



Ephemeral Images: Zita of Bourbon-Parma and Picture Postcards

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Abstract: This article will focus on Zita of Bourbon-Parma, last Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary's visual representation on postcards between 1911 and 1922. It argues that Zita was consistently presented in the roles of wife, mother, and *Landesmutter* (mother of the country). On the face of it, it seems simple that Zita's self-perception was wrapped up in the roles of wife and mother as coloured by her Catholic faith. However, this article shows that the picture is more complicated. While the roles themselves remained static, the way in which they were imagined and manifested changed as Zita underwent transitions in her life and status. These were influenced not only by her Catholicism, but also by external political forces and needs. Images of Zita and the imperial family were meant to provide the public with images of stability and domesticity in a time of great upheaval. Postcards produced in exile are evidence of a clear initiative on the family's part and were used to keep the family in the public imagination and therefore maintain or create support for a potential restoration. It is possible to trace a line up to the present day, where Zita's image continues to be used as a result of her status as Servant of God in the Catholic Church.

Keywords: Zita of Bourbon-Parma; Habsburg; photography; picture postcards; First World War

Introduction



While postcards might seem like insignificant objects today, their importance and usefulness as a historical source should not be underestimated.¹ They were of particular consequence when they first came to be used in the latter half of the nineteenth century. As Philip J. Hatfield writes, postcards were not only born of nineteenth-century technological modernity but also represented it.² For some, they are the “object par excellence of the late Victorian era” and illustrate an increasingly globalised world.³ In Austria-Hungary, they became one of the most important forms of visual media, “allowing the population to ‘get a picture’ of events or locations.”⁴ Additionally, the use of images and slogans in wide circulation made for an easy way to influence the masses. Royal families throughout Europe used picture postcards as public relations tools and their sale was a method of raising money for the war effort.⁵ This, combined with the fact that a large number of postcards still exist individually or as parts of albums, suggests that, rather than being ephemeral, images that circulated through the medium of postcards are more significant than one might first think.⁶ This article will focus on the visual representation of Zita of Bourbon-Parma, last Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary between 1911 and shortly after her husband Emperor Karl’s death in 1922.

While postcards were produced by private companies in the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary, the majority were made by organisations related to the government and *k.u.k. Kriegspressequartier* (imperial war press office). Photographers would sometimes

¹ I owe great thanks to the following people who have helped me in the process of researching and writing this article in various ways: Mairi Bunce, Karl Habsburg-Lothringen, Walburga Habsburg-Douglas, Robyn Dora Radway, Borbála Faragó, Martina Winkelhofer, Philippe Henri Blasen, Christopher Brennan, Christopher Guyver, Rainhard Kloucek, Constantin Staus-Rausch, Marlene Eilers-Koenig, Thomas Köck, Szilveszter Dékány, Éva Patyi, and the reviewers.

² Philip J. Hatfield, “Circulations: the photograph and the postcard,” in *Canada in the Frame: Copyright, Collections and the Image of Canada, 1895-1924*, ed. Philip J. Hatfield (London: UCL Press, 2018), 3.

³ Hatfield, “Circulations,” 3.

⁴ Joachim Bürgschwentner, “War Relief, Patriotism and Art: The State-Run Production of Picture Postcards in Austria 1914–1918,” *Austrian Studies* 21 (2013), 101.

⁵ Bürgschwentner, “War Relief, Patriotism and Art,” 102.

⁶ I found one such album in the *Bildarchiv* of the *Nationalbibliothek* (PK 3574/1-55) entitled “*Kaiser Karl im Bild*” (Emperor Karl in images). This was part of the library of the aristocratic Kettenburg family. It is filled with postcards of Karl and Zita and produced by the *Verlagsanstalt Tyrolia Innsbruck*. The date is uncertain, though its contents show that it was certainly after Karl and Zita’s exile. Additionally, it was produced by their trusted photographer, Heinrich Schuhmann.

produce their own, but these would be photographers hired by the family and/or the press office. Private businesses creating postcards would have to use photographs organised by the above, and so images of Zita were still controlled. Therefore, there is much to be gleaned from the images of Zita and her family that were transmitted on postcards.

This article argues that Austria's last empress was consistently presented in the roles of wife, mother, and *Landesmutter* (mother of the country). While the roles themselves remained static, the way in which they were imagined and manifested changed as Zita underwent transitions in her life and status. These were influenced not only by external political forces and needs but also by her Catholic faith. They were meant to provide the public with images of stability and domesticity in a time of great upheaval, reminding them of what they were fighting for during the First World War. The images that the public consumed were first controlled and manipulated by the *Kriegspressequartier* and then by the family itself once in exile. Postcards produced in exile are evidence of a clear initiative on the family's part. They were used to keep the family in the public imagination and therefore maintain or create support for a potential restoration. Zita's presentation as wife and mother continues to be employed to this day as a result of the ongoing canonisation process for her and her husband in the Catholic Church.

A large sample of postcards from various collections have been used in order to make this analysis. However, it is important to state that this article does not claim to be a comprehensive look at all of the images circulated via this medium. It is difficult to form a complete picture as such items are highly sought-after by private collectors all over the world. Before analysing Zita's images on postcards directly, we will first look at the *Kriegspressequartier*'s role in censorship, production, and circulation, as well as the development from *carte de visite* photographs to picture postcards.

Zita of Bourbon-Parma and the First World War

Zita, Princess of Bourbon-Parma, was born on 9 May 1892 at the Villa Borbone in Lucca, Italy. Her parents were the deposed Roberto, Duke of Parma, and his second wife, Infanta Maria Antonia of Portugal. Zita was one of twenty-four children, twelve from her father's first marriage and twelve from the second. The family spent most of their time in Austria, though Zita had a rather international upbringing: her strict religious education took place not only in Bavaria but also in England. As a former ruling family, they had many connections with the Habsburgs. She met her future husband, Karl, when they were children. Their marriage was convenient, but it was also a love match and Karl had hurried

to propose after he heard a rumour that Zita was to be engaged to someone else. Karl, who was Emperor Franz Joseph's great-nephew, became heir to the throne through a series of accidents. Franz Joseph's line of succession seemed secure until disaster struck. His brother, Maximilian, was killed by firing squad in Mexico. Crown Prince Rudolf, Franz Joseph's only son, killed his seventeen-year-old mistress, Baroness Mary Vetsera, before turning the gun on himself at Mayerling hunting lodge. Karl's uncle Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie, were assassinated in Sarajevo. When the old emperor died in 1916, Karl and Zita ascended to the throne in the midst of the First World War. The pair inherited a war that they did not want, and unsuccessfully tried to negotiate its end. Karl trusted his wife deeply and even had a telephone wire installed between Baden (the location of the Army Higher Command) and the Hofburg so that he could keep in touch when they were apart. Zita would often accompany him to the front and at times even brought their children with her. However, her influence has often been exaggerated. While Karl knew and admired the intelligence of his wife, he did not always share her views. Ultimately, the last word in decisions was his.

When the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy imploded in the autumn of 1918, Karl waived his rights to be involved in government and the family moved to Eckartsau, a former hunting lodge in private Habsburg possession just outside Vienna. It is important to note that this was not an abdication, which is what Zita first thought Karl was being asked to sign. A staunch believer in the Habsburg right to rule, she declared:

Never! A ruler can be deposed ... That is force, which precludes recognition. But abdicate—never! I would rather fall right here at your side. Then there would be Otto. And even if all of us here were killed, there would still be other Habsburgs!⁷

During their time in Eckartsau, Karl caught the Spanish flu and never truly recovered. Due to fears that they would be assassinated like the Romanovs, the family were sent into exile in Switzerland. After Karl twice tried and failed to retake the Hungarian crown in 1921, they were expelled from Switzerland and moved to Madeira. It was here that Karl died after catching a cold at the age of thirty-four in 1922. Zita was eight months pregnant with their eighth child at the time of her husband's death. The young widow and

⁷ "Zita's reaction to the suggestion that Emperor Karl should abdicate on 11 November 1918," *The World of the Habsburgs*, Schloß Schönbrunn Kultur- und Betriebsges.m.b.H, accessed 11 June 2022, <https://ww1.habsburger.net/en/cites/zitas-reaction-suggestion-emperor-karl-should-abdicate-11-november-1918>.

her family went on to move several times (including as war refugees during the Second World War) and it was not until 1982 that she was allowed to return to Austria. She died in 1989 and was the penultimate Habsburg to have an elaborate funeral ceremony and burial at the Capuchin Crypt, Vienna.⁸

