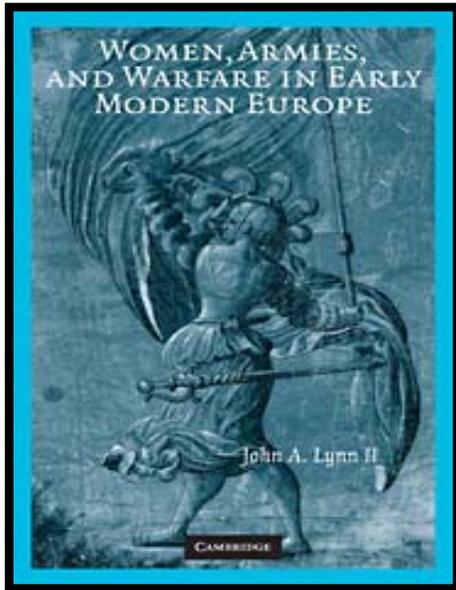


John A. Lynn II. *Women, Armies, and Warfare in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. 239 pp. ISBN: 978-0-521-72237-7

Reviewed by Elizabeth Lagresa
University of California Santa Barbara



Spanning over a period of three centuries this book attempts to unite military and women's history through the common thread of a forgotten figure, the camp women of early modern Europe. As John A. Lynn II stipulates in the dedication, his book places the spotlight on the often overlooked and unsung "...women of strength, endurance, and courage..." that accompanied early modern armies to combat as both soldiers' women and female service personnel (v). With the goal in mind of exploring the lives and contributions of campaign women, Lynn embarks on an ambitious journey to not only contribute to the history of these noncombatant women who marched to battle from 1500 to 1815, but also to expand our understanding about the conduct of

war and its evolution during this time period.

A fundamental premise of this study is that women represented a large portion of the military campaign community, sometimes even outnumbering that of soldiers. Thus, a secondary but equally pivotal aim of this work is to grapple with and shed light on what forces led to the drastic decline in numbers these camp women suffered during the second half of the seventeenth century and onwards. Through his research Lynn presents and supports three main theses: 1. camp women were numerous and played a vital role in maintaining military forces before 1650, 2. these women were key to the plunder-driven campaign economy that dominated within the model of the aggregate contract army, and served the important role of business and financial managers, and lastly 3. their drastic decline after 1650 can be understood by analyzing the evolution of armies and states during this period and their drive for greater efficiency, control, regularization, growth in size and power, and ultimate modernization.

This comprehensive and insightful study certainly pushes the boundaries of what one book can possibly achieve, but as Lynn readily admits, it remains preliminary due in part to a lack of detailed monographs (8). To offset this absence of formal records about campaign women Lynn builds his argument by piecing together sources from popular literature such as songs, plays, and picaresque novels; a wide array of popular

art like prints, drawings, and paintings that provide fascinating visual details; as well as contemporary treatises, memoirs, legal proceedings, and military commentaries and directives. All however, as he recognizes, can only offer a one-sided perspective –that of men. Despite this apparent constraint in sources and their accompanying biases, Lynn does succeed in generating insights and drawing conclusions firmly grounded on meticulous research, which will certainly serve as a great stepping stone for future scholars interested in the subject matter.

The brief, yet carefully developed introduction surveys relevant literature on the subject and proposes data gathered from various sources to estimate how many women actually participated in campaign life. Lynn proceeds to organize his argument into four chapters, with the first serving as a historical framework from which to establish the story of these women. In it he discusses to varying degrees of depth the three contexts that he determines must be taken into account: military excess and reform, campaign community, and the history of women and gender in early modern Europe. According to Lynn, “These three contexts link the lives of women on campaign with major historical themes, most importantly the conduct of war, the rise of the state, the boundaries of gender identity, and the independence, status, and power of women in early modern Europe” (19). Due to his background as a military historian, Lynn understandably tends to focus most of his attention on the first two aspects. From the onset, possibly as a preemptive measure, he repeatedly acknowledges his inexperience with “gender history,” while the brief section dedicated to commenting on such aspects certainly attests to his lack of confidence in handling the subject matter.

The first chapter revolves primarily around developing one of the main arguments of the book, understanding what prompted the eventual decline in the presence of camp women. To explain this phenomenon Lynn points to both military and governmental reforms that were fundamental to state formation as the culprits. Primarily he directs his attention to two interlinked aspects of military history that are critical to his argument: the evolution of army style and pillaging. The decline of the aggregate contract versus the rise of the state commission army, followed by the appearance of a third, the popular conscript army, corresponds according to Lynn to both social and governmental developments such as the growth of centralized bureaucratic governments, administrative innovations, and an overall push for standardization. He concludes these changes altered the lives of armies and consequently those of camp women, transforming them from economically pillage-driven to state dependent, from private and mercenary to national standing militia, and from victimizers of civilian populations to protectors that embodied patriotism.

