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Charlottenburg Palace

Royal Prussia in Berlin

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Charlottenburg Palace: Prussian Splendour in Berlin

History and significance

In spite of devastating damage during the Second World War and a lengthy period of reconstruction, Charlottenburg is today the largest former residence of the Hohenzollern dynasty in the German capital.

Now a museum of international standing, it is a popular destination for excursions as well as a venue much in demand for cultural events and social functions alike.

A magnificent ensemble of buildings, interiors, artistic masterpieces and gardens provides a variety of insights into the history of the court of Brandenburg-Prussia from the Baroque period until the early 20th century. The turbulent architectural and social history of the extensive palace complex has been marked by numerous alterations during the 200 years of its existence, both as a royal residence and subsequent state administration, as well as by the ravages of war and lengthy reconstruction phases. On a cultural "journey through time", the visitor can directly experience 300 years of art and history in an authentic setting.

Standing in the Berlin district of Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf, the splendid palace and garden complex not only displays the culture of the Brandenburg-Prussian monarchy, but also symbolizes the turbulence of German history from the 17th century to the present day. The complex is dominated by the Old Palace with its monumental domed tower visible far and wide. The Great Courtyard is flanked by two further wings. The Chapel to the left is adjoined by the Great Orangery, while to the right, parts of the New Wing can be seen. Behind the central section lies the Baroque formal garden with the Carp Pond beyond.

Charlottenburg Palace: The Beginnings

From an electoral hunting lodge to a royal summer palace – Sophie Charlotte's "Court of the Muses"

The original building, a small palace named Lietzenburg or Lützenburg, was erected between 1695 and 1699 not far from the village of Lietzow, which was one Brandenburg mile (about 7.5 kilometres) from the centre of Berlin. It was commissioned by Electress Sophie Charlotte, the second wife of Elector Frederick III of Brandenburg, who in 1701 declared himself "King Frederick I in Prussia". In its modest dimensions, based on Dutch exemplars, this little summer residence, built to the plans of Johann Arnold Nering, accorded with her wishes for a rural retreat away from the official court life of the City Palace in Berlin. However, once she had been elevated to the status of first "Queen in Prussia", she decided that the little Lietzenburg no longer adequately reflected her new position. Extensive enlargements based on the designs of the Swedish architect Johann Friedrich Eosander culminated in a splendid Baroque three-wing complex in line with the latest French taste. From 1701/02, the main axis

A drawing by C. Reichmann (fl. early 18th c.) of the view from the Lietzenburg courtyard in 1704 shows the original building by Johann Arnold Nering (1659–95) still without the tall domed tower begun in 1710/12. On 11 July 1699, Frederick III's birthday, the Palace was opened with splendid festivities ending in a fireworks display. The electoral couple and their guests had great fun, "leaping, so to speak, over tables and benches".

"She has big, gentle eyes, wonderfully thick black hair, eyebrows looking as if they had been drawn, a well-proportioned nose, incarnadine lips, very good teeth, and a lively complexion." The portrait of Sophia Charlotte painted in 1702/05 by Friedrich Wilhelm Weidemann (1668–1750) confirms contemporary opinion of her imposing appearance. As the daughter of Duke Ernest Augustus of Brunswick-Lüneburg and his consort Sophia of the Palatinate, when this picture was painted she had been married for dynastic reasons in 1684 to the future Elector Frederick III of Brandenburg at Herrenhausen Palace in Hanover. Sophia Charlotte was a piece of great good fortune for the up-and-coming princely capital of Berlin. She brought cosmopolitan flair, taste and charm to the electoral court. Having sought at first to promote her family's political aims, after being crowned first Prussian Queen in 1701 she retreated to the domain of intellectual leadership at Lietzenburg.

Johann Böcklin (fl. early 18th c.) created this view of Charlottenburg from the courtyard side on the basis of drawings by Johann Friedrich Eosander (1669–1728). The Great Courtyard with its imposing approach for prominent guests takes account of the greater demands of court ceremonial following the elevation of the elector to royal status.

was extended both to the east and to the west, and provided on the garden side with a prestigious show-façade on the model of Louis XIV's palace at Versailles.

