



**David VOGEL**

**Emperador Maximiliano – A Habsburg on the Mexican Throne**



Emperor Maximilian

<http://www.nevadaobserver.com/TNO%20Reference%20Page%20File/Maximilian,%20Emperor%20of%20Mexico.jpg>

**Preface**

As the topic of my essay, I've chosen a historical event of maybe less importance, although with many peculiarities. The story of an archduke from the imperial and royal family of Habsburg-Lorraine accepting the invitation of the French Emperor to occupy the throne of a country that is 10 000 kilometres away from his home could be the object-lesson of great powers playing. The aim of the study is to give an insight in this short moment of Mexico's history and to show a picture of Hungarian soldiers fighting on Latin American soil.



## Historical Background

The first half of the nineteenth century started really eventfully for Mexico. The 1910s were spent achieving independence, the subsequent decade brought a short-lived empire and then major territorial losses in due course followed by instability, which further weakened the young state. The situation was still aggravated by the war fought against the USA between 1846 and 1848. In the *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* ending the two-year war Mexico lost one third of its territory: Texas, furthermore the bigger part of California, Arizona and New-Mexico. In the fifties the policy of consolidation of the Amerindian (Zapotec) president *Benito Juarez* ensued, which is remembered by the public under the name of *La Reforma*<sup>1</sup>. , it was impossible for his reforms to result in significant changes in the little time at his disposal and they only contributed to the stability of the country to a limited extent. On the other hand, the liberalism of his policies proved sufficient to excite the attention of the leader of one of the great European powers. *Emperor Napoleon III* took steps as early as the end of the 1850s in order to increase France's potential of worldwide influence, moreover, to prevent the USA from further expansion to the South. The Juarez government had to stop repaying state debts and their interest owing to financial difficulties. This presented Napoleon with an excellent opportunity to create an ad hoc coalition - by means of the Convention of London in October 1861 - among France, Great-Britain and Spain - all of them desirous to recover their money. The first expeditionary forces arrived in the country at the turn of 1861-62. However, in accordance with the terms of the *Convention of La Soledad* the English and Spanish troops stayed at home. Nevertheless, it did not cause a major hitch in the French plans. The French forces pushed the Juarez army back to the US frontier *Paso del Norte*, but they were unable to crush it. The French timing was perfect: the attention of the USA - and therefore its foreign interest representation potential - was arrested by the civil war dividing the country into two.

## A Habsburg Archduke

*His Imperial and Royal Majesty, Ferdinand Maximilian Joseph of Habsburg-Lorraine, Archduke of Austria, Hungary and Bohemia, Emperador Maximiliano*,<sup>2</sup> *Max*: he was born on July 6th as the second son of Archduke Francis Charles of the House of Habsburg-Lorraine (1802-1878) and Princess Sophie Friederike of Bavaria (1805-1872) in Schönbrunn<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The majority of his measures affected the clergy negatively, such as the dissolution of monasteries, the nationalisation of clerical property, the introduction of secular registration and wedding, the abolition of numerous church holidays. VILLEGAS – BERNAL – TOSCANO – GONZÁLEZ – BLANQUEL – MEYER 2002: 84.

<sup>2</sup> *Emperador Maximiliano I de México*.

<sup>3</sup> According to several urban legends mostly spread among the Viennese, his real father was the French Emperor Napoleon II.



Being the empress' favourite, Maximilian received the same education as his elder brother, the future Austrian-Hungarian Emperor; therefore by the time he reached adulthood, he had been fully equipped to be a leader; he had become an erudite, insightful statesman also well-versed in the natural sciences<sup>4</sup> and arts<sup>5</sup>. However, he was destined to forever live in his brother's shadow as the second-born son, being assigned only minor tasks. Independently of this, it naturally meant functions worthy of his rank: so Maximilian became the commander-in-chief of the Imperial-Royal Navy (*K. k. Kriegsmarine*) in 1854 – at the age of just 22 -, in which position he reorganised and modernised the Austrian-Hungarian Navy. He founded and built the military harbours of Trieste and Pula. Despite the fact that the war navy had never featured among the (military) priorities of the Habsburg Empire, he succeeded in implementing significant and later vital developments. The modernisation created the opportunity for Admiral *Wilhelm von Tegetthoff* to later obtain significant victories over the Italian navy in the Adriatic theatre of the Prussian-Austrian-Italian War. Not only his activities in the field of the art of war, but also those as a patron of the sciences can be said to have been of momentum: he initiated the first around-the-world war navy expedition between 1857 and 1859 on the *SMS Novara*.

