A Crossroads, A Borderland, The Center of an Empire: The Evolution of Austrian Identity

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Identity is everywhere if you look hard enough. In recent centuries, national identity has become increasingly important in an ever globalizing world. Governments have striven to create a positive “brand” of their country in order to unify the populace and standout in world relations. Identity can have modern roots founded in pop culture or deep roots based in ancient political systems and civilizations. The unique aspect of identity is that it is present in every country regardless of location, government system, size, stability, or age. Identity is also essential to examine in order to understand human differences and overcome problems in mature, responsible, and peaceful ways.

Austria has many contributors to the perceived identity of the country. From schnitzel and the von Trapp family to the swastika, Austria is a country with many roots of identity. Through the deep history of the territory, several central themes have developed. In the beginning, Celtic Salt Traders established civilizations in the territory as a crossroads. The Romans followed and established their borderland of the *limes* on the banks of the Danube. The Babenberg family arose as the next hegemon of the area and ruled the border territory of *Ostmark* within the Holy Roman Empire. In the late 13th century the Habsburgs came to power. The royal family established Austria as the center of the vast Holy Roman Empire bringing political power and cultural poise to Vienna. After the end of World War Two, Austria added another facet to the makeup of its identity as the nation declared itself neutral and embarked on an economic plan to re-establish the country.

These facets of identity have evolved from one into the other while simultaneously flourishing independently and continuing as individual aspects. Today, Austria is a crossroads and a borderland. Additionally, it reflects attitudes of an empire and of a citizenry content with their subtle role in the global theatre.
Chapter 1- Roots: Celtic Crossroads and Roman Border

Today, this mineral is available all over the world thanks to modern geological technology and capitalism. Few individuals go further than either their kitchen table or the local grocery to get it. This compound regulates heart rates in all animals and controls the body’s balance of fluids.¹ It is essential to life at nearly all levels and has shaped countries far and wide and has played essential roles in the history of India, China, and many other countries. Austrian identity has also been shaped by salt multiple times. Once in the times of Celtic and eventually Roman rule of the country and again during the height of the Habsburg Empire. How exactly has Austrian identity been influenced by this early salt trade?

Once upon a time salt was not easy to come by. Few people today realize the importance of salt due to its plentiful supply, and it may seem laughable to see such a common resource as precious. It has been compared to oil today, a necessity for any nation or individual, household or army. Coastal communities used the ocean to gather salt by way of evaporation, a lengthy and energy-intensive process. The Danubian cultures of early Austria did not have this luxury and so had to look elsewhere. As early as 1300 B.C.E. a culture was mining salt from the central Alps in what are now the German-Austrian borderlands outside of the city of Salzburg.²

These early Austrians were the Celts and the Gauls and were called by their enemies “the salt people,” from which they derive their name. The complex and far reaching culture was not organized into a nation but was a far reaching group of tribes which extended from the British Isles into the deserts of the Asian Silk Road. Although they were far from nation builders, their culture was centered, as far as cultural anthropologists today can tell, in the area of the

Salzkammergut and, more specifically, in the Austrian, alpine village of Hallstatt, literally meaning “salt village.”

The organized and regimented societies of early Europe dismissed the Celts as a nomadic, unorganized group of barbarians until the mid-19th century when a miner by the name of Ramsauer found two skeletons, an ax, bronze jewelry, and other ornaments in a salt mine. His 1846 discovery was greeted with funding and over the next 15 years the mining engineer discovered over 1,000 graves and burial sites. With these bodies were buried bronze, gold, and silver jewelry, stone statuettes, model carts, and some even claim silk. The myth of barbaric nomads was dispelled and the concept of a rich society with an economic base on salt mining replaced it. Ramsauer’s discoveries go back as far as 700 B.C.E. and continue through much of the Iron Age to about 500 B.C.E. and are today’s main source of knowledge about the 1,000 year Hallstatt Iron Age.

Salt production in Hallstatt began late in the 2nd century B.C.E. when natural brine was carried out of the mountain and evaporated to make salt cakes. This method of salt production continued until the end of the Bronze Age. Smiths in the Hallstatt area began to produce a low grade steel as early as 730 B.C.E. and it was immediately employed in salt production and military use. Interestingly, the early Austrian salt miners soon switched back to the weaker bronze tools as they were resistant to the oxidizing forces of the very mineral they sought. With new techniques of forging, Hallstatt miners were able to make passageways into the Salzberg (Salt Mountain) and began pulling out impure rock salt in leather bags strapped to backs of men,

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4 Kurlansky, 55.
5 Kurlansky, 56.
6 Rowlett, 123.
7 Rowlett, 126.
wearing leather trousers which allowed workers to slide back down wooden banisters to quickly dig out more salt.⁸

The height of this early salt producing culture was around the turn of the 6th century B.C.E. At this point Hallstatt culture stretched across modern day Austria and into the Northern Balkans.⁹ Miners in the Hallstatt Salt region were excavating salt in rock form, crushing it, sifting out impurities, and then packing it into columns for transport on barges and carts. The inhabitants of the Salzkammergut turned to the Danube for most of their transportation needs. Sometimes, the salt moved down the Danube to areas on the border of the Hallstatt culture, like Vienna, or further on into areas in the Balkans. More often, salt was shipped up the Danube to modern day Passau, where it was bartered and also used in the production of salted meat.¹⁰ During this time, salting was the only way to preserve food effectively on long journeys for soldiers and merchants. This Celtic good became a luxury and could only be produced at a low enough cost close to salt sources.

This trade brought a plethora of wealth and technology from across the continent of Europe. Technological advances included early forms of chainmail and cavalry swords for mounted warriors.¹¹ Many of these originated in the Hallstatt and Celtic region (chainmail) while other developments came inward to the Hall communities, including a basic form of the safety pin. Nearly all burial sites in Hallstatt have some foreign good buried with the individual, providing evidence of a prosperous trading civilization.¹² The development of roads and the use of rivers to transport salt and other materials both sent Celts into the unknown and also brought others to the area as merchants and emissaries. The expanse of the Celtic salt trade can be

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⁸ Kurlansky, 168.
⁹ Rowlett, 130.
¹⁰ Kurlansky 166.
¹² Rowlett, 125.
quantified through the examination of language. Celtic, Greek, and Egyptian languages all share the same root for the commodity (hal-) and the use of this root to name saltworks can be seen from Spain into the Ukraine and the southern Balkans.

With the end of the 5th century B.C.E. the pre-historic salt trade in Hallstatt slowed as a result of depleted salt mines, with the technology available, and with the discovery of more plentiful and pure salt resources in the Hallstatt cultural region in Alsace-Lorraine. The Hallstatt mines did continue to operate and soon enough the well-traveled roads to the area brought in another culture very interested in controlling the area and the salt it sat on top of, the Romans. The Romans would eventually conquer the culture created by the Celts and label them as barbarians, a title that stuck until 1846. The great nation builders of ancient times treated the area no differently than other areas in their empire and set up civilization as we know it in places like Salzburg, Vienna, and Carnuntum.

The capital of Austria is built on top of Roman ruins that date back to the very start of the Common Era. In the years leading up to the “turn of eras,” Roman generals were defeated by the Germanic tribes north of the Alps after having been active in the area for nearly a century. After these defeats in 16 and 15 B.C.E., Emperor Augustus decreed that the Germanic threat had to be dealt with once and for all. To secure his empire, Augustus looked to the Danube. After several years of Celtic and Germanic revolts the Danube was secured as the northern border of the Empire and would remain so for over four centuries. To fortify this, the emperor Augustus, and eventually future emperors, organized a far reaching border defense called the limes. This “first line of contact with the enemy” had fixed and mobile troops and was designed to ensure

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13 Rowlett, 129.
rapid deployment of troops to any border area.\textsuperscript{16} With the incorporation of Pannonia Superior into the empire in the 1\textsuperscript{st} Century C.E., modern day Lower Austria, the Burgenland, Styria, Carinthia, and Vienna were all by definition “Roman.” With these new territories came the new fortifications of Vindobona and Carnuntum.

Carnuntum became the capital of Pannonia Superior and estimates suggest that upwards of 50,000 residents inhabited the city at its height. The capital had an expansive military camp for legions, including a gladiatorial school, and an adjacent civilian city outside of the defensive ramparts. Carnuntum is regarded as one of the least explored areas of known Roman activity.\textsuperscript{17} Only one percent of what is believed to exist at Carnuntum has been excavated and already aspects of the city rival those found in Rome itself. It offers examples of extensive Roman baths, an amphitheater capable of seating over 10,000 residents, and a still standing triumphal arch.\textsuperscript{18} More significant is Carnuntum’s history as an outpost used not only by the military but also by emperors themselves staging battles and making law.

