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“England Is the Motherland and America the Daughter?”

Colonial and Revolutionary America in the Habsburg Mind

PEOPLE IN THE HABSBURG lands had formed a deep connection with America long before the American Revolution. For centuries prior to the outbreak of war in the 1770s, knowledge of an “America” and then many “Americas” had come through several mediums. Dynastic servants, Jesuits missionaries, merchant traders, newspaper editors, and artists came together to weave different strands into the tapestry of the Habsburg outlook on the New World; they influenced the wider perception of America and helped to shape the mental worlds of their contemporaries. This process began with the voyage of Christopher Columbus and was still underway by the time of the Declaration of American Independence and the Siege of Yorktown. It was a muddy process, one shaped as much by events in the Americas as it was by events in Europe. In the Habsburg case, it was also a process shaped by geographical proximities and cultural legacies: the abjuration from Habsburg Spain and the abrasion against the Ottomans. Negatives—depopulation, censorship, sickness and disease—also played a role. By the eighteenth century, however, a singular Habsburg preconception of America came to exist, one based on a blend of pseudo-scientific observations largely from Catholic missionaries and coloured by late-Baroque rationalism. As revolution approached in the 1760s, attention shifted northwards towards the British North American colonies. New commentators focused on the potentiality of America, its bountiful landscape, and the harmonising nature of its commerce in more universal tones rather than a foreign land of oddities.

In charting this rise of colonial and revolutionary America in the Habsburg mind, one fact becomes clear: the Habsburg Monarchy was not a detached entity from the Atlantic maritime world. On the contrary, Habsburg inhabitants learned about America with relatively equal pace as much of western Europe.

Many Habsburg subjects, moreover, contributed to the discourse around the Americas from the Hungarian István Budai Permanius, whose poems waxed lyrical about Newfoundland, to the Brno-based tax collector and publicist Heinrich Georg Hoff, who counted George Washington as among one of the most remarkable and famous people in the world.¹ Entwined within the richly interwoven European narratives on America was a continuous Habsburg thread. Unpicking this thread not only contextualises the meaning of the American Revolution in the Habsburg world but also better contextualises that same Habsburg world, one which encompassed a broad, global outlook as well as a European one.²

Post-Columbian America and the Habsburg Monarchy

The voyages of discovery from Christopher Columbus's arrival in 1492 to the confirmation of a separate hemisphere in the voyage of Amerigo Vespucci implanted a new spatial order in European minds. The Habsburg Monarchy of the eighteenth century did not yet exist at that time. Bohemia and Hungary were independent kingdoms. The Austrian dominions were fragmented as several duchies and, up until a few years before Columbus's landing in the Bahamas, had been partly conquered by the Hungarian King Matthias Corvinus. Emperor Maximilian I's reconquest of the Austrian territories throughout the 1480s consolidated his reputation. Maximilian sought to commemorate his achievements in imperial propaganda. He ordered the completion of the *Triumphal Procession*, a series of woodblock prints, spanning 54 metres in length. Conceived by Maximilian and an Austrian cartographer before being worked on by several artists including Albrecht Dürer and Hans Burgkmair, the series depicted a fantastical allegorical train of carriages containing the emperor's subjects to proclaim his glory. One such group was the warriors of Calicut, a malleable sixteenth-century term denoting people beyond the seas, including Americans.³ Half-dressed in feather skirts and headdresses, erroneously clutching European bladed spears, the ensemble reflected the new cognizance of America in the Habsburg mind. On another plate, the people of Calicut appear as bare-breasted women carrying bountiful produce, tending to oxen and rams while one features a monkey combing her hair and headdress. In this case, the plates served Maximilian's desire to display his worldly omnipotence.⁴ To erase any shadow of a doubt, Maximilian sanctioned an accompanying verse to reinforce his ties to the Calicut and connection to the New World: "The Emperor in his warlike pride, conquering nations far and wide, has brought beneath our Empire's yoke the far-off Calicuttish folk."⁵

It was a Habsburg device deployed again in the real-life procession held in Brussels in 1517 to mark the accession of Maximilian's grandson (and future heir) Charles of Ghent to the Spanish throne as Carlos I (known more famously as Charles V). A group of Amerindians preceded a final float which carried a giant golden globe as if to fulfil Maximilian's earlier vision.⁶ For the Habsburg rulers contemporary to the discovery of the New World, inclusion of the Amerindian float in their displays of power meant projecting their interests upon it. As rulers of the Holy Roman Empire, an edifice commonly understood to be universalist in scope, Maximilian saw new extra-European territory as falling under his patrimony as a universal emperor.⁷ But staking a theoretical claim was not the only result. By incorporating America, the Habsburgs also served to revitalise their image as modern rulers, bringing the new, wondrous, and exotic to the people in such public processions and prints. Maximilian planned for the *Triumph* series to be hung in all major halls throughout the Holy Roman Empire and had various copies made of the panels. In a later version by a Tyrolean artist, the Calcuttish warriors appear even further defined by the Habsburg psyche; possessing beards, wearing sandals, carrying rounded shields, and brandishing bows more akin to an Arabian style than anything related to the New World.⁸ Maximilian alluded to further claims in his written plans for the *Triumphal Arch*, which included the "1,500 islands"—a reference to Columbus's letter about 1,400 sighted islands—as one of his patrimonial crests adorning the monument.⁹ It was only fitting that the first Latin publications of Amerigo Vespucci's voyages, which capitulated his prominence and helped enshrine the name America for the new continent, bore dedications to Maximilian.¹⁰

