

*Iron and Blood. A Military History of the German-Speaking Peoples since 1500*, Peter H. Wilson. Allen Lane, 2022. 869 pp.

Unusually for so many books, this study delivers what it promises. The title is no deception, for we have a coverage of the peoples, including the Swiss, as well as a survey of all aspects of military life, from weapons to morale, geopolitics to social content, the treatment of prisoners to the costs of war. The question of a *Sonderweg* is discussed with care. Alongside a clear and lucid text, there are twenty excellent maps, as well as illustrations. There is no equivalent study of this quality for Germany, nor, indeed, really for any other European state, so Wilson deserves considerable praise for a work which should receive much attention. It is also very welcome to see some discussion of the post-1945 situation although possibly more could be added in a future edition. In particular, Wilson notes briefly the changes in German popular attitudes. He is correct, but this section is brief and could do with amplification and extension, not least in terms of more on East Germany, as well as on differences and tensions within German, Austrian and Swiss politics, and episodes that require more attention such as West German interest under Strauss in developing atomic warfare capability and the American response. Valuably, the book does not at all end in 1945, but there is an opportunity in waiting for the second edition which is sure to be eagerly awaited. Praise is earned by the inclusion of much that tends to be underplayed, including the naval dimension, and also the nature and extent of military knowledge, for example war games.

Individual themes, such as the role of cavalry and the nature of fortifications can be traced across the centuries through specialist sections. The consideration is thoughtful. For example, alongside the attention given to the increase in artillery (not least ammunition) in the late nineteenth century, Wilson draws attention to a traditionalism in assumptions on the part of artillery officers.

Impressive features include Wilson's justified stress on the long-term significance of the Austrian Habsburg monarchy, alongside the smaller German lands, all relative to Prussia, into the mid-nineteenth century. Within the space limits, Wilson also valuably sets the German experience into its broader European and, to an extent, global contexts. This brilliant book sets a model for other works.

(378 words)

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