The first distinguishing aspect of Carnuntum was the elevation of the city to the level of self-governance through Emperor Hadrian marking it as a \textit{municipium}, the second-highest ranking type of city in the Roman Empire.\textsuperscript{19} Carnuntum’s citizens enjoyed the right to vote and declaration as Roman citizens as a result. Another defining moment for Carnuntum was the use of the city as headquarters by Emperor Marcus Aurelius for three years during his campaign against the Marcomanni.\textsuperscript{20} The Marcomanni were a confederation of Germanic and Baltic tribes who plagued the Romans during the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century C.E. The last significant act of Rome giving historic and cultural value to Carnuntum came at the start of the 4\textsuperscript{th} century C.E. when the rule of

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\textsuperscript{16} Gudea, 66.
\textsuperscript{17} Archäologischer Park Carnuntum.
\textsuperscript{18} Archäologischer Park Carnuntum.
\textsuperscript{19} Archäologischer Park Carnuntum.
\textsuperscript{20} Archäologischer Park Carnuntum.
the empire was divided between four individuals. In 308 C.E., Emperor Diocletian called for a meeting of the emperors to solve issues arising in the Empire. Additionally, the conference made an attempt to consolidate the overstretched society and regain control of the Empire’s far off territories. After the departure of Roman legions from the Austrian Danube Valley, economics in the area relocated to Vindobona.

Vindobona, as the Romans called modern Vienna, was originally a Celtic settlement but was taken over by the Romans and used to defend the region from its former residents, still present to the east.\(^{21}\) The fortress not only served to protect the Roman borderlands but also established control over the confluence of the amber road (from the Baltic to the Adriatic) and the salt road (out of the Alps down the Danube).\(^{22}\) Vindobona was first a purely military outpost but quickly grew into a true Roman society, incorporating locals into various walks of Roman life. The fortress original was constructed of timber, abutting the former course of the Danube. Civilian settlements quickly sprang up outside of the protective walls and were inhabited by artisans, smiths, and other non-elite people. During the reign of Trajan, Vindobona and many other fortresses on the \textit{limes} were fortified with stone. Vindobona was thereafter capable of housing, supporting, and deploying over 5,000 legionnaires and 1,000 or so additional, conscripted warriors.\(^{23}\) As a result of increased importance, Vindobona began to have a true civilian society, including homes with elaborate heating systems, bathhouses, and water piped in from the Alps.\(^{24}\)

Although fortified and part of one of the greatest empires of all times, Vindobona was far from free of hazards. The settlement was sacked and burnt to the ground multiple times.

\(^{22}\) Lendering.
\(^{23}\) Lendering.
throughout its first several centuries of existence. After a Germanic invasion at the start of the 3rd Century C.E., the settlement entered its most luxurious time under Roman rule. By 250 the civilian population may have been as high as 20,000, with soldiers providing a source of economic wealth.\textsuperscript{25} Additionally, a small naval fleet of Roman warships was harbored on the Danube during this time period. It is even speculated that at this time the city hosted naval gladiatorial battles in a \textit{naumachia} at the confluence of the rivers Wien and Danube.\textsuperscript{26}

Over the next century, the settlement began to slow in importance and growth, eventually declining in size as a result of a reduced threat from the Northern Germanic tribes. At the end of the 4th century, Vindobona was sacked by Germanic tribes and rebuilt for a final time, although not nearly as well planned or engineered as in previous projects.\textsuperscript{27} At the start of the 4th century administration of the city was handed to the Huns and Roman Vienna came to an end, but its influence upon the future capital would continue to shape the identity of Austria until today.

So what did both of these very different cultures impart to Austrian identity before declining into the history books and archeological field charts? Hallstatt culture bridged the scattered communities of central Europe through trade. It was a culture separating settled nations and societies to the south and the west from nomadic cultures to the north and east. Early Austrians living in Hallstatt were modern for their time, affluent, and, for some, lovers of luxury. Most significant to Austrian identity, these early salt traders were worldly. They and their goods traveled roads and likely encountered much more than the average person for their time. This also helped to make their society as a whole multi-cultural, another defining aspect.

The Romans contributed to Austrian identity in some very similar ways. For one, they again brought an international aspect to Austria through the spread of this Italian Empire all the
way to Vienna and Lower Austria. Additionally, the Romans brought an attitude of superiority to many civilians through granting citizenship to many individuals in Carnuntum and some in Vienna, a rare privilege for any individual at the time. This was different than the multiculturalism seen in Hallstatt culture. Romans offered the chance to assimilate and leave one’s culture behind in favor of a Roman one. The establishment of Vindobona and Carnuntum as meeting places for dignitaries, such as Marcus Aurelius and Diocletian’s emperors, also added to this sense of superiority. This political and trading importance was one of the most significant aspects of cities like Carnuntum and Vindobona. The single most significant implication of the Romans in Vienna is likely their establishment of Vindobona and Carnuntum as borderlands and the “first contact with the enemy.” This is one of political significance but also of cultural importance, as it defined the area’s role in the greater Roman Empire. As an American today I know the Rio Grande and St. Lawrence Seaway as borderlands. That is the defining aspect of these areas. When the Romans built Vindobona and the limes, the Danube was the borderland.

Chapter 2- Transition: Establishment of Austrian Borderland

After the fall of the Roman Empire, Austria, like nearly all far-flung regions under Roman occupation, fell into an era of successive military campaigns led by individuals who managed to rule the territory for only short amounts of time. This long period of turmoil resulted in a loss of many luxury goods, educational institutions established by the Romans, and of the empire concept that had been the heart of Roman government. This reshuffling of the deck allowed for a new leader to arise and re-establish the area as a state. This role was filled by Charlemagne, whose actions would lead to the creation of the modern Austrian state. The start of the 8th century would see the rise of the first rulers of Austria, the Babenbergs (through the

creation of the Holy Roman Empire), and the Crusades. 29 Additionally, this intricate history again helped to create an Austrian identity?

Shortly after the complete collapse of Roman forces in the area, Frankish forces began to settle the areas of Bavaria and the Danube valley. Missionaries were some of the first people to move southward and push down the Danube. They began to settle sparsely populated areas and ship goods such as timber and salt both up and down the Danube. Frankish nobles soon began to settle in the area in hopes of controlling local resources and populations. 30 With the accumulation of power and territory by Charlemagne in the 8th century, many settlers rushed out of densely populated Western European areas and into the eastern borders in search of economic prosperity. 31

Through the early to mid-700s Charlemagne gathered forces and accumulated territories throughout greater Germany and Central Europe. From 768 until his death in 814, Charlemagne expanded the Frankish Kingdom far into the east and slightly further south in the Pyrenees. Most influentially for Austria, in 788 Charlemagne was able to incorporate Carinthia into his domain. 32 With his victory over the Avars in Bavaria, he moved the majority of his forces into modern day Austria and began a campaign against the Avars’ new position along the Danube, virtually wiping them out by the year 795. 33 Charlemagne then proceeded to set up “an eastern bulwark” referred to as Ostmark. 34 At the Diet of Regensburg in 803, Ostmark was officially recognized as a political entity. This border state was completed with a border fortress at its

29 Rickett, 16.
31 Thompson, 265.
32 Beller, 17.
33 Thompson, 268.
34 Rickett, 16.
easternmost point. Wenia was built on the foundations of Roman ruins from Vindobona.\textsuperscript{35} Even in these early years of Ostmark, it was seen by outsiders as civil and organized. When famines hit east of the Danube, people flowed into the newly created territory via the Danube from eastern Slavic territories. Additionally, the centralized Ostmark was seen as extraordinarily orderly for a border province and a stark dividing line between West and East. Most colonists therefore settled immediately around monasteries, as there remained a “precarious existence” close to Slavic borders.\textsuperscript{36}

This territory remained under the newly established Frankish regime with the name Ostmark, literally meaning Eastern March, for nearly 100 years. Near the end of the 9\textsuperscript{th} century, the Magyars defeated the Frankish armies at this border fortress and the eastern territory collapsed. In 955, at the legendary battle of Lechfeld, German King Otto I defeated the Magyars.\textsuperscript{37} This re-established Ostmark and is viewed today as the defining defeat pushing the Magyars out of Central and Western Europe. Otto the Great, as he came to be known, was crowned by Pope John XII in 962 as Holy Roman Emperor. At his death, Otto the Great controlled a swath of Europe stretching through modern day Germany, south into the Italian peninsula past Rome, and into modern day Croatia, and eastward into Poland, ending just east of modern day Vienna, near today’s border with Slovakia. This empire, although waxing and waning, stood for more than 840 years, until the end of World War One.

