

Absolute war: violence and mass warfare in the German lands, 1792-1820

Hewitson, Mark, author

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Abstrak

Wars have played a fundamental part in modern German history. Although infrequent, conflicts involving German states have usually been extensive and often catastrophic, constituting turning points for Europe as a whole. This volume is the first in a series of studies that explore how such conflicts were experienced by soldiers and civilians during wartime, and how they were subsequently imagined and understood during peacetime. Without such an understanding, it is difficult to make sense of the dramatic shifts characterizing the politics of Germany and Europe over the past two centuries. The studies argue that the ease, or reluctance, with which Germans went to war, and the far-reaching consequences of such wars on domestic politics, were related to soldiers and civilians attitudes to violence and death, as well as to long-term transformations in contemporaries conceptualization of conflict. Absolute War reassesses the meaning of military conflict for the millions of German subjects who were directly implicated in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Based on a re-reading of contemporary diaries, letters, memoirs, official correspondence, press reports, pamphlets, treatises, poems, and plays, it refocuses attention on combat and conscription as the central components of new forms of mass warfare. It concentrates, in particular, on the impact of violence, killing, and death on soldiers and civilians experiences and subsequent memories of conflict. War has often been conceived of as an act of violence pushed to its utmost bounds, as Clausewitz put it, but the relationship between military conflicts and violent acts remains a problematic one.