INTRODUCTION

Austrians, it might be said, are a nation without a history, and Austrian history is a history without a nation. Only since 1945 have Austrians seriously tried to construct a national identity separate from that of Germans, and succeeded; yet Austria as an identifiable historical concept long antedates even the idea of the nation-state. For a small country such as modern-day Austria, with a population of only about 8 million, there is an awful lot of Austrian history.

Yet little of that history is straightforwardly 'national', and much of it refers to places and peoples far beyond Austria's current borders. Until 1918 'Austria' was a multi-national, dynastic empire, otherwise known as the Habsburg Monarchy, in which the Germans of the Alpine hereditary lands (modern-day Austria, more or less) were only one ethnic 'nationality' among other 'Austrians' (such as Czechs, Ruthenians and so forth). While there was an 'Austria' in the form of the First Austrian Republic after 1918, few 'Austrians' regarded this as the best response to the Monarchy's collapse, most preferring *Anschluss* (union with Germany) instead. Between 1938 and 1945 this wish was fulfilled, but with horrific consequences, as National Socialist Germany incorporated Austrians in its war-and-murder machine and made them both complicit in the Holocaust and partners in total defeat.

After 1945 a newly independent Austria arose. A new identity was consciously constructed by Austria's leadership, both to create the solidarity so sorely missing between the wars, and also to distance 'Austrians' from what 'Germans' had perpetrated between 1938 and

Illustration 1. Austrian archetype: Salzburg.

1945. The resurrection of Austria after 1945 is one of the more miraculous stories of Europe's post-war recovery. A combination of political and economic peace at home, neutrality abroad and a general agreement to let the sleeping dogs of the past lie, resulted by the latter part of the twentieth century in one of the most prosperous and pacific countries on Earth.

On the face of it Austria, even today, deserves to be called an 'island of the blessed'. Its per capita GDP is one of the highest in the European Union, and the Austrian economy has successfully transformed itself, using the population's high level of technical education to move from an industrial to a service base. Austrians benefit from an extensive and generous welfare state, coupled with some of the world's lowest crime rates, especially as concerns violent crime.

The country's geographical position at the heart of Europe, once a huge liability, is now potentially a large advantage. Its landlocked position between Germany and Italy made it the prey of both powers

in the interwar period, but now, as part of the European Union's internal market, gives the country strategic commercial significance. Being surrounded by successor states to the Habsburg Monarchy, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia, meant political hostility and economic dislocation in the interwar period. After the post-1945 communist takeovers of its neighbours, with the Iron Curtain on much of its frontier, Austria found itself on the edge of the 'West'.

Since the fall of communism and the enlargement of the European Union in 2004, Austria now has burgeoning economies on its borders, and hence large economic opportunities. Moreover, this enlargement has finally put Austria in what Austrians always thought was its proper place, at the heart, rather than the eastern edge, of 'Europe'. One might have thought that the Austrians would consider themselves very fortunate at their nation's remarkable transformation.

And yet the weight of Austrian history, especially what happened when Austria was not 'Austria' between 1938 and 1945, continues to mark, complicate and trouble national self-understanding. From 1986 the Waldheim Affair raised old ghosts from the time of the Second World War and scandalized foreign opinion. For a time thereafter the actions of the Vranitzky government suggested that Austrians were seriously trying to come to terms with 'their' past. Yet the resistible rise of Jörg Haider and his far-right Freedom Party to power (albeit in coalition with moderate conservatives) suggested otherwise. It is very paradoxical: Austrians, renowned for their 'happy-go-lucky' temperament, and living in one of the most successful states in the world, continue to be extremely sensitive, even self-conscious, insecure and defensive, when asked about their 'national' past.

There are powerful reasons for this discomfort with Austrian history. There is the central paradox with which we started, that there is a very strong discontinuity between what Austria and Austrians are today, and what Austria and 'Austrians' were before. There is the question of the labyrinthine complexity of historical 'Austrian' identity, which stems from the inability of 'Austria' to fit itself into the 'modern' world of nation-states in the past two centuries. This left a problematic legacy to Central Europe, yet at the same time

allowed 'Austria' to be at the centre of many of the twentieth century's intellectual, ideological and cultural currents, for good or ill.