In 976, Holy Roman Emperor Otto II granted reign over Ostmark to Leopold of Babenberg. At the time, this meant rule over a very small territory, but the Babenberg dynasty would go on to govern increasing territories of modern day Austria for almost 300 years.\textsuperscript{38}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[35] Thompson, 266.
\item[36] Thompson, 266.
\item[37] Beller, 18.
\item[38] Beller, 18-19
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marks the true start of a politically organized Austria but does not even come close to marking a period of stability, given the ever-present Magyar threat. Even as late as 1030, with the Babenbergs ruling from the Wachau, Vienna was seized by “barbarians” to the east.\textsuperscript{39} In the first years of rule by the Babenbergs, a plethora of military fortresses began to line the Danube down to the Wienerwald, built to protect monasteries and colonists settling the area. Abbeys at Melk, Gottweig, Klosterneuburg, and Heiligenkreuz were built during this time.\textsuperscript{40} Leopold III founded two of these churches, at Klosterneuburg and Heiligenkreuz, and received land grants and acknowledgement from both church and emperor, a rarity during the time of the investiture controversy.

The resettlement of Ostmark clearly influenced modern Austrian identity. First, the existence of nobles controlling lands in the 7\textsuperscript{th} and 8\textsuperscript{th} centuries tied Austria to Western Europe, as did the Danube. This upper echelon of society helped to tame “wild” Austria after the lack of an organized society for approximately 300 years by bringing in the “civilizing” force of Christianity and establish a formal economy. The Danube influenced this time of change as settlement would have taken much longer if it had not offered an easy route deep into the Northern Alps. Resettlement took place primarily along the banks of the Danube and was slow to move inwards into the deep forests. Furthermore, the Danube remained the major highway through the country and access to it was essential for prosperity in the far-flung region.

The arrival of Charlemagne in Austria was also essential to the nation’s identity, as it solidified the German language in the area and strengthened German ties.\textsuperscript{41} Incorporation in Charlemagne’s domain was crucial as it brought Ostmark into the Holy Roman Empire, of which it would later be the ruling seat. Ostmark’s role within Charlemagne’s empire furthered the

\textsuperscript{39} Thompson, 270.
\textsuperscript{40} Rickett, 18.
\textsuperscript{41} Thompson, 263-288.
province’s role as a borderland and “an eastern bulwark.” This is also supported by the fact that individuals from further East sought refuge in the nearby and organized Ostmark when famine and disaster struck and also by the many attacks on Vienna and Ostmark by organized Easterners seeking a foothold in the West. Charlemagne’s incorporation of Ostmark may also have set the stage for empire building by the Austrians, as places like Slovenia, Northern Italy, and parts of the Balkans would later come under Viennese control.

Just as Ostmark began to settle and re-establish some its identity, the settlements in the Wachau and Vienna were threatened with the onset of Crusades to the Holy Land. Neither Ostmark nor its Babenberg rulers participated in the First or Second Crusades. Regardless, the borderland benefited greatly from these early campaigns. Many Crusaders chose the Danube as their path to battlegrounds in the East. This increased flow of traffic brought goods and wealth into the Babenberg lands, greatly enriching their population.42 Vienna was perhaps the greatest beneficiary of the early Crusades, as it was deemed a last stop to refuel and re-equip before entering the daunting East.

Crusaders themselves were not the only individuals who brought great wealth to the Dukes of Austria during the 12th century. The years 1120 to 1190 saw the peak of Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Many pilgrims from the West elected to travel by river, often traveling the Rhine and eventually traveling the Danube for the remainder of their journey. They too brought wealth and a variety of cultures to Ostmark.43 The Melk and Klosterneuburg monasteries both reported building larger hospices for travelers and pilgrims. Vienna’s economy benefitted greatly as those traveling to the Holy Land stocked up on goods, organized for their journey, and also passed through the city again on their return trip. As a result of this increased

42 Thompson, 279.
movement of populations, the Babenbergs began a greater exploitation of their growing territory’s natural resources. This was made possible by the increased amount of capital brought into their country and also by the increased population in their lands. The eastern province began exporting large quantities of salt and iron as well as huge quantities of timber, adding to the expanding state’s wealth. Under these circumstances many of the people living in port towns like Vienna, Melk, and Krems became wealthy and nearly everyone experienced an increased standard of living as compared to their previous “rude and crude life.”

In 1189, Babenberg Leopold V, Duke of Austria, brought his municipality into a formal Crusade. Leopold V brought his forces to aid in the Siege of Acre and took control of Holy Roman Emperor Barbarossa’s remaining forces after they had suffered severe losses, including that of their aged leader, Leopold’s half-brother. In early July of 1191, Leopold V joined the forces of Richard I (Lionheart) of England and several other crusading commanders. On July 12, the Christian forces succeeded in routing Saladin, and Leopold V and his men triumphantly raised the Red-White-Red Austrian standard on a seized building. This was quickly torn down by English forces, trampled, and discarded in a ditch. The outraged German and Austrian troops immediately departed for home, with Leopold V promising revenge for such a despicable act. The fight for Acre raged on for another month, with Richard eventually maintaining control. He then departed for home to settle problems occurring at the hand of his own brother in England.

By this time Richard had made many enemies throughout Christendom and getting home proved to be far from easy. He took an Odysseus-like path homeward by way of bribing pirates and sailing in dilapidated ships. He managed to land on the Northern Adriatic coast and crossed

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44 Beller, 22.
45 Thompson, 282.
47 Reston, 192.
48 Reston, 195-97.
over the Julian Alps with only a few loyal Crusaders still protecting him.\textsuperscript{49} This forced Richard to pass through Vienna and right under the nose of Leopold V. Richard arrived shortly before Christmas of 1192 in Vienna and sent one of his loyals to gather food at the market. The boy spent prolifically and spoke too much of his brave and wealthy master.\textsuperscript{50} Men loyal to the Babenbergs captured the squire, tortured him, and arrested Richard, dressed as a peasant. Richard was handed over to Leopold V, who imprisoned him up the Danube in the Castle of Durnstein in the Wachau. He eventually was handed over to the Holy Roman Emperor Henry VI at a price of 60,000 pounds of silver.\textsuperscript{51} Although Richard spent most of his imprisoned days in Trifels on the Rhine, it was in Durnstein that he received his notorious name. Legend reports that Richard fell in love with the beautiful jailer’s daughter. When the jailer discovered his daughter’s forays with the traitor, a lion was thrown into Richard’s cell. The king quickly reached down the beast’s throat and ripped out its beating heart.\textsuperscript{52} As a result of his revenge, Leopold V was excommunicated from the church for imprisoning a Crusader on journey.

The excommunication of Duke Leopold V did not stop travelers, adventurers, and pilgrims from pouring through Vienna, via the Danube, on their way to the East and they continued to come in droves well after the fall of Acre in 1292.\textsuperscript{53} Leopold V himself judged that the immense ransom paid to him outweighed the religious blow and went about spending the silver. With the ransom the Babenbergs rebuilt Vienna’s fortifications, founded a city at Wiener Neustadt, and bought more territory to the west and south. Furthermore, Leopold V went about

\textsuperscript{49} Reston, 303.
\textsuperscript{50} Reston, 307.
\textsuperscript{51} Reston, 305.
\textsuperscript{52} Rickett, 19.
\textsuperscript{53} Fowler, 65.
appeasing the church in other ways by spending significant amounts of money on the new
monasteries throughout his territory.54

With this increase came an immense increase in education among the colonists brought in
by the Crusades and also by other settlement opportunities. At this time, Ostmark was still
relatively unpopulated and, as a result, much of the population benefitted from a centralized
municipal school system.55 This allowed many impoverished individuals to gain access to
education at a young age and access to books and libraries through their lives.

The establishment of the Babenbergs brought a Western attitude from Christendom to the
former “eastern bulwark.” Additionally, the construction of many monasteries and churches in
the Danube river valley brought modernity to the area and supported the role of the country as a
barrier between the “barbaric heathens” of the East and Christendom to the west. In this context
the Danube can be seen as the path from West to East and the Wachau and Vienna may be seen
as formidable gates to pass through to enter Christendom. During the many attacks on Vienna
and Ostmark during the early reign of the Babenbergs, Vienna and the Wachau proved to be just
that to oncoming Easterners.

The Crusades likely had the greatest implications for Austrian identity during this time
period. The Crusades populated Austria with religious travelers, adventurers, traders, and
Crusaders themselves. With these individuals came money and increased trade both up and
down river. The Danube’s reputation as a trade route began to emerge and Vienna was seen as a
crossroads as well as a border to the East, as travelers headed east stocked up and rested in the
city before pushing onward to the Holy Land. The Babenbergs were the first major rulers

54 Reston, 328.
55 Fowler, 61.
appointed to rule Ostmark as its own entity. This legendary family expanded the territory, created its economy, and gave it an identity.

