

BACKGROUND

HISTORY FROM THE BEGINNING

The 25,000-year-old statuette the *Venus of Willendorf* is evidence of inhabitation of the Danube Valley since the Palaeolithic age. Vienna, situated at a natural crossing of the Danube (Donau) River, was probably an important trading post for the Celts when the Romans arrived around 15 BC. The Romans established Carnuntum as a provincial capital of Pannonia in AD 8, and around the same time created a second military camp some 40km to the west. Vindobona, derived from the Vinid tribe of Celts, was situated in what today is Vienna's Innere Stadt, with the Hoher Markt at its centre and borders at Tiefer Graben to the northwest, Salzgries to the northeast, Rotenturmstrasse to the southeast, and Naglergasse to the southwest. A section of the southwestern border had no natural defence, so a long ditch, the Graben, was dug. A civil town sprang up outside the camp that flourished in the 3rd and 4th centuries; around this time a visiting Roman emperor, Probus, introduced vineyards to the hills of the Wienerwald (Vienna Woods).

In the 5th century the Roman Empire collapsed and the Romans were beaten back by invading Goth and Vandal tribes. During the Dark Ages, the importance of the Danube Valley as an east-west crossing meant that successive waves of tribes and armies attempted to wrest control of the region, and as a result Vindobona foundered.

BEST BOOKS ON VIENNA'S HISTORY

- *A Nervous Splendour: Vienna 1888–1889* (1979) and *Thunder at Twilight: Vienna 1913–14* (1989), by Frederic Morto, are highly enthralling accounts of seminal dates at the end of the Habsburg rule. The first deals with the Mayerling affair (the murder-suicide of Franz Josef I's son and the son's lover), and the second with the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo.
- *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (1980), by Carl E Schorske, is a seminal work on the intellectual history of Vienna in seven interlinking essays.
- *Guilty Victim: Austria from the Holocaust to Haider* (2000), by Hella Pick, is an excellent analysis of Austria during this period.
- *Last Waltz in Vienna* (1981), by George Clare, provides a moving account of a Jewish upbringing in the interwar years leading up to the Anschluss (the annexation of Austria by Germany in 1938).
- *The Austrians: A Thousand Year Odyssey* (1997), by Gordon Brook-Shepherd, is one of the few books to tackle the history of Austria from the Babenbergs through to the country's entry into the EU, and is great for a general overview.
- *Vienna and the Jews, 1867–1938: A Cultural History* (1989), by Steven Beller, gives an insightful look into the cultural contributions that Vienna's Jewish community made to the city.

TIMELINE

AD 8

Vindobona, the forerunner of Vienna's Innere Stadt, becomes part of the Roman province of Pannonia.

1137

Vienna is first documented as a city in the Treaty of Mautern between the Babenbergs and the Bishops of Passau.

1155–56

Vienna becomes a residence of the Babenbergs; a new fortress is built on Am Hof and Babenberg's Margavate is elevated to Duchy.

The rise of Charlemagne, the king of the Franks, marked the end of the Dark Ages. In 803 he established a territory in the Danube Valley west of Vienna, known as the Ostmark (Eastern March). The Ostmark was constantly overrun by Magyars, a nomadic band of peoples from the Far East who had settled the Hungarian plain, until King Otto the Great crushed the Magyar army in a decisive battle in 955. However, the region received no mention in imperial documents until 996, when it was first referred to as ‘Ostarrichi’. The forerunner of the city’s modern name – ‘Wenia’ – first appeared in the annals of the archbishopric of Salzburg in 881.

THE BABENBERG DYNASTY

Some 21 years after Otto’s victory, the Ostmark was handed over to Leopold von Babenberg, a descendant of a noble Bavarian family. The Babenberg dynasty was to rule for the next 270 years.

The Babenbergs were a skilful lot and it wasn’t long before their sphere of influence expanded: in the 11th century most of modern-day Lower Austria (including Vienna) was in their hands; a century later (1192) Styria and much of Upper Austria were safely garnered. Heinrich II ‘Jasomirgott’ (so called because of his favourite exclamation, ‘Yes, so help me God’) was the most successful Babenberg of them all, convincing the Holy Roman Emperor to elevate the territory to a dukedom; Heinrich II moved his court to Vienna in 1156.

Vienna was already an important and prosperous city by this stage, welcoming clerics, artisans, merchants and minstrels to its population. Its citizens enjoyed peace and economic success; the Viennese were awarded staple rights in 1221, which forced foreign tradesmen on the Danube to sell their goods within two months of landing, allowing locals to act as middlemen for commerce downstream. In 1147 Stephansdom (St Stephen’s Cathedral; p54), then a Romanesque church, was consecrated and a city wall was built. A king’s ransom flowed into the city in 1192: Richard the Lionheart, on his return home from the Crusades, was captured by the then ruler, Leopold V. Richard had purportedly insulted the Babenberg ruler at the Siege of Acre (1189–91), and an astronomical figure was demanded in exchange for his release. Leopold used the money paid to found Wiener Neustadt. Under Leopold VI, Vienna was granted a city charter in 1221, ensuring further prosperity.

In 1246 Duke Friedrich II died in battle, leaving no heirs. This allowed the ambitious Bohemian king, Ottokar II, to move in and take control. He bolstered his claim to Austria by marrying Friedrich II’s widow. Ottokar gained support from Vienna’s burghers by founding a hospital for the poor and rebuilding Stephansdom after a destructive fire in 1258. However, he refused to swear allegiance to the new Holy Roman Emperor, Rudolf von Habsburg, and his pride proved costly – Ottokar died in a battle against his powerful adversary at Marchfeld in 1278. Rudolf’s success on the battlefield began the rule of one of the most powerful dynasties in history, a dynasty that would retain power right up to the 20th century.

THE HABSBURGS’ REIGN BEGINS

Rudolf left the government of Vienna to his son Albrecht, who proved an unpopular ruler – he removed the staple right and began taxing the clergy. His successor, Albrecht II, was far more competent, and while he gained the nickname ‘the Lame’ due to his polyarthritis, he was also known as ‘the Wise’. The city, however, struggled under a string of natural

1273–76

Ottokar II hands the throne to a little-known count from Habichtsburg (Habsburg); Rudolf I of Habsburg occupies Vienna and the Habsburg dynasty commences, running until 1919.

1420–21

Under Duke Albrecht V, the first large-scale persecution of Jews in Vienna (known as the Wiener Geserah) takes place.

1529

The first Turkish siege of Vienna occurs but the Turks mysteriously retreat, leaving the city – Vienna survives and construction of the city walls begins.