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# Concept for Validating the Theoretical Potential of Historical Sources. The Case of Analyzing Long-Term Changes in the Habsburg Military Habitus

*Helmut Kuzmics* \*

**Abstract:** »Ein Konzept zur Validierung des theoretischen Potentials historischer Quellen. Am Beispiel der Analyse langfristiger Wandlungen des habsburgischen Militärhabitus«. Interpreting sources that stretch over a period of more than a century causes major methodological problems. For every type of source, different pragmatic contexts exist on the level of the generation of these data (administrative, audience-directed etc.) that determine also the possible uses for descriptive and explanatory purposes. The paper argues that although these problems should not be neglected it is, nevertheless, possible to overcome them in a reflexive, theoretically informed way. The example discussed here is how to verify the assumption of a stable habitus: Most Habsburg commanders and officers seemed to have lacked the readiness to take (calculated) risks and initiative – the qualities of good leadership. Can we explain lacking success in war by a specific Austrian military habitus? This paper tries to solve this puzzle by analyzing selected autobiographies, official files, literary sources and semi-official regimental histories that contain descriptions and declamations of the relevant emotions that steered the behaviour of Austrian officers and commanders throughout this period of more than a century.

**Keywords:** Theory and Methods, Figurational Sociology, Sociology of Emotions, Military Sociology, Habitus, Validity, Military Personnel Records, Ego-Documents, Autobiographies

## 1. The Research Problem: Grasping an Austrian Military Habitus and Identifying its Role in Success or Failure in War

The Habsburg officer has left his traces in hundreds of reels of film that transmit to us a brilliantly deceptive picture of his nature or better: of his appearance. He is charming, wears a sparkling uniform, is a darling both to mature ladies and betrayed, innocent girls; he is most often not too clever, but never

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shuns a duel and takes the field courageously, particularly when reserved for merry military exercises. If we want to deal with his (and his commander's) fate in the spirit of objective science, though, this picture most certainly has to be redrawn and revised. It is also necessary to specify these emotions according to the main goals of a research-agenda, which is defined by one interest: how to explain success or failure in war as being caused by a certain type of collective mentality, in this case, of Habsburg armies throughout a period of more than a century until the final collapse of the Dual Monarchy in the year 1918. We start with the astonishing stability of certain constellations in the Austrian history of armed conflict: After the overwhelming victories of Prince Eugene against Turks and French between 1683 and 1736, no decisive and lasting triumph was secured by Habsburg armies.

In the character of Austrian officers and commanders, we encounter the paradox of an unbroken, feudal and chivalrous warrior-spirit (Allmayer-Beck 1987: 31-2) that is in marked contrast to an attitude of faltering and wavering, of dependency and indecision, which makes defeat seem inevitable. This holds true for most of the second half of the 18th century, but it culminates in the French Wars from 1792 to 1815. Around the year 1800, Napoleon's way of making war was, simple, quick and ruthless, compared to Austria's. Even the great reformer of the Austrian army, Archduke Charles, victor in the battle of Aspern, was not prepared to accept this new line of thinking unconditionally (Krieg 1809. Vol. I 1907: 116). His officers and generals were even less able to adapt to it, according to the opinion expressed in the so-called 'Generalstabswerk' about the Napoleonic War in 1809, roughly a hundred years after the event:

Individual capable leaders, as they might have proved to be while conducting small detachments and performing duties that formed part of the so-called 'small war', lost any initiative, did nothing without obtaining orders from above, as soon as they felt themselves caught in the narrow framework of the army. They saw themselves, according to tradition, only as a little cog of the big machine, whose movement, small or big, depended only on the main driving force, the supreme command. This behavior of leaders of the lower ranks left its imprint of passive obedience on the Austrian army, an obedience, which made the troops sacrifice themselves in blind devotion but which seldom encouraged them to act in a self-reliant and circumspect way. This led necessarily to massive failure against an enemy who showed activity and initiative on the grandest possible scale (Krieg 1809. Vol. I 1907: 118; translation by author).

The late-baroque 'Austrian philosophy of battle' (Allmayer-Beck/Lessing 1981) with its tendency towards paralyzing inactivity had already been put to painful test by the Prussian Frederick II; Napoleon enforced a total reversal. But in spite of all reformist activity (with reforms also after defeat in the battles at Solferino and Königgrätz), Rauchensteiner was to characterize the quality of

Austrian command in World War I in roughly the same words. Here after the failed autumn campaign of Luck 1915, he writes:

What could be seen here, was a dilemma of Austro-Hungarian command, though, and in particular, it was also a dilemma of its commanders. The commanders of the army and a whole lot of commanders of army corps were, indeed, neither able to show initiative nor to guide a practical operation independently. They showed a degree of dilettantism that was shamefully concealed by most of Austrian literature written after the war.

But it would probably not be correct to single out individual persons and to criticize them. Since they were not single individuals! From the army's supreme command, to the army commanders, and the commanders of army corps and of divisions, one had to conclude time and again that the generals fell mostly short of expectations, developed too little initiative, did not always obey to orders and, above all, could neither convince nor inspire. Therefore, to talk of failure is not enough, for the reasons for it were to some extent, indeed, more profound than that (Rauchensteiner 1994: 290; translation by author).

Rauchensteiner blames the training. But it was just this education and training that had continually been addressed since the war against Prussia in the 18th century. Did the Habsburg armies never succeed in adapting to the standards of their time, in spite of eternal reforming?

Beyond its possible interest to military historians, this question can also be formulated as a more general one, in a broader historical-sociological context.

Why do some states assert themselves in the course of history, and why do others fail? This question has re-emerged in Sociology, after a period of rather abstract and economically oriented thinking in terms of prospects and trends of 'modernization' with all its implicit vagueness.

A re-born historical sociology (Abrams 1982; Smith 1991; Mann 1993; Tilly 1992) has renewed our interest in the problems of state formation and warlike state competition as well. But not accidentally, probably, our focus of attention had also been directed to psycho-history as a historical sociology of emotions. Both have brilliantly come together in Elias's theory of the civilizing process (Elias 2000 [1939]).

The 1980s brought a re-discovery of the nation-state and its success in overcoming older political systems like dynastic states and empires, although most authors were guided by their wishes to see an end both to nations and nationalism (Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990).

For Anderson (1974), Austria's major defect lay in her inability to bring about fully developed capitalism, embodying, at the same time, a dissociating negation of the bourgeois nation-state. Roughly the same complex of arguments can be found in Kennedy's (1990) account of overstretched great powers with limited economic resources: According to Kennedy, Austria's fall out of the ranks of the established great powers was simply due to lack of resources and national cohesion, although Kennedy does agree with the revisionist line of thinking that refuses to see the Habsburg economy as a failure, in line with

Good (1984). This view of over-stretch is shared by a recent historical analysis for the 18th century in a detailed way (Hochedlinger 2003). M. Mann's (1993) certainly most sophisticated account discusses all these factors, putting weight rather on the lack of common citizenship and the dynastic madness of pursuing ambitious aims in geopolitical state-competition that lacked realism, exacerbated by a profound lack of leadership and wisdom.

But what these three historical-sociological narratives omit is any mention of mentalities or social (or national) habitus. None of the authors discussed the emotional aspect of this process of knock-out competition between empires and nation-states. They converge in attributing a major role to military success or failure – losing decisive battles or winning them –, but they do not provide any information of how these were achieved or experienced. These explanations cannot, for instance, tell why it was so often the case that Habsburg armies lost battles even when they were hugely superior in numbers.

Austria's status as a great power was a result of the victory over the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the 18th century. After the triumphs under the leadership of Prince Eugene, virtually no decisive victories were achieved until the fateful year of 1914. The slow decline of Austrian greatness, however, lasted two centuries and it contained ample opportunities for successes on the battlefield. In the wars against Prussia (1740-1763), France (1792-1815), Prussia again (1866) and the Entente-powers (1914-1918), Austrian armies – contradicting the myth of total financial neglect and poor equipment – enjoyed, time and again, the advantage of substantial numerical superiority over their opponents, at least in some decisive battles.

Why did they also often end in defeat? To select just a few examples, Habsburg armies lost battles against numerically weaker enemies at Soor 1745 (*Österreichischer Erbfolgekrieg 1740-1748*. Vol. VII. 1896: 577-9) and Leuthen 1757 (*Allmayer-Beck/Lessing 1981*: 47, 92), Ulm 1805 and Eggmühl 1809 (*Schmitthenner 1937*), Königgrätz 1866 (*Preil 1993*) and Luck 1915 (*Rauchensteiner 1994*).

Some elements seem to be common to all these defeats – slowness of movement, lack of energy, indecisiveness, scattering of forces, passivity, but not seldom combined with enormous sacrifices in reckless, suicidal attacks.

This doesn't mean that we have to believe in an outmoded concept of 'decisive battles' as turning points of world history. As Clausewitz had already pointed out, it is very often the numerically weaker who, if only determined enough, wins the day. In addition, the ability to form successful coalitions is very often more important for achieving survival or triumph in state-competition – a very good example is Austria herself in the Napoleonic wars: it was only by forming a successful coalition – and not by spectacular fighting – that she survived these disastrous years as a formidable great power.