Amassing new-world objects for semi-private display was another route to utilise America for personal enhancement. Habsburg elites were no different from their European contemporaries who sought to acquire American objects for their collections. Emperors Maximilian I through to Rudolf II all collected new-world curiosities for their wonder cabinets (*Wunderkammern*).¹¹ Maximilian's daughter, Margaret of Austria, was one of the earliest collectors owing to her brief second marriage to Don Juan, son of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain in the 1490s. She saw herself as a future ruler of the newfound dominions over which the Spanish monarchs had claimed sovereignty for themselves. By 1524, she had acquired nearly two hundred American artefacts.¹² In general, the Habsburg obsession with the Spanish throne and its territories in the New World fostered an American prominence in the dynastic lands of Central Europe. Emperor Ferdinand I, who was born and raised in Spain, prized his collection of Americana.¹³ He retained personal connections with numerous

Spanish courtiers who informed him of the latest American discoveries.¹⁴ His son and heir, Maximilian II, followed much the same interest, instructing his ambassador in Madrid to collect the rarest and most spectacular new-world objects.¹⁵ Ferdinand I's other son, Ferdinand, who ruled as a sovereign in the secundogeniture of the Tyrol and Further Austria, also placed great value on obtaining and exhibiting Americana. His most notable possessions included Aztec feather garments, headdresses, and shields such as those worn by the Aztec figures featured in *Esther und Avasver*, a painting which he displayed prominently at Schloss Ambras near Innsbruck.¹⁶

Dreams of owning the New World and of reconnecting with Spain persisted throughout the dynastic line of the Austrian Habsburgs. The father of Maria Theresa, Emperor Charles VI, yearned to recreate a Spanish-Austrian world empire centred on the colonial conquests in the New World.¹⁷ After his forced relocation from Barcelona to Vienna upon the death of his brother, Charles contorted the Central European space he found around him towards such a vision. He filled the court with Spanish personnel and reformed institutions to be more like Spanish colonial enterprises. The Karlskirche in Vienna became perhaps the most tangible manifestation of his imperialist aims with its dual columns representing the Pillars of Hercules at the Straits of Gibraltar opening out to the Atlantic.¹⁸ This Spanish-New World influence was still alive and well in the generation of the American Revolution. Maria Theresa's court processions as well as portraits of her and her husband Francis Stephan boldly showed off Spanish-styled clothes and fashions.¹⁹

Illusions of the rulers often affected the allusions of the ruled. Habsburg elites emulated the incorporation of America through collecting and self-fashioning. Prince Pál Esterházy, for example, acquired engravings of Amerindians after observing the collections of Rudolf II in Vienna.²⁰ In mimicking the tastes of the Habsburg monarchs, courtiers and nobles precipitated a wider craze for Americana. Fetishising parrots became one symptom of this trickle-down mania. The quest for these new-world birds, mainly from the "land of parrots" (Brazil), was a longstanding obsession of the Habsburg rulers from Rudolf II to Francis Stephan.²¹ Such imperial projects provoked a cultural fascination around the colourful avians. The Archduke Sigismund Francis of Tyrol and Further Austria purchased an ornate parrot clock, and in Bohemia, a surviving inventory of ball costumes features a courtly couple bedecked in parrot feathers.²² Donning new-world dress became a fashionable exercise among Habsburg nobles as proud portraits of the Netolický and Schwarzenberg families can attest.²³ In Prague, the imperial feather-worker Jan Fuchs established a shop to cater for city elites

and their fascination for colourful plumes.²⁴ Aristocrats consciously sought out and absorbed Americana through friendships, family networks, grand tours, and diplomatic offices.²⁵ As time wore on, these elites developed more consumer-orientated tastes for Americana. The exotic gave way to the luxurious. Consumables and commodities such as sugar, coffee, and beaver hats became *en vogue* and with them the first indirect commercial pathways to the Americas emerged.²⁶ In turn, America became less a curious land and more a source of produce, industry, and exploitation for Habsburg inhabitants.²⁷

Allegorical art was one medium in which the colonial image of America remained constant. From the late Renaissance to the early nineteenth century, artists developed a visual metaphor for America. Continental allegories depicting the four continents of the earth—Africa, America, Asia, and Europe—became an artistic shorthand throughout the southern lands of the Holy Roman Empire.²⁸ No less than ninety American allegories appeared on the ceilings and walls of parish churches, manorial houses, monastic libraries, and grand palaces across the Austrian lands between 1645 and 1832.²⁹ In these frescoes, the personification of America often took the form of a woman (or cherub) half-dressed and crowned with a feather headdress. Commonly associated animals, including the much-adored parrots, featured alongside alligators and armadillos. Inferences oscillated between representations of a noble savage and princely figure, but a sense of inferiority was always apparent, reinforced by the position of America as subordinate to Europe and Asia and a counterpart to Africa. The locations of these allegories reflected the further trickling-down of American interest within Habsburg society. Prior to 1710, the majority abounded in the palaces of Lower Austria and Styria such as Schloss Eggenberg near Graz and the Lower Belvedere near Vienna. Later, American allegories appeared predominantly in abbeys and monasteries before reaching parish churches in the mid-eighteenth century. These images introduced the concept of America to ordinary people who came to these everyday places of worship. Consciously and unconsciously, such iconography shaped the mental worldview of Catholic churchgoers across the Austrian lands.³⁰ Despite this localised influence, parish reliefs did not hold a monopoly on the religious vision of the Americas in Central Europe.