The *Kriegspressequartier* and censorship of word and image

The *Kriegspressequartier* was founded by Colonel Maximilian von Hoen on 28 July 1914 on the day of partial mobilisation.⁹ However, its conception and planning date to 1909, long before the start of the First World War.¹⁰ This office controlled press, photographs, and information and was the central military propaganda institution during the war, but it initially only coordinated newspaper reporting, for which it brought in journalists and writers.¹¹ We can easily say that the material produced by the *Kriegspressequartier* was propaganda. When visual propaganda began to be utilised by the office, civilian reporters and photojournalists were blocked from working.¹² No disturbing images were to make their way to the home front and reporting was strictly regulated by this office.¹³ More than 500 artists and journalists worked for the office and more than 33,000 photographs it produced are still extant today.¹⁴ Walter Reichl estimates that, at its peak in 1918, the *Kriegspressequartier* had around 900 employees.¹⁵ As Martina Winkelhofer has argued, these numbers are clear evidence of the huge imperial propaganda machine that was operating.¹⁶ The office's rules of service admit this purpose: written in 1917, this document uses the word "propaganda" multiple times. These rules were written not under Franz Joseph but under Karl, who has earned the nickname "propaganda Kaiser." It is made clear in the rules

⁸ Her son Otto (Austria's last Crown Prince) was the last in 2011. Archduchess Yolande (wife of Zita's fifth child, Archduke Carl Ludwig) was buried in the crypt in a private family ceremony in October 2023.

⁹ Walter Reichel, "Pressearbeit ist Propagandaarbeit" — *Medienverwaltung 1914-1918: Das Kriegspressequartier (KPQ)* (Vienna: Studienverlag, 2016), 18.

¹⁰ Deborah Holmes, "Cultures at War: Austria-Hungary 1914-1918: Introduction," *Austrian Studies* 21 (2013), 3.

¹¹ Reichel, "Pressearbeit ist Propagandaarbeit," 17.

¹² Samanta Benito-Sanchez, "Pressefotografen zwischen den Weltkriegen. Eine Biografiensammlung von Pressefotografen, die zwischen 1918 und 1939 in Wien tätig waren," (MA thesis, University of Vienna, 2009), 28.

¹³ Martina Winkelhofer, *Karl & Zita Menschen, Hintergründe, Geheimnisse: Österreichs letztes Kaiserpaar und das Ende der Habsburgermonarchie* (Vienna: Krone Verlag, 2017), 46.

¹⁴ Winkelhofer, *Karl & Zita*, 46. These images can be found today in the Austrian National Library, Vienna.

¹⁵ Reichel, "Pressearbeit ist Propagandaarbeit," 17.

¹⁶ Winkelhofer, *Karl & Zita*, 46.

of service that “press service is propaganda service.”¹⁷ Here, propaganda is neither shied away from nor viewed in a negative light. According to the rules of service, the *Kriegspressequartier*’s purpose was to produce positive propaganda inside and outside the monarchy and to fight against antimonarchy propaganda.¹⁸

We can discern that the written word was originally the primary medium used by the *Kriegspressequartier*, but it was soon overtaken by the visual. Zita and Karl made use of the photographic and printing technologies, which were developing quickly, as a way to build rapport with and transmit their image to the public. Royal families were aware of the public desire for photographs and public visits, though not all of them were particularly thrilled about it: Kaiser Wilhelm I has been described as resisting “visual omnipresence” whereas Karl and Zita welcomed it.¹⁹ Karl and Zita were aware of and keen to broadcast the royal image through as many mediums as possible, like their contemporary Kaiser Wilhelm II.²⁰ Through photographs and continual in-person visits, they were able to remain not only in the public’s imagination, but in the public’s thoughts. Austria-Hungary and Germany were not the only places to utilise visual propaganda during the First World War. On the Allied side, the British set up a department in 1916 which appointed official photographers and set up a department that would distribute their photographs and films to other countries.²¹ Martyn Jolly has written that “images became central to public understanding of the war, and photography and film supplanted the written word as the most powerful weapon in propaganda.”²² This same statement could easily be applied to Austria-Hungary, particularly under Karl and Zita.

The development of press photography allowed the public to follow the movements of the imperial family more closely. Public appearances were a moving image of royalty for the people present but, during Franz Joseph’s reign, they also started to become literal images: photographers would follow the emperor and photograph him in less formal and posed settings. This made the emperor more accessible to people who were not able to see him in person. When Karl became emperor, the taking and circulation of photographs

¹⁷ Reichel, “*Pressearbeit ist Propagandaarbeit*,” 27.

¹⁸ *Dienstordnung für das Kriegspressequartier*, k. k. Hof- und Staatsdruckerei, p. 3, 1917, KA, FA AOK KPQ KT. 23, Kriegsarchiv, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv (Hereafter cited as *Dienstordnung*).

¹⁹ Eva Giloi, *Monarchy, Myth, and Material Culture in Germany, 1750-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 246.

²⁰ Giloi, *Monarchy, Myth, and Material Culture in Germany*, 267–270.

²¹ Martyn Jolly, “Composite Propaganda Photographs during the First World War,” *History of Photography* 27, no. 2 (2003), 155.

²² Jolly, “Composite Propaganda Photographs,” 155.

during public appearances reached new heights. This was in total opposition to Tsar Nicholas II, who used film and photography in order to reach the public while safeguarding his privacy.²³ Karl and Zita were ever-present through public appearances and photography that was circulated in various forms, particularly postcards. The press was the major tool for mass communication in the dual monarchy, and newspapers were subject to intense censorship when emergency measures came into place immediately after the start of the First World War.²⁴ Newspaper journalism, which was the primary way in which press photography was seen by the public, was the main medium at the beginning of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the war.²⁵ However, the actual market for German-language newspapers in the dual monarchy was relatively small.²⁶

Control of the press was provided during the First World War by the *Pressesubkommission des Kriegsüberwachungskomitees* (Press Subcommittee of the War Oversight Committee).²⁷ The *Kriegspressequartier* was responsible for setting the task, determining the destination, and choosing the subject of the text or photograph reports. After being censored by the *Kriegspressequartier* on site, the materials were brought to the respective papers by a military courier.²⁸ Additionally, newspapers were obliged to submit photographs intended for publication to the press subcommittee so that they could decide whether the publication harmed military interests; thus photographs, not just text, were also censored.²⁹ Moreover, we can see that newspapers (and other forms of media) primarily dealt with second-hand, curated material. This material was not to serve the purpose of informing the public but was clearly propaganda.³⁰ When Karl and Zita came to the throne, control of the imperial image was tightened further when Karl became the first

²³ Richard Wortman, "Publicizing the Imperial Image in 1913," in *Visual Texts, Ceremonial Texts, Texts of Exploration: Collected Articles on the Representation of Russian Monarchy* (Massachusetts: Academic Studies Press, 2013), 73–74.

²⁴ Cornwall, Mark. 2019. "Propaganda at Home (Austria-Hungary)," in *1914-1918 Online*, accessed April 13, 2022. https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/propaganda_at_home_austria-hun.

²⁵ Reichel, "Pressearbeit ist Propagandaarbeit," 17.

²⁶ Reichel, "Pressearbeit ist Propagandaarbeit," 30.

²⁷ Ilona Balog Stemlerné, "Fotografien des Ersten Weltkriegs und der Revolutionen (1914-1919)," in *Kulturmanöver: das k.u.k. Kriegspressequartier und die Mobilisierung von Wort und Bild*, ed. Sema Colpan (Vienna: Lang, 2015), 257.

²⁸ Balog Stemlerné, "Fotografien des Ersten Weltkriegs und der Revolutionen," 258.

²⁹ Balog Stemlerné, "Fotografien des Ersten Weltkriegs und der Revolutionen," 260.

³⁰ Benito-Sanchez, "Pressefotografen zwischen den Weltkriegen," 28.