The years spent at the *Kriegsmarine*, the training received at the war navy had a huge influence on Maximilian. He undertook several voyages on the frigate *SMS Novara* of the Imperial-Royal Navy in the world. In the course of such a voyage, he ventured as far as Brazil. In 1850 he became engaged to *Maria Amélia* of Brazil,<sup>6</sup> who was the only daughter of the Brazilian Emperor *Peter I* (abdicated in 1831) from his second marriage. However, the princess died of tuberculosis in 1853. According to the priest who administered the last rites on 4 February, *Maria Amélia's* last sentence was about comforting her mother: "*Do not cry... let God's will be done; may He come to my aid in my last hour; may He console my poor mother!*"<sup>7</sup>

As his next mission, his brother appointed him governor of the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia (*Königreich Lombardo-Venetien*) in February 1857, which then belonged to the Empire. Maximilian married *Charlotte of Belgium* (*Charlotte de Belgique*), the daughter of *Leopold I*, King of Belgium on July 27th of the same year.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> According to memoirs, he had excellent writing and fluent oral skills in Hungarian since his early childhood. Both he and his brother were taught by the abbot Pál Nemeskéri Kiss. TARDY 1990: 146.

<sup>5</sup> Including navigation, botany and natural sciences in general.

<sup>6</sup> *Maria Amélia's* full name: Dona Maria Amélia Augusta Eugénia Josefina Luísa Teodolinda Heloísa Francisca Xavier de Paula Micaela Gabriela Rafaela Gonzaga. *Princess Maria Amélia of Brazil* <http://www.spokeo.com/Princess+Maria+Amelia+Of+Brazil+1>

<sup>7</sup> *Princess Maria Amélia of Brazil* <http://www.spokeo.com/Princess+Maria+Amelia+Of+Brazil+1>

<sup>8</sup> *Charlotte* was given the title of Archduchess of Austria (*Erzherzogin von Österreich*) by right of marriage. Their union remained childless, probably because of the complications of the syphilis infection Maximilian had contracted during his Brazilian trip.



Maximilian and Charlotte

[http://joannavandergrachtderosado.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/art-nouveau\\_maximilian-charlotte\\_web.jpg](http://joannavandergrachtderosado.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/art-nouveau_maximilian-charlotte_web.jpg)

As governor, he pursued more modern and liberal policies, but the conservative Francis Joseph did not agree with Maximilian's ideas and therefore dismissed him at the beginning of 1859.<sup>9</sup>

After this, the 27-year-old archduke retired from all political activities and he moved with his wife to the picturesque Miramare Castle near Trieste, which he had built for his own use. His sole objective became the organisation of a botanical expedition to Brazil, even though in the same year he was also visited for the first time by Mexican royalists under the leading of the Mexican nobleman *José Pablo Martínez del Río*, who offered him the title of Emperor of Mexico. Maximilian refused them on this occasion.

Meanwhile, after the democratic revolution had swept over Mexico, the political system of republic was introduced in the Latin American state, by which political move the church and the landed nobility stood to lose the most. They started organising the opposition at once against the changes injurious to their interests. The French Emperor wished to take this opportunity to realize his ambitions of becoming a world power. He was also supported in his plans by the Catholic Church.<sup>10</sup> The numerous troops sent to

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<sup>9</sup> The next governor became *field marshal Ferenc Gyulay*, but not for a long time: soon after this in the 1859 Austro-Sardinian War the Austrian Imperial Army suffered severe defeats at the hands of the French army, which supported the rebels of Piedmont at Magenta and Solferino. In consequence, Lombardy seceded from the Austrian Empire. In imperial circles Maximilian's liberalism was blamed for the event.

<sup>10</sup> It was not done without good reason. The Juárez' reform laws had injured namely the church' interests to a significant extent, i. e. the law had declared the nationalisation of church property, the dissolution of monasteries, the secular registration and wedding, furthermore, the secularisation of cemeteries and the abolition of several church holidays. VILLEGAS – BERNAL – TOSCANO – GONZÁLEZ – BLANQUEL – MEYER 2002: 84.



Mexico under the command of general *Élie-Frédéric Forey* supported the anti-government forces and took control over the majority of the country by 1863.

