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Coronations and Royal Inaugurations in the Austrian Monarchy 1790-1848

In 1804 the Holy Roman Emperor, Franz II, re-invented himself as the Emperor of Austria. Two years later he relinquished his former imperial title when he dissolved the Holy Roman Empire. No coronation ceremony was then introduced for the new empire to replace the imperial coronations which had since 1562 been held at Frankfurt am Main. Yet this did not mean that there was any shortage of Habsburg inauguration ceremonies. All three of their core territories – Austria, Bohemia and Hungary – continued to perform equivalent rituals. Yet, according to Dr Godsey, these events have been largely neglected by historians and even when they have been studied, they have usually been considered only in isolation. While Joseph II had, where possible, avoided them, Leopold II and Franz II deliberately revived and embraced these traditions. Those for Franz II may have seemed an unnecessary burden during the military crisis of 1792. Yet instead they proved to be vital expressions of loyalty at the point when Franz had the greatest need of them. In 1830 he had his son, Ferdinand, crowned as Ferdinand V of Hungary to secure a succession made uncertain by Ferdinand's obvious incapacity. Moreover, Ferdinand's coronation as King of Lombardy and Venetia in Milan in 1838 was as pure an example of 'the invention of tradition' as Napoleon's coronation there as King of Italy had been in 1805. For Godsey, these various ceremonies were ways in which the Habsburgs were able to harness the growing forces of nationalism, giving particularism a valued role within their transnational empire. The absence of a single imperial coronation for the whole empire may therefore have worked, at least in the medium term, to the Habsburgs' advantage. **AB**