The tale of Richard the Lionheart added to the country’s historical tone and legendary culture. Additionally, the fact that Leopold V did not mind going directly against Christendom’s wishes established it as something out of the “exotic East.” Through the Crusade’s pull of people to the Holy Lands, many individuals passed through the province on both legs of their journey. These pilgrims brought culture and tales with them from the West and the East. This gave the city of Vienna an eastern flair and contributed to its multicultural identity. Although the Babenberg reign lasted for nearly 300 years and had a tremendous influence on the nation’s history, it is far from spectacular in comparison to Austria’s next hegemon, the Habsburg family.

Chapter 3- Establishment: Habsburg Centrality

The Babenberg expansion of Austria and solidifying of the territory’s borders came to an abrupt halt in the 13th century. Friedrich II defeated a new Magyar threat to Vienna and was bent on pushing the “band of nomads” out of what he viewed as the family’s rightful lands. He engaged in one too many battles and was killed with most of his forces at the Battle of Leitha in 1246. For the next 30 years, the Duchy of Austria entered the “Interregnum.” There was no emperor and the territory was ripe for the picking. King Ottocar of Bohemia eventually gained control of the Duchy’s lands but was defeated shortly after. In order to stabilize the Holy Roman Empire, the Pope commanded that Ottocar be removed from power and Rudolf von Habsburg took action. As reward for his valiant efforts, Rudolf gained control of what is now Upper and Lower Austria, Styria, and Carinthia. This federation of states would become one of the longest

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56 Rickett, 10.
57 Rickett, 20.
lasting in the world and would be led, for the most part, by the Habsburgs. This ruling family brought Austria into the realm of Western powers through building cathedrals, expanding kingdoms into a vast empire stretching across oceans, thwarting “barbarian” invasions, and by exercising tremendous power. The Habsburgs chose Vienna as their seat, which brought the city wealth and popularity along with political significance.

Rudolf IV was undoubtedly one of the greatest Habsburg rulers. He ruled from Vienna from only 1358 to 1365 and was only 20 years old when he was granted the throne.\(^{58}\) In this time he brought honor and formality to the Viennese court. He began by enlarging St. Stephan’s church in central Vienna. In 1304, his ancestor, Albrecht I, had ordered that the Romanesque church be re-constructed in a Gothic style after the Viennese fell in love with the architectural style. Rudolf sought to bring a bishop to Vienna to further the city’s recognition among other states. He employed some of the greatest Gothic architects and established artisan workshops in and around Vienna.\(^{59}\) Rudolf, who was given the title of “The Founder” by the Viennese and also by modern historians, also set about bringing prestige to his city and territory by founding a university. This was an honor reserved only for the Holy Roman Emperor (Charles IV at this time, who had established a university of his own in 1350). Rudolf rebelliously built the second university in central Europe in 1365, much to the dismay of his superior.\(^{60}\) Although he died in 1365, Rudolf brought Vienna and his Southern Germanic territory into Christendom proper.

Friedrich III, who ruled from 1440 to 1493, brought two essential ruling philosophies to Vienna and the Habsburgs.\(^{61}\) Friedrich III brought political prowess and power to his kingdom as he was crowned Holy Roman Emperor in 1452. This signaled Austria’s rise to the dominant

\(^{58}\) Rickett, 25.  
\(^{59}\) Rickett, 26.  
\(^{60}\) Rickett, 26.  
\(^{61}\) Beller, 37.
power in Central Europe. He was the first Habsburg to be crowned Emperor but was far from the last, as the family proved to be the dominant hereditary line of the empire. The family held the position of Emperor nearly continuously until the early 1800s. Friedrich’s first political strategy involved intermarriage with other monarchies to gain power. He married Eleanor of Portugal in 1452 and thereby gained control of Portuguese landholdings in Southern Europe and Northern Africa. Friedrich’s famous line “Let others wage war for a throne – you, happy Austrian, marry” was the definition of this policy. His policy of uniting and expanding the empire through marriage would continue until the end of the Holy Roman Empire. Although he was the first Habsburg to use marriage to expand the empire, it became the primary form of diplomacy of many Habsburgs to follow. Friedrich III is also credited with proclaiming the following phrase: “Austria is the center of the world.” This has also been translated “Austria will outlast all other powers.” He shortened this to A.E.I.O.U. (in German Alles Erdreich ist Österreich untертan, “All the world is subject to Austria”) and put it on almost anything he could touch, including engraving it on St. Stephan’s Cathedral. Although Friedrich was an empire builder in public relations, he proved to be just the opposite in military defense and expansion.

In 1485, the Magyar threat once again knocked on the eastern door of Austria. Friedrich III fled to Wiener Neustadt. Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus captured Vienna with help from the Ottoman Empire. It became his capital until his death in 1490, when his forces were routed by those from the Holy Roman Empire. This began a renewed period of instability on Austria’s eastern front.

After Corvinus was pushed out of Vienna, Maximilian assumed his father’s throne. Despite his father’s suggestion to let others wage war, Maximilian waged plenty of them. In

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62 Rickett, 27.
63 Beller, 40.
1498, he fought the French and Italians over claims to Milan. In 1499, the Swiss Federation sought to remain independent from the growing Habsburg monarchy and battles erupted along the Tyrolean border. 1504 brought Maximilian into a conflict between Bavaria and Tyrol over land debts stemming from alliances between the two territories. This ended with the Habsburgs controlling all of Tyrol and parts of Bavaria.64 These conflicts, early in his reign, ended with the creation of a more unified and centralized Österreich or “Eastern Kingdom.” When Maximilian could no longer wage war, like his father he sought to gain territories through marriage. He created dynastic opportunities through marriage in Poland, the Spanish Empire, and throughout much of southern Germany.

Rudolf, Friedrich, and Maximilian typify the actions of many of Austria’s and the Holy Roman Empire’s rulers. Rudolf the Founder declared Austria as a state within the realm of Europe through his momentous actions. The existence of St. Stephan’s Cathedral and the University of Wien may not be enough to join the EU; but, in the 1300s they marked civilization and a high standard of living. These helped to bring Western European attention and personal prosperity to Vienna and Austria and marked the area as a civilized part of Christendom. Friedrich III furthered this status of Austria through his coronation as Holy Roman Emperor by the Pope.

Friedrich also contributed to Austrian identity as he claimed Austria was the center of Europe and its “designated” ruler. This concept of rule through divine right encouraged the Habsburgs to create their enormous empire. Additionally, “Austria is the center of the world” justified Habsburg rule over many far off states and provinces. Friedrich’s belief that Austria was the world’s ruler and center did not truly extend outside of his mind. Travelers in the 16th century avoided Vienna and the city’s bridges were more or less barges, ready to be cut free in

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64 Beller, 44-45.
Politically, Austria did become more central. Through the expansion of his empire through marriage, Austria began to rule more of the world and occupy a more central position within the Holy Roman Empire. This is Friedrich’s greatest impact on Austrian history. It implanted the attitudes of a monarchy and eventually added many territories to the state.

Maximilian continued his father’s philosophy of building the empire through marriage and expanding the Austrian state. Maximilian also spent much of his reign unifying the territories of modern Austria and creating Österreich. These previously independent territories came under rule and the larger entity of Austria was formed leaving behind Ostmark. This had obvious impacts on Austrian identity, as the state’s citizens now belonged to a kingdom and no longer an eastern border province. During Maximilian’s reign, his kingdom became less and less a border land and more a part of Europe.

However, this did not mean an end to Austria’s role as “the bastion of Christendom.”

While the Habsburgs were creating a unified Austria and ruling the Holy Roman Empire, the Ottoman Empire was rapidly expanding eastward. The Ottomans wished to control the wealthy shipping route of the Danube and the roads leading to Venice and other merchant cities to sell their commodities of cotton, dried fruits, and other goods. In 1521, Suleiman the Magnificent departed on a westward campaign. He began by taking Belgrade and traveled northward up the Danube. In the spring of 1526 Suleiman began his military campaign in proper and traveled northward to Hungary. In August, Suleiman captured the throne of Hungary in Budapest.