Austrian monarch to set up his own press office.³¹ Additionally, the *Kriegspressequartier* moved between Galicia and Moravia until Franz Joseph's death. In November 1916, it then moved to Vienna—the imperial capital and Karl and Zita's base when they were not at the front or travelling around the monarchy for their countless public appearances.³²

Royal images from *carte de visite* to postcard

Before looking directly at Zita's images, it is important to trace the development of postcards and their link to the popular *carte de visite*. Postcards did not appear out of the blue, but are the result of the development of writing habits and the increased circulation of photographs.³³ It was the *carte de visite* that first brought royal likenesses into mainstream consumption.³⁴ These are photographic portraits mounted onto a piece of card, the process for which was patented in 1854 by André Adolphe Eugène Disdéri. While Disdéri was not the first to make the *carte de visite*, he enabled production costs to be reduced by taking eight portraits on one plate.³⁵ Prior to this, photographers relied on daguerreotypes, where making multiple copies of the same photograph was almost impossible. Helmut Gernsheim locates the beginning of the *carte de visite* "craze" in May 1859, when Napoleon III was photographed by Disdéri in this format.³⁶ Henceforth, fashionable French society imitated Napoleon and it was not long before the rest of Europe followed suit. Queen Victoria, who was a passionate patron of photography, moved away from the daguerreotype and began to have herself and her family photographed with the *carte de visite* technique. Just as so-called royal watchers today collect images and cards of the British royal family, it was normal in the nineteenth century to accumulate and exchange not just photographs of one's own relations but also of monarchs. It was not just the general population that did this. Queen Victoria had a huge photographic collection. Empress Elisabeth of Austria also collected *carte de visite* photographs, becoming famous for her *Schönheitsalben* (beauty albums). In 1862, she wrote to her brother-in-law, Archduke Ludwig Viktor: "I am beginning a beauty album and am collecting photographs of women."

³¹ Anton Holzer, *Rasende Reporter: eine Kulturgeschichte des Fotojournalismus; Fotografie, Presse und Gesellschaft in Österreich 1890-1945* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2014), 111.

³² Cornwall, "Propaganda at Home."

³³ Cornwall, "Propaganda at Home," 4; Alison Rowley, *Open Letters: Russian Popular Culture and the Picture Postcard 1880-1922* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 136.

³⁴ Rowley, *Open Letters*, 139.

³⁵ Helmut Gernsheim, *A Concise History of Photography* (New York: Dover Publications, 1986), 55.

³⁶ Gernsheim, *A Concise History of Photography*, 55.

Any pretty faces you can find from Angerer and other photographers, I would ask you to send me.”³⁷ Images held a different meaning for Elisabeth from what they did for Zita; Elisabeth was concerned with becoming the most beautiful woman in Europe, perhaps in an effort to gain more autonomy; for Zita, this was not the case.³⁸

Photography and its dissemination through *cartes de visite*, newspapers, and other media such as postcards, was another way in which the Habsburg dynasty could control their public image. It was Ludwig Angerer (the photographer Elisabeth mentioned in the above-quoted letter) who introduced the *carte de visite* to Vienna in 1857.³⁹ Angerer founded the first Viennese photograph studio and was appointed as court photographer by Emperor Franz Joseph in 1860.⁴⁰ Angerer sold “enormous quantities of *cartes* of the imperial family.”⁴¹ This desire and the rise of photography was also directly linked to the rise of “fan culture,” as Eva Giloi has termed the phenomenon when examining the German Empire, and *carte de visite* photographs enabled royals to determine “the public’s experience of royal charisma.”⁴² These pictures were sold in the same way that picture postcards are today; Baroness Mary Vetsera famously collected photographs of Crown Prince Rudolf prior to their affair and her death at his hands at Mayerling hunting lodge in 1889.⁴³ Members of the royal families themselves would exchange *carte de visite* portraits; Tsarina Maria Feodorovna sent Crown Prince Rudolf autographed photographs of herself and Tsar Alexander III.⁴⁴ Additionally, members of multiple European families—including the Habsburgs—would send copies of their portraits in photographic or postcard form in

³⁷ Gerda Mraz, “Sammeln aus historischen interesse?,” in *Fotografie in Österreich: Geschichte, Entwicklungen, Protagonisten 1890-1955*, ed. Anton Holzer (Vienna: Metroverlag, 2013), 16.

³⁸ Martina Winkelhofer, *Sisis Welt* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 2024).

³⁹ Mraz, “Sammeln aus historischen interesse?,” 55.

⁴⁰ Josef Maria Eder, *Geschichte der Photographie* (Halle an der Saale: Verlag Wilhelm Knapp, 1932), 489; Austrian Centre for Digital Humanities and Cultural Heritage, “Angerer, Ludwig (1827-1879), Photograph und Pharmazeut,” *Österreichisches Biographisches Lexikon ab 1815* (2. überarbeitete Auflage – online), last modified 1 March 2011, https://www.biographien.ac.at/oeb1/oeb1_A/Angerer_Ludwig_1827_1879.xml;internal&action=hilite.action&Parameter=angerer*.

⁴¹ Gernsheim, *A Concise History of Photography*, 55.

⁴² Eva Giloi, “‘So Writes the Hand that Swings the Sword’: Autograph Hunting and Royal Charisma in the German Empire, 1861-1888,” in *Constructing Charisma: Celebrity, Fame, and Power in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, eds. Edward Berenson and Eva Giloi (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 42.

⁴³ Lucy Coatman, “Love Is Dead: Newly discovered letters get us closer to understanding the tragic truth of royal murder-suicide at Mayerling,” *History Today* 72, no. 2 (February 2022), 16.

⁴⁴ Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv, *Brief von Marie Zarin von Russland an Kronprinz Rudolf*, 04/02/1876, AT-OeStA/HHSTA HausA Selekt Kronprinz Rudolf 19-56.

response to unsolicited correspondence.⁴⁵ This practice can still be seen today in the British royal family.⁴⁶ We can therefore see that, prior to Zita's joining Austria's reigning family, there was a large appetite for photographic depictions of royals throughout late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Europe. But how did royal images find their way onto postcards specifically?

The first postcards (without images) were sent from Austria-Hungary in 1869.⁴⁷ These were known as *Grußkarten* (greeting cards), where one side would be used for the address and stamp and the other for the message.⁴⁸ It was around the turn of the century that pictures—such as landscapes—came to be used on postcards, though one side was still dedicated to the address and stamp. Therefore, small messages would be scribbled around whatever picture was on the front.⁴⁹ By the First World War, the back of the postcard held enough space for the address, stamp, and message. It was at the turn of the century that picture postcards began to be used by European royal families to mark public activities of royalty. It could be argued that, as postcards moved away from landscapes, the royals themselves began to represent the homeland. This was particularly evident in the case of Karl and Zita and their images on postcards could perhaps remind the public of what they were fighting for during the war. As Alexis Schwarzenbach has noted, the mass-produced and impersonal textual messages of royal postcards did not stop them from being effective public relations tools.⁵⁰ Postcards were used in England to mark the death of Queen Victoria and in Germany to commemorate Kaiser Wilhelm II's visit to the Holy Land in 1890.⁵¹ Such postcards and photographic releases would keep royal activities at the forefront of the public's mind in a way that painted portraits of previous centuries would not. Postcards were also used in order to create certain narratives. Alison Rowley has successfully shown how the Russian royal family used portraits on postcards in an attempt to counteract

⁴⁵ Rowley, *Open Letters*, 141; Mraz, "Sammeln aus historischen Interesse?," 15.

⁴⁶ "Royal watchers" eagerly await the release of new portraits to mark birthdays, Christmas, and anniversaries. These are sent in card format to people who write to members of the British royal family.

⁴⁷ "Postcards," Postal Museum, accessed 13 April 2022, <https://www.postalmuseum.org/collections/highlights/postcards/>.

⁴⁸ Lisa Schögler, "Das Symbol im Bild Propagierete Geschlechterbilder auf Postkarten im Ersten Weltkrieg in Österreich-Ungarn," (MA thesis, University of Graz, 2011), 34.

⁴⁹ Schögler, "Das Symbol ...," 34.

⁵⁰ Alexis Schwarzenbach, "Royal Photographs: Emotions for the People," *Contemporary European History* 13, no. 3 (August 2004), 260.

⁵¹ Rowley, *Open Letters*, 147.

negative publicity that surrounded their reign.⁵² As Rowley notes, the Russian royal family was not unique in this, even if their context varied greatly from other European dynasties.⁵³

In 1885, privately produced illustrated postcards were legalised in Austria, allowing for a “golden age” of the picture postcard.⁵⁴ Joachim Bürgschwentner estimates that, just before the war, 1.7 million postcards were being sent every day in the Austrian half of the monarchy. During the war itself, around 50,000 war-related picture postcards were created and circulated in Germany and Austria.⁵⁵ Many postcards still exist today in museums and private collections. We can therefore see that not only were a lot of postcards being produced but they were also being kept and collected, which increased their effectiveness as a public relations tool. Zita and Karl would use portraits on postcards to create certain narratives: images of Zita as wife and mother reflected how Zita saw herself and perhaps also helped to tackle rumours and accusations that her influence extended beyond the realm of what was appropriate for her position and gender.

