



# In Destiny's Hands: Five Tragic Rulers, Children of Maria Theresa

*Justin C. Vovk*

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The powerful epic of an imperial mother, determined to forge alliances through marriage, and the price her children paid for it.

## In Destiny's Hands: Five Tragic Rulers, Children of Maria Theresa Details

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## **From Reader Review In Destiny's Hands: Five Tragic Rulers, Children of Maria Theresa for online ebook**

### **Theresa says**

This was a very enjoyable and interesting read. I have not read much of most of the featured historical figures before. the exception is Marie Antoinette. There was a lot of her in this book, but much of 4 of her other siblings and her mother, Maria Theresa. I recommend this book to anyone interested in European and/or Royal History.

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### **Ghost of the Library says**

about Maria Theresa so much has been said and written, about her daughter Marie Antoinette oh my god, twice as much probably! now about the other brothers and sisters..i for one knew almost next to nothing so this book was a very good read and a very informative surprise!  
all the brothers and sisters are presented in a clear and very engaging manner, with a ton of information on the lesser known ones being presented to us and it is fascinating!  
may not be perfect in terms of historic content but it is certainly worth the read!

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### **Margaret Hren says**

Good book as an overview of the children of Empress Maria Theresa. I've read other more detailed books, but this one is good for anyone looking for a detailed refresher on these facinating people who shaped history. Only think that bothered me was all the heavy footnoting in each chapter. Made me feel like the author was copying word for word from other texts.

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### **Samantha Bee says**

I really wanted to like this one more than I did. Sadly, I just couldn't. While an interesting and fairly easy and quick read—which I do appreciate, especially for a book following multiple people with similar names—it also lacked sources for a lot of what was said, which always worries me when I'm reading about something I don't already have a decent amount of knowledge on myself. Not bad, but not great. I would say if you're going to pick this one up don't take everything that is written in it as being 100% factual.

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### **Connie Haller says**

**A very stimulating read**

An interesting read for the history buff and people who enjoy stories about royalty. I'd recommend this book highly to fans of history

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## **prinzheinelgirl says**

The author's style is quite engaging but I like to stick to (historical) facts as much possible. And this is my main issue with this book...

I'm uncertain that this book is even close to facts. Specifically on the parts that referred to Maria Amalia, Duchess of Parma. It seems to me that the author did not even cite the sources of most of his "facts" on her, because plenty of his information just seems to be mere inferences! It appears that he didn't bother to look for more sources but just made a mumbo-jumbo of secondary sources and then proceeded to make his own conclusions based on trite comments or suppositions by other authors. And worst of all, his inferences were made out as "facts". He certainly got many trivial things wrong, like the godmothers of Maria Amalia's daughters, but that's nothing compared to his other errors.....

For instance, where on earth did he get that "fact" that Emperor Franz I/II sent his aunt Maria Amalia out of Vienna's way and sent her to Prague instead during her exile? My own sources clearly indicate that she had, at the very least, very cordial relations with Vienna during the Napoleonic years and even promoted the careers of her (commoner) godsons at the Viennese court. That would've not had happened without the approval of and a good relationship with her nephew, whom she certainly met on her visits to Tuscany.

The BEST sources on Maria Amalia's life in Parma would be her own (still extant) correspondence to friends and also that of her husband Ferdinand of Parma, some of the (unbiased) Italian authors. and the state archives of Parma and Piacenza. Sadly, Mr Vovk MISSED those important sources. It would've been great to get many inaccuracies about the Duchess of Parma cleared. Instead, the author added MORE inaccuracies (on her relationship with her mother, husband, and how she was viewed in the duchy, to name a few).

I'm sorry to say that this isn't a reliable biography of the Duchess of Parma.

Also, he was positively fawning over Maria Carolina, who was quite a **\*\*nasty\*\*** person and had an **\*\*overrated\*\*** intellect. He also downplayed MC's **\*\*bullying\*\*** of her husband (calling it only "dramas" but such would've lasting effects later on; even her brothers Joseph and Leopold cautioned MC on her behaviour towards him), which led her husband to (eventually)hate her. I doubt if a good number of the Neapolitans or Sicilians appreciated her (useless) fights with Napoleon or her rule overall. The government of Naples and Sicily were so corrupt during that time and wasn't well-managed. If MC was as brilliant as he claimed her to be, she would've cleaned up the government at the very least. And as another review elsewhere put it, MC was only a middling figure in the 18th century but the author exceedingly bloated her importance and "achievements" (if they can be called such).

Also, on beauty, let's see...why did Mr Vovk choose to describe Maria Luisa of Spain and Maria Beatrice d'Este as "beautiful"? I look at the portraits of said ladies and by no stretch of imagination could anyone call them such (Joseph described Beatrice to Leopold as "undescribable"). I also look at Maria Carolina's portraits and do not find her very attractive as he claimed her to be. Some of those English travelers or authors might claim so but if I were an (objective)author, I'd be more conservative about such claims. MC still attractive in her late 40s and early 50s? She wasn't even one of the prettier sisters at any rate and certainly aged very fast due to numerous pregnancies (not to mention her bad temper).

Overall, I'd recommended it only as an INTRODUCTION to these siblings.

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### **Rebecca Huston says**

A look at five of the children of Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, and their turbulent times on the thrones of Europe. Each of them in their own ways had to deal with revolution, war, and the ending of their dreams. Joseph II became Holy Roman Emperor after the death of his father, and co-ruler with his mother, but his personal life was a shambles, and he nearly brought Hapsburg rule to an end. Leopold II was first Grand Duke of Tuscany, and married happily (sixteen children there), and would succeed his brother as HRE, but had the misfortune of dying early. Of the sisters, Amalia married the Duke of Parma, and while the marriage started off badly, she did manage to get some proficiency in the art of ruling. Maria Carolina married the King of Naples, bore numerous children (seventeen children there), and turned herself into a thorn in Napoleon's side in his attempts to conquer southern Italy. Then there's Marie Antoinette, the most unfortunate of the daughters, and last Queen of France.

