

Tryntje Helfferich. *The Essential Thirty Years War: A Documentary History.* Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2015. xxii + 161 pp. \$16.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-62466-349-9.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Tryntje Helfferich's *The Essential Thirty Years War* is a useful introduction to the social and political history of the Thirty Years War. As an abridgment to her similarly titled *Thirty Years War*, this book is brief. It contains twelve excerpted sources divided into three chronological sections and two excerpts from diaries that span the length of the war. The chronological sections divide the war into three periods: the beginning of the a local rebellion in Bohemia in 1618 to the crushing defeat of Elector Frederick of the Palatinate in 1623; the beginning of foreign intervention from Denmark in 1625 to the defeat of the Protestant and Swedish armies; and finally the long war beginning with the French intervention in 1635 to the Peace of Westphalia.

Within these sections, the political events that drive their organization play little role in the excerpted documents. Most of the documents themselves describe the devastating social and economic effects of the war. Only three of the fourteen documents help to flesh out the political developments that shaped the war: a depiction of the Defenestration of Prague, a letter from King Gustavus Adolphus explaining the reasons for fighting the war, and the Peace of Westphalia. This disparity, however, works well within the general framework of the book. Helfferich's "General Introduction" as well as the introductions to

each section and each document explain the political contexts shaping the war and the circumstances within which the documents were produced. These editorial comments do much to inform the reader about the political and military history. The documents themselves flesh out the devastation of the Thirty Years War. Descriptions of widespread coinage debasement, arbitrary violence from soldiers in the military contribution system, the siege of Magdeburg, and the desolation of the country predominate in the volume.

The most interesting aspect of this short documentary volume is the space Helfferich gives to two diaries produced in extended excerpts as the final two chapters. These chapters make the volume distinct, so I will provide more space to them. Produced by two significantly different individuals—one a soldier, the other a peasant—these diaries provide further depictions of the experience of the war.

Peter Hagendorf was a soldier who traveled with his family and was hardened by the war and the personal losses it inflicted on him, becoming increasingly callous. Hagendorf survived multiple gunshot wounds, the burning of Magdeburg, the deaths of seven of his children and the first of his two wives. He participated in the contribution system pervasive during the war that decimated villages. At times, soldiers demanded a half *thaler*

per night per soldier from villagers to “keep his livestock in peace” (p. 110), or they spoiled entire fields of crops by “reaping it, riding through it, or burning it” (p. 119).

Johannes Haberle was a small craftsman in a small town that was routinely victimized, but he also fought back alongside other townsfolk. The early years of the war left Haberle relatively untouched. He suffered the pains many felt from the influx of devalued money, but little more. In the 1630s and later, the violence of the war made his life increasingly miserable. He helped defend Ulm as a member of the militia before the city’s surrender in 1631. Famine, plague, and continued raids followed. When Haberle and his neighbors dared to defend their property and selves, the attackers found it necessary to burn the town. In the winter of 1635, the raiding was almost a daily occurrence, and the soldiers even took the shoes off his feet (p. 149). Haberle reports fleeing to Ulm for safety at least twelve times (p. 149). Upon his final return home after peace came, his house was in poor shape: “the windows, ovens, and doors were destroyed” (p. 152).

The choice of these two individuals is especially interesting because they crossed paths on three occasions. In addition, their stories demonstrate the degree to which individual experiences could differ by station, place, and time. Hagendorf’s experience during the war was fundamentally different from Haberle’s. Both, however, were similarly traumatic—even if Hagendorf’s actions were the sort that caused the suffering of so many.

I have only one primary quibble with this impressive documents book. Helfferich suggests in the “General Introduction” that negotiations continued so long because both sides sought a definitive victory on the battlefield to bolster their diplomatic positions. Certainly, such a statement is completely agreeable, but it does not seem to be supported throughout the volume. Especially since this volume is directed toward undergradu-

ates, one would like a document or some comments to support it. The primary diplomatic document of the volume is the Peace of Westphalia—of course, the product of extended diplomatic meetings that continued throughout ongoing conflict—but this juxtaposition of conflict and extended negotiations is not explicit.

The pros, however, heavily outweigh the cons for a documents collection. The volume is eminently readable. The translations of the documents flow easily. Helfferich claims that she tried to stay true to the documents: documents that were gripping or simply written in the original are translated as such, and those that were “boring and pedantic” are similarly translated (p. xxi). Regardless, none of the excerpts are overly cumbersome or boring. The accounts are quick reads. Directed toward undergraduates, this would make a superb volume to include in classes relating to early modern European history, German history, or war and society.

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