The Great Courtyard on the city side is enclosed by two further wings at right angles to the main building, guard-houses, and wrought-iron railings crowned by the stars of the Prussian Order of the Black Eagle. It was in this courtyard that the equestrian statue of the "Great Elector" Frederick William of Brandenburg (Frederick III's father) was re-erected in 1951 after spending the war years in storage. The central section of the original palace is dominated by the domed tower, approximately 50 metres tall, with its lantern topped by a

The first official portrait of Frederick III as the new Elector of Brandenburg, painted c.1688 by Gedeon Romandon (d. 1697), already gives some inkling of the ruler's desire for a crown.

The statue of the Great Elector, commissioned by Frederick III to honour the achievements of his father, was modelled by Andreas Schlüter (1659–1714) between 1697 and 1700, and cast by Johann Jacobi (1661–1726). It originally stood on the Long Bridge in the grounds of the Berlin City Palace and is one of Europe's most important equestrian statues. The four slaves chained to the base of the plinth, added only in 1708/09, symbolize the four humours and the enemies subjugated by the Great Elector.

weather-vane in the form of a gilded figure of Fortuna, the goddess of good luck. Two orangeries were planned as winter quarters for citrus plants, but only the Great Orangery on the western side was actually built, being completed in 1712.

In place of the planned eastern orangery, Frederick the Great had the New Wing erected as a summer palace, before deciding that he preferred Sanssouci in Potsdam. Since 1977 a bronze statue of the king, after a 1792 marble original by Johann Gottfried Schadow, has stood in front of this New Wing.

Sophia Charlotte's Lietzenburg was not an official summer residence, but her private retreat. The rooms are decorated with damask and brocade hangings in different colours, while Far

The regular alternation of slender mirrors with green damask in the Glass Bedchamber of Sophia Charlotte's First Apartment (room 118) brings an illusion of the garden into the room. Today, magnificently carved and gilt display furniture, along with a silver mirror from Augsburg, still recall the original elaborate splendour.

In the Writing Cabinet of Sophia Charlotte's Second Apartment (room 112) her white lacquer writing-desk with its chinoiserie painting is still extant. Made probably in Holland c.1700, it is an expression of a sensuous and exotically fantastic dream world, which, as a fashion for all things Chinese, was to be a model for Europe's courtly society for more than 100 years.

Right: The copy of the statue of Frederick the Great after Johann Gottfried Schadow (1764–1850) in front of the New Wing shows the king as general, legislator and peacemaker.

Eastern porcelain and exotically painted lacquer furniture are in tune with the then prevailing fashion for chinoiserie. The ceilings of Nering's First Apartment for Sophia Charlotte are characterized by gilt plasterwork, while Eosander's Second Apartment reflects the new, French-influenced taste for ceiling-paintings. It was the express wish of the electress that high glazed doors provide direct access from the built architecture to the elaborately designed "nature" of the gardens.

The daily routine of Sophia Charlotte's predominantly youthful courtiers and guests was characterized by relaxed parties, balls, garden festivals and

The elaborate but delicate ceiling painting of the Golden Cabinet in Sophia Charlotte's Second Apartment (room 109) depicts figurative representations in the then (c. 1700) highly modern French style, with its vegetal running motifs. The god Apollo, hovering on the clouds in the centre, is surrounded by the allegories of music, poetry, architecture and painting—a mythological image of the earthly court of the muses maintained by the chatelaine of Charlottenburg.