## A European Emperor in the Land of the Aztecs

The French success changed the earlier situation fundamentally; the royalists revisiting Archduke Maximilian could report that Mexico had come under their control and moreover, - according to the result of the April 10 plebiscite stipulated by Maximilian - the population of the country also supported the archduke's succession to the imperial throne. On this basis, Maximilian of Habsburg renounced all his incidental Austrian succession rights in April 1864 and then travelled to Mexico with his wife<sup>11</sup>: he ascended to the throne<sup>12</sup> under the name of Maximilian I<sup>13</sup>. According to memoirs, Maximilian dedicated his time to writing a manual for court etiquette instead of reading the books on Mexico he had been given for the voyage.

On board of the SMS Novara<sup>14</sup> frigate – accompanied by two other frigates, the Austrian SMS *Bellona* and the French *Themis*, moreover, the *Phantasie*, an imperial yacht – he set sail from Trieste in April 1864.<sup>15</sup> After a nearly two-month sea voyage, the Emperor and Empress of Mexico arrived in Vera Cruz on May 28<sup>th</sup> and then they entered the capital, Mexico City on June 12<sup>th</sup> escorted by the 25,000-strong French forces under the leading of lieutenant-general *Francois Achille de Bazaine*. Maximilian took possession of the Chapultepec Palace, the nearby Aztec imperial abode as his imperial residence. Among his first measures, the emperor ordered a wide avenue to be built between the imperial palace and the city centre, which was named<sup>16</sup> the Empress' Esplanade (*Paseo de la emperatriz*).

Maximilian's first measures betray several things. First and foremost, the young emperor had not been sufficiently informed about the situation, the repugnance of the Mexican people, the proceeding of the plebiscite (one of Maximilian's conditions) and its real outcome by either Emperor Napoleon III, or the local French forces, or the Mexican monarchists. But the same can also be stated in connection with the banished, but not vanquished president Benito Juarez and his adherents or even the possibility of foreign intervention, since nobody can seriously have believed that the civil war tying up the US forces would be protracted for a much longer period. And even if it had dragged on, after its end, the USA would inevitably have used pressure or

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<sup>11</sup> The Spanish Count Montezuma, direct-line issue of the last Aztec ruler, Montezuma (died in 1540) protested against the assumption of the imperial title in a letter referring to succession. TARDY: p. 147.

<sup>12</sup> His name in Mexico was: *Emperador Maximiliano I de México*, his wife was called *Emperatriz Carlota de México*.

<sup>13</sup> The French military support was not free; according to the Miramare Convention Maximilian had to pay 260 million francs to France. VILLEGAS – BERNAL – TOSCANO – GONZÁLEZ – BLANQUEL – MEYER 2002: 85.

<sup>14</sup> SMS: Seiner Majestät Schiff = Her/His Majesty's Ship

<sup>15</sup> HASLIP 1971.

<sup>16</sup> Its current name is Reform Promenade (*Paseo de la Reforma*).



even military power based on the Monroe Doctrine to prevent a European intervention in the home affairs of the continent, and particularly so, since the intervention was happening directly at its southern borders.

Secondly, Maximilian caused surprises to his European supporters, primarily to Napoleon III. The young emperor's life ambition was namely to turn Mexico into a European-style, modern, liberal state; a French satellite state where conservative, feudal ideas prevail was by no means his goal. In spite of all his enlightened ideas, which were also manifest in his first measures, the republicans and the large majority of the Mexican society considered him a foreign intruder.

In order to increase his popularity among the population, Maximilian adopted the grandsons of Emperor *Agustín de Iturbide* (ruler of the first empire)<sup>17</sup>: *Salvador de Iturbide y de Marzán* and the two-year-old *Agustín de Iturbide y Green*, whom he appointed Prince of Iturbide and at the same time heir apparent. He also hoped to cement his position by appointing *General Antonio López de Santa Anna*<sup>18</sup>, the former president of the country to first marshal of the empire (*Reichsmarschall*).

It evidences not only his wish to strengthen his position, but also his liberal way of thinking that several acts of the former president, Juárez remained in force, for instance the agrarian reform, the extension of franchise to landless peasants, furthermore, several acts provoking displeasure in the Catholic Church, such as the declaration of freedom of religion, nationalization of church property, secular approval for papal decrees, secular registration or the secularization of cemeteries. He introduced long and liquid measurements based on the decimal system. Besides, he initiated laws which contained social measures earlier unknown in the country: he regulated the wages and working conditions, pensions and contributions<sup>19</sup>, moreover, he abolished bondage and returned the Indians' land.<sup>20</sup>

In the meantime, the empress endeavoured to behave in a way worthy of a monarch, she undertook several trips in the country; the memoirs highlight her visit to the city of Uxmal on the Yucatan peninsula in particular. According to the chronicles, during one of their mutual trips the local leaders wanted to erect a marble arch of triumph in Carlota's honour, whereupon the emperor thanked them saying that they should rather dedicate it to the memory of the independence. All in all, the imperial couple evidenced an extremely liberal, altruistic and pro-Mexican way of thinking. A manifest sign of this was that they received their subjects in their palace every week, in order to find solutions to the surfacing problems.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the adoption was not just an empty gesture, since the imperial couple did not have children and owing to Maximilian's earlier syphilis disease, which he had contracted travelling in Brazil, they could not have any, either.