And, last but not least, the situational and institutional constraints that can be summarized as consequences of 'over-stretch' might remain the central

causal factor but with the addition that they operate by way of a mediating mentality or habitus. In this case, it will act not as an independent but as a dependent 'variable', gaining independent causal value only if seen as a habitus lagging behind otherwise changed social conditions (of armament, strategy or geopolitical constellations).

But if it is correct that a certain mentality was responsible for defeat in state-competition: how, then, can we prove it sociologically? I think that a sociology-of-emotions perspective might help a lot here.

## 2. Problems in Operationalizing the Concept of a Military Habitus

The concept of a 'social habitus' has always been a very difficult one, and its sociological use presupposes careful elaboration of it in terms of definition, range (officers vs. common soldiers), consequences for the selection of data and its place in causal explanation.

### 2.1 Defining Concepts

The basic problem of an historical explanation based on the assumption of a collective mentality (as an approximation of the concept of 'habitus') is simply to overcome the disbelief of all those who deeply mistrust the possibility of gaining reliable, intersubjective access to a person's inner world of feelings and perceptions. Since the core of history as a discipline is still defined by the chronological reconstruction of events as reported by spotless sources, and since neither the grand nor the petty emotions would normally find their way into those, historians are notably sceptical and will probably always be so. While they did not necessarily need to subscribe to Berkeley's solipsism (Lorenz 1997: 113), they would – and still do – always prefer data that either allows for an easy classification of observable objects or that provides unequivocal evidence of clear intentions (therefore, the focus is on 'intentional explanations' and the accordance of – rational – plans with subsequent action (Lorenz 1997: 115-6).

Therefore, it took many generations of historians before the power of the 'unconscious' or the 'Super-ego' (Freud) was acknowledged, at which point a new psycho-history (P.Ariès, L. De Mause, P.Gay, R. Porter etc.) arrived and claimed its rank among the established disciplines. The second blow to 'intentional' explanations was the existence of all non-intentional consequences of planned action, and the more so, if they formed a kind of 'structure' with a certain order. Both – the unconscious and the non-intentional – are combined in Elias's theory of civilizing processes (Elias 2000). But this is sociology.

Although, sociology, too, harbours representatives of various schools who are against too much theorising about 'inner states' of feeling – like some sym-

bolic interactionists (Blumer 1973) or followers of the model of 'rational choice' –, it has developed manifold methods of qualitative research that can cope with emotions quite well. Here, the skepticism revolves around the notion of a process spanning several generations and generating a recognizably stable structure of 'social' or 'national' habitus; in particular, a new orthodoxy has formed itself that treats everything ethnic or national as 'constructed' or 'invented' (Hobsbawm/Ranger 1983; Anderson 1983).

Therefore, the concept of a state-specific military habitus needs careful elaboration in order to allow empirical data to function as 'plausible evidence' for an interpretive, 'verstehende' sociological method (see Schwandt 1998: 225-235 for the difference between phenomenological and interactionist conceptions of 'Verstehen', and Kincheloe/McLaren 1998: 287-8 for the criterion of 'trustworthiness' against conventional 'validity').

In order to give an unequivocal empirical meaning to the concept of a military habitus that shaped the behaviour of Austrian commanders and officers, it will have to be developed in five steps:

- 1) I discuss some of the emotions occurring most often in soldiers, officers and commanders at war.
- 2) I will turn to the concept of habitus as used by Elias.
- 3) I embrace the still relevant analytical distinctions made by Clausewitz (1952).
- 4) I turn to some attempts of operationalization in a well-known study of empirical research ('The American Soldier', Stouffer et al. 1949)
- 5) I will discuss the implications for the collection of historical data.

Against the conventional view of 'battle' as social event that military historians have developed, John Keegan (1976/1991) has put particular emphasis on the concrete experience of the single ill-treated soldier himself. There is no neat and well-ordered picture for him. Physically and psychologically, things are in constant flux; there may be hours of secure boredom and passivity, and then suddenly, he is thrown into a tumultuous sequence of extremely dangerous moments. He can experience exultation, panic, rage, grief, consternation, courage, and feelings of loyalty to his comrades in arms. In principle, he will live through every affect that we might find in one of the current lists (Tomkins 1963): joy, fear, anger, shame, disgust or dismay, grief, surprise and distress, although quite likely in differing composition and proportions according to the difference between peaceful everyday-life and organized fight. We may distinguish three aspects of these emotions:

- *somatic* (acceleration of the heart-beat, sweating, trembling etc.);
- *behavioural* (flight or attack, including the expressive aspect, functional in group communication) and the
- *feeling-component* (i.e., panic) in the narrower sense of the term 'emotion' (Elias 1987).

All these emotions are subject to what Elias called 'affect control', enforced by external constraints or self-constraint, although in varying degree, from extreme panic to moderate, 'civilized' anxieties, which are accessible to cognitive planning.

Those emotions and emotional controls which can be seen as relevant for the success in battle ('courage', 'boldness', 'discipline') are, of course, also subject to social change; the 'lust for attack' of a medieval knight may turn into irresponsible rashness under the condition of narrow tactical discipline in the machine-like armies centuries later; 'heroism' might appear in the disguise of dignified perseverance under heavy fire. 'Boldness' is different in the case of a common infantryman or a general (Keegan 1987/1997): the latter's boldness can take the form of considered restraint.

The expression of emotions can be genuine or feigned; much of what counts as qualities of good leadership involves the emotional labour of simulating feelings (appearing untouched, calm, or fiery).

And finally, we have to distinguish between emotions as a result of situational constraints and as a result of relatively stable dispositions, of 'personality' and its 'traits' (Argyle 1976). The latter contain elements of learned behaviour – the so-called 'social' or 'national habitus' (Elias 1996) in case of stable institutional arrangements, of social mints that coin 'civilized' behaviour.

## 2.2 Officers vs. General Soldiers

Everywhere in the world, a good general gives his orders in unmistakable terms, is outspoken and clear, and an excellent observer. He also cares for his men, gives praise to them if necessary and sees to it that they are well-nourished and -paid. But, in order to motivate the troops, he must also control the expression of his own emotions which may involve not only self-mastery but also a good portion of play-acting. The commander's emotions and emotional control are, therefore, no less important than those of the common soldier. They are certainly of no lesser importance to success in battle than the situational and technological factors that limit 'command in war' as has been shown by Van Creveld (1987).

In a sociological perspective, what counts is the unity of a process-related sociological puzzle – here, like in Elias's famous examples, I develop a dominant research question (the apparently hapless behaviour of Austrian armies in the 19th and early 20th centuries), and I try to solve it with the help of the concept of 'habitus'. By 'habitus' – a word which he used long before its popularization by Pierre Bourdieu – Elias basically means 'second nature' or 'embodied social learning'' (Dunning/Mennell 1996: IX). A habitus, as Elias once remarked, usually takes at least three generations to appear (and, probably, three to disappear). A habitus is the result of learned affective controls – of

fears and joys and their consideration in action-chains of varying length and varying degrees of rational planning.

### 2.3 Choosing and Finding Appropriate Data

The general notion both of emotions in war and of an affect-regulating military habitus was already familiar to Clausewitz. For Clausewitz (1952: 255), no normative theory of war could be formulated without giving these ‘immaterial’ forces their due:

Since no victory, for instance, can be plausibly explained in its effects without taking the moral impressions into consideration. And, thus, most of the subjects we deal with in this book consist of half physical, half moral causes and effects, and one would like to say: the physical forces appear rather only like the wooden shaft of a sword while the moral ones are the precious metal, the real, ground-down weapon (Clausewitz 1952: 255; translation by author).

For Clausewitz, these factors were inseparably linked and could be distinguished only analytically. Most remarkable was his concept of ‘martial virtues of the troops’ (‘kriegerische Tugend eines Heeres’). These properties should not be equated simply with courage and enthusiasm for war, both of which are seen as necessary, but not sufficient conditions for these martial virtues to emerge. Practice and training have to follow, as do obedience, rule and method. War is a business that can turn into a craft exercised with ease and reliability. The control of emotions is central to it – not getting terrified by imagined fears, but fighting against justified ones; showing pride in victory, but not despairing and disobeying in defeat; keeping trust and confidence in their leaders even in misery – such is an army that is infused with a warlike spirit. If we conceptualize ‘habitus’ in a way that it contains both emotional and cognitive elements as well as behavioural automatisms that become ‘second nature’, already visible in the make-up of the person (soldier, officer, commander), then this is the concept Clausewitz had in mind. ‘Kriegerische Tugend’ is a product of critical experiences in battles (‘battle-hardened’ is the term we need) and of successful commanders; it emerges during wars but can persist through several generations, even in periods of peace. Its main elements are boldness and perseverance. The development of the ‘joy of attacking’ (Elias 2000: 161-71) throughout the civilizing process, conceived as a process of weakening of emotions like anger or rage, from altruistic sentiments of friendship to the pleasure of physical combat, can go into two ideal-typical directions:

- 1) *optimization and routinization of constraints by others*, i.e. discipline, defined as the automation of self-constraints,
- 2) *strengthening of self-constraints* in terms of individual self-control.