The Habsburgs, under Ferdinand I, felt the threat of an army that was, thus far, invincible, and mobilized forces to push Suleiman out of Hungary. The leaders of Österreich were aware of

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66 Beller, 49.
68 Clot, 64.
the Ottoman destination and penultimate goal of seizing Vienna. Suleiman was driven back and the Habsburgs claimed western Hungary. The Turkish threat re-emerged in 1529 with more support and began marching on Vienna. The Ottomans defeated the royal family at Budapest and in modern day Bratislava as they sailed up the Danube. Suleiman’s forces outnumbered the defenders of Vienna ten to one. Inside the walls of the city were troops from Bohemia, Spain, Styria, Lower Austria, and Viennese civilians full of spirit to protect their city. Likely due to bad weather and a long campaign, Suleiman the Magnificent was defeated, and he turned back to Budapest for the winter. The Turkish siege of 1529 was over but sieges in 1532 and 1545 did damage the city.

The Habsburg seat was again threatened by the Ottoman Turks in 1683. The Ottomans sought Vienna’s control over the Black Sea-Central Europe trade route of the Danube and the overland trade route between the Baltic and the Mediterranean. In the fall of 1681, the Ottomans made it clear they intended to seize Vienna. It would be another 15 months before Vienna would come under attack and this time between mobilization of forces and the siege gave Vienna and the Holy Roman Empire ample time to prepare. Leopold made alliances with Polish King Jan Sobieski, Rome, and Venice, in addition to recruiting forces from the German states. July of 1683 brought the Second Siege of Vienna and the Turkish forces slowly made progress towards seizing Vienna. This came to an abrupt halt on September 12 when relief forces of the Holy League charged down the Kahlenberg onto the Ottoman forces, which had just

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69 Clot, 65.
70 Clot, 65.
71 Clot, 67.
73 Beller, 69.
74 Beller, 70-71.
breached the Viennese walls.\(^7^5\) The cavalry charge consisted of at least 45,000 troops and sent the remaining Ottoman troops into a panicked retreat. This retreat continued across the Hungarian highlands and into the Balkans.

These large offensives by the Ottoman Empire had long lasting impacts on the Habsburgs, the Holy Roman Empire, and on Austrian identity. In the First Siege of Vienna, Ferdinand retreated to Linz so that he could communicate with his brother, Charles, and organize a relief force if necessary. If Vienna fell, Charles and Ferdinand knew it would mean a long siege against the Turks as the Ottomans would push into Central Europe. This view of Vienna as the eastern bulwark and a gateway has been seen in many other eras and can again be observed here. Furthermore, for the first time, we see the opposite viewpoint as Suleiman the Magnificent saw Vienna as his first step into Europe. Through this siege the attitude of *rule by divine right* was observed as Ferdinand simply took his “rightful” place as King of Hungary after his in-law fell at the hands of the Ottomans. Additionally, it is interesting to see that Viennese and Austrian civilians made up a substantial portion of the troops fighting the Turkish threat and the concept of a Viennese, and potentially Austrian, identity is apparent. The civilians could easily have fled for refuge within nearby cities but instead remained to protect their city. The appearance of troops from outside greater Austria on the defending side of the siege also helped foster the multi-cultural aspect of the city and province. Through the creation of Österreich and the title of Holy Roman Emperors, the Habsburgs gained more distant territories. People from these territories moved more freely as a result of the unification of territory and delegates of the Habsburgs traveled far from Vienna but still made it their home. As a result, the city experienced more cultural expansion within its own borders. The siege also proved to be vital

\(^7^5\) Beller, 71.
for maintaining order within the Holy Roman Empire and Austria by creating a common enemy
during the turbulent times of the Reformation.

During the early 16th century, the Reformation created chaos across the continent,
especially in Germany. The rise of the Turkish threat allowed Christendom to unite against a
common enemy. In Austria, Protestant and Catholic leaders were forced to set aside their
differences for the time being and focus on maintaining Christendom’s existence.

The Second Siege of Vienna was no less important to Austrian identity than the first.
This fight for Vienna shows the city as highly multi-cultural as Polish troops are credited with
saving the city from Turkish occupation. As the Polish, Venetian, and Roman troops were
successful in defending the city, Vienna and Austria were the last defenses against the
“uncivilized barbarians” to the east. Additionally, the city was seen as a cultural confluence due
to this siege and the aims that the Turks hoped to achieve by it. The retreating Turks left behind
most of their supplies and arms, including bronze cannons which were melted down to make St.
Stephan’s South Tower bell. Coffee beans were also allegedly left behind and picked up by a
baker who started the first Viennese coffee house. Furthermore, huge amounts of gold and other
treasures were collected, greatly enfranchising the Viennese population. This added to the
already wealthy coffers of the city, which allowed the area to become more organized and
modern.

The continued retreat across the Hungarian plains is another way in which this siege
influenced Austrian history. The Holy League, which was formed as a result of this siege, went
on almost a final crusade, pushing the Ottomans out of European territory. The territory
“liberated” by this campaign fell into the hands of the Habsburgs and widened the House’s
dynasty's empire. This vast expansion eastward to Transylvania and south to Dalmatia placed Vienna, and
thereby the Habsburg seat, in the center of their empire. The actions of the Holy League pushed the Habsburgs into a time when they lacked major threats from outside their own domain. With this, trade began to flourish on the Danube. After the expulsion of the Ottomans, the Habsburgs controlled the Danube up to Bulgaria. This encouraged trade and movement of people into and through Vienna via the Danube. More goods moved up and down the Danube from and into the “unified” eastern provinces. For the first time in the late 17th century, regular passenger services were offered from Ulm to Vienna and onto Pressburg. Additionally, grain from the Hungarian plains and spices from the Near East began to flow into the Holy Roman Empire via the Danube. All of this economic and personal exchange led to more multi-cultural cities in Austria.

Shortly after the siege, France declared neutrality and was no longer a threat to the Holy Roman Empire. This, in combination with the vast new territories east of Vienna, shifted the focus of the Habsburgs. The Habsburgs moved defenses along the French border to support their eastern conquests. In less than 20 years their primary border switched from the Rhine to the Danube. Close to half of the Empire was now east of the Danube. This created a huge influx of eastern goods and customs into Austrian society, stimulated trade, and diversified the cultural city of Vienna and the entirety of the Empire.

Chapter 4- Solidification: Crossroads, Borderland, and Center in the Modern Era

Over the centuries, the concepts of Austria as a crossroads, borderland, and the seat of an empire evolved to create the concept of Austrian identity. In the beginning the territory was a crossroads, under the Romans it became a borderland, and with the Habsburgs it became the center of an empire which ruled far and wide. These three tropes of identity continued to be

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76 W.G. East, 340.
77 W.G. East, 339.
evident in Austrian society and are still evident today. With the rise of the middle class and industrialization, the 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries saw the start of international tourism. River, coach, train, and foot travel became popular pastimes and guides became available. Tourists flocked up the Rhine, to the French Riviera, and explored the Eastern United States, and many ventured into Austria. Many of these early international travelers sought to explore sites of cultural importance and other aspects of society that had shaped the identity of a nation. These sites of cultural importance and evidence of a common identity arose in guidebooks, diaries, and memoirs. Through examination of these texts, one can deduce how travelers saw Austrian identity. The impressions of visitors, what travelers took the time to see, and the feelings with which they departed reflect three historical dimensions of Austrian identity. These travelers, who conveyed Austrian identity to the outside world through their published writings, reflected the nation as the intersection of ancient cultures, an outpost marking the end of civilization, and as the seat of a vast empire.

Austria, and specifically Vienna, holds a history of acting as a crossroads. From ancient Celts moving salt down the Danube and encountering the Amber Road to Crusaders using the river for transport and meeting other pilgrims, eastern Austria has acted as a mixing ground for much of its history. This conception remained central to travelers in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Emil Lengyel, in his comprehensive historical text of 1939, \textit{The Danube}, specifically mentions the role of the Danube and the Amber Road in creating a magnificent and wealthy city. He argues it is this aspect of the city, the confluence of cultures and its centrality to the Habsburg monarchy, that has created the “cultural miracle” that is Vienna.\textsuperscript{78} Russians, Poles, Turks, the Balkan

\textsuperscript{78} Emil Lengyel, \textit{The Danube} (New York: Random House, 1939), 131.
nations, and Jews are all represented in great numbers in the phonebook and the multi-cultural facets of the city are visible in just walking down the street or looking at door names.\textsuperscript{79}

Patrick Leigh Fermor, a young man of 18 who walked from London to Constantinople from 1933 to 1934 after being kicked out of boarding school, was also struck by the wide variety of backgrounds in Vienna. Fermor arrived in Vienna in the early spring of 1934 with his pockets empty. He and a fellow traveler set out to sell sketches in order to feed themselves. They encountered Hungarian residents, Austrian maids, Polish landlords, and people of a plethora of other nationalities ranging from Slavs and Germans to Croats and Italians. Fermor heard stories of how and why the families he paints came to Vienna. A family business, talented children, and banking were the usual causes of immigration.\textsuperscript{80} The friend with whom he gallivanted is another piece of evidence showing the mixing ground of Vienna. Konrad, who Fermor met in a Red Cross Youth Hostel in Vienna, was a career vagabond and the two quickly bonded. Konrad came from the Frisian Islands and was passing through Vienna for reasons that Fermor either does not know or does not want to forfeit to the audience. Regardless of what brought him to Vienna, travelers like Fermor and Konrad abounded, as their hostel swarmed with ragged-looking individuals from a multitude of backgrounds.\textsuperscript{81} Through Fermor’s encounters with citizens of Austria, he viewed Vienna as a cultural crossroads where many different cultures come together and commingle.

