

DEATH OF THE EMPEROR

George Stepney (1663–1707), British Envoy to Vienna (1702–1706)

to Robert Harley (1661–1724), British Secretary of State for the Northern Department (1704–1708)

Vienna, 5 May 1705

My several letters to you of late will have prepared you for the news which this brings of the Emperor's¹ death, who after one and twenty days illness of a dropsy and other complicated diseases expired this afternoon at 4 o'clock after having received all the ceremonies of the Roman Church, taken leave of the Empress,² and given his blessing to his family. He had almost completed the 65th year of his age, and has reigned King of Hungary 50 years, King of Bohemia 49, and Emperor 47.

He has left five children by the present Empress,³ Eleonora Magdalena, sister to the Elector Palatine, viz:

1. Joseph, born 26 July 1678, crowned King of Hungary 9 December 1687, and chosen King of the Romans 24 June 1690. He has been married 6 years to Wilhelmina Amalia of the family of Brunswick, Lunenburg, by whom he has living two daughters.⁴
2. Elizabeth, born 13 December 1680.⁵
3. Anna, born 7 September 1683.⁶
4. Charles, the Archduke, born 1 October 1685, and declared King of Spain at Vienna 12 September 1703.⁷
5. Magdalena, born 25 March 1689.⁸

The present Emperor, Joseph I, is likely to find no manner of difficulty that may obstruct his assuming the Imperial Dignity, his succession having been settled, of course, 15 years ago by his coronation at Augsburg. There is no necessity of confirming his title by any new solemnity of that kind, nor is there any other capitulation required than what he then swore to, by the 48th article whereof he is only obliged to sign an act of reserve to the Electors, promising once more to observe all the articles therein contained.

In the main I do not conceive that this change can prove of any prejudice to the public, for the successor is in the flower of his age (being in his 27th year) and in a perfect state both of body and mind for carrying on the regency. He has indeed many excellent qualifications and particularly some military knowledge (acquired in two campaigns) which may prove of use to the public towards pursuing the war with more vigour and spirit. The measures against this campaign are already taken, and both the Margrave of Baden⁹ and Prince Eugene¹⁰ are by this time at the head of their respective armies.

We must expect great changes among the ministers, whereof I now send you a numerous list, that you may hereafter better conceive the alterations that are made; which in all appearance may come near to a general revolution, for all employments are become vacant and must be renewed.

¹ Leopold I (1640–1705), Holy Roman Emperor (1658–1705)

² Eleonora Magdalena of the Palatinate (1655–1720), third wife of Leopold I

³ Leopold's previous two wives had born 6 children between them, all of whom had died by 1705, and Eleonora Magdalena had borne, in addition to the children listed below, another 5 daughters who pre-deceased the Emperor.

⁴ Joseph I (1678–1711), Holy Roman Emperor (1705–1711), and Wilhelmina Amalia of Brunswick (1673–1742) had three children, two daughters of whom were still alive in 1705.

⁵ Maria Elizabeth (1680–1741), who never married

⁶ Maria Anna (1683–1754), who later married King John V of Portugal

⁷ Charles (1685–1740) was the Hapsburg claimant to the Throne of Spain throughout the War of the Spanish Succession (1702–1714) and later Holy Roman Emperor (1711–1740)

⁸ Maria Magdalena (1689–1743), who never married

⁹ Louis William (1655–1707), Margrave of Baden

¹⁰ Eugene (1663–1736), Prince of Savoy, the pre-eminent Hapsburg military commander and cousin of Louis William of Baden

The Prince of Salm¹¹ having been Grand Master to the King will, of course, succeed in the same post to the Emperor, and consequently be first minister. His Grand Chamberlain, Grand Marshal, and Master of the Horse will likewise be advanced. Great cabals have been held for these ten days among our young ministers, who aspire to the other chief offices and hereafter I shall acquaint you how they succeed, for I believe no extraordinary change will happen till the burial is over.

I am apt to believe this accident may rather further than obstruct our negotiation with the malcontents, for while Mr. Bruyninx¹² and I were at Schemnitz, both Prince Rákóczi¹³ and Count Berczeni¹⁴ frequently expressed very great veneration for the King of the Romans. It were to be wished they would show it in effect now they have so fair an opportunity of being reconciled in the beginning of his reign.

Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, *Archivum Rákócziánum: Rákóczi Ferencz Levéltára* (Pest: Eggenberger, 1873):73–74.

¹¹ Charles Theodore (1645–1710), Prince of Salm

¹² Hamel Bruyninx, Dutch envoy to Vienna (1700–1738)

¹³ Francis II Rákóczi (1676–1735), leader of the Hungarian rebels

¹⁴ Miklós Bercsényi (1665–1726), leading military commander of the Hungarian rebels