Following this latter criterion, the war of commanders and officers is always more civilized than the war of common soldiers; but we may also think of developments that lead to more self-reliance and autonomy of the ordinary soldier himself. The main subject of the well-known study on the ‘American

Soldier' (Stouffer et al. 1949) was, thus, to explore what would 'make the [soldiers] want to keep going and do as well as [they] could' after they had already had combat experience.

Some hints can be found in the percentage of people who say that they were motivated by 'solidarity with the group' or 'thoughts of home and loved ones', but which emotions are hidden behind the business-like formulation 'ending the task' (39%, and therefore the largest part of the respondents, consented to this sentence)? Some confessed to 'vindictiveness', and largely their officers believed that many men were motivated by 'leadership and discipline' (19%; as opposed to only 1% of the men, who agreed to that). We do not find any item in this study which could be interpreted simply in terms of what Elias called 'Angriffslust' (best translated as 'attacking spirit' or 'joy of attacking'): The closest results we can get are the 59% of respondents who believe that 'the best combat soldier [they] have known' showed, above all, courage and aggressiveness (Stouffer et al. 1949: 133-4). These latter qualities were much less important in officers (30%); whereas 'leadership' (56% for officers) received exactly the attention one would expect. We do not learn here what it is that defines good leadership in a more detailed way.

Courage means the overcoming of fear, caused by the horror of war and its brutality. We owe John Keegan a detailed, precise description of the decisive, headless flight of Napoleon's Imperial Guard in the battle of Waterloo in 1815. This was the famous, battle-hardened Imperial Guard, not a bunch of recently drafted conscripts. Why did their morale collapse? Many explanations can be rejected. The general and officers led their men bravely. The soldiers were experienced. The guard's battle-order was immaculate, in spite of massive gunfire before the attack. Paradoxically, the flight did not begin where the danger was greatest and the enemy-fire most painful – here, the guard did not give in. The flight-movement occurred in the rear where, apparently, the danger was less; but, according to Keegan, the attacking column had been very narrow, organized in depth, and so the effect of forced passivity (the soldiers had no space to put up a fierce resistance) added to the lack of knowledge about what was going on at the front. Unguided, they were hit by an irresistible wave of panic, and an absolute elite-formation dissolved into a sheer crowd. In such cases, neither fear of sanctions nor the loss of 'honour', of respect in the eyes of the others can help, although, normally, group-pressure and the fear of shame are the most important pillars to secure 'discipline' and 'courage'.

How dramatically fear can be experienced has also been demonstrated in 'The American Soldier (Stouffer et al. 1949: 201): In one of the most telling of all survey-research items ever (Fear Symptoms Reported by Troops in Combat Divisions), the Division A-soldiers from the Pacific war-theatre confessed that they had experienced somatic symptoms at least sometimes: from 'violent pounding of the heart' (84%) to 'vomiting' (27%), 'losing control of bowels' (21%) and 'urinating in pants' (10%). 65% of the soldiers (Stouffer et al. 1949:

232) admitted to having experienced a state of fear at least once that had made them virtually unable to react 'adequately' in battle (this is an important finding and has to be weighed against the manifold criticisms against quantification as reported in Schweber 2002).

A good example for this is given by the Italian writer and soldier in the First World War, Emilio Lussu, who described the emotions in the fight after 'going over the top' without shelter and under heavy fire: Instead of using his pistol, he throws a stick, an 'alpenstock' on the bewildered Austrians, who catch it in the air (Lussu 1992: 128).

If we think that male pride seldom allows for confessions like these as made by Lussu and the American soldiers in the study, we gain both an idea of how often these emotions will be under-reported (also in fiction!) and of what 'courage' or 'boldness' really mean (as conscious, reflexive action or automatically trained behaviour in face of terrible fright). We can also take it for certain that their meanings will vary in time.

Let us now summarize the methodological implications for the study of the Austrian habitus of 'tarrying and faltering' from 1800 to 1918. Explaining behaviour as a consequence of a certain 'habitus' means that we are able to typify some character traits which restrict the free choices of acting and favour some alternatives above others. The best possible data are those which allow us simultaneously to identify the emotion and the corresponding behaviour, that can be seen as the result (for instance, panic and a silly decision to withdraw in face of overestimated danger). Such data will be rare, since this would mean having an observer (or honest self-reporter) being present where both the emotion occurs and the action takes place. Moreover, also the behaviour is rare, since it occurs in a few battles that interrupt usually far longer periods of peace. And a habitus can not be observed directly, but only indirectly, by selecting indicators that allow to draw plausible conclusions.

## 2.4 Building an Historical Causal Explanation

Moreover, emotions can evade both the observer and the consciousness of the actors themselves: in the case of by-passed, unacknowledged shame, Scheff and Retzinger (1991) have demonstrated the absence of all normally reliable 'markers' of shame, such as trembling hands, gestures of flight, and blushing, whereas only accelerated speed of speech, combined with the tacit knowledge of its cause, may indicate a state of deep shame. And it may be taken for granted that such shame-states are not even noticed by the person involved himself. We might need a lot of additional, *biographical information* in order to be able to decide questions like these; this information might only be found in autobiographies or detailed biographies which, in the absence of videotaped interactions, can usually only be found for persons of a certain, usually higher, social status.

But putting these problems aside, emotions can also be detected often quite easily – in *everyday-life* as well as in the particular situation of scientific observation: We might look for nonverbal and verbal indicators of emotional states (gestures, sounds, mimics, whole-body posture etc.; speech acts of all kind). Because emotions also have a behavioural component (e. g. the fight-or-flight-reaction; Elias 1987), people are able to interpret this behaviour as indicating the emotion quite reliably – otherwise, social life would not be possible at all.

Proceeding from emotions to a habitus characterised by a particular mixture of affects and learned affective controls, we might also gain information about the social environments that shape it.

The stable traits of a type of personality may be the result of early socialization (thus generating what Clausewitz called the ‘martial spirit of the people’ [‘kriegerischen Volksgeist’]; in the Habsburg monarchy, Tyroleans or the Serbs and Croats of the so-called ‘military border’ against the Ottoman Empire [‘Militärgrenze’] might be plausible candidates). But more often, as also Clausewitz maintains, the ‘martial virtues’ of an army are the result of a certain continuity of institutions and their ‘*esprit de corps*’. Here, the stability of character very often might mean the stability of situations that vary only little from generation to generation. Austria might never have achieved the highest possible degree of professionalization throughout the century – what we would need here, therefore, is information about the *institutions of training and military education*. They are inseparably linked to the fate of the whole, dynastic state itself and we would certainly need some process-related information about it – a biography of ‘Austria’ (or ‘Austria-Hungary’) from the Napoleonic Wars to its demise as a political unit in the year 1918.

Provided we can obtain the data as sketched here so far, this will still not be sufficient for the causal explanation that we aim at (that it is a habitus which co-determines success or failure in war). In order to be able to estimate its effect, we have to collect *comparative data* or provide a theoretical frame which allows us to draw comparisons. This is probably the most difficult part of our enterprise: It is not enough to show that Austrian officers had problems in taking bold and circumspect decisions – we must be able to infer that their problems were greater than those of the French, the Prussians or the Russians, in any case, than those of the immediate rival in state-competition. We can only hope to occasionally get such direct information (e. g. French visitors uttering harsh opinions about the Austrian or voices of Austrians, comparing their situation unfavourably to that of the Prussians).

For the purpose of this paper, three types of process-generated data have been triangulated:

- 1) public administrative data, collected for the purpose of evaluation of the professional qualities of Habsburg officers

- 2) an autobiographical account of an Austrian commander of the Napoleonic Wars (Mack, who was defeated at Ulm 1805 and tried to defend himself against the accusation of high treason);
- 3) the equally autobiographical account, based on diaries, of an Austrian general in the First World War, compared with semi-official accounts by officers in a kind of 'regimental history'.

### 2.5 Paradigm Guiding Data Analysis and Interpretation

These data will be interpreted in a middle way, somewhere between what Clifford Geertz (1973) called 'Thick Description' and the interpretative method advocated by Anselm Strauss, which has become famous as 'Grounded Theory' (Strauss/Corbin 1990/1996). The latter method was developed for the analysis of material, gained for the explicit purpose of scientific investigation, be it observation, field work or qualitative interviews. The material used here was originally gained for other purposes: the context of data-generation differs from the context of scientific use. We have, therefore, to adapt a sociology-of-knowledge perspective for the interpretation of the data in use. They are part of a larger process of communication in which the descriptive element of mapping a certain area of reality is complemented and shaped by the pragmatic functions of these data (evaluation reports aim at improving the quality of military staff, the elaborate defence of a general aims at securing the restoration of his honour with the help of a public audience, autobiographies may help to secure the love and devotion of the children and imagined grand-children; novels want to accuse or to move, and so on).

