

Prussian Army Soldiers and the Seven Years' War: The Psychology of Honour. By Katrin Möbius and Sascha Möbius. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. Pp. 240. Cloth \$80.50. ISBN 978-1350081574.

Eighteenth-century Prussia readily evokes images of obedience unto death, harsh discipline, and royal autocracy. For more than two decades now, historians have sought to rectify the notion that the soldiers of Frederick the Great's army were mindless automatons. According to Christopher Duffy, Dennis Showalter, T. C. W. Blanning, and most recently Ilya Berkovich, not coercion but a dedication to their profession made these men endure the hardships of war. Military life had its own rewards, which included comradeship and pride in their martial proficiency. Berkovich, in particular, highlights the complex, interlocking system of incentives and sanctions that sustained the morale of old-regime armies from the moment of enlistment to the battlefield. What made recruits—be they conscripts (*Kantonisten*) or mercenaries—expose themselves to canister shot and bayonet charges was in part rigorous drill practice but also the distinct honor cultures that regiments cultivated. Far from being the unique property of a noble officer elite, honor pervaded all rungs of the early modern social hierarchy. Members of the armed forces possessed the gentleman's privilege to carry a sword and expected to be treated with the dignity that befit their training.

Katrin and Sascha Möbius knowingly build on the pioneering work of this “new school” in military historiography. Many of their book's themes are therefore familiar. Like Berkovich, they foreground the importance of emotions and accord honor a central heuristic place in their study. There are also obvious methodological similarities in the reliance on soldiers' memoirs, letters, and diaries. Some of these sources are well known (such as Ulrich Bräker's account of his time with the Prussian colors), whereas others can be considered virgin discoveries. The inclusion of unpublished reports from contemporary Spanish observers adds an interesting outsider's perspective to the mix.

The first chapter of the book sets the stage with an overview of the Prussian army's organization, recruitment, training, armament, tactics, and social history more generally. This segment is followed up with a discursive deconstruction of the ego documents. To that end, the authors trace how soldiers gave meaning to their experiences through the medium of writing. Cultural conventions dictated which emotions could be articulated and in what manner. In general, shameful or—by biblical standards—sinful acts went unmentioned lest they besmirch the honor of the men and their regiments. At the same time, metaphors like “heat” abounded to describe soldiers' intense affective reactions to combat because—as Möbius and Möbius perceptively point out—often “panic cannot be explained rationally, so much [so] that it can be used to exculpate the losing side from accusations of cowardice” (105).

The third and final chapter builds on these multilayered literary representations of violence with an analysis of why Enlightenment soldiers fought. The authors suggest that their contempt for death became one of the main sources of martial honor. Another was their symbiotic relationship with the monarchy, whose reputation hinged on the victories and defeats of the army. The authors throw this connection into relief with a particularly intriguing discussion of military music. Frederick the Great, a passionate flute player, rewarded regiments for valor by awarding them prestigious instruments that elevated their position in the military scale of honor. A much-coveted distinction was the trumpet, for it represented the “queen of baroque instruments” (152).

Despite thematic overlaps with earlier scholarship, *Prussian Army Soldiers and the Seven Years' War* sets its own accents. Although Berkovich contends that the honor of the rank and file derived in part from their self-stylization as romantic antiheroes in opposition to civilian values, Möbius and Möbius stress the soldiers' continuing ties to the communities from whence they came. Because conscripts usually hailed the same recruiting districts, companies tended to replicate the close-knit social networks of home. A soldier's place in peasant society carried equal weight with his military rank in some contexts, and impressing relatives and friends with stories of his honorable conduct mattered a great deal to him. Secondly, the two authors repeatedly insist that the Prussian army of the Frederician period must be viewed on its own terms, rather than as the agents of a "military Enlightenment," which carried over into the age of mass conscription. National consciousness remained underdeveloped, and masculinity played a marginal role in the way soldiers assessed one another's performance in combat. In short, there was "no male component in their concept of honour in battle" (140).

To be sure, broad assertions such as this stretch the available evidence a bit far. The reader might quibble, too, with some of the editorial choices. For instance, although all the branches of the Frederician army are mentioned, the ego documents on which the findings of the study rest come almost exclusively from the infantry. To what extent can they be considered emblematic of the experiences of the Prussian soldier *tout court*? A few words on this methodological issue would have been welcome. Furthermore, the order of themes in chapters 2 and 3 is not immediately apparent. Perhaps this is due to the dual authorship of the book. Ruminations on the soldierly honor code become somewhat repetitive in places, and the transition from the excellent analytical dissection of emotions in combat to the descriptive coverage of "Little War" in chapter 2 is rather stark.

Nevertheless, at only 172 pages of main text, this book offers an accessible introduction to the cultural history of the Prussian army under Frederick the Great. Its sophisticated treatment of the sources in light of the latest research renders a great service to the historiography. A bonus for teachers at Anglophone universities are the twelve translated soldiers' letters in the appendix, which really bring to life the mentality of ordinary Prussian soldiers. It is therefore to be hoped that the book finds a wide readership.

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Experimenting at the Boundaries of Life: Organic Vitality in Germany around 1800. By Joan Steigerwald. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019. Pp. 460. Cloth \$55.00. ISBN 978-0822945536.

Historians of biology have long wrestled with how to understand the categories of "organic vitality" (*Lebenskraft*) and "organicism" in Germany from roughly the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries. Scholarship by Timothy Lenoir, Robert Richards, John Zammito, and others has highlighted the impact of German idealism, romanticism, and studies of organic phenomena in a range of disciplines (chemistry, comparative physiology, etc.) on the forging of a new "science of life" during this period. Yet, as Joan Steigerwald