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Stendardo di Lepanto (1570), Lati A e B, Museo Diocesano di Gaeta. Wikimedia Commons. Lo stendardi fu dipinto a tempera su seta da Girolamo Siciolante da Sermoneta (1521-1575), su incarico del Cardinale Onorato Caetani. L'11 giugno 1570 fu benedetto da Papa Pio V nella Basilica di San Pietro e consegnato a Marcantonio II Colonna ponendolo al comando della flotta pontificia. Partito da Civitavecchia e giunto a Gaeta il 22 giugno 1571, Marcantonio Colonna, fece voto di consegnare lo stendardo al patrono della città qualora fosse tornato vincitore. Il 13 agosto Pio V fece consegnare un secondo stendardo della Lega a Don Giovanni d'Austria, comandante generale della flotta cristiana che, riunitasi a Messina, salpò il 24 agosto verso Lepanto. Durante la battaglia del 7 ottobre i due vessilli sventolarono rispettivamente sull'Ammiraglia e sulla Capitana pontificia e non furono mai centrati dal tiro nemico. Nelle stesse ore il papa ebbe la visione della vittoria e in ricordo rifinì l'Ave Maria nella forma attuale, aggiunse le Litanie lauretane alla recita del Rosario e l'appellativo mariano di Auxilium Christianorum e consacrò il 7 ottobre a Santa Maria delle Vittorie sull'Islam, celebrato con lo scampanio al mattino, a mezzogiorno e alla sera in ricordo della vittoria. Papa Gregorio XIII trasferì poi la festa alla prima domenica del mese di ottobre intitolandola alla Madonna del Rosario. Al ritorno da Lepanto, Marcantonio Colonna sciolse il voto consegnando lo stendardo al vescovo Pietro Lunello. Il vessillo fu poi conservato presso la cattedrale dei Santi Erasmo e Marciano.

Clausewitz and Military History:

The Case of the 1799 Campaign in Switzerland and Italy

by Ami-Jacques Rapin

ABSTRACT. Composed concurrently with the revision of *On War*, the analysis of the 1799 campaign represents one of Clausewitz's most accomplished historical studies. An examination of this work elucidates the author's conceptualisation of military history and the interrelationship between history, critical analysis and theory. Furthermore, it highlights the challenge posed by the reliability of the historical data accessible to Clausewitz.

KEYWORDS: MILITARY HISTORY, ON WAR, WARS OF REVOLUTION, THEORY, CLAUSEWITZ

In his biography of Clausewitz, Bruno Colson posed the question of why the author had undertaken the most extensive of all his historical studies. Indeed, the analysis of the 1799 campaign in Switzerland and Italy is much more comprehensive than that of the 1796, 1812, 1814, or 1815 campaigns. Moreover, it is his latest historical study, which was probably written at the turn of 1829-1830. The absence of Bonaparte from the field undoubtedly constituted a significant factor. The analysis of operations conducted by generals deemed less talented provides a more balanced perspective for the criticism to be levied. Indeed, Clausewitz frequently invoked Napoleon's example to illustrate the short-comings of the generals engaged in the European theatres of operations during the 1799 campaigns. In addition to this primary rationale, there is a second, related factor to consider: the terrain in which a portion of the campaign was conducted. This includes mountainous regions, including high-altitude mountainous areas. Mountain ranges exert a significant influence on the conduct of war, making them a crucial aspect of military theory, as Clausewitz elucidates in *On War*.

¹ Bruno Colson, *Clausewitz*, Paris, Perrin, 2023, p. 514.

² Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, p. 301. Online at the site: clausewitz-gesellschaft.

