



*Courage and Grief: Women and Sweden's Thirty Years' War* by Mary Elizabeth Ailes.

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In *Courage and Grief*, historian Mary Elizabeth Ailes<sup>1</sup> (Univ. of Nebraska-Kearney) studies the Thirty Years' War "from the perspective of the women involved in the fighting and those affected by the war" (11). The book makes two important points: first, that women made an underexplored and little acknowledged contribution to the war effort; and, second, that women's wartime experiences were much more diverse than used to be thought. Seventeenth-century Sweden had acquired a position of considerable power and influence in Europe owing to its battlefield successes and growing state apparatus. Therefore, a demonstration of women's contributions is highly relevant not only to Swedish historiography but to the larger narrative of the relationship between war and the formation of early modern states.

The book's four chapters illustrate the diversity of female experiences. Chapter 1, "Women on Campaign," shows that women were a common feature of military trains. While wary of their potentially disruptive influence, Swedish officers and government officials had to accept the fact that soldiers sometimes married and often brought their wives with them on campaign. These women provided comfort and consolation to the troops and in turn availed themselves of new economic opportunities.

Chapter 2, "Peasant Women and Conscription," demonstrates that the mobilization of a large part of the male labor force in peasant communities left women to fend for themselves and their families. But war offered both challenges and opportunities to these women. They often assumed the responsibilities of heads of household, asserting rights they did not ordinarily possess. Ailes stresses that the authorities took these women's claims seriously.

Chapter 3 examines the strategies and activities of "Officers' Wives on the Home Front," many of whom belonged to the nobility. Ailes provides thought-provoking examples of how these women sought to protect the interests of their families as well as showing solidarity with and assisting one another.

Chapter 4, "Queen Christina and Female Military Leadership," focuses on the most famous of seventeenth-century Swedish women, including her upbringing, ascension to the throne, and desire to control the ongoing war and subsequent peace negotiations. The author emphasizes the shift from a system in which monarchs personally led troops in battle (which women were believed incapable of) to a more professionalized and bureaucratic one in which they took charge of military administration (a role women could play as well).

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1. Her previous work includes *Military Migration and State Formation: The British Military Community in Seventeenth-Century Sweden* (Lincoln: U Nebraska Pr, 2002) and "Wars, Widows, and State Formation in 17th-Century Sweden," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 31 (2006) 17-34, which demonstrated the existence of a connection between war and proto-welfare provisions for women with relatives in the military.

Throughout, Ailes builds on relevant Swedish and Finnish scholarship, while also perceptively adducing new archival evidence. One of her overarching conclusions—that women made underexplored contributions to the war efforts—aligns with what Marie Lennersand<sup>2</sup> and other scholars have recently argued. Ailes also maintains this had implications for the early modern Swedish state's relationship to its subjects and, by extension, for the strength and effectiveness of its military endeavors:

On the home front, women's support of the war effort was ... of crucial importance as many women took over running farms and paying rent and taxes when their male relatives went off to fight... Women also raised troops for the cavalry, hired substitute soldiers for their male relatives, ... and used their social influence to promote their husbands' military careers. This suggests that having a kingdom's subjects' support for a war effort was an important component of a state's military effectiveness. (167–68)

Ailes also discusses the position of women in early modern Sweden more generally, contrasting their many new wartime prospects with their “normal,” much more restricted, peacetime situations. Building on an article by Kekke Stadin,<sup>3</sup> she contends that seventeenth-century Swedish scholars regarded society as “a hierarchy in which everyone knew and accepted his or her place in order to preserve social stability.” The household was the legitimate center of women's lives in a world where the husband was head of the family, while the wife “was to be under his authority” (70). This rigidly patriarchal norm, Ailes suggests, was significantly modified in times of war.

In my view, this reasoning exaggerates the difference between the “normal” peacetime experience and the exceptional and “liberating” wartime experience of women, and fails to do justice to Stadin's more nuanced argument. By studying German-language theological theses later translated into Swedish, Stadin showed that the Swedish bishop who adapted the texts for a Swedish audience argued that there actually were times when the husband should obey his wife, hence moderating Martin Luther's demand that wives subordinate themselves unconditionally to their husbands. She also demonstrates that this view of household order was widely disseminated in the country in church sermons. Thus, rather than a single household norm, there were several, one of which accords with what Ailes and others have shown women could do and be in the period. They acted as heads of household in certain contexts, and not only in wartime, and they were quite capable of petitioning state authorities to assert their rights. Moreover, they were not upbraided for these activities but accepted as legitimate representatives of their households.

Thus, the contrast Ailes draws between normal subordination and extraordinary leeway during wartime is overstated and at times contradictory. At one point, she follows Maria Sjöberg<sup>4</sup> in stating that military commanders respected the women who accompanied their husbands on campaigns “because as married women they were fulfilling societal expectations that adult women would be under their husbands' control” (30), but half a page later writes that they were ac-

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2. See Lennersand, J. Mispelaere, C. Pihl, and Maria Ågren, “Gender, Work, and the Fiscal-Military State,” in *Making a Living, Making a Difference: Gender and Work in Early Modern European Society*, ed. Maria Ågren (NY: Oxford U Pr, 2017) 178–203.

3. “Hade de svenska kvinnorna en stormaktstid? Stormaktstidens svenska stat och konstruktionen av genus,” *Scandia* 63.2 (1997) 193–225, plus English summary.

4. “Transformation into Manhood: Sex, Violence, and the Making of Warriors, Women and Victims in Early Modern Europe,” in *Transforming Warriors: The Ritual Organization of Military Force*, ed. P. Haldén and P. Jackson (NY: Routledge, 2016) 88–108.

cepted “because they performed many important functions” (31), for instance, acquiring supplies, cooking, cleaning and washing clothes. This interpretation is much more convincing than the first one.

The author sometimes misrepresents the findings of the previous scholarly literature. For instance, she writes, with reference to an essay by Mia Korpiola,<sup>5</sup> that the transfer of sex crimes from ecclesiastic to secular control “took oversight of sex crimes away from local communities and placed it under the control of secular law and political officials” (83). But, in fact, courts manned by people from local communities administered secular law.

The book suffers from a certain dissonance because of the unresolved tensions between wartime and peacetime, one norm and many norms, as well as norms and practices. It is, nevertheless, an interesting and valuable contribution to the scholarship on early modern Sweden and, more generally, warfare and state formation in the period. Particularly compelling and innovative is its argument that women’s support for the early modern state contributed to the effectiveness and success of Sweden’s wars. Mary Elizabeth Ailes combines erudition with a knack for finding exemplary micro-stories to illustrate her points.

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5. *Between Betrothal and Bedding: Marriage Formation in Sweden 1200–1600* (Boston: Brill, 2009).