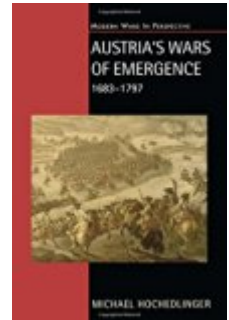


Michael Hochedlinger. *Austria's Wars of Emergence: War, State and Society in the Habsburg Monarchy 1683-1797*. New York and London: Longman, 2003. xviii + 466 pp. \$30.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-582-29084-6.



Reviewed by Reed Browning

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How Austria Became a Great Power

Michael Hochedlinger is Senior Archivist at the Austrian State Archives and author of several works on eighteenth-century Austrian history. In the book under review he draws widely upon recent research on the diplomatic, military, and institutional history of the Habsburg realm in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to produce a coherent account of Austria's entry into the ranks of Europe's great powers. Moreover, he lets the reader know when he dissents from the conclusions of others, and his many asides constitute a useful commentary on an era that remains, in spite of some recent attention, relatively undercovered. Although unable "to make full use" of sources in Czech and Hungarian, he labors conscientiously and usually successfully to transcend a "Germanocentric perspective" (p. 3). Featuring splendid charts (to guide the reader through the exotic complexities of Habsburg organizational structures), helpful maps, and a useful glossary, *Austria's Wars of Emergence* is both a triumph of synthetic scholarship and (thanks to its extensive

bibliographic notes) a road map for future researchers.

Hochedlinger's thesis accepts the conventional notion that, with respect to the international standing of the Habsburg realm, Austria's eighteenth century falls into three parts. The first is the celebrated age of heroes (1683-1718), dominated by the figure of Prince Eugene, when military success thrust Vienna's authority deep into the Balkans and Italy. The second is the 1730s and 1740s, when Vienna's capacity to defend its newly-extended realm was revealed to be hollow, and the dismemberment of the *Erblande* themselves seemed a genuine danger. The third is the reestablishment of Habsburg power and influence in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Hochedlinger sets out to explain this sequence. He argues that the successes of the first period were essentially products of military accident, unnourished by any institutional frameworks. They were therefore misleading, prompting international figures in Austria and elsewhere to rate the Habsburg realm above the level of power and influence merited by its intrinsic inter-

national strength. The martial calamities of the second stage were, by this reckoning, nothing more than the inevitable outcome of the artificiality of Austria's inflated great power pretensions. And the assertion of national strength after 1750 was the consequence of a deliberate effort to create the military, administrative, fiscal, and educational institutions that Austria would need if it hoped to close the gap between reality and ambition. As a result, Austria finally achieved an authentic great power status in the years after 1760--only of course to see the whole accomplishment undone by the French Revolution and Napoleon.

Several leading themes guide Hochedlinger's approach to his subject.²⁰ Preeminently, he wants to underscore the importance to Austria of its international environment, and thus he makes a point of situating the Habsburg realm within a dangerous European order. The Habsburg monarchy was, he writes, "a model case of a polity whose destiny [...] was as a whole shaped by foreign-policy concerns and influenced by geopolitical realities" (p. 58). Within that context, he accepts the notion that the church, the army, and the dynasty were the three institutions that gave coherence and a modicum of unity to the empire. (The estates were centrally important too until weakened by Joseph II's reforms.)

He agrees that Austria in some measure defied the ordinary early modern pattern whereby the building of a national army was closely linked to the centralizing of the state. And while his characterization of Austria's typical posture toward the outer world as one of "defensive aggression" (p. 360) registers his modest dissent from Charles Ingrao's claim that Austria was averse to offensive war, he acknowledges that the key dynamic in Austrian policy-making was reactive rather than proactive, with Austria in general preferring to wait upon external events rather than take initiatives.

The book is divided into five sections. The first is a lengthy prolegomenon, describing the

many regions and institutions of the post-Westphalian Habsburg realm, delineating the shifting and ambiguous relations between Austria and the Reich, and focusing on the character of the Habsburg army.

This structural section sets the stage for two narrative sections, the first treating the explosion of Habsburg power into areas previously claimed by Turkey and Spain in the quarter of a century after the siege of Vienna, and the second relating the tale of the various wars of the 1730s and 1740s that demonstrated that Austria was unable to deal with the challenges posed by Romanov probing, Ottoman revival, Bourbon meddling, and Hohenzollern ambition.