The Society of Jesus was responsible for the most popular religious lens on the Americas in the Habsburg lands. Whereas fashion and art had solidified forms of the exotic, Jesuit missionaries from the Austrian Habsburg lands created a more nuanced picture of the Americas. Officially formed in 1540, the Society of Jesus grew steadily in the Habsburg lands. Of the 5,340 Jesuits of the German assistancy in 1750, over half originated from the Austrian and Bohemian

provinces.³¹ Jesuits from the Habsburg lands enthusiastically participated in the missionising efforts of the order in the Americas. At least 737 Jesuits travelled westward for this purpose from the German assistancy; around forty percent came from the Austrian, Bohemian and Tyrolean provinces.³² A similar enthusiasm existed in Hungary.³³ Completing this mission brought Jesuits into close contact with inhabitants from Brazil to the plains of North America.³⁴ From these intense and sustained encounters, often lasting years, Jesuits from the Habsburg lands formulated pejorative views of their hosts and neighbours. Indigenous societies seemed “primitive” even “uncivilised” rather than conforming to the idyllic representations of the “noble savage” or “children of nature” tropes.³⁵ Missionaries played an important role in brokering this new view to people in their native lands by writing reports to their peers in provincial seminaries and to their families.³⁶

Central European Jesuits also aimed to publish their letters in specialised journals in their native lands. In the Habsburg lands, two Jesuit journals stand out as influential in shaping the Central European perception of America. In the first instance, Jesuits at the University of Trnava (Nagyszombat) began publication of an annual almanac in 1676. Reports from missionaries in the New World featured throughout. Typical entries focused on the savagery and dissimilarity of the Native peoples.³⁷ The 1709 issue, for example, featured news of the “Indos” who had dog’s teeth and barked.³⁸ The Bohemian Jesuit Joseph Neumann, for instance, published in Prague a bloody memoir in Latin of his mission during the Tarahumara revolts against the Spanish and Jesuit presence in New Spain in the 1690s.³⁹ Another Bohemian Jesuit, Adam Gilg, formulated his American reality with harsher words in a letter home. America, in his opinion, was “a garden full of spines deprived of all human consolation.”⁴⁰ Such information appeared as evidence in treatises written by Jesuit fathers at Trnava who strove to comprehend mankind in all its unusual forms from the “harmonious” to the “imperfect.”⁴¹ Their treatises on geography, avians, botany, and dendrology all cited examples from New World observations. From the men who outran deer in Florida to fantastical golden trees in the Caribbean to the worshiped *Quetzalcoatl* birds of the Aztecs, such information supplemented the growing global outlook of Central European Jesuits who sought to conform new discoveries into a rationalised knowledge system.⁴² Information contained in the Trnava almanac reached large audiences. The main editor of the almanac, the polymath professor Márton Szentiványi, repurposed this information for further publications which were translated into German and French.⁴³ Szentiványi’s refashioning of new-world knowledge also reached

other Jesuit centres of the Hungarian lands long after his death in 1708. In Košice, for example, parts of his treatises were printed in the *Calendarium* of the Jesuit university in 1754.⁴⁴ The Jesuit father Pál Bertalanffi reworked much of the Hungarian Jesuit knowledge into his 1757 geography of the Americas.⁴⁵ The endless cycles of circulation and recirculation through multiple authors, from Jesuits present in the Americas to the editors of almanacs in Hungary to their translators and readers, ensured the constant diffusion of Jesuit knowledge about the New World in the Habsburg lands up to the time of the American Revolution.

If Hungarian Jesuits had Trnava as their epicentre of world-knowledge generation, then the Jesuits of the Austrian province had the city of Graz. For thirty-five years between 1726 and 1761, Jesuits in the city produced *Der Neue Welt-Bott* (The New World Messenger), founded by Joseph Stöcklein.⁴⁶ Stöcklein’s initiative was a similar undertaking to Szentiványi’s almanac in Trnava and followed examples of French Jesuit journals about the New World, which reproduced translated accounts and transcribed oral testimonies of missionaries.⁴⁷ By presenting actual assertions of missionaries, albeit somewhat edited, Stöcklein directly transported his readers to an eyewitness position. Furthermore, accounts published in *Der Neue Welt-Bott* appeared in the vernacular German rather than Latin, reflecting Stöcklein’s broader aims for dissemination beyond the clergy.⁴⁸ In producing such rich content, around 812 reports in total, Stöcklein’s endeavour paid off as *Der Neue Welt-Bott* became one of the most influential sources of new-world information in the German-speaking lands.⁴⁹ Although the journal featured reports from Jesuits across the world, fully one quarter (203 reports) featured the Americas.⁵⁰ *Der Neue Welt-Bott* presented a wondrous vision across the Atlantic. It was a land filled with mysterious animals and peoples in need of converting by a “civilised,” learned preacher.⁵¹ Aiming to serve German-speaking readers, Stöcklein selected letters showing non-German missionaries (except for the Bohemians and Hungarians) as “vainglorious and boastful” or “cruel and greedy.”⁵² Combined with extensive imagery, *Der Neue Welt-Bott* served to create vindication and enthusiasm for the Germanic—and in this case, Habsburg—presence in the Americas.⁵³ Stöcklein’s mission to not only to feed the “German” “appetite for knowledge” but also to elevate the endeavours of his fellow countrymen that increased the Habsburg sense of purpose in the New World and, at the same time, made it less alien.⁵⁴ It was no surprise that young Jesuits from the Habsburg Monarchy who ventured to the New World after reading Stöcklein’s journal specifically wrote accounts intended for publication in subsequent editions.⁵⁵

