



*How the Husum Protest Pig in Austria
Became a Political Symbol
and Nearly Replaced the Double-Headed Eagle*

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Between 1910 and 1912, a curious discussion from today's perspective took place in Austria: a debate on the introduction and dissemination of a patriotic pig, which was also known as the "Austrian Emperor's Pig." To understand this debate and the concerns of the debaters, it is necessary to try and bring those times back to life, or at least to mind.

The Austrian Emperor Franz Joseph I (1830-1916) was battered by many personal tragedies, and, quite probably due to these private catastrophes, was very well loved by his subjects. Almost mystically revered and affectionately called the "Eternal Emperor" by many, while simply referred to as "Franz Joseph" by everybody else, he had been Emperor of Austria since 1848.

In Vienna proposals for how to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the Emperor (which was coming up in 1918) had been circulating for a long time. In salons, clubs, and backrooms, in civil organizations, at balls—discussions were being held everywhere on how people could celebrate this great festival in the most appropriate manner. The sixty-fifth anniversary in 1913 was to be a kind of a rehearsal, an introduction of what was to come. However, the unspoken, underlying concern was that both festivities would stand in obvious contrast to the meager, inexperienced, twenty-five or thirty-year reign of the German Emperor, Wilhelm II.

Memorials were erected, strips of land and rivers were to be rechristened, even constellations were to be given Franz Joseph's name. That fireworks would be set off across the entire country was a given, and music commissions had already been made. Everywhere discussions ensued, preparations were made, and new ideas appeared, were discarded, and replaced by new, even grander ones.

One group led by the Viennese court official Rüdiger von Schittmacher came up with the idea for a pig with a red, white and red stripe; that is, a pig in the colors of the monarchy, the colors of the triband state emblem, the colors of the military. This pig would be declared a national pig and most importantly be recognized as a specifically *Austrian* pig, and all the farmers of the monarchy would be encouraged to switch their pig farming to producing this national pig.

In Rüdiger von Schittmacher's view the advantage of this plan was that such a pig would have, in many ways, great and highly respected characteristics. Such a plan and such a pig would incarnate all levels of homage and appreciation, as well as have a very persistent, lasting effect for decades to come; in addition, it would embrace the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy in its entirety, like no other project on the occasion of the great celebrations ever could or would be capable of.

This national Austrian pig-to-be was bred for the first time in 1880 in Schleswig-Holstein. It was a frugal, fleshy, sturdy pig, which had not yet received any official recognition or appreciation, so that it was still entirely free to be named and recognized—clearly it was just waiting to be discovered.

Why such a pig was bred, and why the Austrians felt an affinity for it, can be explained by the following story.

On February 18, 1864, Austrian and Prussian troops crossed the border into the Kingdom of Denmark and conquered the dukedoms of Schleswig, Holstein, and Lauenburg. On October 30 of the same year, in the so-called Treaty of Vienna, the three dukedoms were ceded to the joint administration of Prussia and Austria. Holstein would be administered by Austria, Schleswig by Prussia, and Lauenburg completely incorporated into Prussia. The Austrians immediately abolished the Torsperre—the nightly closing of all gates—in Lübeck, and the Prussians declared Kiel a Prussian naval port.

A fierce and heated debate immediately flared up between Prussia and Austria as to whether displaying the Danish flag and colors was to be tolerated. Austria, with its experience of multiethnic mixture in the Dual Monarchy, largely tolerated this, while Prussia prohibited it outright with threats of severe punishment. In the end it was agreed that things would be handled differently in each administrated territory.

Two years later on June 6, 1866, Prussian troops occupied Austrian Holstein. On July 3 of the same year Austrian troops were devastatingly defeated by the Prussian army at Königgrätz (Hradec Královè), which is located in today's Czech Republic. This resulted in Holstein being passed over to Prussia in the Treaty of Prague. Prussia immediately proceeded to ban the showing of the Danish Red and White in Holstein.

Fifteen years later, in 1881, a Prussian police station in Husum reported to the government in Berlin that they had recently observed farmers with red and white striped pigs—clearly the forbidden red and white colors of Denmark. When questioned, the grumpy, uncommunicative, and secretive people answered: "We've always had them." Some farmers claimed it did not mean anything; some claimed it was just a sun tan—that the pigs had taken a nap under a German oak by mistake. They were immediately reprimanded for their insolent reply.

