

## **Coping with Life during the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648)**

**By Sigrun Haude. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021. Pp. xvi + 312.  
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The destructiveness of the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) is well known, with current scholarly consensus estimating a gruesome population loss ranging from a low of 15% to a high of 35% within the Holy Roman Empire. This was a war that not only lasted for decades, but extended across the entirety of Central Europe, leaving few areas completely untouched by the violence or its usual handmaidens—plague, famine, and economic crisis. Sigrun Haude outlines the war's effects on daily life, but her focus is on returning agency to contemporaries by viewing them not as passive victims but as creative authors of their own survival.

This careful study draws heavily on archival and published eyewitness accounts and journals, especially chronicles of members of religious orders, mostly from the areas of Bavaria and Franconia. After an introduction that provides readers an overview of the history of the war, in chapter 2 Haude illuminates how people experienced the war and its devastation, describing not just how they saw and understood the violence, poverty, and starvation, but also the impact of instability and disruption to the pattern of their everyday lives. Here, Haude emphasizes the extensive variations of contemporary experiences based on factors such as time, geography, and rural/urban living, and engages with the history of emotions by exploring how the war left many feeling intense emotions such as fear and vulnerability.

Chapter 3 describes the role of governing authorities in addressing the problems caused by the war. This included obvious steps such as hiring troops, strengthening defenses, and negotiating with enemies, but also providing guidance and advice, establishing systems of poor relief, implementing regulations to combat disease, and seeing to the people's spiritual needs. Haude's deep knowledge of the history of Bavaria under the long rule of Duke Maximilian (r. 1597–1651) is especially evident here and offers readers considerable insight into the steps he took to aid his people, especially his surprisingly effective work to mitigate the spread of disease in his capital of Munich and the surrounding areas. Nevertheless, plague broke through his defenses during an outbreak in 1634, leaving many dead and, Haude argues, the survivors deeply dispirited and newly disillusioned at the duke's ability to protect them from harm.

Chapter 4, which makes up the book's strong thematic core, addresses what strategies people took to aid themselves—that is, how they coped with and responded to the trials of the war. In this section, Haude lays out with fascinating richness the difficult decisions contemporaries were forced to make, the importance of news and information exchange in this process, and the vital role of social networks, community, music, and religion. An important theme here, and throughout this volume, is the complexity of everyday experiences during the war and the broad range of reactions, as Haude wonderfully explores not only individual stories of pain, suffering, death, and destruction, but also resilience, pragmatism, resistance, and creative problem solving; not only fear, anxiety, resignation, and despair, but also courage, faith, humor, and curiosity. For example, while she describes the conflicts that often existed between the civilian population and soldiers—both enemy troops and those belonging to or allied with the local governments—she also explores numerous instances of coexistence or friendly interaction.

As in chapter 3, in this section Haude contends that, despite their best efforts, wartime governments were seldom able to protect their people, since the measures the authorities took “had only very limited success and more often showed up the leaders' inability to shield the populace from harm” (89). This meant, she argues, that survival during the war depended

primarily on individual or communal action, which in turn led the common people of the empire to experience a fundamental and earthshaking loss of faith in the ruling authorities. This is surely one of the most interesting and thought-provoking arguments in this book. Indeed, it seems clear that ordinary people, especially those in the countryside, were often left to their own devices, so that terrified and angry peasants frequently had no recourse but to find some way to save themselves, their families, and their possessions from hostile forces. On the other hand, it is always far easier to see when protective measures failed than when they succeeded, and it seems likely that governing and religious authorities were not nearly as useless as their contemporary critics may have claimed. Despite their many obvious shortcomings, authorities could and did raise troops, buy weapons, build up fortress walls, arm the peasantry (rarely), and enforce regulations to lessen problems of disease and poverty, and they also could and did engage in extensive (indeed almost unceasing) peace and alliance negotiations, work diplomatic channels, exploit personal and patronage ties, and appeal to God for aid. Especially after the early years of the war, moreover, it became standard practice for occupying or through-marching armies to negotiate terms for regulated war-taxation with local governmental authorities. This at least lessened whole-scale looting and plunder, and when combined with other interventions, surely saved thousands, maybe tens of thousands of lives throughout the empire, along with houses, barns, churches, mills, and other vital infrastructure.

The second half of Haude's argument, that the war's destructiveness led to a general embitterment and fundamental loss of faith in the authorities, is similarly difficult to assess, but perhaps even more intriguing. Her extensive evidence of popular disillusionment is of necessity anecdotal but quite convincing and utterly reasonable on its face. It also suggests the value of additional research and exploration of what would then seem to be a contradictory post-1648 tendency of European populations to rally around strong central authorities and state churches—something past scholars have often attributed to an overall yearning for law and order after the violence and chaos of the war.

In addition to raising some interesting questions about the relationship between governing authorities and their people in Central Europe (and, one hopes, spurring further investigation), this fine work is approachable, clear, and well-organized, with a useful subject index and a brief glossary. It is highly recommended reading for those interested in the war and in *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of everyday life) and is extremely successful in its principal goal of diverting our view of the war away from the European halls of power and diplomatic tables, and instead focusing our attention on the countryside and the life experiences of ordinary people who were living in, and coping with, extraordinary times.

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## **Modern Historiography in the Making: The German Sense of the Past, 1700–1900**

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For some time, historians of early modern humanistic knowledge have been learning from and working with historians of science; one of the consequences has been a flowering of the fields, particularly as the result of deepened attention to the practices of knowledge-making.