## 3. Validation of Data Analysis

Peter Laslett once wrote an essay on the relationship between the use of qualitative data (in particular, fictional literature) and science under the title: 'The wrong way through the telescope'. Written against tendencies in his field, such as tendency in French histories of childhood, dying, sexuality etc., to employ 'soft' methods such as the interpretation of literary sources, Laslett's article pleads for a return to the virtues of the hard data of demography, such as frequencies of birth and deaths, family size, age of marriage and so on. His main proposition is contained in the title: Those who use literary, 'soft' data resemble the spectator who wants to see nature but stares into the diminished eye of another spectator instead. Reading Shakespeare to gain information on the past, we arrive at Shakespeare's eye, at that which Shakespeare wants us to see of reality or what he allows us to see. Following Laslett, we need to find a positive answer to these questions:

- Since literary evidence also has non-descriptive functions (to entertain, to accuse, etc.), does it not distort reality by putting emphasis on these interests?
- Could the author not have invented what he/she describes?
- Can literary evidence be confirmed by further, perhaps nonfictional evidence?
- Could the author have been in a position to know the social phenomena from first-hand experience?
- Fiction normally contains only vague, if any, statements of frequency (of events, properties, etc.). Are the proportions roughly accurate reflections of reality?
- A sociology of literary expression is needed which deals with the problem: What kind of audience was addressed by what kind of message? Since exaggeration, colourization, suppression and invention are common elements of literature (poetic truth is different from plain truth), the social scientist must have a theory of that or at least a suspicion about the intentions of the author and their effects on the subject; how his/her position is related to the interests, attitudes and expectations shared by members of those strata in which he supposes his/her reader to be. Not only are the conscious intentions of the writer important but so, too, are the many unconscious traits of the socially shaped person of the literary author.

Laslett's essay aimed, primarily, at the use of literary sources, like fiction, poetry or drama, but many of his postulates can be extended to the use of qualitative data of all other kinds – such as the evaluation files, autobiographies and regimental histories that were the basis of the comparison drawn here.

We can identify five aspects or dimensions of evaluation:

- 1) that of the *pragmatic intention*, in which this act of communication took place, and the effect which this intention has on the correctness of self-characterisations and of the perception of the behaviour of others, including external, institutional constraints;
- 2) that of the value which can be attributed to the author's utterances from the *emic perspective* (Pike 1954/1967) of his/her everyday-life view of the world, in the dialectics of 'Selbstverstehen' and 'Fremdverstehen' according to Schütz (1932/1974); these authors can be considered as lay actors who want to make sense of the social world as it is assumed by sociologists in the traditions of ethnomethodology.
- 3) that of the meaning of the new source's evidence, seen and judged from the *etic perspective* from the professional scientist him/herself who adds theories, historical and institutional knowledge; here, for instance, about the process of Austrian state-formation and the development of the army from the late 18th to the early 20th century. Complementing the macro-perspective, we also need theoretical models of the affective make-up of the typical per-

sonality-structure (for instance, Elias (1996) describes the warrior-mentality of the German aristocracy);

- 4) *triangulation*: that of the innovative, falsifying or confirming, character of the new information: how typical is it for theoretical classification?
- 5) *conceptual generalization*: the value of the information for comparative purposes and for judging the relative impact and extent of an Austrian habitus.

## 4. Data Type 1: Public Administrational Data

### 4.1 Description of the Data Source

Since the third and last war against Prussia waged for the possession of Silesia 1756-1763, the Austrian army had introduced so-called ‘Conduite-Listen’, later called ‘Qualifikationslisten’ (evaluation records) in order to collect systematic information about the qualities Habsburg officers should possess. In doing this, the Austrians followed the example of the (successful) Prussians; the personality-traits of generals and commanders were included in so-called ‘individual descriptions’ (‘Individuelle Beschreibungen’) which were, as a rule, more complex than those of the officers. These records, kept by their respective superiors, contain a wealth of information on the average Austrian officer and commander, classified in those categories that were deemed important for their behaviour in battle and peace (in the barracks). These documents date back to the reign of Maria-Theresa and are available for all officers starting in the year 1823.<sup>1</sup> The records were kept until 1918 and can serve as a preliminary operational definition of an ‘officer-habitus’.

Let us take a closer look at some files of officers. In the year 1838 the record of Joseph Radanovich – who was a long-serving captain of riflemen (‘Grenadier’)<sup>2</sup> – contained the category: ‘performance’ (‘Aufführung’), with the subcategory: behaviour (‘Betragen’), in turn with the subcategory ‘in the face of the enemy’ (‘vor dem Feinde’) and here, we find the entry: ‘Shows courage and endurance, has resolution and ambition, fulfils his duty, has been wounded once.’

Another category listed the number and year of the campaigns he was involved in (‘was für Campagnen mitgemacht’): Here, we find the Napoleonic wars (1805, 1809, 1812, 1813, 1814, 1815), and the war in 1821. In the record of a 1st Lieutenant Friedrich Count Deym (for the year 1828), these categories are empty (‘has not served yet’, ‘none’). The evaluation file for Mathias Koller

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier files were largely burned in the fire that laid waste to the Austrian ‘Palace of Justice’ (‘Justizpalast’) in the year 1927; from 1869 onwards, they were called ‘evaluation records’ (‘Qualifikationslisten’; Ganser 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Here and in all other examples of evaluation-files the translations are my own.

(from the year 1824) contains under the heading: 'behaviour in the face of the enemy' the simple word 'good' ('brav') – Koller took part in the campaigns of 1813 and 1814 (he belonged to the light cavalry – 'Dragoner') All three were long-serving soldiers; Radanovich the longest-serving with more than 33 years.

The category 'behaviour' was split into three further subentries: 'Towards civilians' ('mit dem Civile'), 'in the regiment' ('im Regiment') and 'towards his subordinates' ('mit seinen Untergebenen'). Radanovich was given the following characterizations: 'decent' (in interactions with civilians), 'pleasing, popular and estimated' (towards his peers in the regiment), 'knows how to maintain respect', and his behaviour towards his subordinates was described as: 'with dignity and authority, severe but fair, cares for his men'. Koller, who was much younger, got less telling evaluations: 'decent', 'sociable' and 'fair' (towards his subordinates), and similar judgement were made for Count Deym ('very decent', 'generally popular' and 'adequate').

The evaluation reports comprehended, thus, information about practically all relevant social relations of an officer: those within the army and those outside towards superiors, equals and subordinates: and, most important of all, in face of the enemy.

#### 4.2 Problem of Social Desirability

But there is one major – even decisive – problem: we lack standards of comparison, and without additional information, we learn more about the conventional norms of behaviour than about the officers themselves. This holds also true if we look at the explicitly moral categories of 'faults' in their behaviour: 'addicted to drink', 'gambler', 'always in debt' ('Schuldenmacher'), 'brawler' ('Zänker'). Here, all three received the entry 'no'; it might well be that their superiors shied away from a judgement that could severely dampen the officer's hopes for climbing up the career-ladder.

The old captain Radanovich was apparently already very ill, but was judged as 'very diligent and scrupulous, altogether a very estimable and capable officer' – as long as he was 'still healthy'. Furthermore, the 'temper' of Habsburg officers was characterized: Radanovich was 'modest and ambitious', a Croat who spoke German and Croatian fluently and some Italian; Koller was 'good and collected', Deym 'cheerful, soft, tractable'. He was also classified ('in overall service' – 'sonst im Dienst') as 'untiringly passionate' and 'striving to be useful in manifold ways'.

All three were good riders, but, nevertheless, not experts with horses ('Pferdekennner'). We also find in Deym's form the category 'power of judgement in military matters and talent for higher military education'; he 'has the gift of quick comprehension, in general and a sound judgement; seems to be fit for higher education'.

The kind of judgement that was presented here is, therefore, rather schematic on the one hand, though more individual on the other. Courage is highly praised – not very surprisingly. The quality of leadership refers rather to the conditions in the barracks. Technical skills and qualifications were mentioned; these were split into ‘theoretical’ and ‘practical’ knowledge; the ability to train and drill ordinary soldiers was listed as well as, for some, the general degree of education (‘a man of wide reading’, or ‘writes in a fluent style’).

#### 4.3 Need for Additional Contextual Information

Without additional, contextual information, we would not know how to classify these sources. Ferdinand von Saar gives us interesting literary evidence about how these files were put together. His short narration ‘Lieutenant Burda’ (Saar 1887/1996), dealing with fictitious events that took place in the early 1850s, provides us with fascinating insights into the meaning, content and origin of such evaluation records. Burda, an excellent and respected young officer, has only one major weakness: His ambitions aim at getting accepted by the nobility. (Being of bourgeois background, he dreams of high-born ladies and he mistakes their reluctant reaction as secret consent.) He tries to prove – against all common sense – his aristocratic origins himself. His signature ‘Gf. Burda’ can be misread as ‘Count Burda’; his superior, a colonel with benign but also inquiring habits, stumbles over this signature just as he is filling out Burda’s evaluation report. The colonel’s rather sharp reprimand embarrasses Burda deeply in front of his colleagues, who had admired him before.