Clara E. Laughlin, a travel writer in the 1920s and 1930s, described similar attitudes in her travel guide (with lots of anecdotal “information”). She explains the many approaches to the city, describing the historical paths one could take to enter it. The author tells how one could take the route from the North of the Crusaders down the Danube or the path of King Richard and

\textsuperscript{79} Lengyel, 131.
\textsuperscript{81} Fermor, 199.
the Romans from the South, and several others. Furthermore, G.E. Milton writes in his political landscape book of Austria-Hungary that on the Austrian Danube, “one is sure to meet on the boat, Austrians, Germans, Turks, Dalmatians, Jews, Slavs and Hungarians.” Milton wrote in 1911 that the multicultural aspect of the river and country was already one to write home about. Milton also describes Innsbruck as a borderland between Northern and Southern Europe. He mentions the Italian-influenced dialect of the German spoken there, the Southern architecture of even the oldest buildings, and the many new train lines that run through Innsbruck on their way traversing the European continent, either in a north-south direction or an east-west path. Furthermore, Milton acknowledges the more laid back and Mediterranean attitude of the southern state of Tyrol. It is clear that these authors encounter and examine living and being at a crossroads of multiple societies and cultures as one aspect of Austrian identity.

Another contributor to the concept of an Austrian identity is the idea of Austria becoming a borderland while maintaining the culture of a crossroads. In the Roman context, Carnuntum and Vindobona served as outposts within the *limes*. In the era of Charlemagne, Ostmark was the last fortification on the eastern front. During the reign of the Habsburgs, Austria served as the last bastion of Christendom and as the gateway to the East. Once again, in these memoirs and political writings, the concept of Austria as a borderland is central to the authors’ conceptions of the nation’s identity. In his diary entries, Fermor discusses the many times that Vienna was on the front lines of Europe and was the greatest frontier of Christendom. He dedicates several paragraphs to a recounting of the tale of the Turkish invasions. Fermor also suggests the new borderland which Austria is part of as he arrives to gun shots in the 19th district. He discovers

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82 Clara E. Laughlin, *So You’re Going to Germany and Austria!* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1930), 395.
84 Milton, 156-158.
85 Milton, 155.
86 Fermor, 230-231.
that a battle is ensuing between the Viennese government, occupying the Karl Marx Hof, and the Austrian army, who seek to rid the country of socialist politics.\textsuperscript{87} This was not to be Vienna’s last encounter with a socialist government and was far from its last act as a borderland between socialism and capitalism as the country would serve as a dividing line and negotiator between the USSR and the US during the Cold War. While in Vienna, where Fermor resides for nearly a month, he spends significant amounts of time in the national and public libraries. Here he pores over maps and discovers that he is slightly less than halfway through his journey and therefore at the gates of Eastern Europe. The young man takes time to view the Danube and when crossing one of its many bridges he sees that the boats slipping underneath have names in Cyrillic. As he peers beyond the horizon, Fermor feels a sense of foreignness, that all beyond this point is unknown. Additionally, when he does leave Vienna behind, he begins a new journal and chapter, entitling it, “The Edge of the Slav World.”\textsuperscript{88} As soon as he is out of Austria he reports feeling a certain change in where he is and delights in the realization that “the indigenous sounds meant nothing at all.”\textsuperscript{89} This language divide between the Western language of German and Slavic and eventually Cyrillic languages is one that has manifested itself culturally and, to Fermor, marks his first step into the truly unknown as this is the first place along the trip where he does not speak the native tongue.

Lengyel too dedicates several pages to the idea of Austria, and specifically Vienna, as a gateway between East and West. He begins by telling how “here [in Vienna] first the Orient sent the Occident its treasures. Then the Occident returned the favor by sending the East the Crusaders’ spears.”\textsuperscript{90} It is clear that the author views Vienna as the first stop in Christendom for

\textsuperscript{87} Fermor, 194.  
\textsuperscript{88} Fermor, 234.  
\textsuperscript{89} Fermor, 237.  
\textsuperscript{90} Lengyel, 131.
those from the Orient. The Orient reached Vienna before any other European destination and it is thereby the border and the start of the east. This can again be observed as the author claims “for thousands of miles behind [east of] Kartnerstrasse there is no street comparable with it in magnificence.”91 Later in his text, when discussing the Roman history of Vienna, Lengyel claims that “Vienna must have been in a No Man’s Land.”92 This implies the feeling of an area of desolation and frontier, an empty border. The view of Austria as the edge of the world and the end of humanity is one that is often found in earlier episodes of Austrian history and is again picked up on in the 1930s.

Laughlin too points to Vienna’s long history as a borderland. She begins discussing Vienna as a borderland by mentioning the fortification that once stood in the city’s place as part of the Roman limes, from which Roman defenders stood at the edge of their empire. The author goes on to mention the role of Vienna as the “chief stronghold of the ‘Ostmark’, the frontier province of the Franco-Bavarian [Empire].”93 Laughlin points to this historical role as one source of the “contrast of culture” which she finds specifically in Vienna.94

It is abundantly clear that all of the authors view Austria, and specifically Vienna, as a borderland and as the crossroads of civilizations that one cannot hope to address all of its examples. From the rise of the Romans who created the concept of a Danubian borderland and frontier, to Charlemagne’s Holy Roman Empire, and on to the rise of Soviet Communism in Eastern Europe, Vienna has been seen as a borderland.

The Holy Roman Empire bequeathed to Austria a new identity, one of a central, ruling territory, rather than a borderland or crossroads. For nearly 800 years the Habsburg family ruled

91 Lengyel, 138.
92 Lengyel, 147.
93 Laughlin, 412.
94 Laughlin, 412.
Austria and many of its surrounding areas. At times, their empire stretched to Spain and across the Atlantic to South America. The Habsburgs chose Austria, and usually Vienna, as their seat to rule over claims from the Balkans to Hungary and Germany. The longstanding feeling of residing at the center of an empire and producing magnificent rulers has played a huge role in forming Austrian identity. Even after the downfall of its empire, Austria retained this identity as a center, and travelers repeatedly described Austria’s imperial grandeur.

Upon entering Austria, Fermor exclaims that castles are never out of sight. His first essential encounter with Austrian culture and identity comes in the form of the hosts who put him up. They are barons and bureaucrats hearing of his travels via friends along the Rhine. His good fortune brings him into many deep conversations which he recounts in his diary. He spends a night with an unnamed, low ranking member of the monarchy. The Baron, as Fermor refers to him, tells tales of “an empire long gone” and the pair discuss the dismemberment of the Empire and the Baron “croaked loud of spent glories.”95 As Fermor makes his way down the Danube he is approached in pubs and by inn keepers about his travels and conversations abound about the Empire lost. In his solitude, Fermor imagines the Empire as it stood: “Most of that huge assembly of countries, slowly and peacefully acquired through centuries of brilliant dynastic marriage…was still intact; and until 1919…a buoyant douceur de vivre had pervaded the whole life…many seemed to look back to those times with longing.”96 Fermor’s opinion was that the attitude of Austrians to still regard themselves as the central members of a far-reaching empire was very much present even after the Empire was no longer in existence. Individuals in Austria still regarded themselves as rulers of “that huge assembly of countries.” Thanks to the

95 Fermor, 137.
96 Fermor, 144.
many years that Habsburgs ruled the Empire, there is a deeply rooted feeling of Austria maintaining a seat of power. This reflects the Austrian self-conception.