<sup>18</sup> The full name of the Mexican statesman is Antonio de Padua María Severino López de Santa Anna y Pérez de Lebrón. He was one of the most determining political players of the country, who filled the presidential position for shorter or longer periods 7 times in 22 years.

<sup>19</sup> VILLEGAS – BERNAL – TOSCANO – GONZÁLEZ – BLANQUEL – MEYER 2002: 85.

<sup>20</sup> FOSTER 1999: 122.

<sup>21</sup> FOSTER 1999: 122.



Nevertheless, the emperor could not expect from all this to fully cement his rule: somehow, Juárez and his troops had to either be appeased or defeated. In order to achieve this goal, Maximilian offered amnesty to Juárez on condition that he should take an oath to the crown, but Juárez refused this. Meanwhile, the leaders of the occupying French military forces informed Maximilian that their troops had crushed Juárez' forces and the time had come to round up the remaining republicans, therefore the emperor decreed the remaining Juárez followers to be executed. This proved a fateful tactical mistake later and given that even the underlying information had been incorrect, it fundamentally influenced the survival of the empire.<sup>22</sup>

In the meantime, the American Civil War had ended and the USA could direct its undivided attention to backing the cause of the republicans: Washington gave free run of several arms and gun powder depots at El Paso del Norte to Juárez and his main ally, *Porfirio Díaz* as well as their troops.

Parallel to this, Maximilian also tried to make use of the Americans: he attempted to create immigrant colonies recruited from among the losers of the Civil War<sup>23</sup> – one such was among others the *Colony Carlota* or the *New Virginia Colony*, for which the concept was conceived by the well-known American oceanographer and inventor *Matthew Fontaine Maury*<sup>24</sup>. However, Maximilian expected immigrants not just from the USA, Austrian and German territories, but also from all over the world.

However, all these attempts proved ineffective in strengthening Maximilian's position in the long run. With the exception of the imperial court it had become a *fait accompli* both at home and abroad that the emperor would have to abdicate. Napoleon III had withdrawn his troops since, on the one hand, he needed them at home against the ever increasing Prussian threat; on the other hand, he had realized that the money and energy invested in Maximilian's cause did not bring the expected results. Nevertheless, the imperial couple did not abandon hope. Maximilian refused to leave the country together with the French forces, whereas Carlota travelled to Europe to seek support for her husband. Her first trip was to the Emperor of France to petition for the prolongation of the French support, but even after several days of negotiation the emperor was reluctant to change his original decision about the final withdrawal. After a short Austrian bypass, in the course of which she also visited Miramare Castle, the empress went to Pope Pius IX to the Vatican to seek assistance. However, the pope was not satisfied with Maximilian's decisions concerning the Catholic Church and closed his ears to her pleading for help.

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<sup>22</sup> However, for full credibility's sake, it needs to be mentioned that Juárez had everybody executed right from the beginning who was loyal to the emperor. FOSTER 1999: 122.

<sup>23</sup> ROLLE 1992.

<sup>24</sup> Maury, who had served as lieutenant-colonel in the Confederate Navy, worked for Maximilian as „Imperial immigration commissioner“. *Matthew Fontaine Maury: Benefactor of Mankind* [http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/maury\\_mat\\_bene.htm](http://www.history.navy.mil/library/online/maury_mat_bene.htm)



After having repeatedly failed, the fragile Charlotte started to exhibit the symptoms of an imminent nervous breakdown more and more perceptibly.<sup>25</sup> According to contemporary memoirs, she burst into tears several times during her visit to Napoleon III and his spouse, her sentiments took command over rational thinking. By the time she arrived in Rome, the situation had worsened: she started seeing visions and thought they wanted to poison her. During her Vatican visit, she also wrote a farewell letter to her husband about the imaginary attempts against her life. Seeing her condition, the pope had a room furnished for her in the Vatican Library, which she occupied until her condition improved. She never returned to Mexico. After the Vatican visit she lived in Miramare Castle for a while and then she went to her home country, Belgium, where she continued her existence first in *Tervuren Castle* near Brussels and then in *Bouchout Castle* in Meise till her death on January 19<sup>th</sup> 1927. In the six decades following her husband's execution, she believed that she was the Empress of Mexico and her husband was alive. According to memoirs, she kept a doll in her bed and called it Max. She kept in touch with the outside world through her close relatives: her contact person to the Austrian imperial family was *Archduchess Stéphanie*, the widow of *Crown Prince Rudolf*.