The fourth section, unlike the first three, combines structural and narrative elements. Its structural component analyzes the character of the reforms associated with the Enlightened Absolutism of Maria Theresa, Joseph II, and Count Kaunitz, and its narrative portion describes the effect these reforms had upon Austria's ability to play a major role in eastern Europe after 1760. The fifth section brings the book to a close, describing how Austrian leadership misunderstood events in France after 1789 and consequently adopted policies that in retrospect can be called feckless.

One of the attractions of the book is Hochedlinger's readiness to challenge received wisdom. He notes, for example, that while the newer view of Louis XIV may portray the Sun King as more interested in stability than conquest, Vienna's response to French activity was nevertheless understandable, since Vienna had no time to "search for deeper motives" (p. 169) behind France's apparent aggression. Hochedlinger believes that Leopold II, whom he describes as "enigmatic and devious" (p. 418), has received a better press than he deserves. He also wonders why, if Austria was really rather cavalier about the retention of the Austrian Netherlands after 1790, Francis II chose to spend his time leading armies there in 1794. And, more generally, he argues that histo-

rians misunderstand Austrian policy in the years just before and after the outbreak of the French Revolution if they regard it as pre-Metternichian counter-revolutionism.

It is important, however, to take note of several things that Hochedlinger's book does not do. For example, although he focuses attention on the Habsburg army, the book (like almost all military history in our own day) gives virtually no attention to the courses of the important battles of the Austrian eighteenth century, and little more to the logic of Habsburg campaigning and the shaping of Habsburg military strategy. It is striking, for example, that Traun's campaign of 1744, which dislodged the Prussians from Bohemia and earned a rueful commendation from no less a figure than the outmastered Frederick the Great, is not even mentioned. It is puzzling that the story of the Austrian victory at Kolin (1757), an event so important to Maria Theresa that she celebrated it as the "second birthday" of the realm (p. 33), merits only a sentence; or that the description of the remarkable triumph at Zenta (1697) merits only two.

At a different level of analysis, it is disappointing that in attempting to account for Austria's dismal military record in the post-Eugene years Hochedlinger can do little more than cite with approval Christopher Duffy's remark that Habsburg generals lacked a "killer instinct" (p. 344). In short, this book exemplifies the subordination of military activity to the presumptively broader questions of modernization and state-building that is so clearly a mark of contemporary historiography.

Every reviewer brings his own understanding and biases to bear upon a book under judgment (that's part of the fun of reviewing a new book), and sometimes that understanding is jarred by an unanticipated turn. I'll note several such instances, less because they touch upon matters central to this fine book than because they might be useful when future editions are planned.

On several occasions--and preeminently when he calls Rakoczy's links with Louis XIV "treacherous" (p. 18--Hochedlinger allows what sounds like an anti-Hungarian tone to intrude into his ordinarily dispassionate analysis. His account of the Ostend Company debacle leaves the reader unclear about why Austria abandoned the project in 1727. On the important question of Austria's motivations for planning to resume war with Prussia in 1757 (the war in fact began a year earlier, when Frederick struck preemptively), Hochedlinger is inconsistent: at one point he characterizes it as "essentially a campaign of revenge against Frederick II" (p. 29 elsewhere he explains that Vienna was interested in recovering Silesia because the duchy was "economically, strategically and morally" central to the well-being of the Habsburg realm (p. 330).

In tending to depict Frederick the Great as simply a very able military commander, Hochedlinger chooses not to employ the now-popular and useful concept of *roi-connetable* to explain the Prussian monarch's remarkable successes. In discussing foreign policy leaders, Hochedlinger scarcely notes the presence of Kaunitz's important predecessor Bartenstein. And as for the reputation of Kaunitz himself, Hochedlinger seems to align himself with those who regard the Chancellor as one of Europe's great ministers--a judgment that, while certainly widely held, may confuse intellectual activity with achievement and appears to stand in tension with the record of the failed initiatives and thwarted ambitions that clutter the Prince's career.

But enough of nits. This book immediately becomes the best treatment in English of Austria's international position in the eighteenth century. It is packed with usefully-organized information. It deals with big questions and proposes answers to them. It directs scholars to other questions that need further research and exploration. It underlines yet again the foolishness of those who teach that Britain and France provided the only para-

digms for political modernization in the early modern period. It is lively and engaging, pointed and clear, challenging and suggestive. I cannot imagine a student of the era not benefitting from reading it.

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