First-hand accounts of America in the Habsburg lands rose after the sudden prosecution of the Jesuit order in the Spanish empire in 1767. Following the decree banning all Jesuit activity in Asia and America, around three hundred Central European Jesuits attempted to return home.⁵⁶ A return to normalcy became increasingly difficult following the general suppression of the Jesuit order in 1773.⁵⁷ Many ex-missionaries turned to printing their memoirs in order to supplement their position, resulting in a literature boom which often portrayed the colonial Americas in a nostalgic fashion.⁵⁸ The fantastical series of forty-seven watercolours depicting mission life in Baja California with German and Spanish subtitles by the exiled Ignaz Tirsch in Znojmo best represent a Habsburg Jesuit's case of longing for former life in the New World.⁵⁹ Jesuits in the Habsburg lands enjoyed relative freedom under the more pious and tolerant reigns of Maria Theresa and Joseph II.⁶⁰ Martin Dobrizhoffer, a Jesuit who missionised among the Guraní and Abipone peoples of Paraguay from 1749, settled in Vienna after the suppression, where, through the patronage of Maria Theresa, he worked as one of her more favoured court preachers.⁶¹ In fact, she often sent for Dobrizhoffer to preach to her personally so that she "might hear his adventures from his own lips."⁶² The publication of his monumental three-volume *Historia de Abiponibus; equestri, bellicosaque Paraquarieae natione* (A History of the Abipones, an Equestrian Warrior Nation of Paraguay) in Vienna in 1784 was due to his royal patronage and an immediate German translation followed.⁶³ In the preface to his work, Dobrizhoffer explained his rationale for writing his account, which does much to illuminate the widespread interest in Americana in the Habsburg Monarchy by the late eighteenth century. Whereas in America Dobrizhoffer had been continually interrogated about Europe, in Austria he was "frequently questioned concerning America" and sought to alleviate himself of this trouble but writing "this little history" on the advice of "some person of distinction," referring to Maria Theresa.⁶⁴ The thirst for first-hand accounts of the Americas from returning Jesuits peaked in the years of the American Revolution. It was not only Dobrizhoffer and Tirsch who contributed to the blossoming field of ex-Jesuit studies on America. American works continued to appear by Jesuits who had sought refuge in the Habsburg lands such as Bernhard Havestadt-, Franz Xaver Veigl, and Florian Paucke who settled in Vienna, Klagenfurt, and the Cistercian abbey of Zwettl, respectively.⁶⁵ Such works by returning Jesuits and their predecessors embedded a deeper understanding of the Americas in the Habsburg web of knowledge.⁶⁶ Yet given the geography of the Spanish empire and the preponderance of Jesuit missions in central and southern America, these

Jesuit accounts transfixed the Habsburg gaze towards these regions rather than North America. It was only as news of the domestic grievances in the British colonies filtered through in the 1760s that the orientation shifted northwards and a new American arena became the focus of attention.

The Dawn of North America

The mid-eighteenth century witnessed a marked decline of hispano-centric Americanism within Habsburg audiences whilst British North America captured an increasing share of the attention. Discussions over southern and central America continued but observers in the mid-eighteenth-century Habsburg lands began to recognise a prosperous, yet precarious situation developing in the British colonies. Prognostications swirled over the future of the colonies and the nature of the colonists living there as new information came to light. Economists, scientists, librettists, and newspaper editors contributed to these emerging debates. The ideas put forward by these individuals owed a debt to the previous centuries of knowledge about the Americas but advanced conversations around the thirteen colonies that would later become the United States of America. Engagement with the complexity of America was not uniform across the Habsburg lands on the eve of the Revolution. Each region—Habsburg Milan, Tuscany, the Austrian Netherlands, Austria-Bohemia, and the Hungarian lands—ascribed their own importance to events and ideas circulating about North America. As the American Revolution dawned, however, the tumult occurring across the Atlantic interested peoples of all areas of the Habsburg Monarchy.

The genre of emigration literature first saw a shift towards North America. Over the course of the eighteenth century, one in three inhabitants of the Holy Roman Empire relocated to territories outside its imperial borders.⁶⁷ Around 100,000 German-speaking migrants sailed to British North America prior to 1776.⁶⁸ Transatlantic migration from provinces bordering the Habsburg lands formed part of this movement, with the most notable cases involving victims of religious persecution such as the Salzburgers, who arrived in Georgia in 1734, and the Moravian Herrnhuters, who followed Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf and David Nitschmann to Pennsylvania in 1741.⁶⁹ Total emigration from the Habsburg lands proper to North America only reached several thousands at most, however.⁷⁰ Another substantial block of German speakers, totalling around 500,000 people, travelled eastwards following resettlement schemes to populate the Hungarian lands and the newly reconquered Banat of Temesvar

from the Ottomans in 1717.⁷¹ The resulting demand for colonists pitted migrant recruiters against one another over the supply of human capital.⁷² Popular conceptions of emigration destinations in North America and the eastern lands became increasingly distorted by the advertising of these recruitment drives. Recruiters frequently depicted North America as a land of proverbial milk and honey.⁷³ Land was cheap there; work was plentiful; religious persecution did not exist, and so on. Even hunting was easier, as the bison, to take one recruiter's word, wandered into your house almost begging to be shot and slaughtered.⁷⁴ The ideal of American life appeared so strongly to prospective German migrants that recruiters for the eastern part of the Habsburg lands chose to imitate the claims. The Banat of Temesvar became known as "Europe's America" in an effort to ascribe positive connotations with North America to the Hungarian interior.⁷⁵ Letters sent back from emigrants to their home communities established a better sense of the harsher realities, but these did little to deter future migrants who relied upon manuals when crossing the Atlantic.⁷⁶ It was possible to walk through the eighteenth-century Habsburg lands and hear the buzz of excitement about America. Towards the close of the century, one writer arrived at a tavern in lower Styria and heard tales of the innkeeper's grandfather and his adventures in America. The writer subsequently published his diary, calling him the "Styrian Robinson Crusoe."⁷⁷