In 1846 Adolph Menzel (1815–1905) illustrated the famous "philosophical strolls" which Sophia Charlotte took in the company of Leibniz in the Lietzenburg palace gardens. The conversations are said to have inspired one of the scholar's major works, the "Théodicée", to answer the question of how a loving and omnipotent God can permit evil in the world. Time and again the knowledge-hungry queen had posed this question.

masquerades. At the same time, the electress and later queen would engage in discussion of the philosophical topics of the day with renowned scholars and theologians. She succeeded in enticing her childhood tutor, the polymath Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, to Berlin, and in 1700 the two of them persuaded the elector to found the Academy of Sciences. Her particular passion and talent, however, lay in the field of music, above all Italian opera, performances of which she sometimes accompanied herself on the harpsichord. Well-known composers such as Attilio Ariosti and Giovanni Bonocini would spend time "on loan" to her court.

During a tour of France lasting several months in the company of her mother, the future Electress Sophia of Hanover, which also included sojourns in Paris and Versailles, the 11-year-old Sophia Charlotte was the guest of her cousin and godmother Elisabeth Charlotte of Orleans. A German princess, originally Liselotte of the Palatinate, this sister-in-law of Louis XIV was regarded as a connoisseur of modern fashions. In her extensive, in some cases sharp-tongued and less-than-genteel letters to her relations at home, she presented a lively picture of life at the French court. Louis Elle (1648–1717) portrayed her in 1673 in hunting gear, the costume of her favourite pastime.

Extensions to the building after elevation to royal status led Sophia Charlotte to abandon her First Apartment on the garden side and to establish herself in 1702 in a Second Apartment on the side facing the courtyard. In the Golden Cabinet (room 109) there is a youthful portrait of her above the fireplace. It may well have been painted during her tour of France in 1679. Delicate lacquer furniture in the Chinese style underline the private character of this intimate room.

Sophia Charlotte's white harpsichord is on display at Charlottenburg (room 103) as the most valuable token of her enthusiasm for music. It was built by the Berlin court instrument-maker Michael Mietke (d. 1719), the coloured chinoiserie painting being attributed to Gerard Dagly (fl. 1697–1714). In 1702, the queen wrote to the director of music in Hanover, Agostino Steffani, about music thus: "It is a loyal friend that never leaves one and never deceives one, it never betrays one and has never been cruel. On the contrary, all the charm and delight of heaven is there. Friends by contrast are lukewarm or unreliable, and lovers ungrateful."

Top left: Among the extant contents of the Toilet Chamber in Sophia Charlotte's Second Apartment (room 110) are portraits of foreign or unusual personalities—an indication of the queen's tolerance and cosmopolitanism. Of particular importance are the portraits in the bottom row of Matveyeva, the wife of the Russian ambassador, the Greek Orthodox bishop Vidola, and the maid of honour von Pöllnitz, who was a close friend and confidante of Sophia Charlotte.

The light background of the in part original ceiling of the Toilet Chamber in Sophia Charlotte's Second Apartment (room 110) is covered by grotesques painted in tempera. These novel ceiling compositions, based on the style of the French painters Jean Berain I (1640–1711) and Claude Audran III (1658–1734), must surely have been executed at the behest of the "francophile" queen.

The portrait of the crown prince Frederick William, the future "soldier king", painted in 1702 by Anthoni Schoonjans (1655–1726), depicting the heir to the throne as David with a sling, is part of the original decoration of the bedroom of his mother Sophia Charlotte in her Second Apartment. Both a portrait and an historical picture, the depiction links the Old Testament shepherd boy with the archetypal Baroque display portrait, with the purpose of conveying a political message: just as David was God's chosen successor to the throne, so Frederick William was God's chosen crown prince for Prussia.

Bottom left: In 1697 Sophia Charlotte succeeded in enticing the Italian composer and instrumentalist Attilio Ariosti, a Servite monk, to her court. In 1702 he was portrayed by Anthoni Schoonjans (1655–1726) seated at a lacquer harpsichord decorated in the Chinese style.

