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Review of William D. Godsey and Petr Maťa (eds.), *The Habsburg Monarchy as a Fiscal–Military State: Contours and Perspectives 1648–1815*

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WILLIAM D. GODSEY and PETR MAŤA (eds.), *The Habsburg Monarchy as a Fiscal–Military State: Contours and Perspectives 1648–1815*, Proceedings of the British Academy, 247 (Oxford, 2022), 390 pp. ISBN 978 0 197 26734 9. £95.00

Around thirty-five years ago, when John Brewer coined the term ‘fiscal–military state’ to describe ‘the sinews of power’ in eighteenth-century Britain,¹ its success and lasting influence on historical scholarship were hardly foreseeable. Yet it was clear from the beginning that Brewer’s ‘heuristic device’² would engender debate, as it offered a provocative reinterpretation of British state formation. In a nutshell, Brewer argued that in the war-torn long eighteenth century, England, like the Continental European monarchies, faced rising military costs. If the English crown wanted to compete in the great power contests of the time, it had to extract financial resources from its subjects through taxation and credit. To pay for war, England, not unlike Prussia,³ built up a powerful state apparatus. Brewer thus debunked several myths: that of the peaceful, polite eighteenth century in opposition to the iron age of religious warfare which preceded it; that of less oppressive taxation and lighter government in Britain than in ‘absolute’ monarchies; and the grand narrative opposing British commercial and naval interests to brute Continental army power. His book also invited further investigation of fiscal and military mechanisms across early modern Europe – and beyond. Critical voices have been raised against efforts to extend the concept globally and across epochs, which threaten

¹ See the first edition of Brewer’s classic *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688–1783* (London, 1989).

² See Brewer’s recent recapitulation of his original intentions and his engagement with the extensions and critical adaptations of his concept in past research: John Brewer, ‘Revisiting *The Sinews of Power*’, in Aaron Graham and Patrick Walsh (eds.), *The British Fiscal–Military States, 1660–c.1783* (London, 2016), 27–34, quotation at 27.

³ A connection between military expenditure and fiscal–administrative development was drawn as early as 1910 by Otto Hintze for the rising Continental power of the Hohenzollern state; see ‘Der Commissarius und seine Bedeutung in der allgemeinen Verwaltungsgeschichte’, in id., *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, vol. i: *Staat und Verfassung*, ed. Gerhard Oestreich, ext. 2nd edn (Göttingen, 1962), 242–74.

to render it too vague for precise analysis. Yet its application to the Habsburg Empire, as in the volume under review here, certainly works well.

In a way, the book, edited by Vienna-based historians William Godsey and Petr Maťa, returns to the origins of the debate. Brewer's influential book built on the work of, among others, P. G. M. Dickson on the financial revolution in England and on Austrian finance and government under Maria Theresa.⁴ His concept thus implied a comparative view of fiscal-military arrangements in the Habsburg monarchy from the beginning. Yet, as Godsey and Maťa point out, the 'Habsburg Myth'⁵ of a weak, fragmented state and a non-belligose foreign policy based on dynastic marriage by *felix Austria* has long prevented further research in this direction. Traditionally contrasted with its rival Prussia, the Habsburg monarchy appeared as a rather weak, perhaps peaceable actor in the emerging international system. Recently, however, some important German-language research has connected Habsburg fiscality to the monarchy's considerable military efforts. Godsey and Maťa's volume aims to introduce this regional expertise into English-language research on the fiscal-military state. It presents a convincing summary of the international debates and successfully connects them to historical area studies of the Habsburg monarchy both as a whole and in its component parts.

Godsey and Maťa structure the volume with two basic propositions. First, they regard the Habsburg dominions as a composite monarchy. Although this peculiar polity might have possessed some of the characteristics implied by alternative concepts such as dynastic agglomerate, polycentric monarchy, or empire, it was, the editors argue, primarily a monarchical state centred on the Habsburg court, with regional and local representative bodies intimately involved in shared yet contended processes of fiscal and military state formation.

⁴ P. G. M. Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688–1756* (London, 1967); id., *Finance and Government under Maria Theresa 1740–1780*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1987).