A fundamental aspect of the Clausewitzian approach to war is the relevance of historical analysis to the development of theoretical frameworks. It is thus imperative to examine this relationship in the context of Clausewitz's work, which differentiates between historical narrative and the critical study of history. It is evident that this critical approach is distinct from the contemporary understanding of "critical history". For Clausewitz, criticism – or critical analysis – is a function or instrument of the analysis of war, which serves to mediate the historical narrative in order to benefit the theory of war. Furthermore, the author posits that theory can serve history or rather the lessons to be learnt from it.³

This approach, nonetheless, faces an inherent challenge: the intertwined nature of criticism and military history. Indeed, the value of the former is contingent upon the quality of the latter. Clausewitz himself grappled with this issue in all of his historical studies, including his analysis of the 1799 campaign.

History and theory

In his "new approach" to *On War*, Jon Sumida considers the relationship between theory and history. The principal advantage of this approach is that it re-evaluates Book II of the work and identifies the challenges that Clausewitz's ideas present for contemporary military history. Nevertheless, Sumida's assertion that Clausewitz and Collingwood were in complete agreement on the subject of "historical re-enactment" is, in fact, an exaggeration. It is challenging to perceive Clausewitz's concepts as foreshadowing Collingwood's to a "remarkable degree" when there is a conspicuous point of divergence. The objective of Collingwood's thought experiments is to present, in the mind of the historian, the situation of the past through the eyes of the historical actor confronted with it. In other words, the aim is to reactivate the past in the present. The celebrated passage in the manuscript *Outlines of a Philosophy of History* on how to write the history of a battle is particularly explicit: "We must rethink the thoughts which determined its various tactical phases: we must see the ground of the battlefield as the opposing commanders saw it and draw from the topography the conclusions that they

de/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/VomKriege-a4.pdf.

³ CLAUSEWITZ, Vom Kriege, cit, p. 75.

⁴ Jon T. Sumida, *Decoding Clausewitz*, Lawrence, University Press of Kansas 2008, p. 184.

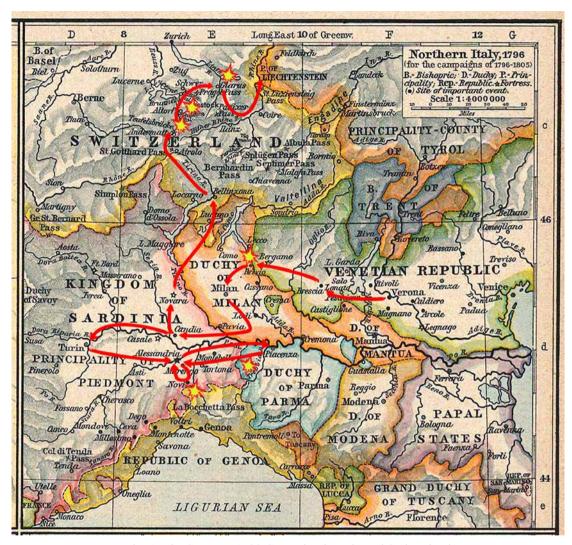


Fig. 1. The Suvorov 1799 Campaign in Italy and Switzerland (red arrows added in 2017 by Wikimedia user Ruthven on the Map of Northern Italy as in 1796 from William Robert Shepherd (1871-1934), *The Historical Atlas*, 1926).

drew; and so forth".5

In Clausewitz's view, retrospective identification with the actor is neither a

⁵ Robin George Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, Oxford, OUP, 2005, p. 441.

necessary nor a desirable undertaking (weder notwendig noch wünschenswert). It is incumbent upon the critic to leverage the advantage of his more expansive perspective, which affords him the privilege of a retrospective viewpoint. The initial rationale is that the warrior genius is capable of discerning relationships that are not discernible to those who lack the superior intellectual capacity of the distinguished military strategist. The second reason is based on what Clausewitz refers to as the judgement by results (das Urteil nach dem Erfolg). The argument is that retrospective analysis is concerned with identifying causal chains (Dieses Verfolgen des Fadens, hinauf und herunter) and that the outcome of these chains cannot be removed from the analysis.