Charlottenburg Palace up to 1713

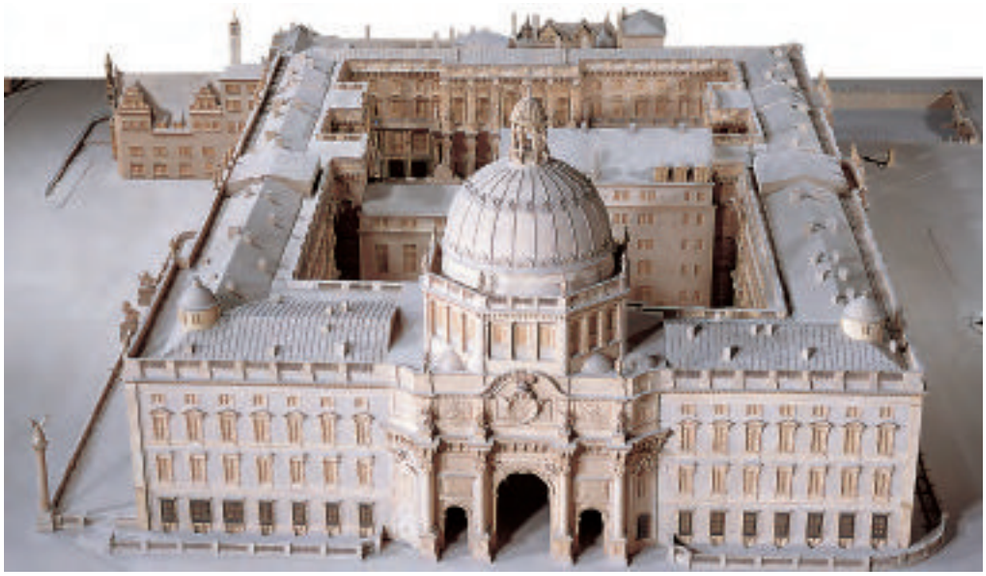
Baroque magnificence – the Old Palace as the country residence of King Frederick I

Following the early death of the "philosopher queen" Sophia Charlotte – she died in 1705 aged just 37 – the lights went out on the cultural life of the Lietzenburg. In honour of his late consort, King Frederick I – as he now was – renamed the palace Charlottenburg. The little settlement that had grown up in front of it was given municipal privileges and also named Charlottenburg. From then on until his death in 1713, it became his favourite country residence, also providing a venue for official state functions such as chivalric ceremonies and audiences with ambassadors, which hitherto had been reserved for the City Palace in Berlin. In 1702, even before the queen's death, considerable alterations to the palace interior had been initiated. On the French model, a strict hierarchy of rooms provided the framework for the requirements of ceremony. The state rooms, which included, in addition to the ballrooms, galleries and audience chambers, also the king's study, bedroom and bathroom, were in some cases provided with anterooms, designed to emphasize the distance between the monarch and those requesting an audience. The Palace Chapel symbolized the link between throne and altar, characteristic of the Prussian ruling house. In order to enhance the unfolding magnificence and the display of power, the rooms were arranged in an enfilade, in other words, all the doors were along a single axis, so that all 13 rooms on the garden side can be traversed in a straight line. The culmination of the 140-metre enfilade is the famous Porcelain Cabinet designed by Eosander, created with the intention of impressing visitors with an overwhelming abundance of Far Eastern porcelain displayed in geometric architectural fashion.

Right: In c.1712 the court painter Antoine Pesne (1683–1757) was summoned from France to paint a splendid Baroque state portrait of King Frederick I with his royal insignia on the silver throne. While still Elector of Brandenburg, he realized that only as king would he be taken seriously by other European monarchs. On 18 January 1701 he crowned himself "King in Prussia", thus achieving his goal. He had more than 20 summer residences erected around Berlin, and commissioned the magnificent extensions to Charlottenburg.

The Prussian crown jewels, made in Berlin c.1700 for the coronation in Königsberg in 1701, are today kept in the Crown Cabinet (room 236) at Charlottenburg. They include the solid gold frames of the crowns of Frederick and Sophia Charlotte, which were once ornamented with precious stones, pearls and diamonds. As the jewels were repeatedly removed in order to present them to members of the royal house for "other purposes", over the years they were lost. The body of the diamond-studded eagle at the top of the sceptre is formed by a magnificent ruby, probably a gift from Tsar Peter I of Russia. The blue enamel orb, crowned by a cross, is enclosed in bands of gold studded with jewels.