⁵ Michael Hochedlinger, "The Habsburg Monarchy: From "Military-Fiscal State" to "Militarization"", in Christopher Storrs (ed.), *The Fiscal-Military State in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Essays in Honour of P. G. M. Dickson* (London, 2009), 55–94, at 58.

Second, Godsey and Maťa propose an overarching early modern chronology for these processes, marked by four systemic shifts in fiscal-military arrangements. After a basis for central fiscal and military institutions had been created with the *Hofkammer* (Aulic Chamber) in 1527 and the *Hofkriegsrat* (Aulic War Council) in 1556, the mid sixteenth-century war against the Ottoman Empire caused the first important shift, initiating efforts by the central state to establish a permanent border defence. The Thirty Years War, during which the *Generalkriegskommissariat* (General War Commissariat) was established, brought more central control of the armed forces, especially after the elimination of Albrecht von Wallenstein in 1634. Godsey and Maťa identify a third shift in the wars of the 1680s, when Emperor Leopold I faced simultaneous threats from the east and west. These conflicts brought wider recruitment, institutionalized in the *Landrekruutenstellung* (provincial recruitment system), and they turned the *Contribution*, originally exacted for troop upkeep during warfare, into a permanent tax. A last set of shifts occurred from the 1740s, when new wars required men and money on an unprecedented scale, bringing the established system to its limits and beyond. Credit and the monetization of regalian rights (especially tolls) were gaining importance. Moreover, recruitment was reorganized with the *Werbbezirkssystem* in 1781, which introduced conscription by regiment in fixed recruitment districts.

This framework informs the selection and organization of the essays in the volume. The first three, by Hamish Scott, Guy Rowlands, and Peter H. Wilson, offer reflections by distinguished experts on the general debate. Scott recapitulates the genesis and development of the concept, reminding us of the fundamental distinction between fiscal states, which exacted taxes for military spending, and fiscal-military states, which mobilized more resources through credit and borrowing. Comparing the paradigmatic British model and other early modern European fiscal-military states with the Habsburg monarchy, Scott draws out the latter's specifics—for example, the importance of Jewish financiers. Yet there were also structural similarities, such as the extension of governmental reach and resource extraction across a composite monarchy in the British Isles and the Habsburg case. For both, the integration of local elites

and regional representative bodies should not be taken as evidence of weak statehood.

Rowlands likewise stresses that comparing fundamental characteristics offers a remedy against conceptual over-extension. He focuses on individual states' internal 'fiscal-military constitution' in order to determine their 'fiscal-military advantage' (p. 61). In this regard, France developed an impressive system very early, gaining a considerable advantage over its rivals. Yet during the heyday of its international power around 1700 under Louis XIV, serious problems emerged in matching the exploding costs of warfare to the amount of revenue raised. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the French monarchy lost its prominent position and suffered the financial problems which would ultimately lead to the revolution. Wilson proposes an alternative to Rowlands' internalist approach. Considering the importance of early modern contractor states and powerful coalition armies, he suggests taking a holistic look at a European 'fiscal-military system' from 1530 to 1870. Within this framework, 'which extended to a whole variety of semi-sovereign and non-state actors' (p. 86), the Habsburg monarchy appears as a crucial player, drawing on the commercial and financial resources of the Viennese hub, but also of the Holy Roman Empire and beyond.

The following chapters turn to the specifics of the Habsburg monarchy. István Kenyeres and Géza Pálffy demonstrate that the need to defend the Hungarian border against Ottoman expansion required efforts to institutionalize standing armed forces as early as the sixteenth century. Thomas Winkelbauer sketches the long-neglected yet crucial role of the General War Commissariat in military finances and logistics from its origins in the Thirty Years War to the mid eighteenth century.