Positive depictions of life in North America created defenders and detractors in Europe. A naturalist, Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon—led the charge in admonishing American qualities. Buffon contended that the presence of smaller creatures in the New World along with the less populous Native peoples pointed to a general American inferiority compared to the inhabitants and nature in Eurasia. Buffon's theory of "American degeneracy," as it came to be known, ignited and fascinated readers in the Habsburg lands as it did elsewhere in Europe. Yet to some, these theories seemed incompatible with the economic vitality of British American colonists. Intellectuals challenged Buffon's ideas, especially in the Habsburg provinces in the Italian peninsula. The Milanese mathematics professor Paolo Frisi attacked the leading works of Buffon and his supporter Cornelius de Pauw.⁷⁸ Frisi argued America was a fertile land populated by intelligent people.⁷⁹ The ultimate proof, Frisi concluded, lay in the example of North America, especially "in Philadelphia where all the other glories of Europe have already been emulated." British colonists, Frisi noted, had engaged in a series of pioneering scientific studies, leading them to "controlling the fire of heaven and calculating the quantity of matter in comets."⁸⁰ His examples alluded

to Benjamin Franklin's electrical experiments and John Winthrop's studies on comets. In exemplifying North America, Frisi shifted focus away from South America. For Frisi, the British colonies in North America served as a repudiation of degeneracy and offered a convincing model for American prosperity and contribution to European life.

Frisi was not alone in his rebuttal of degeneracy and promotion of British North America as the paragon of colonial virtue and enterprise. The Milanese nobleman Gian Rinaldo Carli published his own polemic refuting degeneracy ideas. Written during the course of the American Revolution, Carli's *Lettere Americane* drew more heavily on the North American example and contained far more vitriol for De Pauw personally. "He thinks everything outside of Breslau and Berlin as barbaric and savage," Carli decried before he claimed De Pauw was an alcoholic who "is drinking beer at this very moment as I write."⁸¹ Carli likewise extolled British colonial examples and won the greater share of acclaim for his *ad hominem* treatise with subsequent translations in French and German.⁸² Franklin, to whom the *Lettere Americane* was dedicated, wrote personally to Carli's publisher to extend his thanks for Carli's "witty defenses [*sic*] against the attacks of that misinformed and malignant Writer."⁸³ Indeed, Carli had done much to propagate Franklin's reputation among the Milanese. An anonymous reviewer of the *Lettere Americane* praised Carli in 1782 for confirming that "the immortal American Mr. Franklin demonstrates the health and greatness of that new American nation."⁸⁴

Friedrich Wilhelm Taube became one of the most knowledgeable commentators of his day on North American matters. Born in London as the son of Queen Charlotte's personal physician, Taube spent his youth in the British capital before the queen's death in 1737 provoked his family's relocation to Hannover where the young Taube studied law at the University of Göttingen. Taube later worked as a lawyer but spent many years travelling, which reportedly included a trip to North America.⁸⁵ Upon his return to Europe, Taube eventually became the legation secretary in the Habsburg embassy in London, utilising his German and English fluency and quickly establishing himself as an expert on the British economy, with a particular interest in Britain's emerging struggles to tax North Americans. In 1766, he published his first work on the issue titled *Thoughts on the Present State of our Colonies in North America*, but no known copy survives today.⁸⁶ One description of this work, however, attests that Taube collected the evidence for it from "his friends in North America."⁸⁷ The work was well received and Maria Theresa honoured him with a golden medallion. Later that

year, Taube unfortunately penned a critical report on the British government's handling of the situation, which prompted his recall back to Vienna. Still of use and recognised for his talents, he joined the Council of Commerce (*Commerz-rat*) as a counsellor (*Hofskretär*) in compensation.⁸⁸

Subsequently, Taube published his magnum opus in Vienna in 1774, his *Historische und politische Abschilderung der Engländischen Manufacturen* (Historical and political depictions of English manufacturers).⁸⁹ In this work, he detailed the nature of the British economy, ranging from the goods produced to the scale and health of Britain's international trade across the world. The book's comprehensiveness made it a popular success, and this work included plenty of reference to the situation of the British colonies in North America. He highlighted for his readers the future prosperity of North America based on its economic vibrancy, growing population, and abundance of land. "That the land in America is so plentiful and inexpensive," he explained, "even the workers, servants, and day-labourers who know something of farming, can in a short time save so much money."⁹⁰ Such attractive economic vitality clarified, in Taube's view, why the population grew so rapidly since young men could easily provide for their families, therefore allowing American couples to marry earlier and have an average of eight children.⁹¹ Although much less explicitly than Frisi and Carli, Taube's convictions also flatly contradicted the ideas of American degeneracy. He argued, moreover, that the colonists were united by shared values of freedom of commerce and equal rights before the law.⁹² This common principle stood in contrast to the evermore restrictive policies imposed on them by their government in London. Taube made a forthright prediction that open conflict would come between the Americans and the British. Already in 1774, he wrote of the inevitability of American independence, which he believed would arise when Americans became "weary enough of English supremacy" and he was made all the more certain by the recent protests for which the colonists went without any chastisement for their disobedience.⁹³ "So it seems doubtful," Taube concluded, "to say whether England has more cause to fear or to hope from its colonies."⁹⁴