It is interesting to mention that the German troops occupying Belgium in World War I placed a board on the gate of Bouchout Castle with the following inscription in German and Flemish:

*"The inhabitant of this house is Her Imperial Majesty Empress Carlota of Mexico, whose brother-in-law is His Imperial Majesty Francis Joseph, Emperor of Austria, King of Hungary."* Therefore the sacrosanct status of the estate was fully respected by the German troops.

However, the empress did not enjoy such regard among the Mexicans: *Vicente Riva Palacio*, a Mexican writer and lawyer wrote a satirical song entitled *"Adiós mama Carlota"*, which is known to this day. What makes it particularly piquant is that Palacio was the defence lawyer at Maximilian's court-martial trial.<sup>26</sup>

## The inevitable

Considering abdication, Maximilian summoned his general staff and promised free defile to anyone who ever could not face the more and more hopeless fight. Three of his generals, *Tomás Mejía*, *Miguel Miramon* and *Leonard Márquez* vowed to raise an army equal to the task of fighting Juárez' forces. They retreated to the fortress of *Santiago de Querétaro* in February 1867 to reorganize their troops, charge again and thereby reverse their fortunes. However, the republicans beleaguered the fortress, which withstood the attacks for long weeks. On May 11<sup>th</sup> 1867 Maximilian made an

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<sup>25</sup> The news of his husband's execution caused the final shock: Charlotte collapsed totally. Her brother, Prince Philippe of Belgium had her examined by several renowned doctors of the age, but they could not cure insanity.

<sup>26</sup> *Vicente Riva Palacio - An Inventory of the His Collection at the Benson Latin American Collection* <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utlac/00031/lac-00031.html>



attempt to escape through the enemy lines, however, his plan was betrayed by *colonel Miguel López*: in exchange for republican money, he opened the gate of the fortress and let Juárez' men enter, who did not keep their previous promise of letting Maximilian escape.

On May 14<sup>th</sup>, the victorious Republicans dethroned Maximilian, and subsequently tried him by court-martial. There could not have been any doubt about the sentence: Juárez wanted to make an example of Maximilian and demonstrate his power, so Maximilian was sentenced to death. Beside the majority of the Mexican population, many well-known figures of the era and rulers protested against the verdict in letters and telegrams - among them *Victor Hugo*, *Giuseppe Garibaldi* and even *Queen Victoria*. However, the decision proved to be irreversible.<sup>27</sup> Barely one month after the dethronement, on June 19<sup>th</sup>, Maximilian and his two faithful generals, Tomás Mejía and Miguel Miramón were executed by firing squad at *Cerro de las Campanas*<sup>28</sup> near Querétaro. According to legend, Maximilian gave gold to the members of the firing squad to bribe them so that they would not shoot him in the head. Despite this, one soldier did so.



Death of Emperor Maximilian in the company with two of his generals on June 19, 1867

[https://webmail.uni-corvinus.hu/iwc/svc/wmap/attach/003\\_Death%20of%20E%20Maximilian.gif?token=MsqpsXbNw9&mbox=INBOX&uid=27129&number=7&type=image&subtype=gif&process=html%2Cjs%2Clink%2Ctarget%2Cbinhex](https://webmail.uni-corvinus.hu/iwc/svc/wmap/attach/003_Death%20of%20E%20Maximilian.gif?token=MsqpsXbNw9&mbox=INBOX&uid=27129&number=7&type=image&subtype=gif&process=html%2Cjs%2Clink%2Ctarget%2Cbinhex)

<sup>27</sup> There were exceptions here too, of course, *colonel Félix zu Salm-Salm*, Maximilian's adjutant, who had also been sentenced to death, was namely pardoned owing to his wife, *Agnes Leclercq Joy's* personal intervention.

<sup>28</sup> *Maximiliano, Miramón y Mejía son fusilados*

<http://www.memoriapoliticademexico.org/Efemerides/6/19061867.html>



According to memoirs, his last sentences were:

*“Mexicans! I die in a just cause. I forgive all, and pray that all may forgive me. May my blood flow for the good of this land. Viva Mexico!”*<sup>29</sup>

Other sources bear evidence that he mentioned his wife in his last words: “Poor Charlotte”<sup>30</sup>.