Similarly, while traveling through Salzburg and Innsbruck Laughlin mentioned the Austrians she encountered and how they were very pleased to tell her about the history of the Habsburgs in their section of the country. This is best seen during a lengthy lesson on the prowess of the Empire from a hired driver taking her from Linz to Vienna. The author was well-educated in Austro-Germanic History but the driver insisted on telling the detailed history of how his homeland came to be the crown of Central Europe.97 The attitude of belonging to a vast, but no longer existent, Empire is one which has evolved from the over 800 year history of the Holy Roman Empire in Austria. Lengyel’s text supports this concept too, as he wrote that, in 1938, Vienna “was the aristocracy’s residential section. Its streets are flanked by the palaces of the former great.”98 This aspect of identity is not one that can be traced back and observed directly. Instead, it evolved out of years of life within an Empire and, in the 1930s, just came to fruition as the reality of modern Austria had set in. Austria and Germany were defeated in a humiliating fashion and stripped of their empires after World War One. That only ten years later citizens still reminisced about the 800 previous years of Central European hegemony is far from surprising. The long history of the Habsburgs in power and as rulers of Central Europe at least during the 1930s remained a crucial aspect of Austrian identity as the devastation of World War One had created a vacuum of culture in the country. This loss of identity through World War One persisted through the 1920s and into the 1930s due to high unemployment and a destroyed

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97 Laughlin, 403.
98 Lengyel, 137.
economy, a loss of national community, and the lack of a trusted government. These circumstances led Austria into the perilous union with Nazi Germany in the late 1930s.

Chapter 5: Adjustment: Towards a New Austrian Identity

After the crisis of World War Two, occupied Austria emerged a divided country with Vienna divided between the Allies as well. The postwar era from 1945 to 1955 proved difficult for the state, as passports, visas, and a plethora of other documents were needed to travel within Austria. Citizens residing in cities had to rely on the black market for goods of all kinds, from food and penicillin to fuel and luxury items. Slowly but surely aspects of Austrian cultural life began to reappear, with the reopening of bombed-out opera houses, theatres, and cafés. As the Allies began to make plans to depart from Austria, the Western powers were wary of instability to the east as they feared that the fledgling state was susceptible to a communist coup. This suggests that the identity of Austria as a borderland and on the fringe of civilization still exists. Austria did rid itself of the occupying “liberators” in 1955 and quickly made itself a non-aligned neutral country along the Swiss model.

*The Third Man*, a film noir directed by Carol Reed, tells the story of a British writer visiting a friend in Vienna. Through the course of the suspense masterpiece, the audience encounters many Viennese. Those in the laymen’s service repairing roads and rebuilding appear to be completely exhausted and tired of their nation’s role in the first half of the 20th century. Additionally, all the Austrians appear to be genuinely polite and congenial to the occupying Americans, Soviets, British, and French. This gives the audience the notion that Austrians feel

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99 Rickett, 168.
100 Beller, 253.
101 Beller, 260.
102 *The Third Man*, DVD, directed by Carol Reed (1949; London: British Lion Film Corporation, 1999).
indebted to these occupiers. There is also a cultural rebirth observed in the film as the main character, Holly Martin, a writer, is asked to speak at a weekly cultural meeting. This reflects Austrian identity as the populace believes they are highly cultured and sophisticated. Without the cultural luxuries they are used to, individuals have elected to re-establish culture themselves. A return to life the way it was before the war also appears in the film from 1949 as people have returned to cafés and are seen in parks.

The film suggests a continuation of some aspects of Austrian identity as the country is still depicted as a borderland and on the edge of the civilized world. The director does this by incorporating many unknowns into the film and through distinct lighting changes with the arrival of certain characters such as the scene immediately lighting up when British and American forces enter the scene.\(^{103}\) Also, the narrative of the film begins with friendship in lightness to betrayal and darkness at the film’s conclusion. Furthermore, the racketeering and underground businesses bring the feeling of a borderland to the country as it is on the brink of civilization and control, nearly slipping into complete chaos. The lawlessness of the “wild East” is evident and the country is a mixing ground of those trying to help the situation and others attempting to take advantage of it.

The feeling of belonging to and being at the center of an empire is also apparent in the film. The citizens are still portrayed as civilized and as possessing an attitude of cultural significance and importance descending from the Habsburg Empire. This is observed when Holly Martins goes to meet with Baron Kurtz at the Café and is surrounded by people dressed exquisitely and enjoying a relaxing cup of coffee. Furthermore, the fact that there is a character referred to as Baron Kurtz fuels the notion of Austrians having an arrogance associated with their long familiarity with their beloved, but long gone empire. Additionally, many of the

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\(^{103}\) Reed, *The Third Man*. 
Austrians in the film are passive characters who do not want to become involved in anything remotely controversial.

The film also introduces a new Austrian identity in the post-war years. Characters attempt to stay out of trouble, not get mixed up into bad business and lay low if they can. This is reflected in politics of the same time period as Austria attempted to shed any blame for the Holocaust and quietly accepted the ramifications of World War Two. This can be observed as National Socialist political parties still harnessed some support after World War Two yet the country still accepted, without any significant problems, the National Socialist Law of 1947, which effectively banned the Nazis from power and forced the country to shoulder responsibility for and accept the Holocaust and atrocities of World War Two. 104 This new aspect of identity seen in the film can also be observed through Austria’s own constitution, signed in May of 1955 when Austria officially regained full independence, which declared it a neutral nation. 105 This is a key facet of the nation’s constitution and reflects this post-war identity shift.

**Chapter 6- Reflections: Austria in the 21st Century**

In the spring of 2011 I was privileged enough to study abroad in Vienna, Austria. This experience was eye opening and incredible in nature and spurred the idea of this project. I lived with an Austrian host family who could not have been more kind or welcoming. I also took classes at the Austro-American Institute on Operngasse, including a course in Habsburg History and another in Austrian Art and Architecture. I was also able to travel extensively while abroad and visited 14 Central and Eastern European countries. Through my host family, course-work,

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105 Bruckmuller, 358.
and travel, I was able to experience firsthand, how, even today, Austria is still a crossroads, a borderland, and a central player in European affairs.

I first learned of Austria as a crossroads through my Austrian Art and Architecture professor who on one of the first days of class discussed the early Celtic cultures and how they exchanged goods as well as ideas in Vienna as a result of the Danube River and Amber Road trade routes. She pointed to the early art forms further up the Danube and how they represented the confluence of individuals from different civilizations. Additionally, she spoke of how the city and country were a crossroads for later art forms as Southern European art styles mixed with Northern European ones for hundreds of years and especially during the high-culture periods between the 16th and 19th centuries.

Austria as a borderland was also first highlighted by my Art and Architecture professor while discussing the Roman fortifications of Vindobona and Carnuntum during a wider class about the *limes* and their role and presence in Austria. We were all encouraged to visit Carnuntum and its triumphal gate and during class we visited the several sites of excavated Roman ruins within Vienna itself in the Hohermarkt and Michaelerplatz. Additionally, I learned of Austria as a borderland through the instruction of my History of the Habsburgs professor. We discussed at length the Turkish sieges and their influence on the city from changes within the city gates to redefining the role and position of Austria within Christendom. We visited the Kahlenberg to see the “last stand” of Christendom against the Turkish invasion and discussed Austria’s role as a border between west and east during these years. The later developed feeling of Austria and Vienna as the center of an empire was also conveyed to my fellow students and me through our coursework and home stays.
While in Vienna, the history course I took was called “Habsburg History.” The simple existence of such a course taught in such a place gives evidence to the Habsburg family playing an essential role in the development of the culture and history of Austria and Vienna. Furthermore, the most celebrated sites of Vienna and Austria focus around the Habsburgs. From Schönbrunn and the Hofburg, to the Kaiserkraft and the Imperial Arsenal, everything we learned about in class was just out the doorstep. The military, political, and cultural center of the Habsburg Empire stood within these institutions and reigned over the surrounding area.

In my government course on European integration, our class discussed the UN and EU headquarters in Vienna and why they were built there. Our professor’s opinion was that the safety, neutrality, and lack of involvement of Austria made it an ideal candidate for these types of institutions. Furthermore, its role during the Cold War as a neutral meeting ground gave the city an infrastructure capable of handling these high caliber political offices.

In addition to learning about these four aspects of Austrian identity, I also experienced the cultural factors of Austria standing as a crossroad, borderland, acting as the center of an empire, and attempting to stay out of large conflicts through my independent travels and experiences. These first hand and independent experiences allowed me to take away both a concept of blatant, self-conceived culture perceived through my course work, and a subtle, personal culture.

With my arrival in Vienna I got the sense of the city as a crossroads. Our plane followed the path of the Danube once out of the cloud cover and we could see highways from seemingly all directions merging in the confluence of Vienna. From the west came roads out of the Czech Republic and from Salzburg and Germany; appearing out of the east were roads from Hungary and Slovakia; and out of the south were roads from Slovenia and Italy. The effort behind these
roads and their true value did not appear to me until a run several weeks later along one of these roads. I had spent the weekend skiing at Hochkar in Southern Steiermark (Styria) and had been bussed along a road whose signs were amazingly printed, amazingly, in German, English and, although less frequently, Italian. This impressed me greatly, as I come from a country where one only sees street signs in one language for thousands of miles. On this run, out in the far southern section of Vienna, I ran across an overpass on Ortsstrasse. Below, on the highway coming north was an exit sign reading “Ausfahrt, Exit, Uscita.” I immediately stopped and was amazed that a city hundreds of miles from the Italian border would put in an Italian exit sign. In retrospect, I view this as a perfect example of Vienna, and Austria, as a crossroads of the cultures of Europe.

