

The "Relief of Vienna and pan-German Catholic Congress" set of 1933



On 15th July 1683, the Turks laid siege to Vienna; on 12th September 1683 the Imperial Army together with the Polish Army vanquished them and relieved the city. To commemorate the 250th anniversary of this event, the 9th Pan-German Catholic Congress was held in Vienna from 7th to 12th September 1933 and the Austrian Chancellor, Dr Engelbert Dollfuss made a major speech on the 11th at the Trabrennplatz, setting the patriotic theme for this "Catholic Day" [Allgemeine Deutsche Katholikentag]. The whole of the historical introduction linked his new Constitution, directed against Socialism and Marxism, with the Habsburg role in the Counter-Reformation and the part played by Vienna in 1683 in saving the Empire and Europe from the Turks.

To symbolise this aristocratic and Catholic concept, the design of this set of stamps (ANK 557-562) was entrusted not to the usual designers but to a young but high-ranking aristocrat: Maria Viktoria Countess von Attems. She was born on 8th December 1899 in Vienna, the elder daughter of Viktor Karl August Graf von Attems, President of the Austrian Naval Court in Trieste, and his wife Mathilde Schürer von und zu Waldheim. The artist had studied at the Provincial Art School in Graz and had completed her studies in Munich and at Rome. She had then devoted herself to the arts of illustration and drawing so she was well equipped to produce the designs for this issue. However, she never designed any other Austrian stamps; instead on 8th March 1940 she married Riccardo, Marchese Pallavicina, and gave up the life of a professional artist.

The countess submitted twelve designs altogether and the six which were not accepted are illustrated in the book "100 Jahre Österreichische Briefmarke". The six chosen designs were: 12g green View of Vienna in 1683; 24g violet Pater Markus von Ariano, papal legate in 1683; 30g scarlet Graf Ernst Rüdiger von Starhemberg; 40g grey-black John III Sobieski, King of Poland; 50g blue Karl V, Duke of Lorraine; 64g brown Johann Andreas von Liebenberg, Mayor of Vienna. These portraits tell the story of the second Siege of Vienna from its start on 15th July 1683.

The celebrations for the 250th anniversary of this most important turning point in history were of a special magnificence. Five Cardinals and twelve Archdukes took part. Later there was a ceremony at the Starhemberg monument when Prince Ernst von Starhemberg (1899-1956), the leader of the Heimwehr, made a speech recording the family's gratitude for the tributes to their ancestor.

Only 50,000 sets were printed by the Austrian State Printing Works; these were produced by the photo-engraving process on flecked paper and line perforated 12½. The stamps were issued on 6 Sept 1933 and sold only at selected Post Offices (but could be ordered from others), in complete sets at double face value. The surcharge thus obtained was devoted to various Catholic Youth charities. Presentation sets, imperf on Japan paper in a folder, exist; as do several plate faults. The stamps were valid until 31.1.1934.