After the execution his body was embalmed and publicly exhibited in Mexico. Admiral Tegetthoff, who had been assigned the task of shipping the body home, only succeeded with great difficulty in reclaiming the corpus from the Mexicans after more than half a year. The state of the body was far from ideal. When the Novara returned to Trieste on January 16<sup>th</sup> 1868, the archduke’s body was transferred to a funeral barge, then in the framework of a spectacular ceremony it was put to rest in the Habsburg Imperial Crypt beneath the Capuchin Church in Vienna (*Kapuzinergruft*).

Thousands flanked the embankments and the harbour of Trieste when the Novara followed by the rest of the fleet entered the harbour in the evening of January 15<sup>th</sup> 1868.<sup>31</sup> Maximilian’s dead body was escorted along the streets of Trieste by *Baron Wüllersdorf-Urbair*, the former commandant of the Novara and Austria’s future minister of commerce.<sup>32</sup>

Under the influence of the events, *Franz Liszt*, the world-famous Hungarian composer of the age, wrote the sixth movement, the *Marche funebre, En mémoire de Maximilian I, Empereur du Mexique* (*Funeral March, In Memory of Maximilian I, Emperor of Mexico*) of his piece entitled *Années de Pèlerinage* (*Years of Pilgrimage*), which was first performed in 1883.<sup>33</sup>

## The Legend

It is usually the case with deaths or executions occurring under insufficiently demystified circumstances with less detailed descriptions that they generate numerous urban legends and myths. And so it happened in Maximilian’s case, too. *Sr. Ronaldo Déneke*, an architect from San Salvador presented the theory in 2007 that

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<sup>29</sup> HERZ: <http://www.inside-mexico.com/featurecinco.htm>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.bartleby.com/81/5545.html>

<sup>31</sup> In honour of the former commander-in-chief of the Imperial-Royal Navy, the „*La Paloma*”, his favourite song was played, when the ship entered the harbour. This song was vowed never to be played again on board of an Austrian-Hungarian warship. This tradition is still adhered to among Austrian sailing boats.

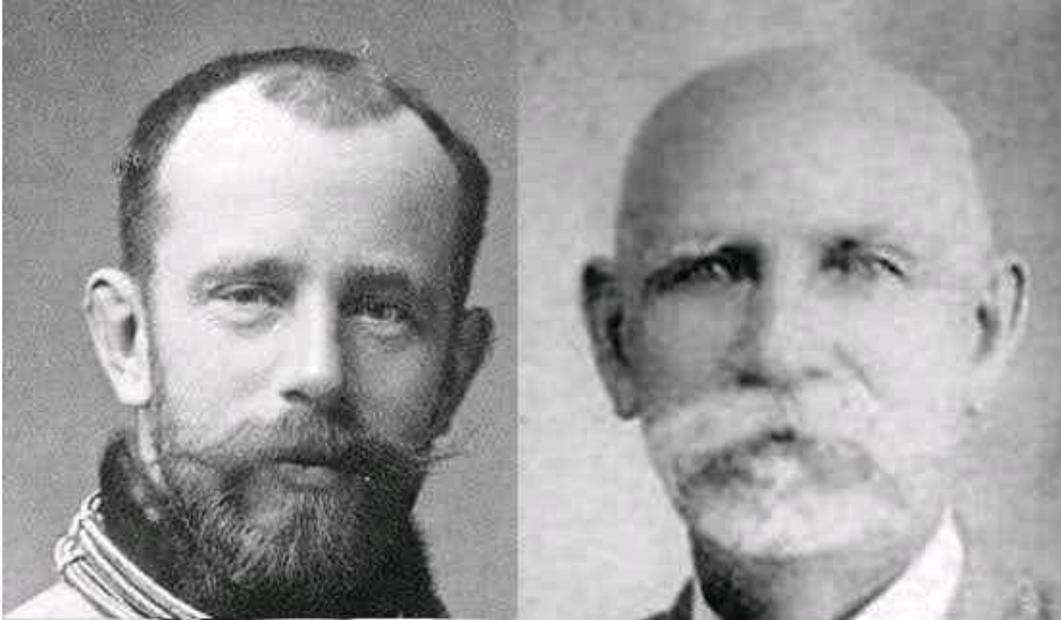
<sup>32</sup> ORGAN 2007.