As the tensions led to bloodshed in the colonies, Taube wrote more works outlining his views. In 1776, he published his *Geschichte der Engländischen Handelschaft, Manufacturen, Colonien und Schiffahrt* (A history of English commerce, manufacturing, colonies and shipping). In an appended essay on the "true causes of the current war in North America," Taube squarely blamed the excessive taxation of the American colonists by the British, which itself lay in the historical development of the British economy.⁹⁵ From Taube's *longue durée* perspective, quite uncommon among German commentators at the time, the

American Revolution was an entirely foreseeable event. “Soon after the Treaty of Paris in 1763,” he explained in the introduction, “there began a longing for free trade in the hearts of the Americans.”⁹⁶ The Tea and Stamp Acts had denied them this natural desire and so the British were at fault for not listening to their unrepresented colonists. A strikingly sympathetic argument, Taube touched upon this theme again in his revised second edition of the *Historische und politische Abschilderung der Engländischen Manufacturen*, which he expanded into two volumes in 1777 and 1778.⁹⁷ In the second volume, Taube took great pains to reiterate the “tremendous changes” and damage done to the British economy by their disastrous war in North America.⁹⁸ Yet Taube planned to publish his best material on that topic in a new third volume focused solely on the American Revolution.⁹⁹ What laudatory views of America and further criticisms of the British position this work would have contained we cannot know since Taube died suddenly in June 1778. In spite of his premature death, Taube’s works helped to pivot attention towards the peril and potential of the American colonists in North America. His works reached a large audience even in England, where the 1774 German edition appeared on the shelves of the Foreign Circulating Library in Leeds.¹⁰⁰ Not all reception was positive, however. The free-market advocate and court economist Count Karl von Zinzendorf read Taube’s volumes in December 1778 with great disgust. As a man who had studied the British economy and American colonial situation, Zinzendorf disagreed with Taube’s praise for the American boycott of British goods.¹⁰¹ “It is a compilation containing some curious facts interspersed with false or superficial reasoning,” he noted in his diary.¹⁰² Superficial or not, Taube had sown the seeds of discussion among the inhabitants of the Habsburg Monarchy. Years later, even Zinzendorf was still reading Taube’s texts.¹⁰³

One man in Vienna undoubtedly aware of Taube’s texts was Jacques Accarias de Sérionne. Like Taube, Sérionne was not a native of the Habsburg Monarchy. Born in Châtillon-en-Diois in southeastern France, Sérionne rose through the French administrative ranks before several risky investments forced him to flee Paris in the late 1750s. He settled in Brussels where he advised regional authorities on economic matters for almost a decade. In 1768, he relocated to Vienna as an advisor in the State Chancellery (*Staatskanzlei*) before moving to Hungary as an agent for the Batthyány family.¹⁰⁴ It was during these wandering years that Sérionne became one of Europe’s most popular economic essayists, publishing a variety of influential texts.¹⁰⁵ In Brussels, he founded the *Journal de Commerce* which ran for forty-eight issues with state support.¹⁰⁶ From his experience in France and as editor of the *Journal*, Sérionne became acutely aware of colonial

economic policies. In nine issues of the *Journal*, Sérionne penned essays on the colonial economies of Portugal and Spain.¹⁰⁷ Sérionne took a harsh line towards the effects of colonial enterprise. He looked backwards rather than forwards and saw in the previous decadence of the Spanish empire how corrosively the colonial market could undermine the metropole. In 1761 he published his *Les intérêts des nations* (The interests of nations) followed by his *La richesse de l'Angleterre* (The riches of England) in Vienna in 1771.¹⁰⁸

In *La richesse*, Sérionne took aim squarely at the American colonies, which he felt had sapped the English commercial system. From Sérionne's perspective a country could only count on its material wealth for economic strength. England, with its vast resources in timber and minerals, enjoyed a stable footing but the establishment of colonial projects had turned this economic system towards venture capitalism. Public credit served no one and private enterprise sequestered away the resources of the state. He noted how the American colonies had all been founded by private companies and had become their "richest branches of trade."¹⁰⁹ In agreement with authors like Taube, Sérionne echoed the vitality of these American colonies but rather than praise their might, he predicted inevitable conflict. "It is astonishing," he wrote in *La richesse*, "that a nation as enlightened as the English, has not foreseen in the projects of its plantations of North America, that those colonies which gather the same fruits and which have exactly the same industry as their metropolis, must necessarily become its rivals and therefore infinitely harmful."¹¹⁰ Sérionne went further with added prescience. He awaited the eventual independence of the American colonies. Written during his Hungarian employment in 1771, Sérionne lamented how it was too late for the British. The Americans had already been allowed to become too powerful for them to be subjugated indefinitely.¹¹¹ "The Englishmen of America are as good as the Englishmen of Europe," he warned, "and three or four thousand troops, which are about all that a European nation can transport to America, would not be enough of an army for them."¹¹² True, he acknowledged, the path to American independence had begun with the Stamp Act crisis, but it was fuelled by the "unceasing" rivalry of trade between the two sides. It would be completed only when the "embarrassment of such division" would interest all the "other industrious nations of Europe."¹¹³ In other words, not one but two commentators under the Habsburg Monarchy expounded the strengths of the American colonies and predicted the course of the War of American Independence several years before its outbreak.

