

William D. Godsey, *The Sinews of Habsburg Power. Lower Austria in a Fiscal-Military State 1650–1820*, Oxford (Oxford University Press) 2018, XX–460 p., 16 fig., 9 tabl., 2 maps, ISBN 978-0-19-880939-5, EUR 95,00.

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During the waning of the Cold War, »the state« has returned to the Humanities and Social Sciences as an object of enquiry unto itself. Since the publication of John Brewer's seminal study on the Anglo-British »fiscal-military state«, the number of studies on these matters and, perhaps more importantly, on a large and growing array of different polities as well has appeared in print¹. William Godsey's study grew out of these developments, and given its focus on one of early modern Europe's least-studied powers, the Austrian monarchy from the end of the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) to the Napoleonic wars (1792–1815), it is a very welcome and much-needed addition to the literature.

Following an extensively annotated introduction (p. 1-36), the book contains ten chapters of differing scale and scope: the first four chapters are largely thematic and investigate in great detail, from c. 1650 to the mid-18th century, the emergence of the intertwined administrative and fiscal-financial foundations of the Habsburgs' standing army. Chapter 5 (p. 189–212) serves as a kind of »interlude« and recounts the crucial chain of events that led to the transformations under Maria Theresa (r. 1740–1780) and Joseph II (r. 1765/1780–1790). The remaining five chapters provide, in meticulous detail, a chronology of the period from 1749 to 1815. A concise conclusion (p. 393–398) unites the various thematic threads, with an Appendix (p. 399–406) rounding off the volume. Particular mention must be made of the extensive bibliography (p. 407–437) and the incredibly detailed – and hence eminently useful – index (p. 438–460).

As much about the book has been said already, I would like to draw particular attention to a number of issues left unaddressed elsewhere that also warrant consideration². Following in Brewer's footsteps, Godsey regularly relates his findings to events and developments in other monarchies, with emphasis resting on the »cooperation« between, and

¹ John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power. War, Money, and the English State, 1688–1783*, London, Boston, MA 1989. See also the essays in: Christopher Storrs (ed.), *The Fiscal-Military State in Eighteenth-Century Europe. Essays in Honor of P. G. M. Dickson*, Farnham, Burlington, VT 2009.

² See the reviews by Laurence Cole and István M. Szigártó in: *European History Quarterly* 49/3 (2019), p. 509–512; and in the *Hungarian Historical Review* 8/1 (2019), p. 230–232 respectively.



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mutual dependency of, »Crown, Church, and Estates« (p. 25)³. While such an approach is an undeniably welcome aspect of Brewer's essentially comparative argument, related issues remain unaddressed: Godsey convincingly argues that the fiscal-financial-military regime *à l'autrichienne* compares well with the Anglo-British experience (p. 128–129) while, at the same time, the French trajectory during the 18th century points in the altogether different direction of repeated problems turning into defeat in the War of the Spanish Succession (p. 144) and revolution (esp. p. 280–281). Throughout the book, the co-evolutionary paths of the Bourbon and Habsburg monarchies intersect, clearly visible in the context of the introduction of the capitation (133-5) or Necker's experiments to bolster the stability of Louis XVI's France in the late 1780s (320–321), both apparently modelled to certain degrees on Habsburg experiences. This explains why historians of both monarchies have come to essentially identical conclusions - even employing literally the same metaphor of an "Atlas" or "colossus on feet of clay"⁴ -, yet this aspect remains unmentioned.

This is a very dense and informed study, the outcome of almost two decades of extensive archival research, yet some issues remain under-developed. As regards the eventual outcome, the estates of Lower Austria assuming a veritable mountain (range) of debt, what happened to these debts? Almost in passing, Godsey notes a partial moratorium »on the Estates' older liabilities«, in place since the mid-17th century, which was »formally extended« in 1723. In other words, »Lower Austrian debt had achieved long-term sustainability« in a »mutually acceptable way« - in a manner that is nothing less than a partial default (p. 149). The implications thereof remain outside the purview of the book. One of the consequences of this achievement, though, was the estates' increased »identification« with imperial aims, which happened for essentially material reasons, as the estates would not be able to regain their outlays without further commitments to provide the imperial court with yet more credit (p. 149–150). Here, the most obvious parallel, the Venetian patricians who held most of the Republic's public debt, would have provided a useful comparative angle, but it remains unexplored⁵.

³ See also the essays in: R. J. W. Evans, T. V. Thomas Crown, Church and Estates. Central European Politics in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, Basingstoke, London 1991.

⁴ Cf. Guy Rowlands, The Financial Decline of a Great Power. War, Influence, and Money in Louis XIV's France, Oxford, 2012, p. 36; Michael Hochedlinger, Austria's Wars of Emergence. War, State and Society in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1683-1797, London, 2003, p. 1.

⁵ Cf. Frederic C. Lane, The Funded Debt of the Venetian Republic, in Venice and History, in: The Collected Papers of Frederic C. Lane, ed. by a committee of colleagues and former students. Foreword by Fernand Braudel Baltimore, MD 1966, p. 87–98. Reinhold C. Mueller, »Quando i Banchi no' ha' fede, la terra no' ha credito.« Bank Loans to the Venetian State in the 15th Century, in: Società Ligure di Storia Patria (ed.), Banchi pubblici, Banchi privati e Monti de Pietà nell'Europa preindustriale. Amministrazione, tecniche operative e ruoli economici, Genoa 1991, p. 275–308.



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Given the support the findings lend to the centrality of the period from c. 1680 to 1730s, the absence of two additional aspects deserves to be noted⁶: on the one hand, while Godsey emphasises the particular »blend of landed and debt-holding establishments« (p. 396), this points squarely to issues revolving around the character of the ruling elites. Here, the comparison with Britain is instructive: for the first two decades after 1688, those who made the revolution actually paid the largest share of taxes; once the new regime was firmly entrenched, the main fiscal burden was placed, again and in a highly regressive fashion, on the general population via indirect consumption taxes⁷. In Lower Austria, however, landed proprietors continued to buy (pay) into the Habsburg fiscal-financial-military system until the first half of the 19th century. The study very much focuses on those who benefitted from these arrangements, that is the »upper three estates« (clergy, lords, and knights). Consequently, those on whose shoulders in the final analysis the burden rested, the subjects, do not appear very often, if at-all, on the other hand. Given the fact that fiscal-financial arrangements like those discussed at length in the book reinforce, and in a way compound, existing inequalities in wealth and income, the absence of their consequences is all the more glaring.

This is a commendable work, based on vast archival research, and an impressive piece of scholarship. Yet, it is also a very one-sided book whose findings reveal, in essence, the considerable degrees of *collaboration* between those few who possessed and ultimately benefitted personally and materially from landed wealth, which should also be called out for what it was: a tight-knit oligarchy. It stands to reason that Godsey's book on Lower Austria's estates will be followed by comparable case studies on the Habsburg monarchy's »other« central lands. Here is hoping that future research will further include a stronger emphasis on the economic and social consequences as well as more appropriate terminology.

⁶ Thomas Winkelbauer, »Nervus Rerum Austriacarum«. Zur Finanzgeschichte der Habsburgermonarchie um 1700, in: Petr Matá, Thomas Winkelbauer (ed.), Die Habsburgermonarchie 1620–1740. Leistungen und Grenzen des Absolutismusparadigmas, Stuttgart 2006, p. 179–215.

⁷ Brewer, The Sinews of Power (as in n. 1), p. 91–114.



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