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of Clausewitz's approach, it is essential to contextualise it in accordance with the three "activities of the mind" that are at work in criticism – that is to say, the three phases of analysis as demonstrated by Christian Müller: the historical research (Geschichts-forschung), the critical research (kritische Forschung), the criticism proper (eigentliche Kritik).⁷ In On War, Clausewitz appended a point that is absent from his Aphorisms. 8 This is a clear differentiation between historical narrative (Erzählung eines geschichtlichen Ereignisses) and critical narrative (die kritische). The fundamental point of distinction hinges upon the concept of causality: historical narratives often eschew any explicit attempt to discern real causal relationships, with the immediate causal connections constituting the sole aspect of analysis. The search for causality thus represents the fundamental aspect of criticism, and more specifically constitutes the second activity of the mind that Clausewitz describes as proper (eigentliche) critical research. This second activity is the condition of possibility for criticism proper (eigentliche Kritik), i.e. the third activity of the mind. This involves the assessment of the means employed, with the subsequent delivery of praise and blame (Lob und Tadel). Regarding the initial cognitive process that

⁶ CLAUSEWITZ, *Vom Kriege*, p. 85. At various points in *Die Feldzüge von 1799*, Clausewitz attempts to adopt the perspective of one or other of the generals involved in the campaign, in this case the Austrian general Bellegarde. However, this is a matter of peculiar reasoning and not a question of analytical principle. CLAUSEWITZ, *Die Feldzüge von 1799 in Italien und der Schweiz*, I, Berlin, Dümmler, 1833, p. 331.

⁷ Christian Th. Müller, Clausewitz verstehen, Leiden, Brill, 2021, p. 87.

⁸ Clausewitz, "Aphorismen über dem Krieg und die Kriegführung", Zeitschrift für Kunst, Wissenschaft und Geschichte des Krieges, 30, (1834), p. 277.

⁹ CLAUSEWITZ, *Vom Kriege*, cit, p. 75.

underlies the critical approach, it is presented in a somewhat ambiguous manner as "proper historical research".

One might encounter difficulties in identifying the precise position of military history, either within the context of historical narrative or that of critical narrative, on the basis of *On War* alone. In fact, when Clausewitz employs this term, he is specifically referencing the historical experience of warfare, or *Kriegsges*chichte, rather than the academic discipline, or Militärgeschichte. Other sources, however, give a clearer picture of the author's position. Military history, as taught at the Berlin Military Academy, did not suit him. As a student, he considered the course superfluous and unsatisfactory. 10 As headmaster, he proposed the abolition of the course and the limitation of the historical approach to the study of a single campaign, delivered by a professor of tactics. 11 Although Clausewitz did not explicitly state this, it is relatively straightforward to envisage that this institutional military history was excessively narrative and lacked sufficient critical analysis. He contrasts this with a genuine study of the history of the war, which is undoubtedly a critical historical narrative. 12 This alternative approach is that of Clausewitz, and in order to gain insight into his conception of military history, it is necessary to examine his historical studies.

The Christopher Bassford's claim that Clausewitz makes a clear distinction between the "functions" of the historian and the military critic may be somewhat exaggerated. The first stage of the critical approach, namely historical research, is presented in *On War* in an allusive manner which makes it impossible to determine whether it can be categorised as historical or critical analysis. Furthermore, Clausewitz explicitly states that it has no connection with theory (*hat mit der Theorie nichts gemein*), despite its explicit integration in the *Kritik*. In light of the aforementioned lack of clarity, the most straightforward approach is to attempt to ascertain the degree to which Clausewitz aligns with the military historians who wrote about the 1799 campaign.

¹⁰ Clausewitz to Gneisenau, 1 October 1815, in Werner Hahlweg (Hg.) *Schriften, Aufsätze, Studien, Briefe*, II, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990, pp. 190-191.

