) and *The Well of Loneliness* by English author Radclyffe Hall (1880-1943).

Gay Men and the Fin-de-Siècle

Gay male culture also began to flourish in the late nineteenth century. As Vienna grew and expanded during the Industrial Revolution, large numbers of people, in the tens of thousands, moved into the city. The increase in young workers, many of whom were single men, arguably facilitated homosexual relationships.

In 1875, Adolf Wilbrandt, the director of the *Burgtheater* (National Theater), published the first gay novel in German, *Fridolins heimliche Ehe* (Fridolin's Secret Marriage). The novel presents a bisexual theory of the soul, comprised of a masculine and a feminine part. Previously unable to love fully because of these contradictory impulses, by the end of the novel, Fridolin is able to satisfy both his heterosexual and homosexual desires and finds happiness.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Vienna boasted a number of guest houses, cafes, and bars that catered to a gay clientele, including Café Carl on Fährichgasse, Dogenhof on Praterstraße, and Café Scheidl on Kärntnerstraße.

For those gay men who were unfamiliar with these establishments, a number of baths and parks served as cruising venues for men to meet each other and have anonymous sex, a practice that seems to have gained popularity among gay men at this time. Since the 1920s the Rathaus Park (City Hall Park) has been a popular place for gay men to cruise.

Krafft-Ebing, Freud, and the Study of Sexuality

Two of the most influential figures in defining and studying homosexuality in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries conducted their work in Vienna. Psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902) and psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) both played important roles in codifying homosexual identity and theorizing about its etiology.

In 1873, the German born Krafft-Ebing moved to Graz. There he began his work on homosexuality and other sexual issues, and in 1886 he published *Psychopathia Sexualis*, which documented and classified a number of cases of sexual perversion. Chief among these cases was his interest in sexual inversion or "contrary sexuality," a concept that gained considerable currency at the time in defining homosexuality.

The father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud spent almost his entire life in Vienna. He contributed immensely to the study of sexuality through his work on sexual development and the unconscious. Among his many works, his "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" stands out as an illustrative example of how psychoanalysis attempts to understand the full range of human sexuality.

World War II and the Gay Holocaust

In 1938, Germany annexed Austria. Under National Socialist rule, German laws prohibiting "criminally indecent activities" between men were instituted in Austria. Known as Paragraph 175, the anti-sodomy law did not ban sexual acts between women, ironically loosening legal restrictions on lesbians. Even so, Nazi leaders viewed lesbianism as a threat to the state, and the lack of legal sanction did not prevent them from persecuting lesbians during the war.

In September 1939, the National Socialist leadership sent the first group of Austrian homosexuals to Mauthausen, a concentration camp in Austria near Linz. Richard Plant notes that a large percentage of homosexual men were sentenced to hard labor in rock quarries in camps such as Mauthausen and Sachsenhausen. Instead of being sent directly to death camps for immediate extermination, homosexuals were condemned to a slow arduous death, working in inhumane conditions. They were also subject to medical experimentation, including castration, in a search for a "cure" to sexual deviance.

Documenting the persecution of gay men and lesbians during World War II has proved difficult. Labeled "anti-social" and forced to wear a black triangle, lesbians are not easily identifiable in records from this period. Gay men were identified by the pink triangle, but they too were almost entirely erased from history. The fact that homosexuality remained illegal in Austria until 1971 made it extremely difficult for survivors publicly to discuss their persecution or to press for reparations.

Gay Liberation and Its Legacy

As in many European countries, the 1970s saw a resurgence of gay and lesbian activism and community building. The lifting of sodomy laws in 1971 reflected the increasing visibility of the homosexual emancipation movement that had been active since the 1968 student protests that reverberated throughout Europe.

In the same year that Austria decriminalized homosexuality, however, it passed a ban against homosexual organizations and positive publicity about homosexuality, codifying laws it had inherited from Nazi occupation. These laws, while largely unenforceable, had the effect of stifling the gay and lesbian movement.

In 1979, a group of Austrian gay activists, in defiance of the 1971 law, founded the Homosexuelle Initiative Wien (Homosexual Initiative Vienna, or HOSI), which has remained the strongest voice for gays and lesbians in national politics. It publishes the magazine *Lambda-Nachrichten* (Lambda-News).

In the mid-1980s, the Rosa Lila Tip (Pink Lavender Tip), a gay and lesbian resource center in Vienna, expanded into a comprehensive community center, the Rosa Lila Villa, and began offering more services to the community, including coming out groups and social support groups.

The activities of these organizations and other smaller groups have helped challenge homophobia in Austria and develop a thriving gay community, especially in the cities of Vienna, Graz, Innsbruck, and Linz.

In 1996, coinciding with the abolishment of the federal law that prohibited public displays of homosexuality, Austria held its first gay pride parade.

More recently, gay and lesbian activists have celebrated the overturning of section 209 of the penal code, which set the age of consent for sex between men at 18 but allowed lesbians and heterosexuals to have sex at the age of 14. In June 2002, the Austrian Supreme Court ruled that section 209 violated the Austrian constitution's "equality principle" and ordered the Parliament to revise the law by February 2003.

In April 2003, HOSI announced that the city of Vienna would begin to take steps to recognize gay and lesbian partnerships. Viewed primarily as a symbolic gesture, it was hoped that such recognition by the city could pave the way for gay marriage in Austria.

Further progress toward marriage equality was attained in December 2009, when Austria's Parliament passed legislation permitting homosexual couples to enter into civil partnerships. The legislation, which became effective January 1, 2010, provides many of the rights enjoyed by heterosexual couples, but denies access to artificial insemination and the right to adopt children.

The success of the legislation was hailed by Christian Hoegl, co-president of HOSI, as "a reward for two decades of lobbying."

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