

THE THIRTY YEARS' WAR BY GEOFFREY PARKER



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The Thirty Years' War

Second Edition

Edited by
Geoffrey Parker

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About the Author

Simon Adams worked as an editor of children's reference and other nonfiction books before becoming a full-time writer. He has written and contributed to more than fifty books on subjects as varied as the sinking of the Titanic, the two world wars, and the history of jazz. He is the author of "Kingfisher Knowledge: Castles & Forts, Kingfisher Knowledge: Life in Ancient Rome, The Kingfisher Atlas of the Ancient World "and "The Kingfisher Atlas of the Medieval World."

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The first edition of *The Thirty Years' War* offered an unrivalled survey of a central period in European history. Drawing on a huge body of source material from different languages and countries throughout Europe, it provided a clear and comprehensive narrative and analytical account of the subject. It has established itself as the classic text with reviewers, students and the general reader.

This second edition has been thoroughly revised to include the very latest research. The updated bibliographical information provides an invaluable resource, synthesising the major work in the field, in all languages, up to 1996.

Written with great clarity and liveliness, the book brings alive the period in all its aspects. It covers the horrors of the war and the contorted politics of the period. It deals with all the major figures, including Wallerstein and Richelieu, Gustavus Adolphus and Tilly, the Winter King and the Habsburg emperors. For range and depth of coverage there is no other work like it. It has become the definitive book on the subject.

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Parker is the Andreas Dopalen Distinguished Professor of History at Ohio State University.

Most helpful customer reviews

57 of 59 people found the following review helpful.

Good, But Not In Isolation

By Leif A. Torkelsen

Geoffrey Parker is quite simply one of the most thoughtful and talented military historians out there. His works are always profound and thought-provoking. However, in this instance, he may have bitten off more than he can chew.

The ugly fact is that the Thirty Years' War is a conflict of incredible complexity. No one book can capture all elements of this war. It is quite simply the historian's Gordian Knot, and even Parker cannot do it all in one book.

The bottom line? If you are a military historian, this is a very good book. However, Parker's own "The Military Revolution" and Dodge's classic biography of Gustavus Adolphus (really a history of European military tactics from 1600-1712) do the job better, especially as compliments to one another. For a political history, Ronald Asch does a better job in his history of the Thirty Years' War from the Hapsburg perspective (especially when combined with the Dodge book on Gustavus). In contrast, Parker's political history gets buried beneath too much detail (thereby running the risk of missing the forest for the trees).

Folks, don't let the complexity of the Thirty Years' War scare you. It is a fascinating conflict, one that is essential to understanding European history, military evolution and the emergence of the modern state. If you've got the stomach to read two or more books on the subject, you will be richly rewarded. Taken in conjunction with other works, Parker's book can add enormously to one's understanding of a seminal event in world history.

38 of 40 people found the following review helpful.

Good Introduction to Complex Topic

By R. Albin

This book is a concise introduction to the Thirty Years War. It is written primarily by Geoffrey Parker, though he recruited expert colleagues to assist on some chapters. Parker is a careful editor, as the book has a uniform style and reads like a single author text. I suspect its target audience is advanced undergraduates, and grad students and scholars specializing in other areas seeking an entry into the extensive literature on the Thirty Years War. It is not a comprehensive and detailed narrative history. Military history aficionados, in particular, will be disappointed because there is little coverage of campaigns and battles. There is, however, a nice chapter analyzing the nature of warfare during the Thirty Years War. The book is devoted primarily to political history, diplomatic history, and the structural effects of the Thirty Years War on the European State System and the organization of individual states. These topics are addressed very well. Of particular interest to the authors is the question of why the Thirty Years War lasted so long. Wars were very common in Early Modern Europe both before and after this conflict but usually of shorter duration. The answer(s) appear to be a combination of factors including changes in military technology, the organizational immaturity of states that precluded decisive victory, the religious dimension of the war, and unwillingness of key actors to compromise. Often presented as a pointless and exhausting conflict, the Thirty Years War did produce lasting effects; for example, the Austrian Hapsburgs would never again try to impose hegemony on Germany. In exchange, however, their grip on the core lands of Austria, Bohemia, and Hungary tightened. The alliance between the Austrian and Spanish Hapsburgs was severed and France emerged as the preeminent continental European Power. One aspect that the authors slight is the international, indeed, intercontinental aspects of the Thirty Years War. Implicit in the narrative is the fact that events all over the world, such as conflict between the Dutch and Spanish/Portugese in South America, and Ottoman-Persian rivalries in the Near East had a huge impact on the Thirty Years War. A very attractive feature is an excellent annotated bibliography written by Professor Parker that will take interested readers deeper into the literature. This book fulfills its goal of being a concise introduction but there is still a need for a substantial narrative history based on modern scholarship.

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful.

An Invaluable Overview without Simplification

By Bryan Gibby

Geoffrey Parker can have one epitaph: concise. A lot of information is packed into this edited history of the 30 Years War. The reader may feel that he or she is not getting the full treatment, but it is all there. Of significant note and contribution is the exposure of the many facets of cause and continuation of the war; religion played a key role, but the war gave birth to national identities that eventually consumed confessional politics. A lot of attention is given to on the surface "irrational" behavior by generals and potentates, and this is the first place I've seen an objective perspective from both sides during the first decade of decision. This makes a great case study for analyzing grand and military strategy. Tactics and operations are not ignored, but rather they figure into their proper place. It was intrigue and financial systems that determined the outcome, not decisive battles or campaigns.

There is a unique aberration, though. The section entitled "Total War" doesn't give much on totality in the modern sense that we think of total war. Particularly since the last section tells how France could not wage anything but small war until the 1640s.

Despite that, the reader gets the sense of the true scope of conflict: from the Iberian peninsula to the fringe of the Ottoman Empire; from south of the Alps to the northern reaches of Sweden. The war was not just a German affair, nor did it result in just a German solution.

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