<sup>33</sup> *Années de pèlerinage III, S.163 (Liszt, Franz)*

[http://imslp.org/wiki/Ann%C3%A9es\\_de\\_p%C3%A8lerinage\\_III,\\_S.163\\_\(Liszt,\\_Franz\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Ann%C3%A9es_de_p%C3%A8lerinage_III,_S.163_(Liszt,_Franz))



Maximilian did not really die, but settled down in San Salvador under the name of *Justo Armas*.<sup>34</sup>



Maximilian and Justo Armas

[https://webmail.uni-corvinus.hu/iwc/svc/wmap/attach/005\\_Maximilian-Armas.jpg?token=MsgpsXbNw9&mbox=INBOX&uid=27129&number=9&type=image&subtype=jpeg&process=html%2Cis%2Clink%2Ctarget%2Cbinhex](https://webmail.uni-corvinus.hu/iwc/svc/wmap/attach/005_Maximilian-Armas.jpg?token=MsgpsXbNw9&mbox=INBOX&uid=27129&number=9&type=image&subtype=jpeg&process=html%2Cis%2Clink%2Ctarget%2Cbinhex)

His theory is corroborated by a handful of circumstantial evidence. First and foremost, Juarez – similarly to Maximilian – was a high-degree freemason, and it features in the secret society's vow not take each other's life, therefore Déneke supposes that the firing squad used blanks. Secondly, the dead body - first seen by relatives months later in a very bad state - was deliberately left to decompose so that it should be returned to Maximilian's family in the most unrecognizable state possible. Not even the closest relatives were to notice that the body lying in the coffin was not Maximilian's. According to official records, the family members who had been requested to identify the deceased – among them Maximilian's mother – did not recognize the dead emperor. As a piece of evidence for his theory, Déneke mentions a visit in the course of which Austrian-Hungarian diplomats visited Armas in connection with the succession at the end of 1916, just before Francis Joseph's death. However, they had to return empty-handed. After this incident, Justo Armas lived for two more decades in the Latin American country, and if he really was Maximilian, he died aged approximately 104. His person is surrounded by a lot of uncertainties. What emerges about Armas from the contemporary local press and records is that he appeared in the country middle-aged, was in possession of a European education, knew the etiquette, had an excellent command of several foreign languages, had first-class connections

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<sup>34</sup> Déneke sees the origin of the existing, but probably assumed name in a Spanish euphemism used for execution – *hecho justo por las armas*. LAMPERTI: [http://math.dartmouth.edu/~lamperti/Justo\\_Armas.html](http://math.dartmouth.edu/~lamperti/Justo_Armas.html)



even as a stranger and in his personal appearance – perhaps due to his typical moustache – he extremely resembled Maximilian.

In order to prove his assumptions, Déneke requested and was granted permission by Otto, the head of the Habsburg family to disinter Armas' body and conduct genetic experiments on it. Based on the evidence of the examination results, the deceased is identical with one of the members of the Habsburg family (Maximilian, Rudolf or John Salvator archdukes come into question).

In any case, it is extremely interesting that the urban legend was not created by posterity, but it was also manifest in the conversations of the members of the contemporary social life. However, the above-listed and construed evidence only circumstantially implies that Justo Armas was identical with Emperor Maximilian. This is not proven by any official or scientific research or examination at present.

### **The Hungarian Connection**

What makes the barely more than three-year-long Mexican “adventure” really extraordinary is the Hungarian connection. Since the time of Andrew II's crusade to the Holy Land, there had not been raised a Hungarian army of such proportions to fight a war far from home in a foreign country.

Also known for his preference for the Hungarians, Maximilian got to know the Hungarian soldiers more closely at the time of his governorship in Lombardy-Venetia, but in the course of his brief career at home, which was curtailed by his brother, he collected positive experience with the Hungarian armed forces several times. Owing to this, parallel to his voyage to Mexico<sup>35</sup> several soldiers of Hungarian nationality<sup>36</sup> were selected for the expedition during the recruitment of the Mexican “voluntary legion”.

According to historian Lajos Tardy's above-cited collection published under the title *“The Hungarian Participants of the 1864-1867 Mexican “Volunteer Legion”*, 1047 soldiers of Hungarian nationality fought in Maximilian's army from unqualified privates to officers who were graduates of the Imperial and Royal Military Academy. Several of them filled particularly high positions, among others the military commanders of several important Mexican cities – also of Mexico City<sup>37</sup> - were of Hungarian origin. But we can also find Hungarians in the Emperor's immediate proximity. Maximilian, who had unlimited trust in the Hungarian soldiers, stated the following when selecting his guards: *“All fourteen members must be faithful Hungarians of unblemished character*

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<sup>35</sup> And so it occurred for the first time since 1849 that the hussar regiment “had to be commanded in Hungarian”, although the command language was German. TARDY: p. 147.

