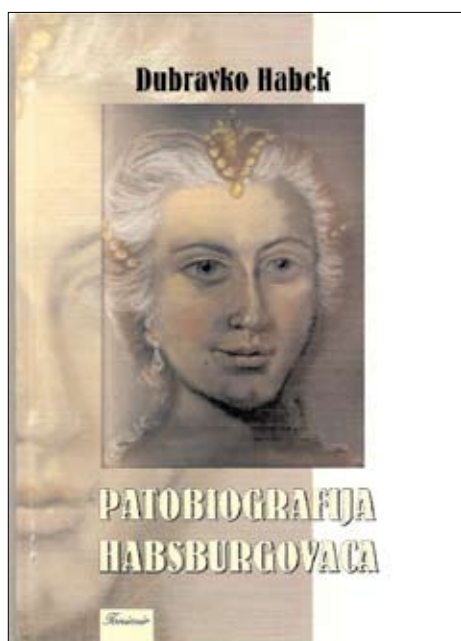


BOOK REVIEW



PATOBIOGRAFIJA HABSBURGOVACA
(PATHOGRAPHY OF THE HABSBURGS)
 by *Dubravko Habek*. Tonimir Printing House,
 Varaždinske Toplice, 2007, 98 pages. ISBN 978-
 953-7069-84-1

This monograph on one of the most intriguing dynasties, the Habsburg Dynasty, demonstrates that biographies, in this case tackled mostly from medical aspect, yet finely intertwined with socio-historical threads, can also offer interesting reading. Clearly indeed, the author is not only a devotee but also a connoisseur of the Habsburgs life, in particular of the segments influenced by the Empress Maria Theresa, having left lasting imprint in this part of Europe.

Although this pathography has generally been written from medical aspect and should thus primarily arouse interest among medical professionals, medical historians in particular, the author has done a very good job by enriching it with brief but picturesque

particularities from the lives of Maria Theresa's ancestors and descendants, thus expanding the potential reading audience. This is evidenced by the list of more than 30 different sources, from books through monographs to periodicals.

Pathography of the Habsburgs is highly interesting for disclosing not only the socio-historical events of the time, but also achievements in medicine of the 17th, 18th and the beginning of the 20th century, then only accessible to few, and information on the prevalence of some diseases such as intractable lung tuberculosis and smallpox epidemic. As obstetrician, the author has invested special effort to give a thorough and precise survey of the number and completion of deliveries in the Habsburgs, infant morbidity and mortality, techniques and therapies used in pregnant women, and life-saving medical procedures and preparations that sometimes proved successful, and sometimes, unfortunately, failed.

In addition, knowing that Maria Theresa, a cult figure, gave birth to 16 children is quite enough for this aspect of the Habsburgs biography to find place in publishing trade; in this book, the author has proficiently intertwined medical aspects and other interesting details from the life of the Habsburg Dynasty, with due care not to merely list flat data and dates from their lives.

Describing particular conditions caused by diseases or mental trauma due to death of family members, the author discloses some episodes from the lives of Maria Theresa, her ancestors and descendants, less known to date, thereby not being focused on those most intriguing ones. The chapter on the empress and queen Maria Theresa is very impressive indeed, written with that subtle feeling and due care for that great yet unjustifiable underappreciated woman and sovereign.

This biography provides another evidence for the meticulousness and high level of organization of the entire Habsburg Monarchy, including royal medical

services, i.e. those that took care of the Habsburgs from birth to death, and even beyond, as the bodies of many Habsburgs were preserved by embalming. This is all indicated by thorough physician reports and autopsy documentation. Embalming, preserving the tongue and the heart, the creepy atmosphere of the Vienna Capuchin crypts appear to transfer the reader from Europe to ancient Egypt or Mesopotamia. The lives and decisions of not only those famous persons but also of millions of the Monarchy subjects were steered occasionally by their curious destiny, whims of God, symptoms and syndromes that are only now at least in part clarified and treatable.

This book reveals and confirms the stories on the habits, diet and lifestyle of some Habsburgs Dynasty members, disclosing that some of them were of rather low morals, even promiscuous sexual life, as evidenced by their sexually transmitted diseases. On reading this exceptional and inspired book as the best thriller, ever new details and embarrassing secrets hidden in dark bedrooms and brightly lit up halls of splendid Vienna are being discovered, over and over, with all pain and suffering of the sovereigns shattered by dropsy, depression, consanguinity, insanity, perversion and intemperance of the mind and body.

This book also brings evidence of medical discoveries of the time as well as of the Empress Ma-

ria Theresa's awareness of the necessity of the mass health education and health care, which she regulated in collaboration with Dr. Gerhard van Swieten, her personal physician and consultant.

The monograph is enriched by a number of illustrations, making it a valuable publication, which will supplement the current knowledge about the Habsburg Dynasty with new, thorough and interesting particularities, mostly from medical fields, but also from other segments of their lives, as a Dynasty that left long-lasting imprints in a number of countries in this part of Europe. This beautiful book is highly valuable not only as a contribution to the pathography of the Habsburgs from the 13th century and Rudolf I, but also as a historical review and multidimensional survey of the human profile of some of the great sovereigns having steered the fate of Europe, including our country. Reaching for this precious book ever anew, every reader will enjoy it, being faced with an unexpected opportunity to think about a brilliant epoch and its immortal figures.

This monograph is especially valuable for Croatian medical historiography because the literature on Maria Theresa, her ancestors and descendants is absolutely inadequate considering their strong impact on the region.

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