#### 4.4 The Meaning of Rank and Respect

The meaning of rank and respect becomes more than apparent in this little scene – which is the first in a series that leads to Burda’s fall from respect to ridicule and finally to his death in a duel.

For the higher-ranking officers, ‘individual descriptions’ were collected that offered far more space for elaborate characterization of the achievements and qualities of commanders. Maximilian Count Auersperg (General-Field-Marshal-Lieutenant; holder of the distinction of the ‘Maria-Theresien-Orden’) was described – in the category ‘behaviour in the face of the enemy’ – as ‘known as a courageous soldier, who had distinguished himself in face of the enemy in all his positions, without being seriously wounded.’ In the year 1835, he had been in service for 48 years and the campaigns he had taken part in embraced the period from 1789 until 1815. Major Georg Budich, scarcely 30 years later (1863), showed in his behaviour ‘resolution, and the urgent wish to excel’. His ‘services and merits’ in the field are characterized in detail: he served in 1848 during the Italian campaign, also in 1849 and 1859, and all minor and major battles are listed chronologically. Lieutenant Colonel Ernst Machek’s behaviour in the face of the enemy (in the year 1867, one year after

Königgrätz) is described as: ‘shows courage and cold blood’, ‘has proved his worth in the campaign of 1859 and he was intrepid and active in all enemy contact’; and he was also a good and useful officer in the campaign of 1866 (both the battles of Solferino and Königgrätz brought a slaughter of a formerly unknown scale).

#### 4.5 Assessing the Source Validity

In the column ‘behaviour towards subordinates’, Count Auersperg is characterized with the words: ‘With seriousness and detailed knowledge of what can be demanded of subordinates, didactic, excellent for an officer of the cavalry, just, fair, punctilious and sympathetic’. In the case of Budich, we find a heading: ‘Skills – treatment of officers and men, in order to raise the spirit’ and written underneath: ‘Treats officers and men with much tact and quite appropriately, knows how to stimulate their spirit and disposes of good knowledge of human nature’. Referring to his ‘properties of temper, feeling and character qualities of mind’, Machek is said to possess a ‘rather earnest, strong disposition, quiet composure without being phlegmatic, has complete control of himself, a firm judicial, determined and solid character, energetic, steadfast and resolute; of extra-ordinary talent and abundant knowledge, of which he never boasts, a particularly explicit organizational talent, quick and autonomous perception’.

What kind of information do we gain from these evaluation-files? Do they enable us to get a picture of the ‘habitus’ and ‘emotions’ of Habsburg officers? Their quality as sources will now be judged by adopting the five criteria mentioned above: pragmatic intention, emic vs. etic perspective, triangulation and the potential for theoretical generalization.

#### 4.6 Criterion 1: Pragmatic Intention

Generally speaking, these files were of pragmatic and instrumental importance and tell us more about the qualities the army wanted the officers to dispose of. In emotional terms: In battle, they should show ‘cold blood’, the famous ‘coup d’oeil’, courage in battle, while in the barracks, they should be able to control their temper, to be modest, just and firm, and to develop a caring attitude towards subordinates. This would add up to a ‘habitus’ of benign authority in peace and manly courage in war.

#### 4.7 Criterion 2: Emic Perspective

The categories develop from the ‘emic’ perspective of the actors involved and mirror every-day convictions about the necessary skills and virtues and their ascription on the basis of every-day beliefs. The reasons why this data does not mirror some simple reality are manifold:

On the one hand, they represent the official face of a 'people-processing institution' which generates data very selectively and according to multiple filters that distort the 'objective' picture of the authentic, individual event or person in action: Everyone who has ever read a detailed report about the tumultuous event of a battle knows how often courage is not rewarded by a distinction or cowardice not punished due to indulgence or selective interests. The same goes for the behaviour in barracks – ethnomethodological studies, like that of Cicourcel (1968) about 'The Social Organization of Juvenile Justice', have documented the statistical consequences of labelling beyond doubt.

On the other hand, the categories and the entries are largely still very abstract and do not really tell us much about the reality both of norms (referring to courage or resolution) and qualities of behaviour (for example, referring to the extent of professional skills in tactical or organizational matters). Being aware of the potential limitations contained in every-day beliefs and stereotypes, we must strive to gain more systematic knowledge of the range of meaning attributed by soldiers and officers to 'authority', 'obedience', 'severe' and 'fair', 'punctilious' and 'popular'.

#### 4.8 Criterion 3: Etic Perspective

According to our third criterion, the 'etic' perspective has to be introduced in order to complement the limited view of those involved in the categorization-process. Seen from this angle, we would need institutional and processual information about structures and their changes in the Habsburg army, correlated with a quantifying analysis of sufficiently large samples of data that inform reliably about changes in the definitions (mirroring changing norms; the famous 'coup d'oeil' is an invention following French models). We could also try to compare officers and their attributes without and with battle-experience and look also at their national background. But from there to the documentation of a habitus it will still be a long way to go.

#### 4.9 Criterion 4: Triangulation

In order to be able to guess the meaning of some of the terms that define our notion of 'military habitus', we might be inclined to use complementary sources of another kind. We get a different impression of the norms regarding 'courage' if we attentively study some fictional sources – when Torresani (1900) tells the story of four Habsburg officers, caught in the Hungarian uprising, fighting with their fear of death: Three are shot, one goes free, and the norm that every Habsburg officer has to sacrifice his life without hesitation meets with the reality of terrible fright.

Another example is the narration of Himmel von Agisburg (1900) who tells about the nearly suicidal attempt of Austrian soldiers to save their regimental flag under massive, deadly breech-loader fire. Of course, fictional sources

normally hide shamefully the ineptitude and lack of tactical knowledge that other sources – autobiographies – bring to daylight (for instance, that of Stillfried von Rathenitz, in the context of the Bosnian campaign 1878 and later). Here, we even get the impression of a rising number of officers with a non-aristocratic, ‘bildungsbürgerlichen’ origin who have not been made familiar with tactical training in the field and who were tormented by an all-pervasive, sterile, rigorous discipline of the barracks. Even we admit that these other sources create problems of their own because of their embeddedness in other pragmatic contexts, we would not want to abandon this option light-heartedly since it promises to enrich our understanding of the whole culture that shapes norms and behaviour in the field we intend to study.

#### 4.10 Criterion 5: Conceptual Generalization

What we don’t get here is the kind of information which would allow us to determine somewhat like the ‘true extent’ of these emotions and habitualized character-traits in Habsburg officers and to compare them with those of officers of other armies or to delineate trends.

Acknowledging this, we turn now to those sources who promise more proximity to reality: autobiographies and diaries – the so-called ego-documents.

### 5. Data Type 2: Ego-Documents

#### 5.1 Description of the Data Source

Between 1792 and 1815, the Habsburg Monarchy had to face a severe existential crisis. The highly motivated and flexible French, leaving behind any notion of impassable terrain and regarding every place as fit to wage a battle, posed nearly insurmountable problems for the traditionally clumsy Habsburg war-machine. The heavy defeats Austrian commanders suffered from hands of the French and their invincible genius Napoleon came as a unique shock. Invaluable evidence for this can be found in a booklet authored by the Austrian general and commander (‘Feldzeugmeister’ = general-quartermaster) Leiberich von Mack, who surrendered disgracefully at Ulm in 1805 with a large army (resp. their remaining 30.000 men) to the troops of Napoleon. As a consequence, Mack was court-martialled; he tried to save his honour by addressing the public.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The title of his elaborate and comprehensive written defence against the charge of treason hanging over him was: ‘Vertheidigung des österreichischen Feldzugs von 1805. Dem Hofkriegsrath übergeben von dem General-Feld-Zeugmeister von Mack, Wien (bei Joseph Schmidt) 1806’ (‘Defence of the Austrian Campaign of 1805. Submitted to the Court War Council by General-Quartermaster von Mack’).

In this ego-document, Mack gives a vivid account of his emotional state and of his failure to act in face of the threatening might of the French army that had been built up with terrible speed. He explains his own situation in unsparing detail, but he also turns to the whole structure and history of an unhappy logic of events that had put him into a position he could neither master nor reject. At the same time, he expresses enthusiastic estimation of Napoleon's gift as a commander to whom he felt hopelessly inferior. Mack sees his main weakness in his 'faltering and hesitation'. Surprised by the enormous speed of the French operations, his army (one of three Austrian armies that would have combined and joined forces with the Russians) gets encircled, and his 'ill genius' offers no good advice:

The unexpected direction of the enemy's marches had confused me completely. I consulted, asked higher authorities, deliberated, and, thus, lost time that would have been better used for acting; until I finally decided to send 15.000 men from the army at Ulm in order to reinforce the troops in Tyrol and, with joint forces, to pave the way for Archduke Charles who, with 25.000 men, came from Italy to aid the great army; these 15000 men ran into the army of Marshall Soult at Memmingen and were decimated (Mack 1806: 248-9; translation by author.).