Visual representations of Zita on postcards: postcards of a wife

From Zita’s remembrances, particularly her 1972 interview for the *Österreichischer Rundfunk* (ORF), we can see that she understood herself in terms of three roles: empress, wife, and mother. It is in these three roles, separately and combined, that Zita is portrayed on postcards.⁵⁶ I argue that Zita used her portraits on postcards to effectively present herself in these roles and that, particularly in the role of mother, female members of the population should have been able to identify with her. In order to understand how Zita presents herself as a wife and mother, it is first necessary to briefly look at her Catholic education, which certainly had an impact on how she perceived herself and her role. Zita’s mother, Maria Antonia, Duchess of Parma, ensured that the children received a religious

⁵² Rowley, *Open Letters*, 147.

⁵³ Rowley, *Open Letters*, 147.

⁵⁴ Bürgschwentner, “War Relief, Patriotism and Art,” 101.

⁵⁵ Bürgschwentner, “War Relief, Patriotism and Art,” 102.

⁵⁶ Here, I am also putting her time as archduchess under the role of “empress” for the sake of ease. At the time of the ORF interview, Zita was still in exile, as she always refused to renounce her rights to the throne. Only in 1982 (ten years after this interview), after six decades in exile, was she able to return to Austria. A pro-monarchy stance is clear throughout, and not only because it is the ex-empress speaking. The documentary was directed by Erich Feigl, a staunch supporter of Habsburg restoration. He was closely connected to the family, particularly Zita and her first son Otto. Thanks to this connection, he wrote what he claimed to be the “only authentic biography” of Zita. Additionally, he was part of the committee responsible for her burial and an active member of the *Kaiser Karl Gebetsliga*, an organisation which has promoted the cause for the last emperor’s canonisation since 1925.

education at home; it was to have practical aspects rather than merely learning the Catechism.⁵⁷ Ten percent of pocket money was to be given to the poor and the ducal children were also sent to poorer districts in order to care for the people there.⁵⁸ The ambassador Heinrich von Tschirschky was aware of this, writing at the time of Zita's engagement that her home education was guided in a "very strictly clerical sense."⁵⁹ Zita was then sent to two convents to finish her education, firstly in Bavaria and then on the Isle of Wight. Some of her sisters remained in the latter convent and took the veil.

This religious setting would have had a major impact on Zita's understanding of the roles available to women. In traditional understandings of Catholicism, there are two options open to women: marriage and motherhood, or the consecrated life. Both of these are epitomised in the Virgin Mary, who remains the ultimate womanly paradigm in the Catholic Church. Zita retained her Catholic faith throughout her life. Her future husband, Archduke Karl, also had a deeply Catholic upbringing, which in turn would guide his understanding of his marriage and the roles to be played within it. According to court rules, Karl's future bride must not only be of the correct social standing but must also be Catholic. The very laws of the Habsburg court required this confessional background from Zita. Additionally, they were not the only couple to share a profound understanding of their Catholic faith; Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie were known for their religiosity. Unfortunately for them, Sophie did not have the required royal lineage for her position, leaving their children out of the line of succession. It was this that would catapult Karl into the position of heir to the throne in 1914.

Karl and Zita loved each other greatly. The night before their wedding, Karl uttered words that have since become famous among Catholics: "Now we must help each other get to heaven." Through their respective roles as husband and wife, they would help each other towards this goal with salvific implications within the Catholic Church. The pair had a deep love and respect for each other, which can be seen not only in Karl's final words to his wife on his deathbed ("I love you so much") but also in day-to-day documents. In a telegram sent from Karl to Zita in the first years of their marriage, he tells her that he is thinking about her often, and ends with "hugging you and the children tightly."⁶⁰ These are not mere empty words (like some of Crown Prince Rudolf's letters to his wife

⁵⁷ Tamara Griesser-Pečar, *Zita* (Bergisch Gladbach: Gustav Lübbe, 1988), 30.

⁵⁸ Griesser-Pečar, *Zita*, 30.

⁵⁹ Griesser-Pečar, *Zita*, 53.

⁶⁰ Kaiser Karl, *Eigenhändiger Entwurf. Telegramm mit Unterschrift*, 1916, Sammlung August Miller-Aichholz, ÖNB Sammlung von Handschriften und alten Drucken Autogr. 436/22-2.

Stéphanie), but reminiscent of new lovers whose every thought is of the other. Zita's telegrams to Karl show a similar affection, closing with things such as "a thousand kisses" or "I cannot wait to see you. Hugs, Zita."⁶¹ Their devotion would continue throughout and beyond Karl's short life: Zita never remarried and wore black for the rest of her days.

Pictures of Karl and Zita prior to their ascension to the thrones of Austria-Hungary were a well-loved postcard choice for people writing to family and friends. Soon after their wedding, postcards showing the festivities were sent. One such postcard was sent from Belgium in 1911.⁶² It is unclear whether the card was bought in Belgium or bought somewhere in Austria, taken back, and sent from Belgium. Simply addressed "Mama," a later writer (the handwriting suggests a later collector organising their collection) adds that the image is of the wedding celebration of the Emperor of Austria (though the image was taken and the postcard sent while Karl was still heir to the throne). From this, we can gather that even those outside the empire were intrigued by this young new couple who were the future of Austria-Hungary. How then, were Karl and Zita presented on postcards?

⁶¹ Zita von Bourbon-Parma, 5 telegraphs, Izdebnik, 1912, accessed March 2023, https://inlibris.com/de/item/bn28669_de/.

⁶² Delcampe, "Hochzeitsfest - Erzherzog Karl Franz Josef, Erzherzogin Zita - Fête de mariage de Karl Franz Josef d'Autriche et Zita," accessed March 2022, https://www.delcampe.net/en_US/collectibles/postcards/royal-families/hochzeitsfest-erzherzog-karl-franz-josef-erzherzogin-zita-fete-de-mariage-de-karl-franz-josef-dautriche-et-zita-927718633.html.



Figure 1. Heinrich Schuhmann, *Erzherzog Thronfolger Karl Franz Josef und Erzherzogin Zita*, 1911. Austrian National Library.

It was the norm in nineteenth and early twentieth-century marital portraits to have the wife seated and the husband standing.⁶³ Such gendered associations with height are particularly striking in the portraits of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in England. The use of standing and sitting in portraiture to project the contrasting ideas of sovereign queen regnant and obedient wife have certainly not been overlooked in the historiography of Queen Victoria's image. Margaret Homans' argument is that, by sitting or standing in

⁶³ Margaret Homans, "To the Queen's Private Apartments: Royal Family Portraiture and the Construction of Victoria's Sovereign Obedience," *Victorian Studies* 37, no. 1 (1993): 15.

portraits with Albert, Victoria represents “simultaneously and ambiguously, her power as sovereign and her subordination as wife.”⁶⁴ The issue of height continued well into the twentieth century, with Charles and Diana’s engagement photograph being a prime example.⁶⁵ As neither Zita nor Diana was the principal heir or ruler, but rather their wife, there was no need to tackle such complex ideological issues in their portraiture alongside their respective husbands. While some portraits featured on postcards have Karl standing and Zita sitting, they are more frequently photographed standing at a more or less equal height. Where they differ is Karl’s military uniform and Zita’s overt femininity, as seen in figure 1, which is a photograph taken by Heinrich Schumann.⁶⁶ Conceptions of gender were particularly powerful during the First World War and highly associated with the idea of returning to order. Masculinity would be propagated through the symbolism of the military, most highly idealised in the image of a soldier.⁶⁷ Women were imagined on the “home front” and associated with ideals of motherhood and moral duty.⁶⁸ These principles were portrayed on many wartime postcards, becoming cultural symbols for *Heimat* (homeland), order, and harmony and a reminder to soldiers of what they were fighting for.

⁶⁴ Homans, “To the Queen’s Private Apartments,” 15.

⁶⁵ It could potentially be argued that this is a continuation of the gendered associations with height seen in the photographs of Victoria and Albert, and on Twitter has been decried as an example of ‘fragile masculinity.’ However, it can be seen from other photographs from this set that the pair are frequently portrayed at the same height. Was there really a need as there was for Victoria and Albert to display this height difference in order to tread a delicate ideological line? (Williamson relates this portrait to those of the nineteenth-century rulers.) There is certainly some element of masculinity at play, as there is no photograph where Diana is shown as the taller of the two.

⁶⁶ An example of this portrait on a postcard was sold on Delcampe: “ERZHERZOG THRONFOLGER KARL FRANZ JOSEF UND ERZHERZOGIN ZITA,” Delcampe, accessed 11 June 2022, <https://ww1.habsburger.net/en/cites/zitas-reaction-suggestion-emperor-karl-should-abdicate-11-november-1918>.

⁶⁷ Schögler, “Das Symbol ...,” 46.