Many modern-day Austrians would like to embrace the double legacy of imperial, supra-national Habsburg Austria and cosmopolitan 'Vienna 1900'. Yet this involves many difficulties, not the least being how to do so without falling foul of the guilt-laden mire of the 'caesura' of 1938 to 1945. This whole enterprise of claiming the other 'Austrian' past to bolster modern-day Austrian national identity is morally perilous. It is impossible to pick and choose which parts of the 'Austrian' past to claim, and the parts omitted in pursuit of a workable national past have bitten back in a very incisive way. Whether contemporary Austrians will fully come to terms with their past, including the history of that past's attempted suppression, remains to be seen.

Even the apparently 'usable' parts of the past are not always what they seem. On 19 September 1991 a body was discovered on the Ötztal glacier high up in the Alps, at Hauslabjoch. A rescue crew from Innsbruck was called on the assumption that this was some unlucky mountaineer, but this was not the case. The body was of a man killed thousands of years ago, and was in fact the best-preserved body from the Bronze Age ever found. Austrian public opinion, especially the tabloid press, responded with a certain degree of national pride in the fact that the 'oldest man ever found' was an Austrian. 'Ötzi the Iceman' had, admittedly, died thousands of years before there was any idea of Austria, but claiming 'ancestors' from time immemorial is not unusual, as British national pride in Stonehenge attests. The Austrian claiming of Ötzi was dealt a devastating blow, however, when, on revisiting the site of discovery, it was realized that the Iceman had in fact been discovered in *Italy*, the Austro-Italian frontier running right through the middle of the Hauslabjoch. After much debate, the two countries agreed that the Austrians could keep Ötzi temporarily for research purposes in Innsbruck, but he would then have to be handed over to the Italians for permanent safekeeping. The 'oldest Italian ever found' (and indeed the Iceman seems to have come from the area of the Mediterranean) now resides in Bolzano, in the Italian province of Alto Adige, otherwise known as South Tyrol.

