

Peter Baumgart, Bernhard R. Kroener, Heinz Stübig (Hg.), Die preußische Armee. Zwischen Ancien Régime und Reichsgründung, Paderborn (Ferdinand Schöningh) 2008, XIV–285 p., ISBN 978-3-506-75660-2, EUR 39,90.

rezensiert von/compte rendu rédigé par
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The origins of this book are conferences held in 2002 and 2004 by the Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur preußischen Geschichte on the development of the Prussian military system in the 19th century. The published proceedings are described as part of an effort to bring the study of military history in Germany into the academic mainstream – not in its traditional format of generals and battles, but as part of a »new military history« concerned as well with cultural, social, and economic questions.

The volume's fourteen essays fulfill that intention admirably. The contributors are a who's who of cutting-edge young scholars – Jürgen Angelow, Michael Sikora, Sabrina Müller – complemented by such long-acknowledged experts as Christoph Allmayer-Beck and Bernhard R. Kroener. The first section addresses the Prussian army of the Ancien Régime. Kroener's challenge to Otto Büsch's long-standing argument for Prussia's »social militarization« merits particular attention-particularly in the context of Rolf Straubel's demonstration that the relationship between army and civil administration was more distant than Büsch acknowledges. In the same context Otto Neugebauer stresses the symbiotic relationship between the Crown and its regional and local officials at the expense of the conventional emphasis on their rivalries. Even Frederick William I, Peter Baumgart asserts, was less the soldier-king of myth, and more the facilitator of Prussia's internal development as the key to great-power status. Michael Rohrschneider provides a useful footnote in his discussion of indirect French and Swedish influences on the Prussian army through the person of the Old Dessauer.

Two essays address Prussia's post-Frederician military profile. Heinz Stübig presents a spectrum of ideas and reforms pointing the way to establishing the army as an instrument of a developing Prussian nation by generating enthusiasm for military service. And Allmayer-Beck demonstrates that at least from an Austrian perspective, the Prussian army remained a formidable instrument of war until the Jena campaign.

Part II carries the Prussian military experience through the 19th century. Michael Sikora demonstrates in successive contributions that the army of the Era of Reform represented a modernization and a rationalization of its Ancien Régime predecessor, as opposed to a structural break with the past. The post-liberation reconciliation of the military and a developing bourgeois society was correspondingly characterized by a high level of everyday friction. Sabrina Müller concretizes the line of argument in an excellent overview of the army's function during 1848/49 as an instrument of state power.

Wolfgang Petter addresses the midcentury military reforms in the context of a general consideration of the role of mass armies in future war. The conclusion that a second-line force could not be entrusted with first-line responsibilities played as much a part in the Landwehr's relegation to rear-echelon missions as did the often-cited political issues. The increasing importance of reserve units after 1871 did not, however, mean the Landwehr's restoration to its original role and status. Jürgen Angelow's contribution is a useful counterpoint, establishing the Austrian army's escalating respect for Prussian methods and effectiveness in the context of the Wars of Unification.

Harald Müller and Heinz Stübig combine to show how the Military Law of 1874 and the development of the Prussian General Staff as an instrument of military leadership combined to continue and extend the division between army and society. That development reflected less a long-term design than Bismarck's specific political manipulations in one case, and the development of specialist professionalism in the other. The consequences were, however, no less significant for the growing encysting of military planning and military development as the »long nineteenth century« segued into the Great War.

While a concluding general essay would reinforce its theme, the anthology's contributions combine effectively to show that the relationships among army, state, and society in Prussia were more complex, less episodic, and less synergistic, than has generally been acknowledged. Individually the essays are well reasoned, well supported, and well presented. It is appropriate, however, to suggest that they reflect a common shortcoming of German scholarship in this field by being culturally self-referencing. In particular the authors tend to overlook the contributions to this subject by their English-language colleagues. As military history challenges its Eurocentric perspective and national frameworks, linguistic and intellectual flexibility in any forms are a welcome contribution.