⁶⁸ Schögler, “Das Symbol ...,” 46.



Figure 2. Postcard of Karl produced by the *Kriegsfürsorgeamt*, 1917. Author's collection.

During the First World War, Karl was always portrayed on postcards in military uniform as seen in figure 2. It was his predecessor, Emperor Franz Joseph, who cemented the image of the emperor as a soldier: not only was it rare to see him in civilian clothing instead of a military uniform but he also slept in the same type of bed his soldiers would. Karl continued the tradition of his predecessor, allowing him to identify with the men fighting on the front and portray himself as “one of them.” Despite being against the war, Karl also saw himself as a soldier. Unfortunately, it is not possible to measure the extent to which this created a sense of rapport between ruler and ruled, though we can be certain that people saw this image of their young emperor—both through the circulation of his portrait on postcards and through his continual visits to the front and to cities throughout the monarchy. This is not to say that Karl only wore military uniform during the war. There are plenty of private photographs that were not circulated where Karl is wearing civilian clothing. Only after the war, in exile, was he seen by the public exclusively in civilian clothing. Private photographs in the estate of Archduchess Marie Therese frequently show

Karl in military uniform, though these were not to be seen by the population in any circumstances. His image, though portraying a certain kind of masculinity through his soldier's uniform, stands in contrast to that of Kaiser Wilhelm II, who wished to be seen as imperious and commanding.⁶⁹ The difference in persona is especially notable in postcards portraying Karl not only as a soldier but also as a father.

There are, however, some stereotypical gendered images of Karl and Zita that play on height, though these are not always easy to read when one thinks of the biographical background. Here, I would like to discuss two postcard images in particular: one of Zita, Karl, and Otto, and one of Zita and Karl at their Hungarian coronation.



Figure 3. H. C. Kosel, *Emperor Karl, Empress Zita and Crown Prince Otto*, photo taken 1914, postcard produced 1916. Author's collection.

The photograph in figure 3 was taken by court photographer Hermann Clemens Kosel when the pair were still archduke and archduchess, before Karl was the heir, but continued to be circulated after Karl's accession to the throne. This image speaks to

⁶⁹ Giloi, *Monarchy, Myth, and Material Culture in Germany*, 273.

multiple tropes: the height difference with the woman sitting, the male dressed in military uniform, and the woman holding her child. During the First World War, when this image was still circulated (as seen by the caption naming Karl and Zita emperor and empress) the ideal family was typified by father/soldier, mother/wife, and child(ren) and this was often used to construct an image of *Heimat* on picture postcards. The imperial family was the ultimate expression of this: the father and mother of the country, as well as the future, in Crown Prince Otto. Queen Victoria's public imagery had already made domesticity a royal virtue, but the First World War brought this to new heights, as described above.⁷⁰ Karl and Zita were not the only ones utilising familial imagery at the time, with Tsar Nicholas II elevating importance of the family while, at the same time, attempting to portray it as commonplace and relatable to his subjects.⁷¹ The photograph on the postcard is thus multilayered, coming together to form an ideal of gender and the family in its quintessential form: the family of the emperor and empress. And yet, there seems to be something else. Karl's posture seems unsure. Although he is leaning in towards his wife and child, it does not come across as protective but rather insecure and lacks the charisma that can often be seen in photographs of his public appearances.

⁷⁰ Richard Ormond, *The Face of Monarchy: British Royalty Portrayed* (London: Phaidon, 1977), 34.

⁷¹ Wortman, "Publicizing the Imperial Image in 1913," 87.



Figure 4. Heinrich Schumann, *The Hungarian Coronation*, 1916. Author's collection.

Figure 4, a picture postcard from the Hungarian coronation featuring a photograph by Heinrich Schumann, also conforms to the ideal of a seated wife and standing husband but, again, Karl is the figure seemingly in the background, almost whispering something to his wife. He is looking down at Zita while she looks into the distance in a regal manner. Even in an accompanying image where both look into the middle distance, she looks like the ruler, reminiscent of some of Queen Victoria's early portraits with her consort Prince Albert. It is important to note that it was felt that the Hungarian coronation must be done as quickly as possible in order to provide a symbol of stability, particularly for the Hungarian aristocracy but also for the entire country during a time of war.⁷² Karl and Zita did not feel that it was right to hold the coronation during wartime but were ultimately persuaded when they learned that there were certain laws that could only be signed by a king. These images circulating on postcards could therefore help to contribute to this idea of stability.

⁷² Gergely Pröhle in "Kaiser Karl I.–Mythos und Wirklichkeit," Servus TV, April 2022, 22:39–22:58, <https://www.servustv.com/allgemein/v/aa9htb5ddd5a3dpvcw7/>.

These images are also interesting because the supposed level of influence that Zita had on her husband is still a source of great debate. As the war progressed, Zita came to be seen as an enemy due to her Italian background and she is still referred to as an “Italian traitor” in online forums. Newspaper articles, no longer under strict censorship after the fall of the monarchy, wrote of Zita’s “betrayals” and attacked her influence over Karl, deeming it disastrous for the imperial house.⁷³ Here, the portrayal of Zita as the “Italian woman” comes through strongly, even if it is not explicitly stated. Karl and Zita’s marriage is presented as a loveless one of convenience (though we can easily see it was quite the opposite) and it is written that, if Karl had married a German princess, he could have saved the House of Habsburg. Zita’s family, the Bourbon-Parmas, are treated as hungry for the throne and, with Karl’s death, they had lost their most important playing card for achieving this.⁷⁴ There is absolutely no sympathy for the young pregnant woman who had just lost her husband and the father of her children. Similarly, the *Villacher Zeitung* (Villach Newspaper) refers to Zita’s “unfortunate involvement” in the Sixtus Affair, which they say led to the breakup of the monarchy, and claim that it was Zita who forced Karl to attempt to retake the Hungarian throne twice.⁷⁵ The emperor’s cabinet head, Count Arthur Polzer, recalled that, when discussions were taking place, the empress was usually present. Here, she would have had a passive influence over her husband and would be “reading” in the corner of the room.⁷⁶ Wilhelm Möller, whom Katrin Unterreiner (a historian who has written a largely negative biography of Karl) relies on heavily to construct the image of a weak emperor and powerful empress, wrote that Zita “undoubtedly had an outstanding influence on him [Karl]. She was intellectually higher and more energetic.”⁷⁷ Unterreiner’s other main source is an anonymous one. It is this source that claims that Zita would remove Karl from meetings when she did not like the direction that they were taking. They would often be gone for half an hour and, when they returned, Karl would have taken the view of his wife.⁷⁸ The anonymous nature of this source makes it problematic, as it is impossible to assess the credibility of the author and what is written. In her later 1982 interview, Zita insisted that she played no role in politics and that all ideas came from and decisions were

⁷³ *Tagblatt*, 15 April 1922, 3.

⁷⁴ “Exkaiser Karl gestorben,” *Niederösterreichischer Grenzboten*, 9 April 1922, 1–2.

⁷⁵ “Tagesneuigkeiten,” *Villacher Zeitung*, 4 April 1922, 3.

⁷⁶ Graf Artur Polzer Hoditz, *Kaiser Karl aus der Geheimmappe seines Kabinettchefs* (Vienna: Amalthea, 1929), 289.

⁷⁷ Katrin Unterreiner, *‘Meinetwegen kann er gehen’: Kaiser Karl und das Ende der Habsburgermonarchie* (Vienna: Molden, 2017), 49.

⁷⁸ Unterreiner, *Kaiser Karl*, 50.

made by Karl.⁷⁹ One may rightly question if this was the true extent of her involvement as empress. When confronted with this idea, Zita's grandson (also named Karl) argues that the emperor had of course made note of the intelligence and energy of his wife.⁸⁰ It appears to be a source of discomfort, and yet Zita would not be the first Habsburg consort to have played a political role; Elisabeth played a key part in the *Ausgleich* of 1867 and Archduchess Sophie, mother of Emperor Franz Joseph, was known as the "only man in the Hofburg" due to her political influence, which eventually brought her son to the throne.⁸¹

With all of the above in mind, it seems next to impossible to reach a middle ground between saint and sinner. Perhaps we should not continue to underestimate Karl while also recognising the influence that his intelligent wife surely wielded. That Zita was politically interested was confirmed by her granddaughter, Princess Maria-Anna Galitzine, who in an interview remembered her grandmother following political affairs in the newspaper or on television, and said that she was always happy to discuss current events.⁸² With the sources available to us coming from Karl and Zita themselves, it is more likely that Karl made the decisions and that those decisions would also differ from those his wife would have made. A letter from Zita to her husband, written in 1916, gives a detailed account of her position on a matter related to Russia. Her thoughts are made clear, but she was well aware that the final decision lay with Karl: "So I ask you now to decide what I should do in the matter!"⁸³ Here, the middle ground seems to be found; in a loving marriage like Karl and Zita's, what husband does not listen to his wife and vice versa? The idea that she was the real power behind the throne seems to be a result of anti-Austrian and anti-Zita feelings that arose during and especially after the war. As public discussions of how much power Zita wielded happened as her husband sat on the throne, images that presented her in her "proper place" as wife and mother may have been used in an attempt to combat negative opinions about her.