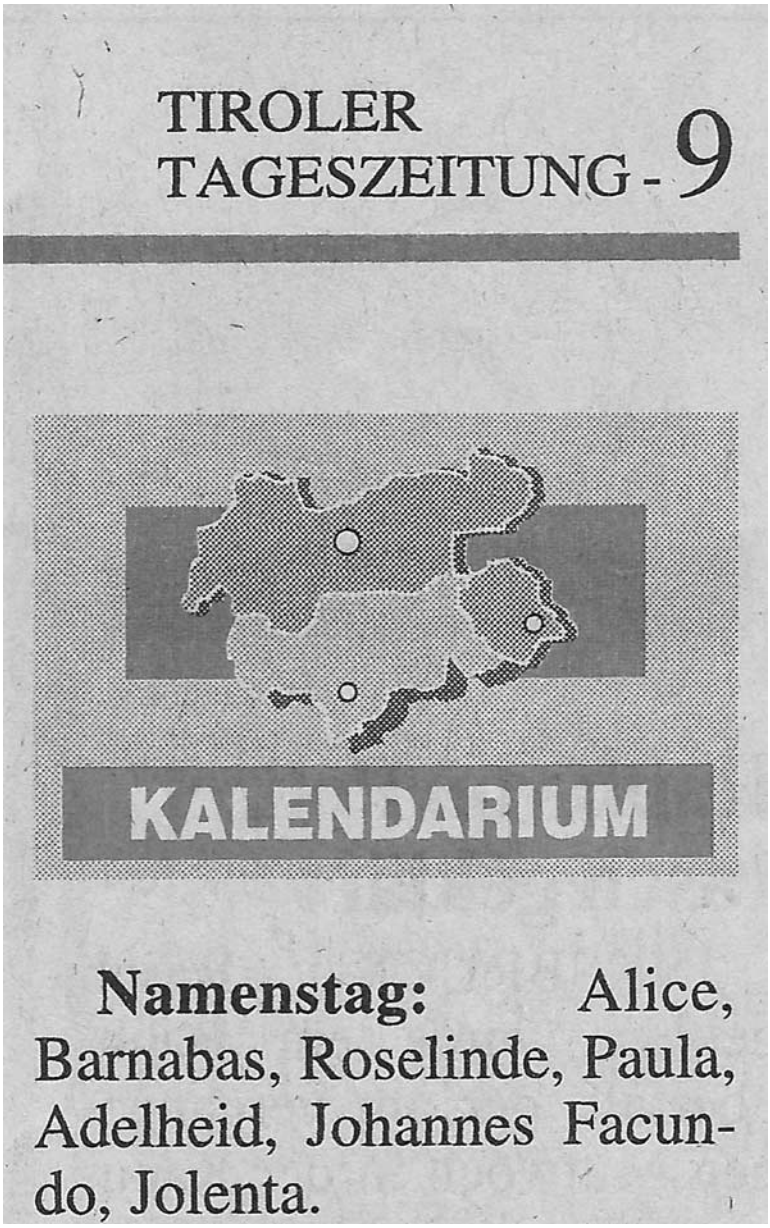

Illustration 2. Tyrolean identity: logo from the *Tiroler Tageszeitung*, 11 June 1996

And thereby hangs a tale. As far as most Austrians are concerned, South Tyrol should be part of Austria. The province is largely inhabited by German speakers, and Italy's sovereignty over it has been disputed ever since it was handed over by the Allies in the post-First World War settlement to reward Italy for entering the war in 1915. The matter has largely been laid to rest, but Tyroleans on both sides of the border continue to see South Tyrol as really part of a greater Tyrol. One of the leading newspapers in Innsbruck, the *Tiroler Tageszeitung*, until very recently had as its header a map of Tyrol, with the two parts in Austria (North and East) in full shading, and South Tyrol in a lighter shade. South Tyroleans themselves seem largely content with the autonomy and other concessions gained from the Italian government, but there is no doubt that they continue to see themselves as Tyroleans. Arguably, Ötzi is neither Austrian nor Italian, but a Tyrolean.

The case of Ötzi highlights one startling fact about modern-day Austria: for a country of only 8 million it has surprisingly large regional variety, and strong particularist identities among its nine provinces. This is partly a result of the country's mountainous terrain and its elongated western segment. In the far west, abutting Lake Constance and hence the Rhine, Vorarlberg remains far more integrated into German and Swiss transportation networks than to Austrian. It takes longer to get to Vienna by train from Bregenz than it does to get to Paris. Tyrol is largely composed of the Alps, and has therefore been central in modern Austria's identity as a tourist destination. Yet it is similarly remote from the main, 'fat' part of Austria and has a heritage of rugged provincial independence which stems in part from its relatively late absorption into the Habsburgs' 'Austrian' domains in the fourteenth century. Another province central to modern Austrian cultural identity, and Austria's tourist industry, Salzburg, was only fully incorporated into the Habsburg Monarchy in 1816. When Mozart was born there in 1756, he was not an 'Austrian'.

The provinces, or *Länder*, to the south and east, Styria and Carinthia, have a longer tradition of being Austrian, Styria having been united with the core Austrian lands in the time of the Babenbergs, and Carinthia coming under Habsburg rule in 1336, yet the Alpine ranges which restrict access to the north and the rivers which

flow south have resulted historically in these provinces having different concerns from their northern neighbours. The latter are the core Austrian lands, Upper and Lower Austria, astride the Danube. Vienna, the capital, was once also the capital of Lower Austria but is now a province in its own right. Burgenland, the most easterly province, abutting Hungary and the puszta, is the province with the shortest Austrian tradition, having been historically part of Hungary before becoming Austrian in 1919.

The geographical breadth, stretching from the Rhine to the puszta, the Alpine barriers which range across the country and the historical diversity of the provinces have fostered regional identities and loyalties that make any claims to straightforward Austrian identity very strained. Part of this particularistic tendency is tempered by the fact that the bulk of the population lives in the flatter part of the country, in Vienna and the Danube valley. The two Austrias, Upper and Lower, combined with Vienna, comprise over half the country's population. Nevertheless, the smaller provinces' identities, with their emphasis on alpine traditions – over half of the country's area is either forested or barren – have done much to inform modern-day Austrian identity. The central theme of that identity can indeed be viewed as the tension between these two 'Danubian' and 'Alpine' sides of Austria, roughly corresponding to Bruno Kreisky's 'valley people' and 'mountain people'. Others see a split between the eastern and western halves of the country, or, more simply, Vienna versus the rest of the country, a tension rich in tradition.