Mack's defense is an interesting, even impressive document in more than one respect. It is the unsparing self-criticism of a sensitive and intelligent man who knows that his reputation is ruined forever and that he has to face this fact like a force of nature. It is also a very perceptive analysis of the real events taking place in a battle against opinion from outside; it demonstrates awareness of the meaning of chance, luck or the auto-dynamics of emotion.

He who always is victorious is finally used to being victorious; he who is always vanquished no longer thinks of victory, and will become, with every battle fought, more and more discouraged, and, thus, more miserable (Mack 1806: 267).

He describes himself as someone

who, to some extent, dared unthinkingly, and, as a consequence, then lost his presence of mind, and ran blindly into misfortune, lacking wisdom and energy, on the waves of fate, sacrificing his glory, his luck, the life of his men, and the honour of his monarch, like a careless boy (ibid.: 30).

Mack knows that his failure also weakened the courage of all his troops (ibid: 292); he compares their enfeebled spirit with the exemplary, war-like spirit in the French army (ibid.: 303); with its professional composure and unshakable confidence, it forms a marked contrast to the Austrian army which was, originally, even superior in numbers.

But Mack does not only describe his own psychological state in unmistakable terms; he is also an excellent observer of the problems stemming from alliances, and here, he denominates the psychological attributes of good commanders in general (control of vanity, altruism in terms of the welfare of their

troops) and those qualities of character that prevent good cooperation: envy, jealousy, national prejudices, egoism and stubbornness. (ibid.: 274-6).

He also gives far-reaching, partly historical explanations for the lack of good commanders in Austria since Prince Eugene. He blames Austrian bureaucracy and analyses skilfully the superior way of warfare that originated in France and culminated in Napoleon.

What now is the value of this source (and comparable sources) as evidence for an Austrian habitus? Above all, it cannot stand alone, it has to be complemented by different, equally trustworthy information, both in self-report and in observation of persons and matters outside. Let us now subsume the information contained in Mack's self-defence according to the five points we developed for the sociology-of-knowledge evaluation of process-produced data in Chapter 3.

## 5.2 Criterion 1: Pragmatic Intention

Referring to the criterion of pragmatic intention, we can say that Mack's booklet was a defence against an all too real accusation; he hoped to save his honour and life against the reproach of treason. The type of speech-act 'defence' with all its illocutionary and perlocutionary implications differs significantly from that of a purely descriptive proposition and frames all of Mack's utterances even if they have the ring of factuality. One may gain the impression that he sketches the extent of his emotional and professional incompetence as much larger than necessary in order to perhaps evade the even worse accusation of treason.

But the whole scale of his self-accusation (which is not a trivial matter, hapless commanders usually blame everyone but themselves) does not hide one fact: He lacked decision and will-power in the moment of truth, therefore, the battle was lost. But he also names the institutional dilemma: unclear, messy structures of command; institutionalized, professional incompetence of many of his colleagues – who were, in contrast to 100 years later, largely members of the high nobility.

## 5.3 Criterion 2: Emic Perspective

The second point deals with the 'emic' character of his self-interpretation and the understanding of the authority-structures that had prevented him from independent, autonomous decision-making: His self-interpretation is a perfect illustration of what Clausewitz had in mind when he described the lack of war-like spirit of the troops or the absent genius of their commander. Mack uses the same predicates – inactivity, loss of the presence of mind, lacking energy, lacking courage; and he gives a good example of what Clausewitz meant by 'moral courage'. Here and in the observation of his fellow-officers, his everyday-knowledge is more than sufficient and made explicit.

Of course, he cannot speak about those psychological mechanisms and outer circumstances he does not know although they might have influenced him. He probably does not see himself as being an example of a typical psychic (and social) habitus. But the text does give information where other similar narrations often do not: The last supreme commander of the Habsburg army 1918, Arz von Straußenburg, also wrote his memoirs from the Great War (Arz 1924), without ever giving hints about the state of his mind or soul; here, we can only guess the reality behind his depiction by drawing analogies from the description of visible behaviour.

#### 5.4 Criterion 3: Etic Perspective

The third criterion is that of the suitability of the data in the source under question for the purposes of theoretical interpretation from an ‘etic’ perspective, which is also – as a rule – linked to the classification as ‘typical’ for the Austrian habitus.

Although Mack is no bad theoretician on its own, it is only the theoretical interpretation, based on knowledge about structures and processes taking place in Austrian armies during, but also before the French Wars, which enables the typification of a ‘Habsburg Military Habitus’. We find, thus, already in the Wars of Austrian succession (1740-1763) quite similar, dramatic examples of lack of decision, faltering and dithering (singling out one figure – in Charles of Lorraine, who lost four battles against Prussia’s Frederick in a quite similar way; cf. the literature on the ‘Österreichischer Erbfolgekrieg’ in 6 vols.; and Allmayer-Beck 1981). We find the same consideration for the authority of the Court in Vienna, and the slow, defensive ‘Austrian philosophy of battle’ has been carefully described by Allmayer-Beck 1981. Radetzky (cf. Regele 1957) remarked once, that the Emperor’s four military advisers would form a body that prevented indeed every successful conduct of war. And at an even higher level, we can see the structural reasons for all of this lying in the patrimonial bureaucracy of the Habsburg Empire, with its semi-feudal and centrifugal tendencies, that were the declared enemy of all central coordination and energetic will-power.

Thus, Mack’s narrative fits in easily with these theoretically grounded suspicions. It serves more as additional evidence; it does not contain much that we would regard as anomaly when perceived from our own knowledge-background.

#### 5.5 Criterion 4: Triangulation

The ‘Generalstabswerk’ about the war in 1809 went beyond scrupulously listing all reforms initiated by Archduke Charles, reforms that were prompted by the defeats suffered at the hands of the French. These reforms included creating of smaller, more autonomous ‘army corps’ instead of the big, old linear armies,

advocating better cooperation and self-reliant action, departing from the old logistics of securing transport-links by keeping well-staffed fortifications, shifting from defence to attack, training of a new type of rifleman – the self-reliant ‘tirailleur’, departing from machine-like drills and shifting towards autonomous judgement. Moreover, it gives ample evidence for the persistence of a habitus hostile to change. We find here ample confirmation for the impression Mack gave of the slow speed of Austrian armies, of the hierarchical constraints that prevented quick and bold reaction and we might even reach the conclusion that Mack’s behaviour was perhaps wrong, but certainly not his own fault alone.

### 5.6 Criterion 5: Conceptual Generalization

We come, thus, to the point of the comparability of Mack’s sketch of an Austrian habitus with that of foreign armies. In his defence, he deals less with most of the other European armies as rivals or allies of the Habsburg army with the only exception of the French.

Here, unfavourable (self-)characterizations abound. He gives many hints about what made Napoleon superior; but we get no reliable information about how the Austrians would fare in comparison to the other great powers. Lack of determination and coordination, lack of clarity and autonomy of command are distinct predicates that mark the central difference to Napoleon. The latter had also ruined the reputation of many other armies, among them the honour of the formerly invincible Prussians. But while the Prussians went through a period of painstaking reforms both of the army and society, starting in the year 1807, that changed their character by giving more weight to the commitment and enthusiasm of the nation, Austria stayed caught in the old forces of patrimonialism and particularism. The pattern Mack describes is detailed enough to be found as a very general and typical one – of course, always seen against the background of other reliable sources.

## 6. Data Type 3: Autobiographies as Semi-Official Documents

### 6.1 Description of the Data Source

The First World War has become the ultimate touchstone for the old Habsburg Army. In a quite specific sense, it did not pass the test – as we know, the war was lost, the Monarchy crumbled and with it a European centre of power that had helped to shape Europe for more than 400 years. Was a specifically Habsburg Austrian mentality also responsible for this? Can we identify the traits of hesitation, of half-heartedness and passivity also in the four years between 1914 and 1918?

The example illustrated here consists of a private, unpublished autobiography of a high-ranking Habsburg officer: the memoirs of the major-general Paul Schinnerer (1869-1957) which begin with memories from early childhood and end with the aftermath of the armistice in 1918. They were apparently based on diaries (otherwise, the sometimes day-to-day reconstruction of events would be wholly implausible) and provide information about Schinnerer's education, military training, his experiences at the Russian front as, first as an officer of the general staff and then, as field-officer; until his career had led him to the post of a commanding major general at the Isonzo-front against Italy. These memoirs amount to roughly 560 pages of typescript (from the original handwriting) and had been collected and archived for scientific purposes (Institut für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte in Vienna, among roughly 50 other accounts).