⁷⁹ This interview was given when the ex-empress was allowed to return to Austria for the first time since her exile.

⁸⁰ Karl Habsburg-Lothringen in "Zita – Österreichs letzte Kaiserin," *Zeitgeschichte*, ORF, 17:11–17:20.

⁸¹ Habsburg-Lothringen, "Zita," 6:00–6:25.

⁸² Princess Maria-Anna Galitzine in "EWTN Live – 2021-12-15 – Princess Maria-Anna Galitzine and Diane Schwind," EWTN, 21:48, accessed 16 March 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHGXLxwqR0&t=332s>.

⁸³ "So bitte ich Dich jetzt zu entscheiden was ich in der Angelegenheit machen soll!" Zita of Bourbon-Parma, letter, 24 April 1916, Hetzendorf, accessed 1 March 2023, https://inlibris.com/de/item/bn43384_de/.

Visual representations of Zita on postcards: Zita as mother (of the country)

Images of Zita were circulated even before she became empress in the form of images on postcards and through public appearances. Zita's visits throughout the monarchy, combined with the first circulation of her image, meant that she would already become more visible than the previous empress, Elisabeth, had been. Empress Elisabeth had been dead for almost fourteen years by 1911 and she had made infrequent appearances during her lifetime. The shy and seemingly narcissistic Elisabeth (known as Sisi) stopped being photographed and painted at the age of thirty-one. If she was seen in public, her face was covered with a fan. Additionally, there is only one known photograph of Elisabeth with her children.⁸⁴ Despite her refusal, there was a huge demand for pictures of the woman who was meant to be the most beautiful in Europe. Photographers were therefore forced to retouch earlier images of Elisabeth to make her appear older or create montages from photographs of other women and the reluctant empress. Unterreiner believes that Zita "knew the power of images."⁸⁵ Knowing that the monarchy had been without a female figurehead for quite some time, this power was probably even more pertinent.⁸⁶ While other European courts, particularly London and Berlin, had women with fixed positions in the public eye, the Viennese court had come to be associated with the aged and seemingly eternal Emperor Franz Joseph.⁸⁷ The example of Queen Victoria signals how the construction of personae (particularly that of the mother) spread through portraiture and photographs can have a noteworthy impact on popular feeling. Victoria set a standard that the other European royal families wished to follow. If Zita was aware of her unpopularity (which she seems to have been at least retrospectively, when thinking of being branded "the Italian" in the 1972 interview), the circulation of certain portraits could have been a way to bolster her reputation.

Seeing images of Zita, even as archduchess, would begin to fill the gap that Elisabeth had left behind. While postcards exist of other Habsburg archduchesses (such as Elisabeth's daughter, Marie Valerie), they did not perform the same function that Zita did. Additionally, while the occasional drawn or painted portrait of Zita and her family found

⁸⁴ See Brigitte Hamann, *The Reluctant Empress* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2016); Joan Haslip, *The Lonely Empress* (London: Phoenix, 2004).

⁸⁵ *Zeit Geschichte*, "Zita," 15:58.

⁸⁶ After Elisabeth's death and Crown Princess Stéphanie losing her status after Rudolf's death and her second marriage, Archduchess Marie Therese became the representative female figurehead of the monarchy. However, she was not able to fill the gap in the same way an empress would.

⁸⁷ Winkelhofer, *Karl & Zita*, 23.

its way onto postcards, the photographic medium was overwhelmingly represented.⁸⁸ Photographs were deemed more authentic than portraits (an attitude we can also see in Britain at the time), though this was not always the case. They were viewed equally before 1900, and it was at the turn of the century that photographs took precedence in authenticity.⁸⁹ Thus, a very real and tangible image of Zita was being circulated, unlike the doctored ones of the previous empress.

Zita, filling this void left by Elisabeth, linked into her future role as *Landesmutter*. In the aforementioned 1972 interview, Zita herself acknowledged this perceived role. It seems to have been reciprocated and reflected, as seen in contemporary poems such as *Wir haben wieder eine Kaiserin!* (we have an empress again).⁹⁰ The idea of a female ruler being the mother of a country was not unique to Austria; the most famous example is that of Queen Victoria, who became known as the “grandmother of Europe.” Victoria also used portraiture of herself as a mother to express this role to the public and, even in death, she requested to be buried with photographs of her children and grandchildren.⁹¹ It seems that the public accepted this persona of mother of the country: when Victoria died, Henry James wrote that it was a “real, personal grief” and that “we all felt, publicly, at first, quite motherless.”⁹² While Zita was not able to have this effect in death due to her exile from Austria, the case of Victoria signals how the construction of a mother persona spread through portraiture and photographs can have a noteworthy impact on popular feeling. Queen Victoria set a standard that other European royal families wished to follow. This ideological line has been named “the spectacle of royal domestic privacy” or “domestication of majesty” by Simon Schama.⁹³ Scholars generally agree on the methods used to present the nineteenth-century domestication of majesty, though there is variation in how much input Victoria truly had in this, as well as in the specific goals.⁹⁴ Zita also

⁸⁸ In my own collection, I have an example of a drawn picture of Zita and Karl (at this point heir to the throne) in a carriage. The postcard was produced by M. Munk, Vienna.

⁸⁹ Holzer, *Rasende Reporter*, 55.

⁹⁰ Fr Eichert, “Wir haben wieder eine Kaiserin,” in *Kaiser Gedichte*, ed. Austriacus (Linz: Druck und Verlag des katholischen Preßvereins, 1918), 29–30.

⁹¹ Julia Baird, *Victoria the Queen* (London: Blackfriars, 2016), 487.

⁹² Baird, *Victoria the Queen*, 485.

⁹³ Simon Schama, “The Domestication of Majesty: Royal Family Portraiture, 1500–1850,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 17, no. 1 (1986): 155–183.

⁹⁴ Homans makes the excellent point that Victoria representing herself as an ordinary wife could have been an intelligent move by the young queen, but it could also merely be the role that was forced upon her by the culture within which she was operating. See Margaret Homans, “‘To the Queen’s Private Apartments,’

utilised this paradox in her portraiture. Important here is her symbolic role as *Landesmutter* expressed through pictures of her as a literal mother. Vital for her construction of this image would be portraits of her with her firstborn son, heir to the throne Archduke Otto.



Figure 5. H. C. Kosel, *Archduchess Zita With Her Son*, 1914. Austrian National Library.
<http://data.onb.ac.at/rec/baa5599371>.

Already as an archduchess, we see portraits of Zita with her children on postcards. This not only ties into the aforementioned preparation for her role as *Landesmutter* but also serves to show the people their future Crown Prince, Otto. Figure 5, an image frequently used on postcards, features Kosel's 1914 photograph of Zita and Otto. The photograph of Zita as archduchess with her young son clearly encapsulates the paradox of the domestication of majesty, with the lavish background setting and the mother holding her child.⁹⁵ She is at

Royal Family Portraiture and the Construction of Victoria's Sovereign Obedience," *Victorian Studies* 37, no. 1 (1993), 6.

⁹⁵ Hermann Clemens Kosel, *Zita, Kaiserin von Österreich, mit Sohn Otto*, 1914, photograph, ÖNB, Vienna, <https://onb.digital/result/1118EC1C>. Although the image is titled online as Zita being empress, she was archduchess at the time that the photograph was taken.

once distant and familiar. Mothers throughout the monarchy would be able to relate to the young woman with the child on her lap (as well as other intimate photographs with her children, see below) while at the same time being inspired to feel the amount of awe her position commanded. Judith Williamson has identified the heart of the current British royal family's popularity as their being "at once like us, and not like us" and the key to this is their representation as a middle-class family in photography and the media.⁹⁶ Ideals of the bourgeoisie family and mother were also very popular in Austria during the First World War.⁹⁷ This could easily be said about Karl and Zita, particularly through photographs of the young family, which were a popular postcard choice. While it is unclear if this did anything for Zita and Karl's popularity in wartime, it is unsurprising that such images were chosen for postcards; they have a clear ideological message.