The most critical problem embedded in Austrian history is encapsulated in an incident from the Waldheim Affair. Responding to questions about his wartime record, presidential candidate Kurt Waldheim stated: 'What I did during the war was nothing more than what hundreds of thousands of other Austrians did, namely fulfilled my duty as a soldier.'

This seemingly reasonable defence becomes strange, once you ask to whom or to what he was fulfilling his 'duty'. Given that Austria had been 'conquered' by Nazi Germany, Waldheim was fulfilling his duty not to Austria but to the Third Reich, the supposed foreign usurper. In most understandings of 'duty' it can only be performed towards legitimate authority, and in the modern nation-state only towards one's own nation, ultimately to one's own higher moral

self. If the Third Reich was, as most Austrians have claimed, not a legitimate authority, then it would have been impossible to fulfil one's *duty* to it. Waldheim's statement thus cast doubt on Austria being the 'first invaded country' and highlighted the deep ambivalence over the national identity of 'Austrians' during the Second World War. Imagine a Czech politician saying the same thing about his fighting for the Germans during the war.

Waldheim's statement has been seen as part of Austria's continuing problem with the Nazi past, as an inadvertent, vestigial identification of the Third Reich as a legitimate authority, inasmuch as Austrians considered themselves as Germans and the *Anschluss* as legitimate, if in retrospect a mistake. There could have been an element of this. Yet I think another explanation is more likely.

The sense of 'duty' used by Waldheim was not that of Western Europe, or even northern, Kantian Germany, but rather a Central European form, with a centuries-old tradition in the Habsburg Monarchy. Under this understanding of 'duty' (*Pflicht*), it makes no difference who is giving the orders; orders are there to be obeyed because by definition whoever is giving the orders is an authority, or 'the authorities', and therefore to be obeyed – the basis of their authority left unquestioned. It is the 'duty' of a subject, and not of a citizen.

Waldheim's claim about Austrians during the Second World War points to a far deeper legacy of Austrian history, the troubled search over centuries for a basis of legitimacy and authority for the Habsburg dynasty to rule over its realms without fear of contradiction. After 1945 Austrians used their history selectively to construct a historical identity which could confer legitimacy and hence authority on an Austrian nation-state, but this behaviour was not new. Austrian history's central theme has been the search for a definition of 'Austria', an identity, a meaning, which would confer legitimacy and authority on what otherwise was simply family rule over a dynastic agglomeration of territories.

The Habsburgs started as the opponents of Swiss proto-democracy, became the opponents of the Protestant nation-states, then of the French Revolutionary liberal nation-state, before ultimately succumbing to the nationalisms of its own peoples (and neighbours). All along 'Austria' strove to define itself in ways which

would make it appear legitimate to itself and others. Sometimes it succeeded, but never for long, and never fully, always with a slight lack of conviction. Austrian history is a case study in the other side of European history, of those concepts of political coherence left in the wake of the triumphant nation-state. Austria's post-war awkwardness with its past and its sense of identity is part of a very long tradition.

1

The Eastern March, to 1439

BEFORE AUSTRIA, TO 1000

Austria began its history in the late tenth century as an eastern march of the duchy of Bavaria. It was during this period that an area in the Danube valley came to be known as 'the eastern land', in Latin 'terra orientalis', or 'ostarrichi' in the local German of the time. The first written evidence of this early medieval equivalent of 'Österreich' dates from 996. In the eleventh century the march was sometimes referred to as 'Osterland'; the Latin version of 'Austria' first appears in a document in 1147.

As Austrian historians were at pains after 1945 to prove, the march was never actually called the 'Ostmark'. Nevertheless, it was as an eastern march of the German kingdom under Bavarian suzerainty, a military district on the Germans' south-east frontier, that Austria started its career.

As the discovery of Ötzi indicates, human activity in the area began thousands of years before any concept of 'Austria'. The mountainous terrain meant that there were few early settlements. The region was not at the forefront of human civilization, and the Iron Age culture evident at Hallstatt appeared relatively late, around 800 BCE. From then until around 400 BCE the main group in the region was the 'Illyrians', who were largely displaced by Celts, chief among them the tribes of the Norici and Taurisci. The Raetii remained in control of the mountain stronghold of what is now Vorarlberg and Tyrol, but in the eastern part the Celts set up the