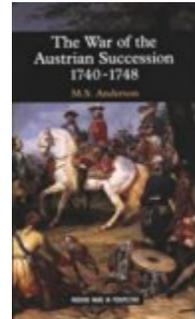


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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

M. S. Anderson. *The War of the Austrian Succession, 1740-1748*. London and New York: Longman, 1995. xi + 248 pp. \$35.66 (paper), ISBN 978-0-582-05950-4; \$188.80 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-582-05951-1.

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This is the fourth volume to be published in Longman's "Modern Wars in Perspective Series" (H.M. Scott and B.W. Collins, editors). The intent of the series is "to advance the current integration of military history into the academic mainstream" (back cover) by providing students with studies of specific wars set in the full context of their times. M.S. Anderson is an ideal author for this project and for this particular subject. Professor emeritus of international history in the University of London, Anderson has previously demonstrated his ability to present effective and readable syntheses of complex subjects in his *Europe in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1961), a volume in an earlier Longman's series which is now in its third edition, as well as his *Historians and Eighteenth Century Europe* (Oxford, 1979). In effect this volume is an "expanded chapter" from his *War and Society in Europe of the Old Regime, 1618-1789* (New York, 1988).

The names we commonly give the wars of the old regime seldom epitomize accurately or explain sufficiently those conflicts, and this is abundantly true of "The War of the Austrian Succession." No central theme or single conflict binds together the multiplicity of rivalries, tensions, struggles, dynastic and diplomatic machinations that constitute the war. And rather than resolving any of these contentions, the process and conclusion of the war seemed only to add new ones.

Understandably the war has been studied and analyzed frequently in his specifics, but rarely as a whole. Fortuitously we now have not only this synthesis, but also Reed Browning's more thorough study published in 1993. How can one grasp the nettles of this subject? Anderson observes that the complexities of the war and its apparent lack of decisive results have too easily led to

the conclusion that it was unimportant. On the contrary, he argues that those very characteristics underscore its importance as a transition point in international and dynastic politics citing the emergence of Prussia as a central player, the waning of the Habsburg vs. Bourbon rivalry and therefore of the Habsburg-English alliance, the confirming of the integrity of the Habsburg monarchy apart from the Holy Roman Emperors, and the rise of the English-French colonial conflict.

The first three chapters set the stage by defining the international situation in 1740, characterizing the state of military preparation and thinking, and assessing the social costs and contributions of war in the eighteenth century. This discussion admirably meets Anderson's avowed goal of providing students with a coherent, yet not over-simplified picture of Europe approaching mid-century.

Chapters four through six provide a clear summary of the progress and outcome of the German phase of the war in three stages: Frederick's invasion of Silesia, his first withdrawal from the war, his renewed intervention and then final withdrawal through the Treaty of Breslau (1745). By then two of the central issues were resolved: the ascension of Prussia as a major power and the confirmation of Maria Theresa's accession in the Habsburg dominions. In a sense both German powers had been victorious, though for Maria Theresa the sense of loss and betrayal persisted and would be the engine driving the subsequent reorientation of Habsburg foreign policy. She was not reconciled to the loss of Silesia, she saw Prussia increasingly as the principal threat, and she regarded England as a selfish, if not perfidious ally.

The seventh and eighth chapters deal with the dis-

persed continuing conflicts in Italy, the Netherlands and the colonies. These stories feed the sense of a war that seemed to persist of its own momentum while all of the participants clumsily sought ways of making peace, individually or collectively. French advantages in the Netherlands canceled out British gains overseas. Habsburg successes against Spanish claims in Italy were mitigated by the deep sense of injury against British favoritism toward Sardinia-Savoy.

Thus the peace which came, the evolution of which Anderson describes in the ninth chapter, was more a truce than a peace, leaving the scene littered with discontents and frustrations. Anderson comments, "One of the most complex and incoherent wars (or rather series of wars) in the history of Europe was ended by a treaty whose making reflected to the full the conflicts and rivalries which had played so great a role during the years of fighting." (p. 209)

On one level the most important "consequence" of the war was its indecisiveness. Anderson remarks that "The war of the Austrian Succession therefore made international relations more fluid by eroding old assumptions and certainties." More succinctly, the War of the Austrian Succession was the proof-text for the necessity of the Diplomatic Revolution of 1756. The wonder is, however, (and it is perhaps indicative of the confusion of the

time) that while the events demonstrated so well the failure of those old assumptions and certainties, so few people understood that and so many clung to those assumptions and certainties.

Little of this is profoundly original, but that was not Anderson's purpose. He has succeeded in providing a well-written and surprisingly clear account of a chaotic period. He appends a selective bibliography which will be helpful for students wishing to pursue particular aspects of the topic. The only deficiency in scholarly terms is purely a consequence of timing: the manuscript was already in press when Browning's admirable study became available and so Anderson was able only to acknowledge it in a few footnotes and in the bibliography.

Unfortunately the book will have a very limited market: how many courses in American colleges and universities will have room for required reading of a book about the war. Despite Anderson's success at his task, and his arguments about the significance of the struggle, it will doubtless remain an obscure topic for most students. On the other hand teachers may find it an easy way to make sense of a topic they may deal with in passing.

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