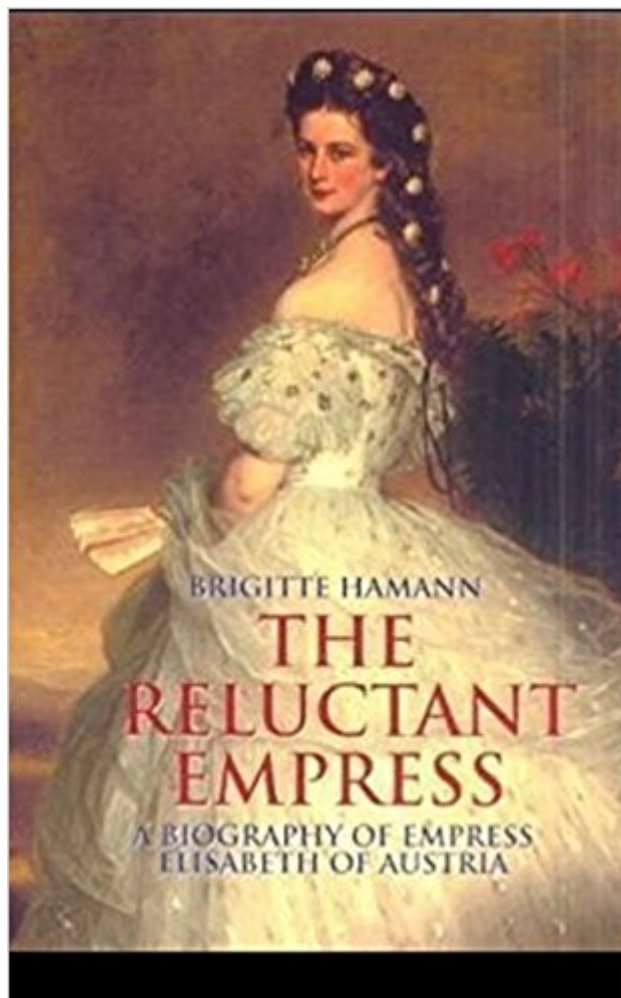


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# The Reluctant Empress.



## Synopsis

Empress Elisabeth of Austria, known to her family as Sisi, belongs to a famous love story of European royalty - in 1853 the Emperor Franz Josef, the most eligible bachelor in Europe, fell in love with her at first sight when she was fifteen; they were married the next year. On the surface, it was a fairytale marriage, all the more poignant, with hindsight, because her death signalled the twilight years of the Habsburg Empire. At the time of its first publication in 1988, Brigitte Hamann's biography, which tells Elisabeth's story from her birth as a member of the Bavarian nobility to her assassination at the hands of an Italian anarchist, led to a revised and deeper understanding of Elisabeth. During her lifetime she was idolised solely for her grace and beauty; now, for the first time, the Empress was portrayed as a stronger character, bitter at her marriage, seeking independence, and struggling against the powerful influence of her mother-in-law, the Archduchess Sophie. Researched by a respected historian, this is the definitive account of Elisabeth's life, death and legacy. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Brigitte Hamann (b. 1940) is an author and historian based in Vienna. She was born in Essen, Germany, and studied history in Munster and Vienna before returning to Essen to work as a journalist. In 1965 she married the historian and academic Gunther Hamann (1924-1994), moved to Vienna and took joint Austrian-German citizenship. She earned her doctorate at the University of Vienna with a 1978 thesis on the life of Crown Prince Rudolf of Austria, published in book form that same year. Her first work to be translated into English was *The Reluctant Empress: A Biography of Empress Elisabeth of Austria* (1986, later reissued in Faber Finds). Subsequent books have

included Hitler's Vienna: A Dictator's Apprenticeship (1999) and Winifred Wagner: A Life at the Heart of Hitler's Bayreuth (2005). --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

No matter how the potential reader has found their way to *The Reluctant Empress*, I don't think you could pick up a more elegant biography concerning a truly multifaceted figure that continues to captivate and mystify historians and armchair enthusiasts of European royalty. I know I couldn't have stumbled on to a better selection; perhaps a little slow in the beginning and final chapters but overall this was a pleasure to read and presented a well balanced realistic portrait of a misunderstood afflicted figure and name that is usually draped only in romantic legend and fancy embellishments of history. The straightforward chapters of the life and times of Empress Elisabeth of Austria kept me coming up with all sorts of reasons to slip away from other waiting books on different subjects and by the final page I not only accomplished what I set out to learn in terms of basic facts about the Empress of Austria and Queen of Hungary but I also fell in step with a respectful guide that extended passages with perfect narrative styling allowing such descriptive images to take me back to the timeline of Sisi's life. That was wonderful to experience and its fair assessments and displays of intimate quotes, snippets from diaries and correspondences along with significant photographs shaded in many delicate areas of debate for this reader but still allowed just enough of the alluring enigma of Empress Elisabeth of Austria to live on.

I was in Vienna last September, I knew the history of Maria Theresa and Zita. I was surprised at how little I knew about the Empress Elisabeth, Sisi. We visited the Schonbrunn Palace, the Hofburg and the Sisi museum. I wanted to know about this sad, lonely person. She was a very interesting person, but being the Empress of Austria, Hungary, Bohemia, etc was not her calling. I feel so sad for Sisi, her husband, Franz Joseph, her children. She should never have been empress, she despised it. Franz Joseph loved her desperately, but poor Sisi was unable to reciprocate.

It is well written, no superfluous words, easy and very informative reading. At the closing of the book, one cannot help wonder what would have been the course of history, and regret all the death involved, if the hard headed emperor François Joseph had paid more attention to his wife's and son's warnings that the political thoughts were changing the course of the world irremediably.

An excellent book about the Austrian empire in the 19th century. Fascinating details and great history.

Excellent!

A methodical and thematically divided biography on a fascinating woman. Well worth reading to get the full story on Sisi, who is so often reduce to a beautiful face. The translation is excellent, although if I had known before I bought it that it was originally in German, I might have bought the German version simply to be a giant nerd about it. Ah well.

One of the few, but the best biography of Empress Elisabeth.

Excellent biography.

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