Schinnerer was born in Vienna in 1869 as a son of a textile merchant and thus belonged to the mercantile middle-class and not to the aristocracy – neither to the 'Amsadel' of recently ennobled members of military and bureaucracy nor the 'real' nobility of old. His memoirs give ample evidence of his distance to the old warrior-caste and warrior-code typical for the Habsburg and Russian armies of the 18th and much of the 19th centuries, bearing witness instead to a peaceful-commercial, unmilitary attitude of the Viennese bourgeoisie with pacifist and German-nationalist undertones.

The development of his character, the psychic process that also included strong emotions of shame and inferiority, provides us with a kind of information to decide on the existence of a 'psychic' and 'social' habitus with much more justification than is provided in other sources (including Mack's account discussed above). But, in contrast to the feudal spirit that still prevailed in the writings from Saar, he never turned to duels to restore his endangered reputation: the military branch he was involved in was logistics, transport, supplementation and staff-like military planning. He owed his advancement into higher officer-ranks to his 'technical skills', not to his brilliant appearance at court or salons. His qualification was proved in examinations; and this also shaped his world-view in military matters. Long before the war, he complained again and again about the spirit of feudal tradition and the hostility against modernization that he felt dominated the whole Habsburg army. Schinnerer addressed the problem of a social habitus hostile to innovation quite directly:

Also quite different men would have been necessary, for all resembled each other. It was not possible to do any more with these same people one had to work with; the old ideas and the old humdrum way could not be stamped out anymore. If one was removed, another one reclaimed his position and went on in the old way; one was able to change the people, but the way of thinking was the same. Even Conrad (the most important, charismatic Austrian commander; H.K.) was not better. He, too, was a 'Wiener Neustädter' (trained in the famous Military Academy, founded by Maria-Theresa, H.K.), and he never ma-

naged to distance himself from the education of his young age there (Schinnerer I, 172; translation by author, here and in the following quotations).

Schinnerer addresses the classical properties of the concept of 'habitus' which includes ideas, but also habits that guide actions unconsciously; it is coined in young age, but persists – as a disposition – through a whole life-time. Part of this habitus is an attitude of 'lacking foresight' and of 'chimeras of those on the top' ('Phantastereien der Höheren', I, p.185), which no one dares to oppose. Again and again, Schinnerer characterizes superiors who shun real work and who denounce all critics as 'pessimists'. His hard judgement hits all professional 'optimists' who underrate the enemy:

I saw that we would enter the decisive struggle wholly unprepared, saw the frightening backwardness awaiting in all areas and the complete headlessness and the criminal thoughtlessness of our leading circles in military and police (Schinnerer I, 194).

He demonstrates the Austrian lack of preparation for a war he had always been convinced to be unavoidable, by indicating dozens of examples – from wrong equipment to unrealistic exercises, from lacking fortifications to lack of tactical training, etc.

Schinnerer's observations are penetrating and of great interest to our research question. He complements the analysis of a '*habitus in battle*' by turning his eye on the '*habitus in peace*' (thus broadening the concept in a way that was also advocated by Clausewitz – although the latter could not have known how technological warfare would develop nearly a century after his writings).

He also seems to contradict our assumption that it was only a 'habitus of defence' and 'hesitation' which could be held responsible for a lack of decision and resolution. While advocating 'pessimism' as a tool for further, rational action, he dismisses 'optimism' as unfounded and, thus, detrimental to the war effort. I confess not being sure myself if I have to take Schinnerer's 'pessimism' as further evidence for the Austrian spirit of passivity, leading to defeat, or if I should treat it rather as 'realism', against which the 'optimism' of the frivolous waste of leading generals and commanders has to be seen as a motor of later defeat. Clausewitz thought this possible and we find several instances of unfounded optimism to be soon followed by catastrophic apathy and then defeat (see also the fate of Charles of Lorraine). But we can take for certain that Schinnerer's attitude differed enormously from the more feudal spirit of many Austrian commanders, in particular of the cavalry, who found themselves soon disillusioned after their catastrophic defeats in Galicia 1914. The difference is also one of social background: bourgeoisie vs. aristocracy.

When the war arrives, it finds Schinnerer as a member of the general staff in Galicia. The coming disaster of the 3rd army which had to retreat soon after the collapse of the illusionary attempt of attacking a hugely superior enemy (1.2 million Austrians fighting against 1.8 million better equipped Russians) is nothing unexpected to Schinnerer. The responsible generals are criticized be-

cause of their carelessness, tactical deficits, inertia and self-deception. Being convinced that the main thrust of the Russian army would hit the Austrians near Lemberg, he is frightened by the prospect of the offensively advancing Austrian troops, unprotected in their flank, being pushed to attack a superior enemy. Soon, terrible chaos will rule; no one finds anyone; the locations of higher command can no longer be identified; some commanders shoot themselves, many 'show their full incompetence' (II, p.12) or surrender ingloriously, such as Field Marshall Lieutenant Krauss-Ellislago, 'the greatest swindler and fraud' (II, p.13).

The most detailed description of the emotions that accompanied this catastrophe can be found in another autobiography, that of Constantin Schneider (2003) who was a young 1st lieutenant at that time:

Here they came, forming a sad line on the road. Dusty horses with their heads hanging down, some riders, dusty, unrecognizable, I identified them only at close range: They were my friends from the regiment, most of them with bleached faces, black from dust and dirt, with wide open, protruding eyes and a mad look. (...) Heaps of men stuck to the limbers, like refugees, sitting sunk down and staring with the miserable look of hopelessness (Schneider 2003: 87; translation by author).

In this quotation, we find the emotions described vividly in the language of observation; the sentiment of hopelessness is given unmistakable expression and so is the lack of trust in the wisdom of the men's commanders. Schneider confirms the impression of lack of leadership and over-ambitious orders that can not be followed any longer. Many officers simply disappear and let their men down.

The various, mixed emotions combine to create the picture of an Austrian habitus in which soldiers are often led by officers and commanders who either form an inhuman caste of butchers totally ignoring the value and dignity of the lives that have been committed to them, or who were small tyrants, rulers over life and death, at safe distance from the bloody events themselves (see Schneider 2003: 351).

It is in Schneider's account that we can also find the important comparative perspective, missing in many other sources, which allows us to determine the relative weight of an Austrian military habitus, here, compared with that of the Germans:

How different was the new spirit that the German command taught us: Simplicity was their device and how to spare human material. We had been told of glorious episodes of struggle when a company undertook an assault and only ten men stayed alive. How our commanders admired the leader of such a company as hero and decorated him with medals. It was different with the Germans: they rewarded, above all, the commander who achieved the greatest success with the least losses. We lacked this kind of understanding totally. The whole conduct of war aimed at blind bravery which arose rather from desperation than from enthusiasm. To have raised this risky bravery was the

guilt of our commanders, their activity was often that of butchers, their meaning was cruelty and their reward was perdition (Schneider 2003: 351).

What, now, is the value of autobiographies like the ones discussed here, according to the criteria formulated in Chapter 3?

## 6.2 Criterion 1: Pragmatic Intention

Schinnerer's and Schneider's autobiographic accounts have to be evaluated carefully with respect of the intention and imagined audience at the time of their origination. Furthermore, we need plausible evidence of their authenticity as correct remembrance by simply asking: When were the facts remembered? At the time they occurred? Or afterwards, written from hindsight, which might also distort the memory towards the feared or wanted outcome?

In the case of Schinnerer, we do not know exactly; the narrative was certainly helped by diaries, but since there is no proof of these, we cannot compare and are, therefore, not completely sure what was authentic in the emotions at the time and what was added later.

Furthermore, we have to ask ourselves about the general frame of intention of this act of communication. It might have had the function of seeing accommodation with the tragic present situation of total defeat which seemed to make the effort of a whole life appear meaningless and an unequalled waste. But the wish to communicate his experiences to his children (he had several, born already before the war) can also be powerful. As long as we imagine our children reading about the deeds of our past, we will probably not be unsparingly honest in all respects.

But even more important for our correct interpretation is the whole frame of accusation – largely devoid of self-defence – that shapes Schinnerer's memoirs. This point of view mirrors the changed composition of the Habsburg officer-staff: Already in the year 1896, 78% of all officers had a non-aristocratic background (Kandelsdorfer, quoted by Deák 1991: 193-4), and in particular, the technical troops (including artillery) were predominantly bourgeois.

And so, all in all (it could not be documented here), we find a code of conduct in Schinnerer's text which favours reason, humanism while opposing unnecessary cruelty and useless, heroic death. His values are those of a diligent, hard-working, educated bourgeoisie and, thus, opposed to aristocratic 'noblesse oblige', carelessness and acceptance of death as fate.

The contrast to the memoirs of the aristocratic commander Arz could not be greater: The same unhappy constellation that prompted Schinnerer to his narrative of reflexive, dark-pessimistic characterisation leads to a quite different conclusion in Arz:

The 3rd army had fought east of Lemberg less happily than the 4th army. It had to retreat in face of the superior pressure of the Russians back to the Wereszyca, where the 2nd army, who had partly just arrived coming from Serbia, closed rank with its southern wing. Here, the battle was to be taken up again

with all available forces, for which purpose the bold decision was taken to make the 4th army turn around and make it intervene through Rawaruska. To realise this intention of throwing around a whole army with its whole baggage train demanded the sharp eye of a leader and a firm hand. The victor of Komarov possessed both (Arz 1924: 23; translation by author).