There is an interesting development in the images of Zita as a mother. The photograph used in figure 5 almost screams "royalty." There is a significant contrast with figure 6, which was produced when Zita was empress. In figure 5, Zita was not even the wife of the heir to the throne but, as empress, we can see through figures 6 and 7 that she becomes more like every woman. Figure 6 is heavily cropped, with the focus solely on Zita and her child. There is no palatial backdrop to add pomp, there are no props, and she smiles. This must have been an important part of her self-expression through portraiture. In a time when the population was struggling, it may not have been deemed appropriate to have portraits filled with majestic trappings. Furthermore, the family was in mourning for Emperor Franz Joseph in figures 6 and 7 (in photographs from the same set, Karl wears a mourning armband). This certainly has an impact on the type of clothes worn, specifically the use of pearls, which were seen as mourning jewellery in Austria. However, simpler clothing and jewellery continue to be seen in Zita's official portraits and public appearances throughout her reign. In her images as an archduchess, particularly those taken before the outbreak of the First World War, Zita's status is made explicit through the posture, clothing, and setting used. It also diverges heavily from the imagery of the previous empress, who needed to be seen as the most beautiful and untouchable woman in the monarchy. Elisabeth stood in contrast to her husband Franz Joseph who, through the wider circulation of photographs, made the myth of the old emperor more "real" to the public. Additionally, the court itself became much more informal after Karl took the throne

⁹⁶ Judith Williamson, *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London: Marion Boyars, 1986), 75.

⁹⁷ Schögler, "Das Symbol ...," 67.

and the emperor and empress became much more approachable than they had been during Franz Joseph's rule. Perhaps this too had an influence on their iconography.



Figure 6. Helene von Zimmerauer, *Empress and Queen Zita with Archduke Felix*, produced by the *Kriegsfürsorge*, c. 1916. Author's collection.

The image of mother and child also had a specific meaning for the war. We can see that mother- and family-related postcards (such as the postcard in figure 6) were chosen for use by the governmentally organised *Kriegsfürsorge* (war welfare) or charities such as the *Zentralkomitee zur Errichtung von Soldatenheimen* (central committee for the establishment of homes for soldiers). Postcards by such organisations were sold through subscriptions and catalogues, at public events, and through unsolicited mailing.⁹⁸ Imagery of Zita as mother was also a popular choice for postcards produced by private publishers (one example being the *Postkarten Verlag Brüder Kohn* in Vienna's first district).⁹⁹ We can

⁹⁸ Bürgschwentner, "War Relief, Patriotism and Art," 108.

⁹⁹ I have found multiple examples from this particular publisher for sale online, in the Marlene Eilers Koenig collection, in the Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv, in Thomas Köck's collection, and in my own collection.

rightly ask what other meanings this symbolism had, aside from the existing monarchical ones. As mentioned in the previous section, specific ideals about the family and the role of men and women were being propagated at the time. Women were particularly associated with motherhood, morality, and caring for the home so that there would be no worries about the homeland.¹⁰⁰ The natural destiny for women was to fulfil the role of wife and mother, and this became endangered by the number of women who became the sole breadwinner during the war.¹⁰¹ Images of women as good, waiting mothers taking care of the home were therefore circulated on postcards to remind everyone of their proper place. Additionally, the imagery was usually reminiscent of the Virgin Mary, elevating the idea of motherhood to even higher levels.¹⁰² Lisa Schögler argues that this “cult of motherhood” already existed prior to the war but intensified during it as it transmitted the idea that everything was in harmony in the *Heimat*.¹⁰³ As mother of the country, Zita was therefore the ultimate example to all other women. It was a role that she came to as soon as she married Karl, even when he was behind Franz Ferdinand in the line of succession. Even before becoming empress, she was the “first lady in the empire” and was the focal point from 1911 onwards.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Schögler, “Das Symbol ...,” 66.

¹⁰¹ Schögler, “Das Symbol ...,” 69.

¹⁰² Schögler, “Das Symbol ...,” 74.

¹⁰³ Schögler, “Das Symbol ...,” 75.

¹⁰⁴ Griesser-Pečar, *Zita*, 82.



Figure 7. Helene von Zimmerauer, Otto, Karl, Adelheid, Robert, and Felix, produced by the *Zentralkomitee zur Errichtung von Soldatenheimen*, c. 1916. Author's collection.



Figure 8. Archduchess Marie Therese, *The Imperial Family in Hertenstein*, October 1921. Author's collection.

Zita's role as mother of the country was to change drastically and this can be seen through the portraits featured on postcards. In 1918, Karl was made to sign a manifesto that removed the emperor from governmental decisions. The imperial family was sent into exile in 1919 for fears that the fate of the Romanovs might also befall them. Even in exile, the family had official photographers document their movements and take family

photographs. A great number of postcards were produced during the exile, both before and after Karl's death.¹⁰⁵ Figure 8 is from 1921 and shows the family in exile at Hertenstein castle. The photo was taken by Archduchess Marie Therese, and reproduced by Heinrich Schuhmann. It shows a clear initiative on the part of the exiled family in terms of how they wished to represent themselves publicly. Karl is no longer in military uniform but he stands as the patriarch of the family. This is made clear by the pyramid formation of the family, with Karl being at the top. Zita is sitting and surrounded by her children. She becomes the mother of the country without a country. It was a time of further turbulence; even, and perhaps especially, in exile, the gender roles that were so important during the war continued to be vital.

It is clear that some in Austria still supported the monarchy; this postcard was produced by the *Staatswehr* (State Defence), which was part of the *Kaisertreuen Volksverbandes* (Association of People Loyal to the Emperor). It is likely that Schuhmann belonged to this association and not only because his image was used by this specific office. Photographers who had previously taken portraits of the family travelled to photograph them in exile and would return to Vienna and produce postcards featuring these photographs. The postcards still refer to Karl and Zita as emperor and empress (as did pro-monarchy newspapers at the time, while others would refer to them as Karl and Zita Habsburg). Schuhmann is the most prominent example of this, and his photographer's stamp can be seen on exile postcards. That Schuhmann and later his son (also named Heinrich) were chosen specifically by the family is made clear from the correspondence in Otto's estate, with the exchange going up to 1954.¹⁰⁶ A great level of trust had clearly been built up between the family and the photographer. In the picture archive of the Austrian National Library alone there are 559 photographs that Schuhmann took of Zita. This makes up over half of the entire collection of Zita photographs the library has.¹⁰⁷ Schuhmann photographed a large number of Karl and Zita's public appearances throughout the monarchy and in other places such as Constantinople and Sofia—we can safely presume that he was hired by the *Kriegspressequartier*. Also of note is that he had photographed their

¹⁰⁵ A large portion is to be found in the collection and shop of Thomas Köck, Plankengasse 7, Vienna.

¹⁰⁶ A short correspondence (Heinrich Schuhmann to Otto Habsburg, Vienna, 18 September 1954; Office of Otto Habsburg to Heinrich Schuhmann, 17 October 1954) exists in the Otto von Habsburg Foundation, Budapest, where Heinrich Schuhmann sends the exiled imperial family a large number of photographs from his archive, after hearing the family had lost a lot of their own collection.

¹⁰⁷ More are to be found in the Otto Habsburg Foundation's archive in Budapest, however the archive has not yet been completely sorted and processed.

wedding and took a portrait photograph of them shortly after their marriage. He took many studio portraits of Karl and Zita together and separately, some of these being intimate moments such as Zita with her baby Archduke Karl Ludwig in 1918. To photograph such a scene would have required a certain amount of trust from the family, especially Zita, towards the photographer. Schuhmann also photographed Karl's public appearances where Zita was not present, such as when inspecting troops. It is likely that the couple had come to know the photographer well. That Schuhmann took multiple photographs of the imperial family in exile not just in Madeira but also in Switzerland and after Karl's death suggests that he was a very much trusted photographer and was likely loyal to the family even after they no longer sat on the throne.

Why, then, would postcards of the imperial family be produced in the country from which they had been exiled? I believe it was important to keep the image of the former monarchs in the public imagination. Karl attempted to retake the throne of Hungary twice and Zita always asserted her, Karl's, and then Otto's right to the throne. Purposely having portraits taken by their old photographers in Vienna to be produced on postcards was a way in which the family could hope to hold some sway over and gain sympathy from their former subjects. It shows a clear initiative and agency on the part of the family in a way that previous postcards may not.



Figure 9. Zita as *Mater Dolorosa*, produced by the *Staatswehr*, c. 1922. Author's collection.

