

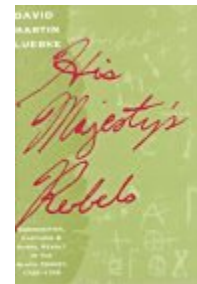
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in the Humanities & Social Sciences



David Martin Luebke. *His Majesty's Rebels: Communities, Factions & Rural Revolt in the Black Forest, 1725-1745*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997. xiii + 270 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-3346-7.

Reviewed by John Spielman (Haverford College)
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Peasant Against Peasant in *Vorderoesterreich*

A surge of monographic literature on central European peasantry in the early modern period has vastly expanded our understanding of the dynamics of rural life in the region from Switzerland and eastern France, through southern and central Germany, and including the Austrian duchies of the Habsburgs. Most of these studies are appropriately very locally based, as is the case with David Luebke's book centering on the "Salpeter Wars" in County Hauenstein in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. There are now enough such studies from the past decade and a half to begin to make some useful general statements about the overall patterns of change. One of the major virtues of this book is that Luebke has surveyed the field broadly enough to begin making some of those larger comparisons and generalizations.

Although Hauenstein was a relatively small (population about 20,000), economically unimportant part of the ancient Habsburg patrimony in the Schwarzwald region, its peculiar indigenous institutions, including an elected governing council of *Octovirs* chosen freely by all adult males, and its relation to the imperial crown as a dynastic territory with ecclesiastical seigneurial dominance in large parts of the county by the abbey of St. Blasien and the convent of St. Fridolin, produced a complex set of competing and overlapping jurisdictions. As elsewhere, landlords relied heavily on peasants to do much of their administrative work for them, bringing malefactors to court and collecting dues and taxes.

David Luebke's central argument is fairly simple: in-

creasing stratification of peasant society, landlords' efforts to increase their income from the land, and the administrative intrusion of the Habsburg state combined to create a situation which the peasants could manipulate to pursue their own interest in controlling their land and overcoming the burdens of serfdom. Conventional wisdom would identify a "peasant community" seeking to secure its interests. Here, however, the situation was quite different. The peasants divided into two competing factions, both created by incompatible views represented in the uppermost sectors of the peasant population, the richest peasants, and above all the semi-professional members of society, millers, blacksmiths, and those who acted as agents for the landlords.

There were many precipitating incidents that rigidified these factions, but the clearest issue had to do with the question of the manumission of serfdom. The *salpeterisch* faction was the most radical, and opposed the negotiation of a 1738 treaty which would purchase the manumission of hereditary servile status, *Leibeigenschaft*, from St. Blasien for a substantial single payment. These "rebels" insisted that the peasants of the whole county were inherently free and serfdom had been introduced in violation of custom. Therefore, an illegal status of servitude could not be remitted, and the purchase of manumission from the abbey was treasonous. Their program involved direct resistance against the landlords, and an appeal to the emperor in Vienna as their ruling prince. The opposing faction, whose leaders were from the same upper class of the peasantry, were the *muellerisch* peas-

ants, who wanted to achieve the same changes in their status, but through the existing legal institutions and by bargaining with the landlords.

The relative strength of each faction waxed and waned, but their tactics were such that whichever had the upper hand in one part of the county at any given time faced relentless opposition by the other. The *muellerisch* faction kept control of the elected offices most of the time with the help of St. Blasien and, on several occasions, Austrian troops sent to put down violence in the county. The *salpeterisch* rebels, on the other hand, relied heavily on mass rallies to whip up support, and on carefully orchestrated pilgrimages to shrines of the Virgin Mary to show the depth of their adherence to the ruling dynasty's pious veneration. They also managed to finance several deputations to Vienna to seek personal interviews with Charles VI. In spite of their consistent failure, they perpetuated a myth of the "good emperor" who would intervene and restore the traditional freedoms of the county.

By the late 1730s animosity between these competing factions replaced their common opposition to the encroachments of authority, and the result was a confrontation which amounted to a small civil war. The rebels indulged in violent purges of the peasant representatives and supporters of the *muellerisch* compromise. This offered the occasion for the imperial government to intervene and restore order by suppressing the rebel faction. The real victim of the war, however, was not just a band of peasant leaders but their whole system of customary institutions which had once provided a large degree of local self rule.

The bare outlines of the story form a core around which Luebke builds layers of analysis: demographic, economic, cultural, social, ideological. As usual, most of the sources for this are from the authorities, but it is also clear that the peasant leaders were literate and voluble. That the rebels' views were often illogical and contradictory did not necessarily reduce their appeal. The authorities themselves had created images which could be manipulated against them; in the case of the Habsburgs, the myth of the dynasty's hereditary benevolence and its Marian idolatry. While the deputations sent to Vi-

enna at considerable expense seem in retrospect quixotically futile, to the peasants themselves they were a great deal cheaper than decades of litigation in unsympathetic courts in the county.

In the analysis of rebel rhetoric Luebke makes some very interesting suggestions in his complex and deeply informed discussion of the nature of popular ideology. When the *salpeterisch* peasants attacked their legalistic opponents, they had not merely to interpret custom and tradition but from time to time actually invent it to suit the situation. Their rhetoric, while apparently consistent with their vaunted loyalty to the ruling monarch, nonetheless resulted in a view that was opposed to all domination. In this regard, Luebke takes a well-aimed swipe at the current debate about "acculturation" and "social disciplining" which focuses on the manner in which the social elite established dominance over popular culture by both suppressing and coopting those aspects in it which were a threat to the established oligarchy and coopting other aspects which were not. The uprisings in Hauenstein were, Luebke argues, like many peasant revolts basically defensive in nature, seeking to prevent seigneurial or state intervention into the existing system as they conceived it (p. 216). In that conception he can find no trace of a hegemonic elite culture. Even the most conservative of the *muellerisch* peasant leaders were seeking to use the judicial instruments of authority against it.

This is a rich study, and though the topic seems small and peripheral, the breadth of Luebke's analysis of comparable phenomena in other parts of Germany, Switzerland and France, as well as Upper Austria, make it part of a very large picture of pre-capitalist peasant society which is only now beginning to grow clearer as more and more pieces of the tapestry are woven into place. For the most part it is also a well-written book, the tables and maps well-produced and so placed as to be useful.

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