From 2 to 16 July 1709, Frederick I received a state visit from Elector Augustus I (known as "the Strong") of Saxony–for a time he was also King Augustus II of Poland–and King Frederick IV of Denmark. The aim of the meeting was a defensive alliance directed at the king of Sweden. During this illustrious visit, courtly entertainments were held in Berlin, Potsdam, Caputh, Oranienburg and Charlottenburg. In memory of the important occasion, Frederick I commissioned Samuel Theodor Gericke (1665–1730) to paint a joint portrait, which was hung in Charlottenburg Palace. It documents not only the political alliance of the three rulers, but also the reception of Frederick I into the circle of the venerable monarchies of Europe.



By erecting magnificent buildings, Frederick I saw his rule immortalized. As early as 1698, with his impending coronation in view, he commissioned Andreas Schlüter (c.1659–1714) and Johann Friedrich Eosander (1669–1728) to draw up plans for the rebuilding of the Berlin City Palace, the old chief seat of the Hohenzollern dynasty, as the most important Baroque residence north of the Alps. The dome, constructed by Friedrich August Stüler (1800–1865) between 1844 and 1852, was visible from afar and gave the Palace its characteristic appearance until the wartime bombing and the subsequent demolition of the building in 1950. After the destruction of the City Palace it fell to Charlottenburg to "deputize" for it. A model kept at Charlottenburg (room 123) still recalls the most important palace of the House of Hohenzollern.

Following the serious damage sustained in the war, the ceiling decoration of Frederick I's Audience Chamber (room 101) was restored between 1975 and 1977. The groups of white figures symbolize learning and the arts. Brussels tapestries woven c. 1730 depict scenes from Plutarch's lives of classical heroes. Lacquer furniture and Far Eastern porcelain underline the fascination of Baroque Europe with chinoiserie.

The oak carvings in the Old Gallery (room 120) were probably executed by an Englishman, Charles King (d. 1756). In rough chronological order, oval portraits of members of the House of Hohenzollern, from the first Elector of Brandenburg to Frederick the Great and his consort Elisabeth Christine, adorn a hall which is also known as the Ancestral Gallery. The chimney-breast is dominated by the full-length portrait of Frederick I, surrounded by his three consorts Elisabeth Henrietta of Hesse-Kassel, Sophia Charlotte of Hanover and Sophia Louisa of Mecklenburg-Schwerin-Grabow.

The magnificent gallery-like Red Chamber (room 100) was probably used as a conference room by Frederick I and his ministers. The walls are hung with red damask wallpaper and gold braid. Above the doors there are portraits of the royal couple, while in the panels at the base of the walls the Prussian Eagle and the Horse of Hanover frame the monogram of Sophia Charlotte in reference to the marital alliance of the two dynasties.

The Baroque state rooms also include the King's Bedroom (room 96). A remarkable feature here is the weather vane on the chimney-breast. In the adjoining Bathroom (room 97) oak-panelled walls surround the sunken white-marble basin, adorned with bronze taps in the form of dolphins. Between the two rooms there was a narrow passage used by the servants.

Right: 5 December 1706 saw the solemn consecration of the Charlottenburg Palace Chapel (room 94). Before her death Sophia Charlotte had approved the plans of Johann Friedrich Eosander (1669–1728). As the architect reported, she wanted "the place she dedicated to her God to be the most richly decorated of any in her palace". Opposite the royal gallery is the carved oaken pulpit, and beneath it the richly gilded communion table by Charles King (d. 1756). Above the royal gallery, which is separated from the Chapel by sliding windows, two hovering geniuses hold aloft a huge crown and Prussian Eagle to proclaim the glorious kingdom of Frederick I. This balanced presentation of temporal and spiritual power, of throne and altar, was in accord with the Reformed Calvinist faith of the Hohenzollern and their view of their divine right to rule. The ceiling painting executed in 1708 by Anthonie Coxcie (post 1650–c.1720), was totally reconstructed after its destruction in 1943 during the Second World War, as was the Chapel itself. The restored organ, dating from 1706, was built by Arp Schnitger (1648–1719).