The images would quickly change. Karl died in Madeira in 1922, leaving Zita alone with seven children and pregnant with their eighth. One postcard from after Karl's death which features Zita with her children holds the caption 'For Mother's Day' Empress-Mother Zita with her eight underage orphans'. Otto, who within royal circles was now named "Emperor," was still very young. The postcard shown in figure 9, (also produced by the *Staatswehr*) is in stark contrast to previous images of the content mother. Even on earlier postcards of Zita alone with a child or multiple children, she glows. Here, she is a *Mater Dolorosa*: a sorrowing mother. While she does not mourn the death of a child like the Virgin Mary, she grieves the loss of a husband whom she loved dearly. Her vocation now was to be a widow, as Princess Maria-Anna Galitzine has stated. It was not that she had lost her Catholic vocation to marriage but that this had evolved now that her husband had died. In this role, she was also a mother and a representative of her husband through her actions.¹⁰⁸ In this postcard, Zita does not even wear pearls as she did after Franz Joseph's death; her grief is too deep for such things. Zita's public image also remained static, as her hairstyle and clothing choices did not change after Karl's death. Her clothes were sober, simple, and disciplined. Like Queen Victoria, who surely set the template for royal widows, Zita was a widow until her dying day. She wore black for the rest of her days, often but not always accompanied by pearls, with her hair piled on top of her head. It is almost as if she became stuck in time. Such images could evoke sympathy for the young, sorrowful mother and her children. This adds another dimension to the images when one thinks that they were being used on postcards as a minor way of supporting a potential restoration attempt. These postcards became particularly vital in transmitting the exiled Habsburgs' image, as there is a distinct lack of photographs of them in newspapers from the former monarchy, whereas, during their reign, newspapers and magazines were filled with the imperial image. The newspapers which do use images seem to be ones that are loyal to the monarchy, or at least can show sympathy towards Zita for her loss, such as the *Linzer Tagespost* (Linz Daily Post):

In all circles where political hatred has not killed every other human feeling, great sympathy is shown for the poor Dowager Empress Zita, who is approaching her

¹⁰⁸ Princess Maria-Anna Galitzine in "EWTN Live – 2021-12-15 – Princess Maria-Anna Galitzine and Diane Schwind," EWTN, 28:13, accessed 16 March 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZH-gXLxwqR0&t=332s>.

difficult hour, which is usually sacred to every human being, in the greatest physical and psychological misery. Merciless fate has dealt this strong woman too much.¹⁰⁹

Postcards continued to be produced for a long time, and there are plenty to be found that feature the adult Otto.¹¹⁰

Conclusion

This article has shown the different personae that Zita portrayed to the public through portrait photographs on postcards. With postcards, we can trace the beginning of Zita's political imagery, which was clearly used as propaganda during the war. It is an image that Zita continued to cultivate through interviews and photographs until her death in March 1989. Zita ultimately always saw herself as Karl's wife and the mother of his children and, after his early death, she never remarried and wore black for the rest of her long life. It has been seen that the distribution of such photographs on postcards was a tool to influence people during a time of great upheaval; Zita's images aimed to contribute to a sense of stability, loyalty, and *Heimat*. While remaining within the confines of wife and mother, her image would evolve through time and adapt to different events that affected her country and family. That Zita clearly wished to present herself in these roles becomes clear when one sees the exile photography and notes that there is a continuous thread from 1911 until the exile and even until her death. To have photographers come from Vienna to photograph Zita and her family after Karl's death shows a clear initiative on her part.

Today, postcards featuring Karl and Zita remain collector's items and frequently appear for sale on websites such as Delcampe, Willhaben, eBay, AKPool, and AbeBooks. They are also to be found on sale at specialist shops throughout Vienna. However, their image also continues to be used today. Even one hundred years after Karl's death, images of the pair are still in wide circulation and their popularity continues to grow within certain circles: the pair are particularly popular with American Catholics as well as with conservative and traditional-leaning believers throughout Europe. In the Catholic Church, Karl holds the status of "Blessed" and Zita is "servant of God." At the time of writing, it is

¹⁰⁹ "Der Tod des letzten Habsburgers," *Linzer Tagespress*, 4 April 1922, 2. "Grosses Mitgefühl wird in allen Kreisen, in denen der politische Hass nicht jedes andere menschliche Gefühl er tötet hat, der armen Kaiserin-Witwe Zita entgegengebracht, die im größten physischen und psychischen Elend ihrer schweren Stunde, die jedem Menschen heilig zu sein pflegt, entgegengeht. Das erbarmungslose Schicksal hat der starken Frau wohl zu sehr mitgespielt."

¹¹⁰ This extends beyond the realm of the current article. Many examples are to be found in Thomas Köck's collection, including photographs taken and photographs produced by Clairson's, Vienna.

expected that her beatification will take place in the next few years. In the Catholic Church, feast days of saints are generally on the day on which they died. However, Karl and Zita are venerated on the day of their wedding. As such, they have become the subject of a Catholic wedding preparation manual that employs “vignettes from the life of the last-ruling imperial family of Austria-Hungary as a witness to the bond of marriage, helping to supplement the preparation a couple receives in their own diocese.”¹¹¹ According to the New Liturgical Movement, the manual invites couples to

spend half an hour each day, for six weeks leading up to their wedding, growing in prayer and openness to each other. The structure for each day is the same: a vignette from the life or marriage of Karl and Zita, a reflection on the sacramental bond, questions for conversation, and short Catholic prayers.¹¹²

Throughout the book, old photographs of Karl and Zita have been given a modern, pop art flair by artist John Ritter, making the couple the ideal vision of traditional Catholic marriage in today’s world.¹¹³ The *Association pour la béatification de l’Impératrice Zita* (Association for the Beatification of Empress Zita) particularly focuses on Zita as wife; fidelity and conjugal love are the first of the values they list as practised by the ex-empress. They also desire to “improve the solidity and fecundity of couples and families in the modern world” through Zita’s intercession.¹¹⁴ They seek equal status for Karl and Zita (“Without anticipating the sovereign judgment of the Church, the Christian life of the couple formed by Charles and Zita of Austria is equally exemplary. It is quite logical to combine the two causes, but they will remain separate as long as the Church has not beatified Zita.”), though of course this must remain within the realms of the proper place for man and woman.¹¹⁵ It is possible to get prayer cards dedicated to Zita and carrying her image in St Peter’s Church in Vienna, and her tomb in the Capuchin Crypt is usually

¹¹¹ “Marriage Preparation Book,” Blessed Karl of Austria: Cause for Canonization USA/Canada, accessed 1 May 2022, <https://www.emperorcharles.org/store/marriage-preparation-book>.

¹¹² Gregory Dipippo, “A New Book on Bl. Karl of Austria for Marriage Preparation,” New Liturgical Movement, accessed 10 June 2022, <https://www.newliturgicalmovement.org/2020/01/a-new-book-on-bl-karl-of-austria-for.html#.YqHY9nZBzIU>.

¹¹³ Dipippo, “A New Book on Bl. Karl of Austria.”

¹¹⁴ “HOME,” *Les Amis de l’Impératrice Zita*, accessed 1 May 2022, <http://associationimperatricezita.com/2340-2/>.

¹¹⁵ “CHARLES AND ZITA,” *Les Amis de l’Impératrice Zita*, accessed 1 May 2022, <http://associationimperatricezita.com/charles-and-zita/>.

covered in flowers and cards. The canonisation causes of both are popular, but especially Karl's. A pilgrimage to his tomb on Madeira for the one-hundredth anniversary of his death was organised by the *Kaiser Karl Gebetsliga* (Emperor Karl League of Prayers) and hundreds of people from around the world attended, including a significant number of Habsburg family members. The family itself supports the canonisation cause, a key example being Eduard Habsburg, who is the Hungarian ambassador to the Holy See.

At first, it seems simple that Zita's self-perception was wrapped up in the roles of wife and mother as coloured by her Catholic faith. However, this article has shown that the picture is more complicated. Uncovering the amount of influence Zita had over her husband is difficult due to the layers added by herself and also later family members, as well as those around the throne. The canonisation causes of the imperial couple makes this even more tangled. Perhaps easier to grasp is Zita's conception of being a mother for the people she ruled over, particularly when she knew that she had to fill the vacuum left behind by Elisabeth. She cleverly used portraiture and public appearances in order to promote this ideological line, though it was not enough to tackle the hostile feelings towards the "Italian woman." And while historical "what-ifs" can be dangerous, one has to ask whether, if Zita and Karl had retained the throne, she could have become the next Queen Victoria, the next "grandmother of Europe"? Perhaps in being the mother of Otto, the "last, great European," she has become so, even if her multitude of descendants are royalty without a throne.

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