In terms of the inner workings of these camp communities Lynn proposes that they were in constant flux and followed their own rules on propriety and morality, which often departed, sometimes even drastically, from the conduct standards followed by civilian populations. Characterized for its libertine and violent lifestyle plagued by drinking, gambling, and prostitution, these military communities desperately required

reform according to the precepts of Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation moralists, which placed an emphasis on family and marriage condemning prostitution altogether. However, Lynn affirms that religious reproof does not explain the decline in the participation of camp women. Instead he points the finger towards “changing military utility” as the culprit (59). According to Lynn various sources indicate that their large numbers represented a problem for the efficiency in movement and supply of troops. As he explains, “because logistics determined the movements of armies, women also exerted influence over the conduct of wars and the shaping of strategy...therefore, the disciplinary, logistical, and operational issues that inspired reforms involved camp women as well as their male companions” (64-65). Consequently, despite the fact that the presence of women in the campaign community was of great utility as Lynn maintains in later chapters, it came to be viewed as a hindrance to military efficiency and the overall evolution of warfare.

The subsequent chapter, titled “Camp Women: Prostitutes, ‘Whores,’ and Wives,” reconstructs with as much detail as possible the personal lives of these women by differentiating between the three categories and the relationships they signified. In it Lynn highlights the violence that existed between the sexes as they battled for power in their relationship within the stress-charged environment of the combat zone. To further build an accurate portrait of the life of camp women and their contributions, the third chapter focuses on the labors of camp women within the community, defined by Lynn as vital to the changing nature of warfare. Besides their involvement in prostitution, Lynn stresses that these women played an integral role in the subsistence of troops by working as laundresses and seamstresses, as nurses caring for the sick and wounded, helping dig trenches, shore up defenses, and more importantly as sutlers selling all types of products including pillaged goods, and as partners in crime and administrators of the plunder that was gathered. The participation of large numbers of women in the pillage-driven economy which primarily helped sustain early modern armies before 1650, according to Lynn, explains “...both their earlier extensive presence in the campaign community and their later exclusion from it” (159). He maintains that despite the fact that their presence aided in supplementing the income of their male partners, thus ensuring their survival, it also added additional pressures which promoted further plunder and its ensuing conflicts since their large numbers represented additional mouths to feed.

Lastly, although most of the book centers on rescuing and giving voice to the more commonplace and numerous faction of camp women, the fourth and final chapter concentrates on the rare and extraordinary group of armed women. Be they elite commanders, working-class defenders, or cross-dressing female soldiers, these women fought at the side of men earning a memorable place in popular culture. According to Lynn, these warrior women served primarily to “...highlight issues of gender in society, and to stimulate military values” by shaming men into military service (166). Fictional accounts of such notable women proliferated from the early seventeenth century eventually fading out of the limelight during the first half of the nineteenth

century. More specifically, Lynn goes on to describe in detail the story of Catalina de Erauso, Christian Davies, Hannah Snell and Marie Magdelaine Mouron among others, as representative cases, while also mentioning various other women that participated from the Dutch War up to the American and French Revolutions. Without a doubt Lynn is at his best when combining impersonal data with the individual portraits of these women, which helps his analysis remain grounded though still humane. Additionally, the masterful interweaving of illustrations throughout the book further contributes in the achievement of his ultimate goal, that of giving a face to these elusive and often nameless participants of early modern warfare.

Conversely, Lynn does leave a number of loose ends when discussing the gender overlaps and conflicts that occurred in campaign communities. For example, he maintains that “camp women chose to appropriate certain masculine traits to better deal with the physical and psychological demands of life in campaign” (51-52). However, he does not clarify what traits they supposedly appropriated, and why men might be better equipped to deal with its demands, in particular its psychological ones. More significantly, despite these few shortcomings, Lynn does shed light on the impact women had in the evolution of military institutions and the conduct of war in early modern Europe, and he unequivocally succeeds in the hope that his work will function in large part as an aid and solid basis from which to scout avenues for future research. As Lynn himself recognizes, his work raises more questions than it answers taking a fundamental step in expanding the horizons of both early modern military and women’s history.