The famous Charlottenburg Porcelain Cabinet (room 95)—the concept being the glorification of the rule of Frederick I and his newly created kingdom—is one of the oldest and at the same time largest of its kind in Germany. As an outstanding witness to the 18th-century fashion for chinoiserie, it was intended not only to impress the visitor with its extravagant abundance of porcelain, but also with the extent of

the kingdom's international relations as symbolized by the acquisitions. Reflections framed in gold multiply to great effect the unique collection of Chinese and Japanese treasures. Following enormous losses in the war, the current stock of porcelain comprises some 2,700 items, predominantly from the K'ang-hsi-period (1622–1722). The chief motif of the ceiling painting "Dawn Drives out the Darkness", executed in 1706 by Anthonie Coxcie (post 1650–c.1720) and seriously damaged in 1943, is the goddess Aurora surrounded by personifications of the continents, signs of the zodiac and allegories of the seasons.

The painting, executed by Dismar Degen (known to be alive c. 1730–1751) in c. 1739/40 shows the front of Monbijou Palace facing the River Spree. On the right in the background can be seen the tower of the still extant Sophia Church in the Mitte district of Berlin. In 1710 Sophia Dorothea was presented with the little jewel Monbijou by her father-in-law Frederick I. After 1877, the palace housed the Hohenzollern Museum. Following serious damage by air raids in 1943, the remains of the building were demolished between 1957 and 1960.

Some of the paintings, among them portraits of the queen's ladies-in-waiting, in Charlottenburg (room 228) recall Monbijou Palace, Sophia Dorothea and the royal family, as do certain items of furniture, for example the so-called "cradle of Frederick the Great".

The double portrait of the two-year-old crown prince Frederick (later Frederick the Great) and his sister Wilhelmine (1709–1758) was commissioned by Sophia Dorothea from Antoine Pesne (1683–1757). It shows her two eldest children, who throughout their lives were bound by ties of love, friendship and mutual reverence. While Frederick with his drum and the Prussian Order of the Eagle is intended to embody the "military element" of his future role as general and ruler, the gravely pacing five-year-old girl is carrying flowers, the attributes of femininity.

In this portrait painted c.1733 in the studio of Antoine Pesne (1683–1757), Frederick William I is depicted as he liked to see himself, as a military commander with his staff of office.

Queen Sophia Dorothea, like her aunt Sophia Charlotte, was a scion of the proudly aristocratic House of Guelph. After a luxurious upbringing in Hanover, she found it hard to adjust to the parsimonious atmosphere at the Prussian court after her husband ascended the throne. She is shown here as the young crown princess in a portrait executed c.1710 by Friedrich Wilhelm Weidemann (1668–1750).

On his death in 1713, Frederick I was succeeded by his son Frederick William I. At Charlottenburg, all new building activities were stopped, although maintenance work was continued as necessary. The parsimonious "soldier king" used the palace solely for receiving high-ranking state visitors and for magnificent family celebrations.

While the new king, whose tastes lay in the military and hunting spheres, invited his friends to come and smoke with him at his palace in Königs Wusterhausen, his consort Sophia Dorothea preferred the little summer residence of Monbijou, on the banks of the River Spree in Berlin. In this private retreat, with its fine collection of works of art, she created a "counter-culture" in which her ten children also spent periods of their childhood. In particular the crown prince (later King Frederick II) and his favourite sister Wilhelmine, the future margravine of Bayreuth, enjoyed the cultivated atmosphere of Monbijou. The unbridgeable difference in character between Frederick William I and his eldest son led to major tensions. In 1736, the latter was given permission to maintain his own court at Rheinsberg Palace. This place of literary, philosophical and musical study in the company of selected friends provided the pattern for Frederick's first seat of government when he ascended the throne in 1740: Charlottenburg.