This short paragraph is symptomatic for the whole text. Even in defeat, the language is active, forceful, and the picture of an Austrian habitus is not visible. Since he was the last Austrian commander of all troops, he probably felt responsible for the army and its state; therefore, if he blames someone, then it is bad fate, the enemy or whatever, rather than one of his 'own' officers.

Yet a different narrative context can be found in the in the case of 'semi'-official regimental history. 1st Lieutenant Burger wrote, on basis of his diary, a comprehensive account of the fate of his regiment ('Tiroler Landesschützen' = Tyrolian infantry) in Galicia and against Italy which was published posthumously (and passing censorship) in 1917, in the midst of the war still going on. His report is rich in statements about his and his comrades' emotions, comparatively honest, but he does not doubt the ultimate wisdom of Austrian army command. While telling a heroic story, it was meant both to move, and to stimulate the general spirit and confidence in the Austrian army. We learn of the organizational chaos that soon broke out at the Russian front, hear of great losses (Berger 1917, pp.29), but the overall spirit is optimistic:

At a higher level, one will have probably recognized the strength of the enemy and assessed it correctly already in these days. But the troops themselves underestimated the Russian enemy completely. We paid for this quite massively (Burger 1917: 29; translation by author).

It is confidence that has not been shattered. Similarly the story was told in a regimental history of the so-called 'Dreierschützen' (Styrian riflemen):

Every attack was repulsed with the cold blood and tenacity of the Styrian. The Russians tried to break through with overwhelming force and cunning, their guns fired furiously on the small heap of warriors around the farm yard. But although the defenders lacked any support of the artillery and although the machine guns were much disturbed by enemy fire and could not come to assistance, the brave men did not cede. They shot so quietly and sure of their aim that the Russians, after several vain attacks, had to fall back again to a respectful distance (Strohschneider 1931: 48-9; my translation, H. K.).

Although also these sources tell of terrible sacrifices, non-existing communication, apparent failures of coordination and lack of leadership, their language is rather that of heroic resistance and its legitimation. In order to decide on the existence of (and explanation of behaviour by) an Austrian habitus, we have to compare analogous events, processes, behaviour and indicators of emotion in a quite detailed way.

### 6.3 Criterion 2: Emic Perspective

The second dimension we had introduced earlier for the evaluation of a source was the plausibility and range of the 'emic' perspective of the narrator. It differs very much according to the degree of reflexivity that the autobiographer achieves (with reference to the 'inner', 'emotional' processes he/she becomes aware of; and to the range of possible observation that the author can dispose of. In the case of Schinnerer, we can trust his knowledge of the behaviour and the personality of his fellow-officers, but we don't know about his ability to empathize with the ordinary soldier. This position enables him to see some things more sharply and some less exactly than the officers who were closest to the front-line.

### 6.4 Criterion 3: Etic Perspective

The third dimension of embedding in an 'etic' perspective from outside that implicates 'theorizing' has also to be considered here. With hindsight and equipped with masses of literature on the events at the Russian front (see, for instance, Rauchensteiner's (1994) magnificent account), we sometimes know more than the author. While Schinnerer is also blinded by the passions and prejudices of his class and position and, moreover, by his and Austria's fate in the war, and since he is simply not able to locate the causes of some major military and peacetime decisions that take shape behind the doors and far from the sphere of his influence and knowledge, we can now, from hindsight and equipped with well-confirmed narratives about events and institutions of the late Habsburg Empire, gain structural explanations for the weakness of the Habsburg army and we can locate Schinnerer's or Schneider's character as a historically new type: the bourgeois, technically educated and trained soldier replacing the feudal, careless aristocratic warrior of old. He does not share their equanimity in the face of death, but compares what he sees with what he thinks would be better and reasonable. A theory of the Habsburg military habitus should embrace this aspect of transition as well.

### 6.5 Criterion 4: Triangulation

In order to typify and categorize the range of an Austrian habitus, we also have to be open to the anomalous, irregular observation that does not fit in with our theoretical knowledge. In Schinnerer's autobiography, I found two observations striking:

- 1) that of the importance of the professional seriousness as part of a military habitus that is already formed in peacetime;
- 2) that of the counterproductive, counterintuitive character of 'optimism'. 'Pessimism' may not always be a precondition of defeat, but also an appeal to realism. Therefore, the concept of 'hesitation and faltering' as typical of

an Austrian habitus has to be complemented by the notion of an unthinking optimism.

This kind of revision may be a not insignificant reward of meticulously sifting through empirical material.

### 6.6 Criterion 5: Conceptual Generalization

Finally, we would like to draw comparative conclusions on the basis of this source. Unfortunately, Schinnerer's account follows a normatively-rationalist model of the conduct of war without laying much attention on comparisons with existing types in other armies. Only some dispersed remarks focus on the 'superior' ways of Germans, sometimes also of Russians or Italians, although these latter armies are everything but the epitome of efficiency. But there are other autobiographies, like that of Constantin Schneider, who do compare, and who can also be trusted for their expertise.

## 7. Methodological Conclusions

Referring to the research question central to this paper – can we find something like an Austrian military habitus that made failure in war more likely? –, the three types of data provided us with various strengths and weaknesses if checked against Laslett's quantification-oriented ideal and if evaluated according to the softer criterion of 'trustworthiness'.

*Public administrative data*, like the evaluation-files for officers and commanders, have two advantages and three weaknesses: Since they are the product of bureaucratic action and reasoning, they are official, relatively stable operational definitions of the desired character-qualities of soldiers in command, with a certain degree of abstraction that resembles sociological categorization. One can imagine interpreting such data in longitudinal analyses which may lead to the detection of developmental patterns both of norms guiding the behaviour of Austrian officers and eventually also of their behaviour itself – the latter, if we can give rough estimates of the various filters that define bureaucratic assessment of these qualities. These filter-processes have the advantage of providing reproducible classifications, yet they also create problems for the interpretation. Their abstractness prevents us from finding the character-traits in question in the experience and emotions of the acting persons themselves. Standards of comparison with respect to the behaviour and habitus of other armies are also lacking.

In the case of *autobiographies and other ego-documents*, this paper has tried to show that the one major problem described by Laslett – that interests and strategies or unconscious mentalities and expectations of the writers can influence the quality and substance of the data – can be sufficiently dealt with so as to secure the kind of objectivity that is also indispensable in order to do justice

to the softer criterion of 'trustworthiness'. This can be achieved by comparing narratives of persons with diverse, even conflicting background and interests, as in the case of the self-defence of Mack and the uncompromising warrior-attitude of Arz, or in the comparison of loyal regimental histories with voices of convinced critics like Schinnerer or Schneider.

But Laslett's postulate that scientific data should contain at least a rough estimate of quantitative proportions can scarcely be met except in the plain sense that we should aim at a fair selection of articulations from people with recognizably different background, in particular with different social origins (bourgeois vs. aristocratic or lower-class membership). We cannot hope to map the various emotions or character-traits proportionately.

And yet it would be wrong to assume that this would make the whole enterprise worthless. Autobiographies, diaries or even letters may be able to portray a whole social environment and describe observable facts mixed with statements of observed expressions of emotions of human beings. They can be seen as 'native speakers' of their section of the world and the quality of their contribution can be matched with the information contained in various other sources – battle reports, description of landscapes in more peaceful times, and so on. If these sources get one detail wrong, then this might be an error that does not necessarily destroy all other truth contained in other information.

On the other hand, their plausibility is enhanced if this data can be verified. One criterion is the degree of accordance of various voices with each other; Schneider and Schinnerer converge visibly.

Another is that of theoretical embeddedness – the mechanisms that produce Austrian structures of authority can be delineated through centuries. The most consequential of all distinctions made in this paper is, thus, that of the 'emic' vs. the 'etic' character of the narratives under scrutiny. The writers of autobiographies are also theorists of their own emotions and of those of others.

The quality of their theories and abilities of observation will differ greatly. They will often formulate composite characterizations in which they infer complex traits of persons or elements of a situation from a combination of simple observations; sometimes, they also give examples of simple expressions or behaviour. Mack, for instance, summarized very comprehensively; Schinnerer was much more detailed and provided character-descriptions that can be compared with those given by other commentators (he converges with Schneider on Conrad). Schneider was the most literary of all and had an extremely rich vocabulary for describing single emotions. He was also the one who drew substantive and informative comparisons with the military habitus of other armies.

But as far-reaching, comprehensive and knowledgeable these autobiographers were, their narratives also must always be complemented by the 'etic' perspective of the researcher outside. The separation-line between 'emic' and 'etic' will be fluent; the more experienced and informed our commentator is,

the less that has to be added from outside. But at last, it is the theoretical model of the social macro-process and of the psychic micro-process that frames value and meaning of the data. Of course, the theory also has to be open for its eventual falsification.

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