Another example of Austria as a crossroads comes in the form of personalities. At the Institute where I attended classes, Frau Weissgarber one day discussed with us the unique opportunities at our fingertips while residing in Vienna. She had plenty of wonderful suggestions for us to enjoy in Vienna but even more to enjoy outside of Vienna and outside of Austria. She was adamant about the fact that we could hop on a train at any of the three major train stations which would soon take us to another country and another culture in more or less no time. She said repeatedly on separate occasions that traveling was so easy for all of us and that we should take advantage of the crossroads of trains. I got to experience this by traveling extensively, but even more so by attempting to force conversation in my barely comprehensible broken German with other passengers about their travels, if that failed I would often resort to using my native tongue. On one occasion in particular, after an incredible day visit to Hallstatt, I asked two kind-looking and German-speaking girls about my age where they were headed. They looked at me perplexed at first and then spoke slowly to me in German. At first I thought, “Finally someone who talks at a reasonable pace who I can actually understand,” and I soon
realized they were simply helping me along and, for their preference, we spoke in English. They were traveling from Switzerland on a school break to visit relatives in Hungary and were spending the night in Vienna with other relatives. To me this was incredible. Simply spending a night in Vienna before switching trains and pressing onward conjures up the exact feeling of a major crossroads.

Another example of Vienna and Austria as a crossroads but more, in my opinion, as a borderland, is the famous (and sorely missed by me) Naschmarkt. To me, Naschmarkt represented the confluence of east and west in Vienna and a fantastic, colorful and aromatic display of Austria’s, and Vienna’s, role as a crossroads and borderland. At least once a week (and once it warmed up outside more like four times a week) I would eat lunch, shop at, or simply stroll through Naschmarkt. Turkish music played from restaurants, kebabs that must have weighed as much as I turned and roasted, and faces of all colors and voices of all dialects showed themselves here. Without fail, I always smiled and was impressed that this was in the middle of central Vienna. As the days got warmer and Naschmarkt became more crowded, it felt more and more like what I imagine Istanbul or Athens or any other truly eastern city to feel like. In Berlin or Strasbourg or Zurich this place would not exist. But here in Vienna, in Austria, it did exist and was treated as a native treasure.

Another aspect of my time abroad that is evidence that Austria is still a borderland is where I traveled to while abroad. Upon my return, everyone wanted to know where I went and what I saw. As I began to be bombarded with these questions on a daily basis I realized something I had not done intentionally; I had traveled nearly exclusively in Central and Eastern Europe. Judging by people’s reactions, I don’t think it was typical for a 21-year-old to come home from a semester in Europe and say, “No, I didn’t go to France, Spain or England, but I did
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get to Bosnia Herzegovina.” I traveled to Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina, and Montenegro, in addition to other places, but the ones listed are what drew my questions’ attention. Even 21 years after the Cold War, and with many of these countries within the European Union, people still have a view of these countries as “eastern” and as beyond Europe. All of these countries are within a few hours’ train ride from Austria and half of them border Austria.

Additionally, while I was in Vienna I could feel and sense the borderland which it was part of. I believe the most defined border for Austria today comes in the form of an economic one. It marks the end of the wealthy Western European nations and the start of the “middle class of Europe.” I remember the exact moment at which I realized this. In February I traveled to Slovenia to watch a Giant Slalom World Cup Ski race. The countryside was beautiful and it was great to get out of the city. The sun was warm, the sky was cloudless, the Americans came in second, and the hills sparkled in early spring splendor. It was time for me to go home at around three o’clock, as I had a German midterm fast approaching. As I awaited my train in a beyond-rundown station in the depressed coal mining town of Jesenice I realized how lucky I was to live the way I do. I arrived at Vienna’s ultramodern Westbahnhof at about nine o’clock. I transferred to the U4 and arrived in Karlsplatz. Upon emerging onto Kartnerstrasse, I was shocked. Light flashed, the trees were lit, the opera ball was in full swing, carriages with luxuriously dressed riders clopped by. A Starbucks was packed with students on their sleek MacBooks. I had crossed the border hours ago under the Julian Alps but just now I realized it.

A third aspect of Austrian identity which I experienced as still important to Austrian while in Vienna and throughout Austria, was the belief in and pride for Austria’s long-lasting empire. One of my five classes while abroad focused entirely on the Babenberg and Habsburg
families and was entitled Habsburg History. In the class we plodded through the mire of family
trees and addressed all of the Holy Roman Emperors and all other significant family members in
detail from the early Babenbergs all the way up to Franz Josef. Our class spent one day every
week being lectured on the complexities of the dynasty and another day every week in greater
Vienna exploring a variety of different historical sites relating to the Habsburgs, from a day at
their vineyards to several excursions to St. Stephan’s Cathedral as well as tucked away facets of
the imperial family’s life. I learned a great depth of Viennese and Austrian history and was able
to fill many conversations with my parents about this incredible legacy when they came to visit.

Furthermore, the width of the empire was another aspect which I experienced in my
travels. Not only around Austria but in the surrounding countries as well, I continually seemed
to bump into Habsburg memories. From the lakeside mountain village of Hallstatt where the
Babenbergs and Habsburgs mined much of their wealth in the Salzkammergut, to Bad Ischl
where they routinely escaped city life, to the vineyards of the Weinviertel and down the Wachau
where they began their rule, history and lore of the families was always on signs, in bars, or at
coffee shops. In Innsbruck people told of their favorite emperor, Maximilian, who brought the
dynasty to their quiet corner of Austria. In Croatia I read the history of emperors visiting the
ruins of Diocletian’s palace. In Budapest and Bratislava I learned of the longstanding
relationship between the monarchy in Vienna and the plains civilizations to the east.
Additionally, my host family and professors always passed along many stories of the Habsburgs
and trinkets of information to remember along my travels. There was a keen interest in my
travels and how Austrian history was involved. Even if only remotely involved, the fun fact of
foreign Austrian history was elaborated upon and told to me with excitement in anticipation of
approval.
The most recently created aspect of Austrian identity was also present to me in my travels and also since my return. On a train from Hungary back to Vienna I was discussing the debt crisis with an Austrian banker. As I was far outclassed in knowledge of all aspects of economics the conversation did not go very far. However, we did compare our respective national debt figures. The Austrian government had a debt figure of ten billion Euros. When this was mentioned I was shocked. This is chump change for the American government. Austria successfully has managed to keep itself, relatively, out of debt trouble. This claim is also supported by the fact that I rarely hear of Austria making the news outside of the Food & Wine sections of the *Boston Globe* or *New York Times*. The Libyan and Egyptian crises erupted while I was abroad. Despite its comparatively close proximity to both locations, Austria remained relatively uninvolved in comparison to my home country. The nation once again laid low and did not get involved.

My time abroad was an incredible and unique time of my life. Eye opening and re-directing are two excellent ways to describe it. In addition to all the fun I had, I learned an incredible amount about Austrian history, culture, and identity. I experienced the country and its capital as a crossroads, borderland, and as the center of a long-perished empire. In action I experienced and learned about the attitude of modern Austrians to lay low and mind their own business. My classes and host parents introduced me to all of these aspects of the area and for that I thank them. Patrick Fermor titles the first half of his journey *A Time of Gifts*. Likewise, I experienced (hopefully only part of) my Time of Gifts in the same cities he did, primarily, in Vienna.
Conclusion

The historical role of Austria as a crossroads, borderland, central political power, and, most recently, as a state pleased to take a back seat in global affairs, all reflect the nation’s identity. Celtic cultures established the territory as a crossroads, the Romans and Babenbergs made the region a borderland, the Habsburgs transformed the area into an empire, and World War Two occupiers established a new identity for the state. Austria’s long and tumultuous history has been shaped by attitudes and actions of rulers and individuals within the state. The reflection of the nation’s identity is therefore the country’s deep and rich cumulative history.

Identity as a concept is unfathomably deep and mired in complexities. The identity of a single nation can never be completely explored or divided into three or four distinct themes. Austria is a crossroads and a borderland. The populace and nation display attitudes of an empire and of a citizenry content with their humble role on the world stage. This is far from an exhaustive list of Austrian historical roles and facets of identity. Although I believe these tropes are important influences upon Austrian identity, exploring a nation’s identity has no end, as it is constantly being generated, updated, and refined.
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