The book does have some inaccuracies, and quite a few typos, but on the whole the research is solid. There is a bibliography, index and extensive notes. Overall, this gets four stars.

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### **Feisty Harriet says**

Maria Theresa, Holy Roman Empress and Austri-Hungarian Queen in the 1700's, had 14 children, five of whom became rulers in their own right across Europe. This book follows the stories of those five children with bits and pieces of their other siblings, their children, the history and political landscape of a revolutionary Europe, history of Prussian, Russian, Ottoman, French, and Spanish wars, including the French Revolution and Napoleon's campaigns. I loved learning more about Joseph II (Maria Theresa's successor and Holy Roman Emperor; Leopold II, Duke of Tuscany and Holy Roman Emperor after Joseph's death; Maria Amalia, Duchess of Parma in Italy, Maria Carolina/Charlotte, Queen of Naples; and Marie Antoinette, Queen of France. I was astounded at how these five individuals and their political alliances and strategic marriages covered over a third of Europe. Maria Theresa had 55 grand children and they were spread from the Netherlands to Italy, the Bourbons in Spain and France, and throughout Central Europe, including a granddaughter who was Napoleon's second wife and therefore Empress of the French, and another who married Louis Phillpe d'Orleans and become Queen of France.

All this being said, this author needs a serious editor. I felt that there were contradictory statements within paragraphs, he always calls these five rulers "Maria Theresa's five special children" which just grated on my nerves (special? really? Is that the best you can do?). I also think that as these rulers started having children, who all had the same names, essentially, it was really confusing to try and keep them straight. And the wars and alliances that had individual cities or regions switching their allegiances would have been easier to keep straight with a few more maps (there is one map in the front, and a few family charts, but I still found them lacking).

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## **Kay says**

I actually started this during a trip to Prague and Budapest, when I realized how little I knew about the Habsburg dynasty that ruled central Europe for 150 years. Vovyk concentrates on just five of Empress Maria Theresa's children, whom she used unashamedly to create alliances with other powers. I couldn't help but pity the fate of very young girls sent off to foreign lands to marry men, some of whom were half-wits or boors. Marie Antoinette, for example, was only 15 when she was dispatched to France, where she was forced to renounce her Austrian nationality in the most brutal fashion: being stripped naked of her Viennese clothes and having her entire retinue--including her puppy--sent back to Austria. She is also a more compassionate person than is commonly believed. For example, when over 100 Parisians died in an accident during her wedding celebrations, she sent her entire clothing allowance for that year to be used as relief for the surviving families--a most uncommon gesture for 17th century nobility.

Some of her older sisters fared better. Charlotte, Queen of Naples, became a very effective monarch and actually ruled the roost because her husband preferred hunting to governing. And their brother Leopold brought excellent reforms to the Kingdom of Tuscany until Napoleon invaded.

If you want a well-researched and readable book about late Eighteenth Century Europe, I highly recommend this one.

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## **Kitty says**

It was interesting enough, but there wasn't a whole lot of new information I hadn't already heard of before. It would probably serve better/be more interesting for someone who didn't already know a lot about the Habsburgs as I do. There were quite a few factual errors that annoyed me as well, such as saying something to the effect of "Marie Antoinette had to watch her brother in law, the Comte de Provence, marry a Savoyard Princess and have children of his own." That was the Comte d'Artois, Provence never had children.

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## **Kristen says**

I'd been delaying reading this book for a while, thinking it might be a boring slog through European history. I couldn't have been more wrong. "In Destiny's Hands" tells the dramatic, sometimes heart-breaking, stories of the children of Empress Maria Theresa, the queen of Hungary and Holy Roman Empress in the 18th century. They include France's ill-fated Queen Marie-Antoinette, Emperors Joseph II and Leopold II, Queen Carolina of Naples, and the Duchess of Parma. As the book progresses, the children seek their destinies in the courts of Europe, only to come back together as the next generation inter-marries and wars and revolutions change the political landscape.

Those who enjoy reading history will be interested in how the family dynamics and personalities -- not to mention tragedies -- continue to shape Europe today.

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## **Linda says**

This tells the story of Maria Theresa and her Habsburg family in fascinating detail. It does make history

seem to come alive during this turmoil filled time. She seems to be the Queen Victoria of the Austria Hungarian empire, loving and trying to guide her children with great wisdom and love.

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### **Joan says**

An interesting book, about the reigning children of Maria Theresa. There were a few inaccuracies and typos, and the most unhelpful family tree I have ever seen. (A good clear one would have clarified rather than muddled the complex family relationships here!) Still- I was somewhat unfamiliar with some of the historical figures here- especially the families in Naples and Parma, so it is a good starting point for further reading.

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### **Marilyn says**

A Marvelous read for those History Nerds such as myself! Particularly, those who have wondered, Whatever happened to Marie Antoinette's sister s, daughters of Empress Maria Theresa of Austria? They are maddeningly mentioned in the Biographies of both Queens, usually with a cliffhanger anecdote on what impression they made on the tragic Reine or her mothers emotions, but then there is silence about these royal ladies. There are many history filling incidents about that eras other mover s and shakers lodged within this well written and researched volume, as well.

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### **Belinda says**

Enjoyed this history lesson of the Hapsburg's and The Holy Roman Empire as led by Maria Theresa and then her 5 special children very much. Not historical fiction but still told in an engaging and colorful manner which not only held my interest but had me looking forward to my history lesson. I loved it.

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