The next four chapters jointly depict the functioning of the monarchy's fully formed fiscal-military structures after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. They expose differences between the reliable 'fiscal-military core' (much of the Austrian hereditary lands and the Bohemian crown's territories; p. 27) and other parts of the Habsburg dominions. Petr Maťa finds that the supposedly fixed tax quotas of the Austrian and Bohemian provinces were continually renegotiated between the central government and the provincial Estates after the

mid seventeenth century. The ensuing discussions did not weaken the Habsburg fiscal-military constitution, but actually stabilized it, as demonstrated for Moravia by Jiří David. The great lords dominating the territorial Estates were willing to grant tax payments because their role as collectors and administrators of royal funds strengthened their traditional authority within their lands. In contrast, Hungary did not meet the increase in standing forces after 1648 with similar willingness. András Oross demonstrates that the resistance of the Hungarian Estates through repeated uprisings and protests was nonetheless countered by the individual army contracting activities of Hungarian magnates. More lasting arrangements were eventually found in the eighteenth century. Peter Rauscher, finally, notes the opposite trend in relations between the Habsburgs and the Holy Roman Empire, where the reliability of grants by the imperial estates was declining over time. While the emperor could still draw on resources from specific imperial allies after 1600, Rauscher confirms the classic interpretation of an 'advancing disintegration of the Reich', paralleled by 'the consolidation of the Habsburg Monarchy' (p. 216).

The following two chapters shift perspective, regarding fiscal-military arrangements not from the point of view of the central state, but from that of noble actors within the complex constitutional settings. While Horst Carl traces the changing social function of regimantal proprietorship for the Swabian barons of Neipperg from the mid sixteenth to late eighteenth centuries, Veronika Hyden-Hanscho delineates the pivotal role played in the early eighteenth century by Léopold Philippe, duke of Arenberg, who mediated Habsburg relations with the Estates of the Southern Netherlands and facilitated access to the wider financial world of Western Europe. The last chapter by Orsolya Szakály takes up this actor-centred approach once more by analysing the saltpetre monopoly exercised by Baron Miklós Vay, demonstrating the importance of military contracting as a commercial opportunity for Hungarian aristocrats in the Napoleonic era.

The three chapters preceding Szakály's shed light on changes to the Habsburg monarchy's fiscal-military constitution in the eighteenth century. William D. Godsey traces the successful employment of medium- and long-term borrowing from around 1700, when the

newly established City Bank of Vienna, foreign financial markets, and the provincial Estates were tapped for credit. Direct public borrowing by the *Universal-Staats-Schulden-Cassa* (Universal State Debt Treasury) from the 1770s complemented this system until its breakdown with the Napoleonic Wars and the paper currency inflation of the infamous *Banco-Zettel*. On the military side, Ilya Berkovich traces the personnel composition of the Austrian regiments from the era of the *Landrekrutenstellung* to the introduction of the *Werbbezirkssystem*. Consecutively, these systems—despite differences in detail—amounted to wide military conscription long before the French revolutionary *levée en masse*. To pay for their huge armies, the Habsburgs relied on taxation and credit, as well as on subsidies by other powers. Patrick Swoboda sheds light on the practical problems of transferring subsidy money during the Habsburgs' western wars in the eighteenth century, pointing out that the sums which Austria variously received from its British, Dutch, and French allies never covered more than 15 per cent of its war expenses. On the whole, subsidies were an investment by financially stronger partners into joint troop strength.

Links across this rich volume are created by the introduction, with its helpful maps, and by the index, which includes thematic entries that allow for quick cross-referencing. It would, however, have been interesting to see the individual essays engage with the overarching chronological and conceptual framework more explicitly. Does it hold up against the fine-grained studies in this book, which approach the topic from such diverse perspectives? How do the essays connect to the suggested conceptual variations on the fiscal-military state—namely, the internal fiscal-military constitution and the European fiscal-military system? How do fiscal-military developments relate to other fields of change, such as commerce, labour, and the exploitation of humans, as well as nature, ideas, or diplomacy? The volume succeeds in tying in a wealth of existing research on the Habsburg monarchy with the influential concept of the fiscal-military state, and it raises important wider questions about the linkages between warfare and money. Ideally, the volume will also achieve its third goal of creating a basis for new discussions of an ageing concept. After all, the comparative approach raises important further questions that also

touch on other polities in early modern Europe. In any case, it will certainly become an important point of reference for future teaching and research on Austria and its fiscal-military constitution.

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