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Review of *Prussian Army Soldiers and the Seven Years' War: The Psychology of Honour* by Katrin Möbius & Sascha Möbius

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Nonetheless, authoritative and incisive, and spanning centuries and vast geographical distances, this beautifully illustrated book brings to life the incredible variety and richness of the crusaders' material worlds. It sets the new standard for entry-level books on the crusades.

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Katrin Möbius & Sascha Möbius, *Prussian Army Soldiers and the Seven Years' War: The Psychology of Honour*. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2020. Viii + 228 pp. 4 illustrations. 1 Table. ISBN 978-1350081574 (hardback). Price £85.

Recent research has transformed our understanding of the motivations of eighteenth-century common soldiers. English-language readers will be most familiar with Ilya Berkovich's book *Motivation in War* (2017), but there have also been many important works by German historians such as Jürgen Kloosterhuis, Jörg Muth, Michael Sikora, Martin Winter and Sascha Möbius. Sascha Möbius and Katrin Möbius have now provided an expanded and re-worked English version of his 2007 book *Mehr Angst vor dem Offizier als vor dem Feind?* The original German work showed that the tactics of the Prussian army during the Seven Years War (1756-63) were much more flexible than previously thought, and that they reflected the decisions of officers in particular situations and the willingness of the soldiers to follow them. It also disproved the idea that Prussian soldiers were motivated only by the threat of brutal punishments. Möbius showed that the threat of force (though rarely its actual use) did help keep Prussian soldiers in battle formation, but that the soldiers' sense of honour, their religious faith, and the encouragement given to them by their officers were much more important.

This English version retains much of the original text, but draws on new letters from Prussian common soldiers. Those who can read German and who are primarily interested in battle tactics may find the original book more approachable, but the English version draws new conclusions about the motivations of Prussian soldiers, asking, for instance, whether they were motivated by concepts of manliness and examines in detail the motivational role of music. It also presents twelve translated letters from Prussian common soldiers.

BOOK REVIEWS

The work contributes to a growing literature which emphasizes that common soldiers in the eighteenth century were part of the broader contemporary society of orders, and that they fought to win honour and material gain commensurate to their position in that society, just as noble officers and rulers did. This book focuses on letters from cantonists: native Prussian subjects conscripted into the army. The Möbiuses argue that 'Kantonisten . . . were not only bound to the men marching and fighting with them, but also to their families and the rural community' (p.34). They fought to defend their communities and uphold their own standing within those communities, as well as from a religious-inspired sense of duty to their king. The achievements of their units and of the Prussian army as a whole reflected honour on the soldiers, while 'dishonourable behaviour – or even the suspicion thereof – would be transmitted home' by other cantonists (p.78). The Möbiuses even argue that, since cantonists did not mention their comrades in letters unless they were from the same village, the concept of small-group cohesion did not apply to the eighteenth-century Prussian army. This claim is less believable. Soldiers' letters were written for the specific audience of their home communities, and it is therefore not necessarily surprising that they should focus on comrades from the same community.

The book brings vividly to life the terrifying experience of serving in the battles of the Seven Years' War. Prussian casualties during the war were so great that, for individual soldiers, 'it was nearly impossible to make it through alive' (p.20). In comparison to the heroic expectations of some modern soldiers, Prussian soldiers approached war without any illusions. They processed their fear overwhelmingly in religious terms. One regiment's thanksgiving text after battle was Romans 8: 36-7: 'we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered' (p.183). The Möbiuses note that the hymn *Ich bin ja Herr in deiner Macht*, which the Prussians sang while advancing to the attack at the battle of Zorndorf, 'is centred around the expectation of death' (p.156). Fear was considered perfectly honourable, and soldiers reported the danger they had faced to their relatives in detail as proof of God's protection of them, and saw the prayers of others on their behalf as their best protection from future harm.

The book contains some repetition, and the writing misses some of the flair of the German original. It is however a valuable work for those studying the social history of eighteenth-century Europe or examining the motivation of soldiers in any age, and it will provide Anglophone students with an introduction to the common soldiers of the eighteenth-century Prussian army.

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