



Andrzej Chwałba. *1914-1918: An Anatomy of Global Conflict.* Trans. Teresa Bałuk-Ulewiczowa. Jagiellonian Studies of History Series. Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2014. 225 pp. \$42.00, paper, ISBN 978-83-233-3638-9.

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“We know more or less all there is to know about the way hostilities of the 1914-1918 war developed,” begins Andrzej Chwałba’s *1914-1918: An Anatomy of Global Conflict*. The details that remain only serve to enhance the chronicle of the war. This slim volume skips this well-established narrative, aspiring to bring to bear a fresh perspective to the problem of the Great War. Chwałba, the director of the Division of Historical Anthropology in the storied Jagiellonian University’s Institute of History, is “interested in the fabric of the war and its participants” (p. 7). He is the author of over two dozen, diverse works, ranging from *Józef Piłsudski historyk wojskowości* (Józef Piłsudski military historian) (1993) to *Polacy w służbie Moskali* (Poles in Muscovite service) (1999). Now he has turned to the global conflict with a centennial appraisal in *Samobójstwo Europy: Wielka Wojna, 1914-1918* (The suicide of Europe: The Great War, 1914-1918) (2014), from which the volume under review derives.

1914-1918: Anatomy of Global Conflict offers just what it claims to, a dissection of the organism and study of its parts. Instead of providing a narrative of causes and course, the work examines four major issue areas: warfare, and the experience of fighting men, of civilians, and of subject nations. The basics of trench warfare are present-

ed—fortification and artillery, with emphasis on mud and squalor. Discussion of warfare is enlivened by treatment of mountain and winter fighting along with information on psychological operations. Mostly the focus is how men experienced this trial, while discussion of the soldier’s lot deals with the wounded, the dead, prisoners, and desertions. The use of historical anthropology, here mainly a concern for the experience of individuals and communities, is less novel than the author’s Central European vantage. Thus the work adds concern for occupation, mobilization, and resistance along with the more customary statements about women’s roles and war economies.

Probably most original is the dedication of a quarter of the work to social revolution and nationalist struggle. The latter, in the author’s judgment, emerged after the “bonds of solidarity with army, dynasty, and state had worn out” (p. 182). Only then did Czechoslovak, Finnish, Ukrainian, and other national elites step into leading roles. In this interpretation, revolutionary and nationalist upheavals ineluctably follow the toll at the front and at home. Broken humanity, society, and polity present a European fabric rent from end to end. Chwałba reiterates the conclusion of his larger *Samobójstwo Europy* that the continent “fixed a

war for itself out of fear of [its own] death” (p. 211).

More than studies from the pens of American and British writers, Chwałba’s succeeds at integrating the western and eastern fronts, great powers and small states, occupiers and occupied. And there is no gainsaying that desertion, disease, and revolution merit inclusion in the canonical reckoning of the Great War. All the same, this volume has little to commend it. The author adds nothing in the way of original research, while the bibliography is limited. For a work concerned with how individuals and communities experienced the suicide of Europe, it omits personal accounts. No topic gets more than a few pages of summary. This allows for some nice formulations but little in the way of trenchant commentary. Although the inclusion of the experience of subject nations is meritorious, the treatment is all too bland. The discussion altogether elides the process by which imperial ties disintegrated and nationalist projects took shape. And, though welcome, the Central European vantage comes with its own problems. The volume omits the Middle East, Africa, and Asia from consideration, a problem for an anatomy of global conflict.

If it is a matter of communities and culture, general readers and specialists alike will be advised to turn to such recent, accessible works as Alan Kramer’s *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing during the First World War* (2009); Jochen Böhrer, Włodzimierz Borodziej, and Joachim von Puttkamer’s edited collection *Legacies of Violence: Eastern Europe’s First World War* (2014); Leila Fawaz’s *Land of Aching Hearts: The Middle East in the Great War* (2014); Aviel Roshwald’s *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, the Middle East and Russia, 1914-23* (2000); and Peter Gatrell’s *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I* (2005), among others. The volume under review might yield to the busy humanities instructor some useful notes for lectures, but

there are better desk references. The breadth of the work and its brevity might make it attractive for general and introductory courses were these not the book’s only merits. Military and European specialists will be most especially disappointed, being more concerned with structure and relationships than gross anatomy and dissection.

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