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German Studies Association

In the Service of the Emperor: Italians in the Austrian Armed Forces 1814-1918 by Lawrence Sondhaus

Review by: Pieter M. Judson

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Lawrence Sondhaus. *In the Service of the Emperor: Italians in the Austrian Armed Forces 1814-1918* (East European Monographs, 291). New York: Columbia University Press for E.E.M., 1990. Pp. 217. \$28.00.

From the view point of military history, Lawrence Sondhaus has produced another carefully researched and well-written volume on a topic closely related to his earlier work on the Austrian navy. The book includes a biographical index, maps and a series of useful tables tracing the histories of Italian units during the nineteenth century. Those interested in questions of nationality and the historical construction of nationalist identities, however, will find this work less than satisfying.

Sondhaus sets out to revise the standard and very different biases which have traditionally informed accounts of Italians in the Habsburg armed forces. It is not surprising to learn that Austrian historiography minimized the abilities of Italian troops in the service of the Habsburgs while Italian historians have focused on the patriotic attempts by a few Austro-Italians to sabotage the efforts of Austria's armed forces. To correct both views, Sondhaus supplies a detailed history of those regiments and naval units which had at one time or another a substantial Italian makeup. He demonstrates effectively that the average Italian serviceman did not, in fact, engage in desertion or acts of sabotage, and that units with Italian majorities often performed exceptionally well, both in 1848 and 1859 against Piedmont, and again in 1863 against Denmark.

Sondhaus' generally uncritical approach to the complex issue of nationality itself, however, diminishes his otherwise fine research. This reader kept asking, Who were these Italians, and who defined them as such? The question poses fewer problems in the earlier sections of the book, where Sondhaus categorizes the Italians as troops originally from the provinces of Lombardy and Venetia. In these sections Sondhaus stresses the importance of local, regional and class loyalties in determining the troops' behavior, questioning the conclusions of those who attributed to them full-blown nationalist identities in 1848.

The problem becomes acute, however, when Sondhaus addresses the post-1867 period, when the Italians in the armed forces come from ethnically mixed regions. Here he relies on census data and Italian family names to arrive at statistics for the Italian composition of the armed forces. In doing so he mistakenly equates *Umgangssprache* with national identity, an untenable equation, given both the widespread bilingualism among many nineteenth-century Austrians, and the influence of regional loyalties on identity. As Istvan Deak has recently pointed out in his study of the Habsburg Officer Corps, *Beyond Nationalism* (178), statistics on "mother tongue" or "language of use" in the Vienna War Archive give no indication as to what these categories meant and how they were derived. Sondhaus' uncritical use of both these terms and

Italian family names as a determinant of national identity creates a host of difficulties. In the case of the famous irredentist Guglielmo Oberdan, for example, a list based on Sondhaus' method might have categorized this famous deserter as a Slovene, given his family name and his mother's Slovene background!

Sondhaus is aware of this problem as when, for example, he concludes that for most Austrian Italians, "*Italianatà* was something that set them apart from their German or Slavic neighbors without necessarily bringing them closer to the people of the Kingdom of Italy" (120), or in his discussion of the Cattarro mutiny which "divided the fleet along lines of class rather than nationality" (114). Yet any awareness of the problems surrounding his categories clearly did not shape Sondhaus' approach to his subject.

Despite its informative qualities and enjoyable style, this book misses some excellent opportunities to bring together the diverse fields of military, social and cultural history. Sondhaus' generally unreflective approach to the issue of nationality denies the complexity of national identity in nineteenth-century Austria, lending it instead a misleading transhistorical quality.

PIETER M. JUDSON, *Swarthmore College*

Brian Keith-Smith, and Lothar Schreyer. *Ein Vergessener Expressionist: Achtzehn Aufsätze über Leben und Werk mit unveröffentlichten Texten, Siebzehn Abbildungen und einer Bibliographie*. Göttingen: Hans-Dieter Heinz, Akademischer Verlag Stuttgart, 1990. Pp. 432. Cloth DM 58,—.

This series of essays by Keith-Smith covers the period from Schreyer's first writing until his death in 1966. The eighteen chapters, some of which were published earlier as separate articles, follow Schreyer's life and work with *Der Sturm*, the appointment to the Bauhaus in the twenties, and the years of his increasing isolation from the avant-garde both before and after World War II. Keith-Smith, who has been publishing on Schreyer for over ten years, offers a thorough overview of what is available in the Marbach archives where most of Schreyer's letters, papers, and manuscripts are housed. He also published here two previously unpublished pieces and quotes amply throughout the book from other unpublished Schreyer material. The bibliography offers a virtually complete listing of Schreyer's writings, some of which cannot be dated exactly because of contradictory dates given by Schreyer himself in various copies of a given manuscript.

Of central interest to Keith-Smith is Schreyer's increasing interest in religion and, in particular, Catholic mysticism. Many of these essays are devoted to an analysis of poems, theoretical writings, and novels inspired by