The economic aspects of the American Revolution became one of the most intriguing details for Habsburg observers as attention shifted towards North



FIGURE 2. Portrait of Father Maurus Lindemayr of the Benedictine Abbey in Lambach, Upper Austria

America. In Lambach Abbey in Upper Austria, one Benedictine monk wrote a play about the Revolution's commercial fallout. Written in heavy Austrian dialect in 1780, Father Maurus Lindemayr's three-act drama *Der engländische Patriotismus* (English patriotism) featured two English merchants coping with wartime turmoil.¹¹⁴ The first, Hickshot, denounces the American "rebels" he reads so much about in the newspapers and yearns for peace.¹¹⁵ "I toss and turn at night; you'd have to scorch Philadelphia for me and blow Boston to smithereens," he recalls in one aria.¹¹⁶ A proud Londoner and Tory, Hickshot defines his Englishness upon anti-American lines. "Good" Englishmen should, in Hickshot's view, "curse the colonists [and], like the Antichrist, strike thunder into the rebel! To pray for that is to be a Brit."¹¹⁷ Hickshot's staunch sentiment is counterbalanced by a Bristol merchant named Smedley who trades freely with the Americans. Lindemayr's play was not anti-American, however. Debate over the colonies is complicated by additional characters, such as Hickshot's lackey John who acts confused by events. He asks at one point whether England is the motherland and America the daughter ("*England ist ja das Mutterreich, und Amerika ist die Tochter?*").¹¹⁸ In a one-sided conversation between John and another, more cognisant Hickshot lackey, the clearest distillation of the new

definition of America appears. Hagel, in response to John's incessant misunderstanding of the impact of the Revolution, proclaims "for me America may be a part of the world but it is no longer a continent (*Weltteil*)."¹¹⁹ Before this, Hagel spells out for John how North America is in fact many component pieces including New France, "*Neubritannien*," Acadia, New England, New Holland, New Denmark, New Spain, Virginia, Florida, and the lands of the Huron and Iroquois.¹²⁰ In Lindemayr's theatrical depiction, America was no longer a single entity but rather a fractured land reflecting the disaggregation unfolding across the Atlantic. Lindemayr's vision of America reached audiences beyond his monastery at Lambach. Augustinians frequently performed his plays in nearby Sankt Florian and Linz and in the neighbouring Archbishopric of Salzburg, Michael Haydn—Joseph Haydn's less famous younger brother—set the play to music.¹²¹ Through song and drama, they articulated the new political constellation unfolding across the Atlantic.

Taube, Sérionne, and Lindemayr were not alone in their reorientation towards North America. On the stages and in the palatial concert halls of the Habsburg lands, theatrical and instrumental works also guided outlooks northwards. Joseph Marius Babo's 1778 play *Das Winterquartier in Amerika* (The winter quarter in America) centred on Hessian mercenaries and the quartering of soldiers among the colonists, for instance.¹²² This trend had begun already in the 1750s. One of the most popular and controversial dramatists in Vienna at that time, Joseph Felix von Kurz staged a pantomime called *Arlequin, der neue Abgott Ram in Amerika* (Harlequin, the new idol Ram in America).¹²³ The titular character Arlequin finds himself shipwrecked on the fictive American island of Tschaladey where, through comical altercations with a magician, he becomes mistakenly transformed into the deity Ram for the native "Indian" islanders. Kurz invoked standard stereotypes of American savagery typical of the prejudicial colonial lens, but the pantomime's end implied the existence of a more sophisticated North America as Arlequin is rescued by Dutch traders heading to the West Indies or New Netherlands.¹²⁴ Kurz's drama was also popular in Prague and Bratislava.¹²⁵ The piece was revived in Vienna in 1766 and appeared again in the 1770s under the name *Die Insel der Wilden* (The island of the savages).¹²⁶ This time the elder Haydn, Joseph, wrote music for the pantomime's arias.¹²⁷ And it was not the only piece by him to deal with an American theme.

Joseph Haydn's cosmos was filled with American imagery. His patron, Prince Nikolaus Esterházy, employed a servant from the West Indies whom Haydn knew well and whose mixed-race son he tutored.¹²⁸ At the Esterháza court in Hungary, where Haydn lived and worked for most of his life, depictions of South

American characters became commonplace through adaptations of works such as Voltaire's *Alzire, ou les Américains* (Alzire, or the Americans) (1736) and Graun's *Montezuma* (1755).¹²⁹ Haydn followed this trend by composing his own works to American themes, but he primarily composed around North American tropes. His symphonies, no. 34 in D minor (1765) and no. 49 in F minor (1768), made allusions to the Quakers in the popular comedy *La jeune Indienne* (The young Indian girl) (1764) by Nicholas Chamfort, a popular fixture throughout the 1760s and 1770s in Vienna as *Die junge Indianerin* (The young Indian girl). In 1779, Haydn set a libretto of *L'isola disabitata* (The deserted island) to music by the Viennese court poet Pietro Metastasio. The performance referred to a Caribbean moral tale of an English slave-owner whose life is saved by a West Indian girl, who he eventually sells into slavery for social advancement.¹³⁰ Within the walls of Esterháza, Haydn learned about America from his careful reading of William Robertson's *A History of America* before his journey to London in the 1790s brought him into personal contact with West Indian merchants and exiled American loyalists.¹³¹

