



Ute Planert. *Der Mythos vom Befreiungskrieg: Frankreichs Kriege und der deutsche Süden: Alltag – Wahrnehmung – Deutung 1792-1841.* Krieg in der Geschichte. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag, 2007. 738 pp. EUR 68.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-506-75662-6.

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Remembering to Forget War

In the last decade, historians have dramatically redrawn the fault lines of the French Revolution and Napoleonic era on German society and political life. Because of sharply focused regional studies, hazarding general statements about the Napoleonic impact on “Germany” or on “Germans” has become increasingly difficult. To cite but a small sampling of the new research, Karen Hagemann’s book on Brandenburg-Prussia (2002), Michael Rowe’s study on the Rhineland (2003), Katherine Aaslestad’s work on Hamburg (2005), and Robert Beachy’s monograph on Leipzig (2005) collectively locate deep and significant differences in regional reception of these events. As the conventional lodestar for general surveys, Prussia thus acts as a poor proxy for attitudes and behaviors developed in Saxony, the Rhineland, Hanseatic cities, or elsewhere. Ute Planert confirms this emphasis on regional difference with a brilliant study of the Napoleonic wars in southern Germany. During Prussia’s decade of neutrality after 1795, southern Germany became a sustained battlefield for Austrian, French, Russian, Hungarian, and Allied armies, thereby generating its own intense relationships to the revolutionary era. With this penetrating evaluation of everyday civilian life in war, Planert reconstructs the material, political, and sociocultural frameworks within which the general population perceived and interpreted the war. Wielding an impressive array of evidence, Planert argues that “the idea of the nation” exerted little influence on everyday life in southern Germany (p. 659). Rather, “inherited loyalties, localisms, and confessional attitudes determined the world view and actions of most people” (p. 659). This general conclusion may not astonish the informed reader, but the work’s depth of argumentation, broadly integrative regional framework, and its

blend of methodological approaches will: this is an innovative study. By combining a substantive social history of the war years with an exacting analysis of postwar memory work, Planert juxtaposes the voices and views of the war years with those of the Restoration to underscore striking incongruities between experience and official memory. Readers can discern first-hand how the “mystic chords” of national memory had little grounding in social experience.

Marshalling a range of archival materials, most notably the ego-documents of ordinary people, Planert assesses how such individuals from Swabia, Bavaria, and parts of Baden experienced and perceived the region’s sustained series of military campaigns between 1792 and 1814. Setting aside the perspectives of state officials, military elites, and publicists, the book probes how villages and towns endured military life and the miseries that attended war. The first 450 pages thus compose a remarkable social record of civilian life in Napoleonic wartime, providing thick descriptions of communities that stood in the crossfire of war. The quotidian miseries of those communities that faced foreign and domestic armies on the march were unrelenting and numerous: plunder, corruption, and extortion; impressment, rape, and violence; tribute, taxes, and tolls; provisioning, billeting, and conscription; disease, epidemics, and infections; and pregnancy, prostitution, and ruined family life. With its tales of destroyed crops, surrendered harvests, extorted tribute, and the unrelenting burdens of billeting soldiers, Planert’s evidence supports the view of Roger Dufraisse and others that rural agricultural villages were in fact the greatest economic victims of Napoleon’s wars. The author makes a convincing case that the survival of family and village loomed far more paramount to average

people in those years than did the abstract ideal of national liberation.

Because of incessant fighting between 1792 and 1814, loyalty toward any one army or political cause remained unfixed. In varying degrees, all soldiers raped and plundered; all were loathsome. With the comparative basis of accommodating numerous armies (Habsburg, Russian, Allied, revolutionary French, and the émigré troops of Louis-Antoine-Henri de Bourbon-Condé), ordinary Swabians, Bavarians, and Badenese generally viewed every army as a misfortune, regardless of its provenance. The swagger of Condé's army caused Badenese subjects to welcome French revolutionary troops as liberators, but this view soon evaporated with French mistreatment, as it did with subsequent occupying armies. Because of earlier war experiences, southern Germans feared their Allied liberators in 1814 as much as they did the French. Drawing on diaries, church books, chronicles, and letters, Planert does not find an inchoate subjectivity of national citizenship taking shape during the war years, but rather one of fractured political allegiance. The Rhenish Confederation's promise of peace and stability, for instance, undermined any universal animus against Napoleon. On the contrary, southern Germans celebrated Napoleon after 1806 and fought with French armies as frequently as they did with Austrian or Allied colors. (Significantly, thirty thousand Bavarians fought for Napoleon in 1812.) Not surprisingly, then, when the Allies rallied to fight the French in 1813, villagers resorted to the usual tricks for avoiding military service and furthermore condoned the act of desertion, which was particularly high in 1813-14. Amidst such flux, religion remained the principal template for framing the war's supralocal and metaphysical meanings. Catholic imperial loyalties, priests' injunctions of divine punishment, and such forms of popular piety as millenarianism, Christian superstition, veneration of saints, and pilgrimages guided political attitudes more than any putative reorientation toward national ideals. Similarly, dynastic loyalty toward the Wittelsbachs spurred popular support of territorial defense more than nationalist sentiment. In short, Planert discounts the thesis that ordinary southern Germans perceived the wars as the "birth years" of a "national uprising." By persuasively contextualizing the conflicting circumstances for producing political allegiance, and by avoiding the plot reductions of subsequent national narratives, the book instead stresses the multivocal and polyvalent responses to a quarter

century of war and upheaval.