An inquiry committee subsequently set up in Berlin created a dossier. After extensive interviews with farmers, they discovered that this red-and-white striped pig was derived from the widespread marsh pig. However, it could not be ascertained whether the specific colors had been brought about by deliberate breeding in order to decorate pigs with the prohibited colors. This kind of provocation would be considered treason, and all these pigs would then fall under the law concerning epidemics and immediately be killed, the farmers severely punished. And yet, it was difficult to argue against a random, spontaneous trend, and one could not abolish or prohibit colors as such. According to the report, the spread of the pigs had already progressed to such a degree that one could speak of their having become domesticated.

The secret report concluded further that the farmers were well aware of the fact that this pig constituted an insult to the Prussians, but because this insult could not be verified, and the pig was now so widespread, a ban and a culling would likely cause a rebellion. For the time being it was recommended that the government not intervene and simply ignore the pig. However, by no means was this nameless pig to be officially recognized, nor entered into the Prussian Domestic Animal Registry as a new breed, for only that which could be named was capable of becoming a danger. As long as the pig remained nameless, it would remain non-existent.

These connections spurred the imagination of court councilor Rüdiger von Schittmacher. This as of yet nameless pig was a provocation against Prussia, true, but if one were to show it off in all its beautiful colors, convince people that the red, white and red indicated the Austrian court, declare it the Austrian National Pig and officially recognize it as an Austrian breed, then these pigs would suddenly be transformed into a symbol of patriotism, an honor for Austria, an homage to the emperor, and a humiliation for Prussia.

If the pig were to be officially declared an Austrian pig in 1913 on the occasion of the 65th diamond jubilee, registered in the list of national farm animal species, and thereby recognized internationally, this Austrian national pig could be recommended by the monarchy to all farmers with a premium notice, and five years later, at the seventieth anniversary, seventy-thousand, or rather, seven-hundred-thousand Austrian pigs would be disseminated throughout the Dual Monarchy, each and every one a tribute to Franz Joseph. It would be the most beautiful, grandiose, and impressive gift that had ever been offered an Emperor.

In his secret dreams Rüdiger von Schittmacher already saw a double pig's head instead of the double eagle in the Austrian coat of arms.

When discussions about the national pig reached their peak in 1911, the legend concerning the origins of the Austrian monarchy's colors of red, white and red marked its 730th anniversary.

Indeed, during the third crusade to liberate the Holy Land in 1191, the Austrian Babenberg Duke Leopold V came back after the conquest of Acre victorious, his jacket blood-soaked from battle, and when he took off his gun belt, a white stripe was visible. He then made this victorious Red-White-Red the ducal colors of Babenberg. Ever since these colors have been the colors of all the dukes, kings, and emperors of Austria.

And this legend could now be improved by the presence of the pig. The allusion to being warlike would be refined by peaceful farming and the farmers' pragmatism, and, in addition, the colors would represent valor as well as the peacefulness of the monarchy.

The other important aspect would be that of obliterating one thing belonging to the Prussians—to recognize the pig in Austria would be tantamount to condemning Prussia to perpetual shame and would be a kind of revenge for Königgrätz.

There were fierce discussions throughout the salons. In Hollabrunn in Lower Austria some of these red, white and red heffers were already grunting. Leisure trips were excitedly organized to go and inspect the local Kaiser pigs. By all appearances, the pigs felt pretty good in Austria, all of them weighing in at more than 300 kilograms and glowing red, white and red like the many flags pinned up around the pigsties. From a distance you could barely tell the difference between the flags and the pigs.

But not everyone was thrilled. There were dissenting votes, as always when something big is being planned. Frau Diotima's influential salon could not decide which position to take. Both opponents and supporters of the Kaiser pig came together there for discussions. General Stam, for example, objected, "What people should fear is that the complicated balance of the K&K monarchy is at risk. The mere fact that our Muslims of the south, not to speak of our Jews, do not think much about tasty pork, but, on the contrary, see this animal as unclean—this makes me doubt the potential success of the plan." The bank director Fischle agreed with him with an approving nod.