<sup>36</sup> Including the families of Hungarian mother tongue whose members were born in the territory of then Hungary, Transylvania and Austria. TARDY 1990: 147.

<sup>37</sup> The Military Commander of Mexico City was Major János Polák of Pápa. TARDY 1990: 147.



and qualification. They are also required to have a respectable appearance and to grow a full beard".<sup>38</sup>

Although it had not been premeditated, *cavalry corporal József Tüdös*, Maximilian's valet and confidant also found himself in a unique position: he was the only European witnessing – having to witness – the dethroned emperor's execution, then it was his sad duty to deliver the dead ruler's bloody shirt to the mourning mother.<sup>39</sup>

The military activities of captain Ede Pawlowsky, the commander of Maximilian's guards, as well as his geographic and military science related work deserves being mentioned – and it is deserving of being given full particulars of, too. Similarly to the medical and geographic oeuvre of Ede Szenger<sup>40</sup>, who was the contingent physician and the head physician of the Austrian military hospital. He continued his work as a private doctor in San Luis Potosi for a decade after Maximilian's execution, until homesickness prevailed and he returned to Budapest.

It would be possible to continue enumerating Hungarians, who documented – primarily regions almost entirely unknown in Hungary – their Mexican stay in a more or less scientific manner, with or without photos, hereby making the Hungarian military travel book and geographical literature more colourful.



Coat of Arms of the Second Mexican Empire

[https://webmail.uni-corvinus.hu/iwc/svc/wmap/attach/006\\_coat%20of%20arms.jpg?token=MsqpsXbNw9&mbox=INBOX&uid=27129&number=10&type=image&subtype=jpeg&process=html%2Cis%2Clink%2Ctarget%2Cbinhex](https://webmail.uni-corvinus.hu/iwc/svc/wmap/attach/006_coat%20of%20arms.jpg?token=MsqpsXbNw9&mbox=INBOX&uid=27129&number=10&type=image&subtype=jpeg&process=html%2Cis%2Clink%2Ctarget%2Cbinhex)

<sup>38</sup> Emperor Francis Joseph also complied with the request, so the fourteen Hungarian members of the Imperial Guards set sail on July 18<sup>th</sup> 1864 on board of the *Adria*. They departed three months earlier than the volunteer legion. TARDY 1990: 147.

<sup>39</sup> TARDY 1990: 147.

<sup>40</sup> SZÁLLÁSI: <http://www.ekor-lap.hu/egeszsegugy/2008/a-19-szazadi-mexiko-egy-magyar-orvos-szemevel>



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## Summary

Maximilian I, Emperor of Mexico attempted the impossible far from the European civilization, in a country with an entirely different history and cultural traditions. The young ruler, who is generally considered to have adhered to liberalism and to have been influenced by the progressive intellectual trends of his age, wished to create a state, whose system had been unknown in Latin America. The 1130 days of his rule proved to be insufficient to achieve it.

Although the extremely ambitious Maximilian possessed an outstanding education and extensive experience in leadership, his plans were doomed to failure the very moment he accepted the crown. This fact could only be obscured by his romantic personality.

His hands were tied from the very beginning in a political “game” which was played by Napoleon III, but also all the other great powers of the European continent. In the Miramare Convention, he became both financially and militarily committed to France, whose leader was seeking a king log for the sole purpose of realizing his own ambitions. However, history shows that both parties were mistaken about each other:



Maximilian did not behave as Napoleon III's king log, whereas the French Emperor burdened Mexico with heavy debts in exchange for military aid, however, he did not cede his armed forces to Maximilian, Napoleon violated the terms of a contract of his own making without further thought and withdrew his troops to Europe thereby sealing the fate of the Mexican Empire.

Despite all his reforms and modern thinking, the emperor – who was different in his appearance and considered as a foreigner, a European intruder – could never secure his place neither in the monarch's position, not in the heart of the Mexicans. So this way, Maximilian did not even have the slightest chance against the former president, Juarez who represented the "Mexican case" more authentically, at least at first sight. Especially, if we take the fact into consideration that the USA had ended its civil war and became fully capable of giving military support.

Taking all these into account, the little bit more than three years of the Second Mexican Empire can rather be interpreted as an adventure, and not a well-planned or a reasonable decision that ever had the potential of executing it with success. However, the significance of the enterprise from the prospective of the Hungarian military science is unquestionable.