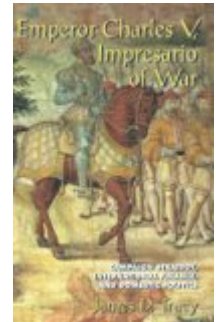


James D. Tracy. *Emperor Charles V, Impresario of War: Campaign Strategy, International Finance, and Domestic Politics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 344 pp. £50.00/ \$75.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-81431-7.



Reviewed by Alfred Kohler

Published on HABSBURG (March, 2004)

The Wars of Emperor Charles V

Originally James Tracy wanted to write a biography of Charles V, on the occasion of the anniversary of the Emperor in 2000. The result now is a monograph concerning the wars of Charles V, undoubtedly an important component of the Emperor's person and reign. The three parts of Tracy's work are dedicated to Strategy and Finance, to Charles' role as an impresario of war: Charles' campaigns between 1529 and 1552, and to war taxation: the parliaments of the core provinces of the Low Countries, Naples, and Castile.

In the first part of his book Tracy examines Charles' grand strategy, his advisers, and the Habsburg-Valois struggle in Italy (1515-1528). Then he carefully examines Charles' search for revenue, both his own income and the parliamentary subsidies in Naples, Castile and the Low Countries, further the search for credit: Charles and his bankers. Tracy shows the deeply rooted pattern of baronial control that complicated the access to the income of the kingdom of Naples. In Castile the situation was much better, especially after the *Comuneros* rebellion.

In part two Tracy examines Charles' war campaigns: in Italy (1529-1530), his crusades in Austria and the Mediterranean, 1532-1535, his failures in Provence and at Algiers, 1536-1541, Charles' grand plan 1543/44--a notion of Karl Brandi, worth examining!--, then the "First" (1546/47) and "Second Schmalkaldic War" (1552) and the assault on Metz (1552). I do not understand why Tracy utilizes the term "Second Schmalkaldic War" since the Elector Moritz of Saxony, the leader of the princes' rebellion against Charles V, was never a member of the Schmalkaldic League.

In every chapter we find a survey of the politics, followed by the "sinews of war," combined with a discussion of the problem of financing the campaigns, but less about genuine political problems, e.g. why did the Sultan decline to give battle to the Emperor in 1532, or was the campaign of Tunis, 1535, really a success?

Part three of the book is dedicated to war taxation in the Low Countries, Naples and Castile. In this part Tracy examines the context of war, finance, and taxes. He compares the taxes of the

most important regions of the territories of Charles V. During 35 years the Low Countries (*beden*) paid 10.5 million Spanish ducats, during the same time Castile (*servicios*) 9.3 million, and Naples (*donativi*) 5.7 Mill. Spanish ducats. During the two decades between 1529 and 1549 the nominal increases amounted to 84% for the Low Countries, 147% for Naples and 78% for Castile. Calculating the rate of inflation, taxes increased by about 42% in the Low Countries, 73.5% in Naples, and 49% in Castile.

What kind of conclusions can we find in Tracy's book? With respect to the success of Charles' politics of the *monarchia universalis* the author's argument is the following: "Paradoxically, it may be the greatest significance of Charles's reign for European history lies not in what he did but in what he did not do: he either failed to achieve or did not even attempt the *monarchia* Gattinara had dreamed of" (p. 307). The emperor was able to fight his wars as he did only because, "like no other prince before him, he made the fullest possible use of the transfer mechanism that European banking houses had developed over the centuries" (p. 308). But at the end of his reign Charles went bankrupt!

The political elites of Charles' reign adapted themselves, e.g. the nobles of Naples developed a sense of loyalty to the new dynasty but no "sense of responsibility to any larger interest than their own" (p. 310). "Thus Charles not only left Europe's ingrained state pluralism essentially as he found it; he also helped make a broader basis of collaboration possible, if and when Christian states could overcome their habitual antagonisms. This may be a modest accomplishment for one who claimed to be Christendom's anointed leader, but Charles V did make a difference" (p. 314).

In his role of an impresario of war Charles planned and executed his campaigns, but at the end of his life the emperor gave the hard line views of lesser men like Pedro de Soto a chance. For these lapses in judgment he paid a high price.

But, as this book has shown, "the price that his subjects paid was higher still" (p. 316). In Tracy's analysis the Emperor and his councils have less profile. One of his strong points is the problem of campaigns and their financing. For that the book is very important and lets us imagine these questions and problems better than before.

Copyright 2004 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
<https://networks.h-net.org/habsburg>

Citation: Alfred Kohler. Review of Tracy, James D. *Emperor Charles V, Impresario of War: Campaign Strategy, International Finance, and Domestic Politics*. HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews. March, 2004.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=8990>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.