Beyond Esterháza, Habsburg audiences (mainly the nobility) digested an influx of new American imagery through operas.¹³² Popular works in Vienna often revolved around new-world themes but in the 1760s and 1770s, the figure of the Quaker loomed large over this cultural space. Viennese conceptions of the Quakers were imported from abroad, in works such as Chamfort's *La Jeune Indienne* (The young Indian girl) and Guglielmi's *La Quakera Spiritosa* (The spiritual quakeress).¹³³ The Tuscan-born librettist Ranieri de Calzabigi was one of the most influential dramatists living in Vienna; he popularised Quaker characters and a more favourable vision of North America.¹³⁴ His operatic libretto *Amiti e Ontario* (1772/1774) takes place in Pennsylvania where two Native Americans, a female Amiti and a male Ontario, are owned by a Quaker, Mr. Dull, who falls in love with Amiti, whilst his relative Mrs. Bubble falls for Ontario. Dull plans to free both of the enslaved in order to go ahead with the marriages but Amiti and Ontario have concealed their own love for each other from him. When this is revealed, Dull, inspired by their true love, responds leniently and honours their freedom despite his own feelings of affection and his power over them.¹³⁵ Although the main Quaker character, Dull, is represented as a slave owner, his benevolence and self-sacrifice shines through, even towards Native Americans. Calzabigi's choice of Mr. Dull as a name seemed loaded with intent as it conjured up connotations with the German *duldsam* (meaning tolerant or indulgent) to further reinforce the positive attributes of the character and his actions at the end of the opera.¹³⁶

As fictive as the characters' names sounded, Calzabigi played on the realistic antagonism between Great Britain and the North American colonies. Mr. Dull's relative, Mrs. Bubble, is made out to be an Anglican who decries Dull's plans for freedom for Amity and Ontario and offers to buy one of them herself—her preference is, of course, for her beloved Ontario. Her interjection provokes an abolitionist declaration from Dull, which not only underscores the moral superiority of the Pennsylvanian but, in the context of the emerging transatlantic split, serves to undermine the British stance vis-à-vis slavery.¹³⁷ In creating a character like Mr. Dull, Calzabigi was not only demonstrating how North America offered a more enlightened example to the world but he was also echoing the thoughts of other intellectuals in the Habsburg lands. It was as if Calzabigi had read and dramatised the reports of the *Gazzetta di Milano* which announced how Quakers in Pennsylvania “gave an unusual proof of love for humanity [as] the majority of the residents of that colony agreed to free all their black Slaves.”¹³⁸ Despite the reflections in Calzabigi's opera, discussions on slavery and the abolition of the slave trade in Central Europe remained muted until the early nineteenth century.¹³⁹ Yet Calzabigi's rendering of Pennsylvanian Quakers in *Amity e Ontario* endured throughout the age of the American Revolution and throughout the Habsburg lands. Giuseppe Scarlatti composed music for its premiere at the Burgtheater in Vienna and for a private performance at the Auersperg family residence.¹⁴⁰ The work was subsequently adapted by Neapolitan librettists and composers into *Le gare generose* (The contests in generosity) in 1786, which saw Mr. Dull relocated to Boston and devoid of any Quakerism.¹⁴¹ The new version arrived back in Vienna the following year with additional revisions by Lorenzo da Ponte and Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf whose changes retained the core of Calzabigi's vision of virtuous North American inhabitants.¹⁴² As the musicologist Pierpaolo Polzonetti points out, America in these operatic performances “was not represented as an exotic, primitivistic land” but rather as “modern, business-orientated, and politically and socially more advanced.”¹⁴³ By the 1780s, North America had firmly entered the cultural zeitgeist of the Habsburg lands through drama and print to create a rising awareness of the different character of the British colonies and their increasingly uncertain future.

Conclusion

The notion of America fascinated the inhabitants of the Habsburg lands long before the American Revolution, and various views of the New World circulated via several mediums in Central Europe. America functioned as a symbol

for Habsburg rulers and elites seeking to display their worldly wealth, and it appealed to aristocratic sensibilities for the latest fashions and curiosity for new-world artefacts. Religious lenses often depicted the New World as primitive and inferior, but information from first-hand reports became the bedrock for new global epistemologies. Jesuit authors in Trnava and Graz contributed to the proliferation of American knowledge. Returning Jesuits kept alive the curiosity and captivation with the Americas; even Maria Theresa was susceptible to the opportunities to learn indirectly about American encounters. As the first murmurings of the American Revolution began in the mid-eighteenth century, Habsburg inhabitants became increasingly aware of the situation in British North America, and Habsburg intellectuals developed distinct responses to these disturbances. Taube and Sérionne correctly articulated the colonial challenge to Great Britain and believed in the inevitability of American independence. In Habsburg Lombardy, Frisi and Carli refuted ideas of American degeneracy using examples of progress from the British colonies. The shift towards a progressive, industrious view of North America occurred simultaneously in drama and music. Colonists in the thirteen British colonies represented a tolerant and prosperous people on stage and in sound, and theatrical performances, especially, reinforced understandings of the colonial contest erupting in North America. England was the motherland and America was the daughter, but the question in Habsburg minds became: for how long?