From Diplomacy to Destruction:

The Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand

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On the cusp of dissipation, the mighty Austro-Hungarian empire, led by the Habsburg family, was desperate to save itself and to keep Bosnia, Serbia, and Herzegovina in its grasp. In 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand journeyed to Sarajevo, Bosnia to keep peace and Austrian rule. There, he and his wife were assassinated which triggered the first World War. This, ironically, ultimately destroyed his beloved empire.

**The Mighty Austro-Hungarian Empire**

Rising from the ashes of the Holy Roman Empire, Austria-Hungary was one of the superpowers of Europe in the late 1800s and early 1900s.\(^1\) Ruled by the same family as the previous empire, the Habsburg dynasty went back hundreds of years. Despite being so revered, the state of their empire quickly declined. In 1848, Franz Joseph was crowned emperor and had early conflicts that made him enemies with France, and Russia. In his first twenty years, he lost territory in Germany and Italy due to poor rule.\(^2\) Because of much civil conflict, he allowed Hungary to become a separate province, even though he still governed it. By the 20th century, Austria-Hungary was divided into seventeen provinces who despised the empire. As Nationalism grew and affected other countries, like Germany and Italy, the empire became unstable.\(^3\)

By now, the royalty of Austria-Hungary were oblivious to the common world. Only those descended from eight paternal and maternal royal ancestors were allowed to

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\(^1\) See Appendix A.


attend the highest and most regal court, while couples were separated at balls if either party did not fit requirements. Many distinguished nobles were turned away if they lacked the necessary family. At the time, the *Neue Freie Presse*, a Viennese newspaper, said:

“*The present generation of the upper aristocracy still wants to dominate the middle class, but they want to dominate the middle class without becoming acquainted with it.***”

Vienna, the capital of the lavish empire, posed to be luxurious and peaceful to the highest degree, but had also the highest rate of annual suicides in Europe.

As with all empires, Franz Josef was concerned with having an heir to the throne. His only son, Crown Prince Rudolf, was born in 1858, but Franz Josef was never pleased by him and was stern with him. Rudolf grew to be self-centered and unhappy, marrying Princess Stephanie with whom he had his daughter Elizabeth. Eventually, Rudolf had no purpose except to wait to inherit the throne. Because he refused positions in the empire and was not trusted by Franz Josef, he became depressed. On January 30th, 1889, he killed himself in his hunting lodge Mayerling.

**The New Heir**

After the suicide of Prince Rudolf, a new heir had to be chosen. The closest Habsburg suitable for such a position was Franz Josef’s younger brother, Karl Ludwig. Karl Ludwig accepted the position, but died from typhoid fever seven years later. All eyes

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turned to his firstborn, Franz Ferdinand.

Franz Ferdinand Erzherzog von Österreich-este was born on December 18th, 1863 in Graz, Austria,\(^7\) and had an unusual upbringing. An archduke, equivalent to a prince, was common in empires, and he was one of seventy others in Austria-Hungary. His parents were the Archduke Karl Ludwig, brother of Franz Joseph, and Maria Annunciata. Karl Ludwig's first wife, Princess Margaretha of Saxony, died in 1858. His second wife Maria Annunciata had four children with him, but acquired tuberculosis at age nineteen. Fearing she would infect her children, she did not allow them to touch, hug, kiss, or even spend time with her. Maria Annunciata died at age twenty-eight in 1871.

After two years, Karl Ludwig married Maria Theresa, daughter of the exiled King Miguel I of Portugal. Maria Theresa cared about the children and finally gave them a loving mother figure. Oddly, Karl Ludwig was stern and harsh with his new wife, as though kindness were a curse. Franz Ferdinand, however, grew well under her attention\(^8\).

Instead of being tutored with other boys, he was educated alone in many different subjects. He was taught arithmetic, grammar, history, science, architecture, dance, fencing, and more. He learned German first, but proved terrible\(^9\) when taught French, English, Czech, Magyar, and obviously Hungarian, which he took most of his life.


Overwhelmed by the mass of knowledge, he learned nothing and spent the time brooding due to lack of understanding.

Though he was not heir until twenty-six, by age twenty-one Franz Ferdinand was a military captain and over twenty more years would ascend to general.

With pale eyes and a large mustache, Franz Ferdinand gave off an aura of fear. His philosophy was to treat others as though they were useless and to only change his opinion if they proved to contradict that. He so intimidated other military officials that one man who worked for him said:

“Ministers and other high officials rarely waited on the Archduke without beating hearts. He was capable of flying out at people and terrifying them to such a degree that they lost their heads.”