In the spring of 1912, once the supporters of the pig had agreed on the name "Austrian-Pig" and the application for recognition was about to be submitted, an anti-imperial diatribe appeared in Vienna that immediately ended all discussion. The anonymously written pamphlet stated: "The whole Hofburg is a giant pigsty, and what stands out most is the main pig himself, a red, white and red striped Kaiser." The whole piece was an insult to the monarchy, a call for its overthrow, and an invitation to anarchy. It stated that the farmers were the only ones who truly belonged to the pigsty and that slaughterhouse workers should be proud as they had the honorable task of killing the red, white and red. The anonymous pamphlet ended by calling on both farmers and workers to stop serving the pigs, to take charge of the pigsty, and to once and for all remove all the manure.

By secret decree the Kaiser-pigs of Hollabrunn were immediately slaughtered and their carcasses burned. Not a single one was left alive. The authorities avoided public prosecution of the pamphlet in order not to bring disrepute to the clubs and salons which had dealt with the question of the pig. They simply dissolved themselves abruptly, renamed themselves, and went on to pursue other goals. Not a word was spoken about the whole anecdote involving the pig, and it was agreed on all levels not to disclose it. This silencing was so well organized that hardly anyone knows the story, and it is still denied by officials even today.

Robert Musil, who used discussions about the Diamond Jubilee to provide the background for his observations of society in his greatest novel *The Man Without Qualities*, knew the story about the introduction of the Red, White and Red Kaiser-pig, and even briefly contemplated including it in his novel. Nevertheless, in the end he rejected the idea, finding it too grotesque and silly, as he remarked in a letter from 1928.

The pig for its part was officially recognized in 1954 and named the "Bright Red Husumer Protest Pig." It was believed to have emerged from the crossbreeding of the black and white spotted Holstein and Jutland marsh pig with the English Tamworth pig as well as a bright red split of the Angeln Saddleback pig. It had been widely bred as a symbol of protest and the farmers' independence in the face of the Prussian occupation.

Today the protest pig is included on the list of endangered domestic species. This easy-to-care for, good-natured pig has the normal number of ribs and is therefore no longer of interest for spare-rib production. Only a few farms still breed the tasty animal, which is indeed very popular among gourmets.

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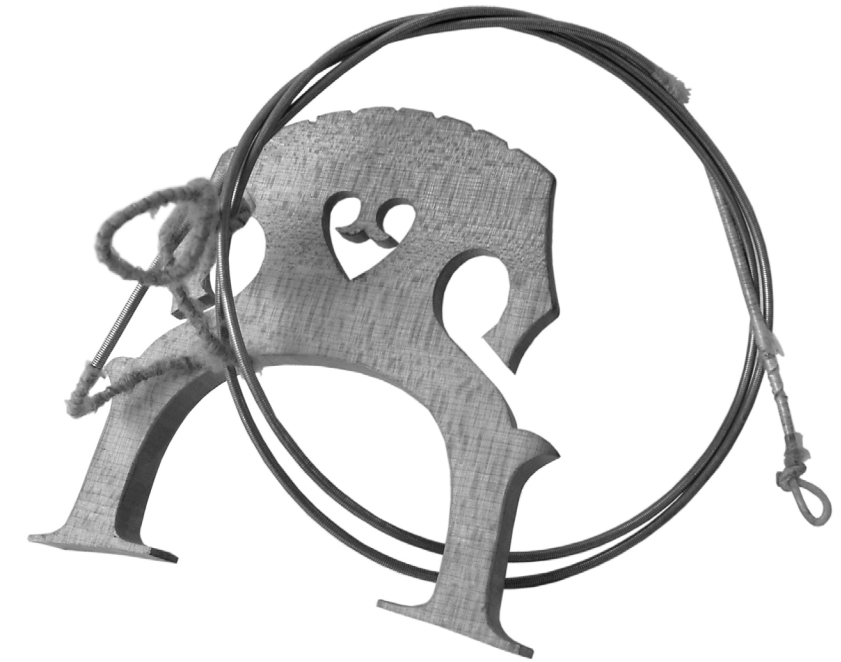
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*On Marin Marais' Torments
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