

**Winfried Heinemann, Lothar Höbelt, Ulrich Lappenküper (Hg.), Der preußisch-österreichische Krieg 1866, Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich (Ferdinand Schöningh) 2018, 374 S., (Wissenschaftliche Reihe. Otto-von-Bismarck-Stiftung, 26) ISBN 978-3-506-78825-2, EUR 49,90.**

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This book contains 14 essays each addressed to various aspects of the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 whose sesquicentary occurred in 2016. Its three editors – Winfried Heinemann, Lothar Höbelt, and Ulrich Lappenküper, all distinguished historians in their own right – have done an admirable job of organizing and presenting the various articles to which the book pertains.

The articles are grouped in five parts. Part one discusses how the decision for war was made by the authorities in the three belligerent Powers – Prussia, Austria and, to a lesser extent, Italy. Part two focuses on the policy of the neutral powers. Part three takes for examination the features of the war as it progressed; part four, the role played in the war by the middle states of the former German confederation; part five, the consequences of the war as a phenomenon in European history. Because of the limitations of space, it will be necessary to move swiftly over some of these contributions. It will not, in other words, be possible to do more than touch very briefly on certain of the points at issue, and then only from the standpoint of their wider significance.

The three essays in the first section of the book are of unusual interest to those concerned with the history of the origins of the war. Frank Möller shows that Bismarck was determined from the outset to keep Schleswig-Holstein, the two Elbe duchies over which the 1864 war with Denmark had erupted, out of Austria's hands. His attempt to settle the question by making the Gastein Convention of 1865 was no attempt at all. Alma Hannig, writing on Austria, recognizes that the war was eminently avoidable, for the Habsburg rulers were not unaware of the weaknesses with which their international position abounded. Luciano Monzali seeks to show that the war of 1859 and the proclamation, in January 1861, of the »Kingdom of Italy«, satisfied few, if any, Italians. Italy's eyes were set on Venetia. Accompanying this was an overestimation of Rome's importance to Bismarck. All these pieces are full of fascinating points and contain valuable information even for the expert.

The outstanding essay in the second section is by Ulrich Lappenküper who gives a general survey of the background, development, and consequences of Napoleon III's actions during the war. The key to his policy after 3 July was his recognition he had backed »the wrong horse« (p. 101). 3 July 1866 was, in French policy, a »date clé« (p. 9). Having counted on a long civil war between Austria and Prussia in which France could step in and dictate the peace (with extensive territorial gains on the French side), he viewed with extreme nervousness and misgivings the speed and scope of the Prussian victory. The problem gained in significance by virtue of the pervasive bewilderment that bedeviled French policy in the years afterwards – especially during the Belgium-Luxemburg crisis of 1866–



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67. Napoleon came, in the end, to realize that, despite his protestations in favor of nationalities, the creation of a German national state would constitute a mortal threat to his empire. This he would demonstrate with disastrous results in 1870. Meticulous scholarship, deep understanding, and an easy style leavened with wit, put this article in the high cannon of Lappenküper's works.

The remaining two essays, though less impressive than Lappenküper's achievement, also deserve attention. T. G. Otte argues that the British policy during the Austro-Prussian War, and throughout the 1860s, was forward, vigorous, and not at all passive. This is a considerable revision. The London conference of 1867, which neutralized Luxembourg, was an obvious example. Alexander Medyakov examines the factors influencing Russian policy during the war. Overshadowing everything else were domestic considerations: the shock of defeat in the Crimean War and the need of the country to remove itself from the limelight and give priority to its domestic challenges.

The third section on the »Development and Course of the War« opens with a most perceptive piece by Thorsten Loch and Lars Zacharias on the features of Königgrätz as a battle. The authors argue that it is a mistake to concentrate on Prussian brilliance as opposed to Austrian ineptness. But the truly decisive factor in the battle was the superiority of the Prussian strategy of encirclement as opposed to Austrian reliance on direct frontal assault. M. Christian Ortner examines the battle of Custoza (24 June 1866). Here the Austrians prevailed over the Italians by their ability to make quick decisions and rapidly deploy men to the front. However, their victory proved a Pyrrhic one because of the high number of casualties they suffered and the inability to transfer troops from Italy to Bohemia to which this calamity gave rise.