Because of this temper, he was not particularly liked. One quality that expressed his knack for aggression, though, was his extraordinary hunting skills. When traveling by train for long periods of time, he would open a window and kill hundreds of wildlife. In 1900, he shot approximately 5,000 deer. He could even shoot holes in coins that were thrown into the air. Still, the emperor hated him, and he wrote in his journal that he suspected it was because he resurfaced painful memories of Prince Rudolf.

**A Battle For Love**

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Without distractions, thirty-five year old Franz Ferdinand concentrated on his own life, and frequently spent time with Archduke Friedrich and Archduchess Isabella. Archduchess Isabella began suspecting that he was courting one of her daughters and set out seeking to discover which one it was. Eventually she and most of the public believed that he was after her eldest daughter, Marie Christina. One day, while changing after playing tennis, he accidentally left his locket on the court. Isabella snatched it up and eagerly opened it, but was enraged to see her lady-in-waiting Sophie Chotek. Sophie, at thirty-one years old, was descended from a mysterious family of Czech nobles, but was essentially a commoner.

The entire empire was rattled by this baffling truth. Franz Josef forbade Franz Ferdinand to marry Sophie, telling him it would disrupt the monarchy, so he should give up the relationship. The archduke resisted and countered that his no longer being lonely would enable him to fulfill his duty to the monarchy even better.

After receiving letters from Pope Leo XIII, Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany, and Tsar Nicholas of Russia, Franz Josef consented. The conditions, though, were that Sophie could never become empress, and they would have a morganatic marriage, meaning that though they could marry, their children could inherit nothing: no land, no titles, and certainly not the throne. The royal court furthermore stated that Sophie could not ride in a carriage with the archduke, could not sit in the same opera box, would be forced to

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stand behind other archduchesses at dinners, and would not be allowed to be buried in the Habsburg royal crypt. Franz Josef refused to attend the wedding.

The couple, despite these difficulties, were overjoyed and had three children: Sophie in 1901, Maximillian in 1902, and Ernst in 1904. Wanting a quieter life than Vienna, they lived with their children in a Bohemian castle. After Ernst was born, Franz Ferdinand wrote to his stepmother saying:

“You don’t know how happy I am with my family, and I can’t thank God enough for all my happiness. The most intelligent thing I’ve ever done in my life has been the marriage to my Soph. And our children. They are my whole delight and pride. I sit with them and admire them the whole day because I love them so.”

It may have seemed to them as though everything was pleasant, that life was unending bliss. Franz Ferdinand, however, was about to play a larger role in the empire than planned, and this newfound peace would be short lived.

Territories Are Unsettled

In 1900, the Balkan territories of Austria-Hungary were anything but supportive of their government. The remaining Balkan nations were Bosnia, Croatia, Herzegovina, and Slovenia. Previously, the nations of Bulgaria, Montenegro, Greece, Serbia, and Romania had split off, leaving the rest under Austria-Hungary’s control, the territories decided by the great powers of Europe. The Treaty of Berlin enabled Austria-Hungary to temporarily govern these nations, but the Austrian foreign minister had tricked and blackmailed the Russian foreign minister to encourage the treaty.

16 See Appendix B.
One independent country was not supportive.\textsuperscript{18} Serbia wanted one Slavic nation, Yugoslavia, meaning “Land of the South Slavs” that included most of the prior Balkan nations, uniting them under one common tongue. On the contrary, Bosnia and Herzegovina had religions that were opposed to “Greater Serbia,” wanting to remain separate.\textsuperscript{19} Franz Josef wanted to keep Bosnia and Herzegovina for fear of losing more territory. Serbians became discontented and restless.

Other countries all agreed that Austria-Hungary had violated the Treaty of Berlin by remaining in control of the Balkan nations.\textsuperscript{20} During the Balkan wars of 1912-1913, the prior Balkan territories rid their lands of Turks which excited Serbia and Bosnia, who began resisting Austrian rule again. Franz Ferdinand knew that the empire was collapsing and planned to save it. Both of his ideas, however, were rejected by Franz Josef.

**An Assassination Plot**

Many Serbians believed Bosnia and Herzegovina needed freedom from Austria-Hungary, and began to construct secret groups to do so. One society, *Narodna Odbrana*, or “National Defense,” recruited high members of society who spied on the Austrian government and spread Austrian propaganda.\textsuperscript{21} Another group was *Ujedinjenje ili Smrt*, “Unification or Death,” commonly known as the “Black Hand.”\textsuperscript{22} The Black Hand


worked with the Serbian government by ensuring that members were stationed at the Austrian border in exchange for knowing some of their plans. Youth who wanted to show support would meet in coffeehouses and demonstrate hatred for Austria. One such boy was Gavrilo Princip.

