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A Concise History of Austria

For a small, prosperous country in the middle of Europe, modern Austria has a very large and complex history, extending far beyond its current borders. Today's Austrians have a problematic relationship with that history, whether with the multi-national history of the Habsburg Monarchy, or with the time between 1938 and 1945 when Austrians were Germans in Hitler's Third Reich. Steven Beller's gripping and comprehensive account traces the remarkable career of Austria through its many transformations, from German borderland, to dynastic enterprise, imperial house, Central European great power, failed Alpine republic, German province, and then successful Alpine republic, building up a picture of the layers of Austrian identity and heritage and their diverse sources. It is a story full of anomalies and ironies, a case study of the other side of European history, without the easy answers of more clearly national narratives, and hence far more relevant to today's world.

STEVEN BELLER is an independent scholar. He has already published a number of books on Austrian history, including *Vienna and the Jews, 1867–1938: a Cultural History* (1989), *Theodor Herzl* (1991) and *Francis Joseph* (1996).

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**Photograph taken by Esther Diane Brimmer.

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Many years ago, when Bill Davies asked whether I knew of anyone interested in writing a Concise History of Austria, it was an easy, if immodest decision on my part to suggest myself. Writing such a book seemed a challenging prospect, but one that could be done fairly simply and in not too much time. It took me a long time to realize that conciseness is very time-consuming, and that a Concise History of *Austria* is, in any case, verging on a *non sequitur* – and for such a small state too. It took me even longer to write the book, but now that it has finally been completed, my hope is that it will help to give both an understanding of the broad outlines of Austria's fascinating history, and some sense of how its extensiveness and its complexity make an easy, concise rendering of it more problematic than might at first appear (or at least as it appeared to me back then). It is also true that part of the fascination lies in that very extensiveness and complexity, but I leave readers to make that discovery for themselves in the following pages.

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Map 1. The Austrian Republic, 2006