

Chapter 17 Viewpoint Activity

Although Maria Theresa's inheritance of the Hapsburg empire caused war in Europe (textbook page 438), she emerged as a remarkable ruler. Here are two historians' assessments of Maria Theresa as ruler of the Hapsburg empire. ♦ *As you read, notice the various qualities that the historians think are important. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Empress Maria Theresa: Two Views

Charles W. Ingrao [Maria Theresa] was blessed with several key character traits that would serve her well during her forty-year reign. She possessed great common sense, particularly the ability to identify those problems that afflicted the monarchy and find practical solutions for them, even when they contradicted her own rather traditional personal values. If her pragmatism helped save the monarchy, it was her sense of justice that made her the most beloved of all the early modern Hapsburgs; her sense of fairness, ethics, and empathy for the unfortunate disarmed even adversaries like Frederick II [of Prussia]. She was also an almost infallible judge of talent, capable of promoting and taking the advice of [capable men], while carefully withholding political responsibilities from less talented individuals, including her own, much beloved husband. Finally, Maria Theresa was more than willing to exploit her position as a female to manipulate the powerful men around her. Her ability to get her way by alternatively displaying her charm, vulnerability, tears, or anger was yet another weapon in her formidable arsenal of guile and grit.



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Edward Crankshaw [Maria Theresa] was not a zealously reforming queen. Her reforms were radical and far-reaching, but she reformed, as she fought, because she saw what had to be done. . . . By the inspired deployment of her extremely powerful individual force, she did far more than conduct a holding action. . . . She achieved for her realm of many lands a sort of balance. . . which was to enable it to survive into the twentieth century as a viable and more or less coherent society.

Perhaps most important of all, she was to offer the world an example of what may be achieved in the way of good guidance by an individual of moderate, peaceable and benevolent temperament standing up against the greed of violent and ambitious men . . . She was fallible, limited, often blind; but her heart was in the right place and she used her head to obey it. She had the supreme gift of discerning first-class advisers and sticking to them. She was not a leader. She was. . . a force, instinctively content to interact with other forces.

Source: (1) *The Hapsburg Monarchy, 1618–1815*, by Charles W. Ingrao (Cambridge University Press, 1994); (2) *Maria Theresa*, by Edward Crankshaw (Viking Press, 1970).

Questions to Discuss

1. What character traits of Maria Theresa do both historians see as valuable?
2. In general, what do both historians see as the effects of Maria Theresa's reign for the Hapsburg monarchy?
3. **Making Comparisons** Crankshaw, the second writer, says of Maria Theresa: "She was not a leader." Do you think the first historian would agree or not?