Born in 1894, Gavrilo Princip was raised near the border in Bosnia with peasant parents, was a prior recruit to Narodna Odbrana, and was member of terrorist group Young Bosnia. Raised hating Austrians, he felt that the only way to help Serbia was to assassinate an important figure and call his people to action. He was shown a newspaper in March of 1914 which contained details about the Archduke’s trip to Sarajevo, and enlisted three friends for help: twenty year old Nedjelko Cabrinovic, nineteen year old Trifko Grabez, and twenty four year old Danilo Ilic. They left for Sarajevo at the end of May.

Major Tankosic, a Young Bosnia trainer, gave them revolvers, one-hundred and fifty dinar, cyanide, and bombs. They split up and took an extensive journey to Sarajevo where they used Black Hand contacts to travel faster. Danilo Ilic, meanwhile, found three others to join the assassins. Princip took a pistol, Cabrinovic a bomb, and Grabez both.

Some claim Serbia had prior knowledge of the assassination due to their arrangement with the Black Hand, but did not interfere. Serbian Prime Minister Nikola Pasic was warned about the attempt on the archduke’s life, but sent only a vague

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message about the possibility, and stated that the archduke should cancel the trip.\textsuperscript{24}

Lacking specification, the message was ignored.

**Triumph For Serbia**

Franz Ferdinand was not eager for the visit to Sarajevo. He regarded Serbs as murderers and scoundrels, not trusting them. He made excuses at first, suggesting to the emperor that he was feeling ill and might not be able to go. This trip would be to conduct military exercises, essentially showing off Austrian power. Sensing danger, he gave his personal assistant a gold watch, telling him to look after his family if anything happened. In fact, circumstance itself seemed to agree with his suspicions. First, his train car caught fire and could not be used, to which he responded sarcastically, "Well, that's a promising beginning for this trip."\textsuperscript{25} While riding in the backup car along the Adriatic sea, the power failed and he had to ride in darkness. He boarded a battleship for eighteen hours before getting on a smaller boat and then a train heading to Ilidza, a town near Sarajevo.

The Archduchess traveled to Budapest and then Bosnia, where she was greeted by cheering crowds. She arrived at Ilidza on June 25th during a downpour, but was still welcomed by the people. While the commoners disliked Austria-Hungary, they wholeheartedly welcomed the Archduchess who was scorned by the hated royalty of the empire. Franz Ferdinand was hard to keep safe because he would always try to lose his guards and would always chat with strangers. After seeing their hotel, they stopped at a

\textsuperscript{24} Doak, Robin S. *Assassination at Sarajevo: the Spark That Started World War I*. Compass Point Books, 2009.

bazaar in Sarajevo to shop, where they were greeted by a crowd who welcomed them. Among them was Gavrilo Princip, who did not act yet.

For the next two days, Franz Ferdinand conducted military exercises while Sophie visited orphanages and schools. On June 28th, they rode in a six car procession of military officials down Appel Quay, Sarajevo’s main street. The first recruit-assassins did nothing, while Cabrinovic threw his bomb. The driver saw the bomb, sped up, and it bounced off of the back and underneath the next car. Cabrinovic tried to swallow his cyanide, spilled it, and was pursued by angry citizens. Princip and Grabez, assuming the attempt worked, were unprepared when the car rolled by them.

After reaching the governor’s house, the Archduke yelled at him and spent an hour resting inside before deciding to visit those injured by the explosion at the hospital. Nobody informed the driver of this, who turned onto the wrong street. As the car turned around Gavrilo Princip, who had been sulking in a coffee shop, ran out and fired twice, hitting the Archduke in the neck and Sophie in the abdomen. Sophie fainted, while the Archduke cried “Sophie! Sophie! Don’t die- stay alive for our children!” After asked about his injury, he murmured “It is nothing, it is nothing.” Both died before they reached medical attention.

**Tragedy For The World**

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Austria-Hungary was offended, but saw an opportunity for a war to unite their provinces. They demanded Serbia punish the assassins and obliterate anti-Austrian propaganda. When Serbia could not comply by July 28th, Austria-Hungary formally declared war on them. Russia, allied with Serbia, declared war on Austria-Hungary while Germany, allied with Austria, declared war on Russia. Soon, a network of alliances was ignited and the entire planet was encompassed in the first World War, shattering Austria-Hungary.\textsuperscript{30} Serbia finally managed to unite the desired countries into Yugoslavia, triumphant in the face of the chaos surrounding them.