The fourth section examines the role of the middle states. Ulf Morgenstern argues that the Saxons used the war as an opportunity to settle dozens of old scores with Prussia that ran back to the eighteenth century. Their defeat – a shattering one – (the Austrians and their Saxon allies lost 44,314 casualties compared with 9,153 Prussians) at Königgrätz sealed Saxony's fate. Wolf D. Gruner focuses on the three states south of the River Main – Bavaria, Baden, and Württemberg. While almost all German states became part of the Prussian-led North German Confederation, these southern states (including Hesse-Darmstadt) were allowed to form their own confederation if they wished; Gruner laments their failure to do so, though he perhaps underestimates the obstacles confronting them. Still, Gruner's is a fine essay, richly informed by his familiarity with 19th-century German history, full of insights, all deserving of a detailed critical comment that cannot be given within this space.

In the final essay in this section, Dieter Brosius takes for examination the role of Hannover in the war. The tale he tells is not a happy one. The gap in understanding was greater, the measure of tragedy more profound, and the problem more delicate than the Hannoverian King George V supposed. But in the end, he decided to ally himself with the Austrians. As it turned out, his decision proved toxic. Prussian troops made short work of the ramshackle Hannoverian army, and on 27 June it was crushed by Prussian forces. Unlike the states south of the river Main, the kingdom disappeared, annexed to Prussia on 3 October 1866.

In the final (and in my opinion) the best section of the book, two authors, Hans-Christof Kraus and Michael Epkenhans, address



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themselves to the results of the war from a European point of view. Kraus concentrates on the implications of the war from an economic angle. The Prussian victory enabled Bismarck to extend the customs union called the Zollverein with the most important North German states (1834) to the four independent states south of the Main – a new association in which tensions could be defused and the new Confederation, by implication, strengthened against foreign powers.

Michael Epkenhans argues more sweepingly that Königgrätz was a battle which changed the course of history. The reasons for this were many. It unquestionably made Prussia, as head of the new North German Confederation, a powerhouse in central Europe. It drove Austria out of Germany and forced it to drastically reform itself at home – as the creation of Austria-Hungary in 1867 bore witness. Not only that. With its historic reason for existence, its German and Italian mission gone, and its strategic position vis-à-vis Prussia hopeless, its only reason to exist were political power ones of security and expansion. As for Bismarck, he always recognized the obvious fact that the dissolution of the Austrian empire would have ominous consequences for Germany and Europe, making Prussia's position between Russia and France even more dangerous.

There is one point, however, that is missing in Epkenhans's analysis: the value of the settlement of 1866 for Prussia and the fact that everything that happened afterward, including, or rather especially, the creation of the German Empire in 1871 weakened Germany by – there is no other way to put it – making it too strong. 1866, in other words, gave Prussia everything it needed – military, political, and economic. Despite occasional setbacks and disagreements with Prussia, all states south of the river Main were tied to Berlin. Not only did their acquisition in 1871 work against Bismarck's goal to free Prussia from competing obligations and secure it against attack, but made it indisputably the greatest of the great powers. Moreover, the victory of 1866 gave Prussia something that the victory of 1871 took away – a sense of purpose, an aim to achieve, a principle to fulfill and discharge.

By absorbing more Catholics (to say nothing of French) and ending the existence of the South German states, Prussia had compromised its older historic mission of representing and defending Protestant interests and individual state patriotism in Germany against Catholic imperialism and selfish domination by Austria. In the same time, through its too complete military victories, territorial expansion, and latent, labile hegemony in Europe, Prussia ruined its chance to be accepted generally as the guarantor of an independent, nonthreatening center for Europe that prevented dominance of either flank (France or Russia) – Metternich's »rocher de bronze« or Bismarck's own ideal of Germany as »das Bleigewicht am Stehaufmännchen Europas«.

Altogether an interesting collection. A serious contribution which shows that from almost any point of view – military, political, economic, international – the War of 1866 had few parallels in modern history, and none in the history of nineteenth century Europe.



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