Juxtaposed with this analysis, the final section's examination of official and non-official memory in subsequent decades takes on a pronounced interpretive piquancy. At the lower levels of society, Planert notes, Germans grieved through the tradition of religion, commemorating their fallen in ways that corresponded to the ritual and calendar of their church. In local settings, families and parishes prayed for their fallen soldiers, including those who fought for Napoleon. Grassroots veteran organizations in Baden, Württemberg, and Bavaria also manifested the complex legacy of allegiance and memory by embracing a range of political credos: dynastic loyalty, nationalism, liberalism, and Bonapartism. But the politics of official memorialization was not so accommodating. With Bavaria leading the way, official memory redacted the era's numerous legacies and meanings. Alliances with the French were conveniently overlooked, just as celebrations of 1815 distorted the participation and engagement of governments and citizens of the Rhenish Confederation. Bavaria, Baden, and Württemberg molded the memory of the Wars of Liberation to consolidate and fortify their territorial sovereignty. Just as Ludwig I erected monuments that elided Bavaria's spilled blood for Napoleon, so too William I erected a column in Stuttgart to fashion himself as a pioneer of the anti-Napoleonic alliance. Substantiating Ernest Renan's claim that forgetting is crucial for creating states and nations, the book further confirms the notion that monuments are rarely built to remember.

The book's combination of social, cultural, and political history amounts to an extraordinary achievement. Methodologically, Planert has successfully blended various strains of social history to render both the structure of wartime life and its perceptions from the general populace. Her sedulous recovery of first-hand subjective accounts of ordinary Germany is particularly noteworthy, and her success should spur a discussion about their wider application for nineteenth-century social history. Historiographically, the volume's findings on southern German life provide scholars with a new level of empirical and interpretive depth for discussing regional response to Napoleonic war and politics. By reasserting the "polyphonic" complexity of southern German society through an adroit blend of methodological approaches, Planert has further demonstrated the significance of the "new military history" for virtually

all facets of history. Finally, the author commendably transcends the usual limitations of regional history by situating southern Germany in the larger sweep of European history. The narrative brings alive the region's trans-European character: its enduring connections with Habsburg imperial culture; its longer strained relations with France and its multiple forms of Francophobia and Francophilia; and its cultural and political transfers and affinities with the Rhineland and Switzerland. What emerges is a comprehensive framework of south-central European history that attests its salient differences from the experience of Prussia and northern Germany.

By bringing the reader so palpably close to the life-world of the southern German *Jedermann*, Planert has broken new ground. But her synthetic portrait of village life should be considered the start of new research program, and less so a comprehensive conclusion. For example, questions on the evolving nature of village political culture still need to be answered. On the one hand, the book's interpretations of village life emphasize deep-seated continuities of religious custom and dynastic loyalty that rendered southern Germans fundamentally indifferent to the rhetoric of national liberation. On the other hand, the book's last section turns on the tension between the Napoleonic era's heterogeneous political experience and the Restoration's subsequent manipulation of that memory: the former offering a broad range of attitudes, from territorial loyalty to constitutional liberalism to Francophilic Bonapartism; the latter, a

cardboard caricature of dynastic loyalty to national sacrifice. The ways in which the many kinds of lived political experience redounded into a post-Napoleonic popular political landscape deserve greater attention. Analyses of village politics do not always permit readers to assess the broad middle ground between hide-bound traditionalism and a full conversion to statist nationalisms. In other words, spurning official viewpoints does not translate into general indifference to changing ideals of governance and citizenship. As evinced by the book's last section, the region's future role in constitutional and oppositional politics was significant—and clearly has a history. But to what degree did villagers apprehend and internalize the new political era? In spite of political and socioeconomic rupture as well as the dynamic communicative flow of soldiers and goods, Planert's view of village politics can be too static. Building on Planert's study, future research should assess more fully how the oral, print, and symbolic communication of a new political era bled into village life over a quarter century. In this way, historians will be able to establish cultural continuities between the Napoleonic era and the political landscape of nineteenth-century civil society.

Such a comment detracts in no way from the larger point at hand: historians are indebted to Planert for this extraordinary work. The book should not only spur additional work on everyday life in the Napoleonic era, but also hone the research design that Planert has conceptualized so intelligently.

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