World War I is remembered as the “Great War,” though few remember the great empire that started the conflict, and fewer the first man out of 30 million who died for it. Austria-Hungary demonstrated how an empire’s struggle for power resulted in the dissipation of it, and how a desperate peacemaker started one of the largest wars in history.

\textsuperscript{30} See Appendix A.
A map of the Austro-Hungarian empire in 1914, prior to its breakup and World War I on the left, and on the right, a present-day representation of the resulting countries.


Franz Ferdinand, his wife Sophie, and their children left to right: Ernst, Sophie, Franz, Sophie, and Maximillion.
Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources:


This secondary source is a photograph of the archduke Franz Ferdinand, his wife Sophie, and their children published on Centenary.com that was taken while the couple were still alive. I used this in the appendix of my paper to provide a representation of what the couple looked like.


This primary source was a newspaper published by the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* on July 25th, 1914, and it helped me to understand what Austria-Hungary demanded in return from Serbia after the assassination of Franz Ferdinand and his wife, and how Bosnia and Serbia were struggling to meet their demands in the time allotted. I used this in my paper to tell what Austria-Hungary demanded of Serbia.


This primary source is a newspaper called the *Daily Capital Journal*, and it helped me to understand some of the opinions that different countries had when Austria-Hungary sent a list of demands to Serbia following the assassination of archduke Franz Ferdinand. I used this information in my paper to tell about how the countries of Europe began to take sides in the war.


This primary source is a newspaper published by *The Bennington Evening Banner* describing the sentences of the assassins of archduke Franz Ferdinand, and it helped me to understand what happened to them and how they were punished. I used this in my paper to tell about what happened to the assassins in the footnotes.
This primary source was a newspaper by *The Ogden Standard* in 1914 that explained and helped me to understand how Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, as well as providing me with the message presented itself. I used this in my paper to explain Austria-Hungary declaring war on Serbia.

This primary source was a newspaper article by the New York Tribune that was transmitted by telegraph in 1914, and told about the assassination of Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie. This article helped me to understand how the people at the time were being told about the assassination of the Archduke and his wife, and helped me understand how people might have interpreted the news. I used this in my paper to tell about some of the alliances in Europe.

**Secondary Sources:**


This secondary source is a map published by Encyclopaedia Britannica that shows the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian empire after World War I ended. I used this in my paper to show in the appendix what the previous empire was shattered into.


This secondary source is a website page from Historyhit.com, and it helped me to understand more about the family of archduke Franz Ferdinand, as well has his less-optimistic relations with his uncle the emperor, Franz Josef. I used this to tell about such relations in my paper.


This secondary source book helped me to understand better what was going on at the time of Franz Ferdinand's assassination in Europe and what happened to the assassins after they had committed their crime. This book also helped me to gain access to some letters and telegrams that were sent between various Habsburg family members. I used this information in my paper to tell about the
trouble with his wanting to be married to Sophie, as well as the names of some of his family members.


This secondary source was a website published by Biography.com, and it helped me understand how the Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated, as well as what was going on in Austria-Hungary at the time and what certain people said about such event. This, of course, being why he was assassinated, what was going on in the country at the time, and some of the quotes and people involved. I used this in my paper to somewhat tell about what was going on in Austria-Hungary at the time.


This secondary source is a website published by History.com, and it helped me to understand further details about the city of Sarajevo and the countries that became involved in World War I. I used this source in my paper to tell about how the European countries started to declare war on each other, but did not elaborate.


This secondary source is a book that helped me understand how Archduke Franz Ferdinand grew up. This helped me to understand how his family functioned and how he was taught, as well as and some of the things that he did in Sarajevo, 1914 before being assassinated. I used this source in my paper to tell about his activities in Sarajevo before the assassination as well as his father's first three marriages and what the empire was like at the time.


This secondary source is a map of the Austro-Hungarian empire published by the New Zealand history website that showed Austria-Hungary before it was destroyed by World War II. I used this in my paper to show the empire in the appendix.

This secondary source was a book that helped me to understand the specific journey of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie to Sarajevo, as well as the extensive preparations that their assassins made beforehand. I used this source in my paper to tell how the assassins made preparations beforehand as well as some of the undercover groups at the time.


This secondary source is a review of one of their previous articles by the *New York Times* that described the assassination of archduke Franz Ferdinand as well as the following events, and it helped me to understand how long World War I lasted and some of the statistics about it. I used this in my paper to tell how many people were killed in World War I.