Thematic excursion chtour

Beginning and end of the Habsburg Dynasty in Switzerland

Habsburg, Königsfelden, Muri, Sempach – places of fame and disaster

Departure at 9.00 from Berne, return to Berne at about 19.00. Registration requested. Saturdays and Sundays. For the same tour on a weekday please register six weeks in advance.

Without military victories over Habsburg, over Austria, the Swiss Confederation would have been a brief episode in European history. The legends about the independence struggle of the first Swiss have found a place in world literature, for instance in the drama by Friedrich Schiller “Wilhelm Tell” of 1804, when Switzerland was in a deep crisis. Later authors have deconstructed the myth, among them Max Frisch with its “Wilhelm Tell: A school text” (1971). There are no dates for the legends around Tell and the first oath of the Swiss on the Rüti meadow, but the battles of Morgarten and Sempach where the Swiss defeated Austria are historic facts.

The Habsburg Dynasty has risen in an area comprising Alsace, Southern Baden and Aargau.

The castle towering above the tiny village of Habsburg, has given its name to the Habsburg dynasty, one of the most powerful dynasties in world history. We start our tour of the sites connected to the Habsburg dynasty with a visit to this castle.

The nearby Königsfelden is the place when a few centuries later, Albrecht I was murdered by a young disgruntled nephew, in 1302. Albrecht was then king of the Holy Roman Empire. He was the son of the count Rudolf I of Habsburg who later became elected king Rudolf I, the first Habsburg that rose to be a leader of the Holy Roman Empire.

The widow of the victim founded a Franciscan monastery and a Clarisse convent (for nuns following the example of Saint Claire of Assisi).

The medieval stained glass windows in the former church of the abbey are outstanding works of art. Left side: God just created Eve out of a rib of Adam (around 1340). Other famous works include Saint Francis preaching to the birds.

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Königsfelden later became the burial place of the noble men killed in the battle of Sempach of 1386 against the unruly Swiss.

We take a walk next to the Aare River in Altenburg, close to the place where the early Habsburg resided before moving to the Habsburg castle, have lunch and drive through the area known as Freiamt region and to the medieval towns of Mellingen and Bremgarten that had belonged to the Habsburg. After a walk through Bremgarten and a view of Reuss River, we continue to Muri, still in canton Aargau, as all the places mentioned above.

**Muri** Monastery was a foundation of 1027 by Radbot, one of the ancestors of the dynasty, and his wife Ita of Lorraine. We visit the magnificent baroque church where representations of Radbot and Ita can be found along with symbols of Austria. We also see the cloister with glasses that protected the monks from rain and wind. The stained glass windows are works of the 16th century. They were offered by friendly families and towns, the network of support of the monastery of that time.

_Bremgarten, Bust of Charles I of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and entry to the Habsburg crypt_

Muri is not only one of the first Habsburg sites, it is also a place connected with the end of the Habsburg as a dynasty of rulers. The hearts of Charles I (1887-1922), last Emperor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire from 1916 to 1918, and of his wife Zita of Parma-Bourbon who died in Switzerland in 1989 are buried here in a special crypt, together with other members of the Habsburg family. Emperor Charles I was beatified in 2004 by Pope John Paul II due to his – unsuccessful - engagement for peace during World War I. Followers of the emperor in Vienna now promote his canonization.

From Muri, we drive through a pleasant landscape with hills and lakes to **Sempach**, a village in nearby canton Lucerne. A chapel and an ossuary stand at the place where Duke Leopold III of Austria and many heavily armed noblemen and soldiers died in battle. A nearby monument remembers the legendary death of the Swiss hero Arnold von Winkelried who threw himself into the pikes of the Austrians, taking them down with his body and opening a way for the fellow Swiss into the Austrian phalanx.

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