¹¹ Carl von Clausewitz, "Denkschrift über die Reform des Allgemeinen Kriegsschule zu Berlin, 21. März 1819", in Hahlweg, II, cit, pp. 1158-1159.

¹² CLAUSEWITZ, « Denkschrift... ", cit, p. 1158.

¹³ Christopher Bassford, "Clausewitz and his Works". Online at the site: clausewitz-studies.org/mobile/Works.htm

Clausewitz, Archduke Charles and Jomini

In his analysis of the 1799 campaign, Clausewitz does not employ the term Historiker, which was introduced into the German language in the mid-eighteenth century. Instead, he uses its synonym, Geschichtsschreiber. The two principal historians of the campaign were Archduke Charles, who published his Geschichte des Feldzuges von 1799 in Deutschland und in der Schweiz anonymously in 1819, and Antoine Henri Jomini, who addressed the subject in the 11th and 12th volumes of his *Histoire critique et militaire des guerres de la Révolution*, published in 1822. Clausewitz does not consider himself to be a military historian, as evidenced by two passages in his analysis of the 1799 campaign. In one instance, he notes that all historians are embarrassed by Suvorov's plan of attack at the Battle of Novi, and he himself is embarrassed by the confusion evident in their accounts.¹⁴ In the other passage, Clausewitz notes that Suvorov's march through the Alps has resulted in all historians making a break in the account of events devoted to the Italian theatre of the campaign; consequently, he himself is also affected by this imbalance in the narrative. 15 In both instances, the construction of the sentence implies that Clausewitz is outside the purview of historians.

The aforementioned examples also illustrate the function that military history should fulfill, namely to provide elements for criticism, as previously stated in the book. Nevertheless, Clausewitz was aware that the two fields were not entirely distinct, and thus had to concede that military historians were also critical in their works. This was the case with Jomini, whom Clausewitz categorised among the critical historians (*kritische Geschichtsschreiber*), while noting that the generalisations of the Swiss military writer – who was also described as an inventor of theories (*Theorien-Erfinder*) – demonstrated his limitations in the theoretical domain. 17

Clausewitz's critiques of Jomini are more methodical in his analysis of the 1799 campaign than in that of the 1796 campaign. Indeed, it could be argued that he was inclined to engage in historiographical controversies with Jomini. These disagreements were occasionally justified, as when Clausewitz deemed the

¹⁴ Clausewitz, 1799, I, cit, p. 519.

¹⁵ Clausewitz, 1799, II, cit, p. 308.

¹⁶ CLAUSEWITZ, 1799, I, cit, p. 423.

¹⁷ Clausewitz, 1799, II, cit, p. 84.

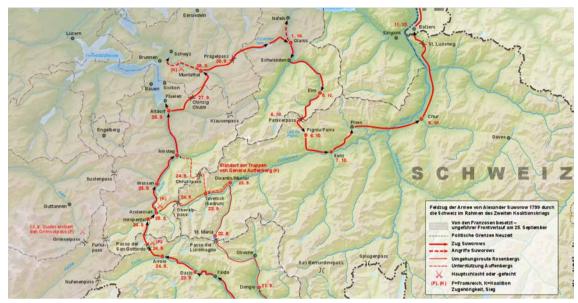


Fig. 2. Route of the campaign of the Suvorov's army in 1799 through Switzerland, by Wikimedia user Chryuša, based on NASA Shuttle Radar Topography Mission

explanations provided by Jomini for Massena's withdrawal behind the Limmat following the first battle of Zurich to be inadequate. On occasion, however, the criticism was misguided. For example, Clausewitz made an unwarranted accusation against Jomini, claiming that he was very negligent (*starke Nachlässigkeit*) in assuming the presence of two generals named Gardanne (or Gardane) in the Italian theatre of operations during the campaign. It is indeed the case that two generals of that name existed: Claude Mathieu, who was made brigadier general by Moreau on the battlefield of Bassignana on 11 May, and Gaspard Amédée, who had been brigadier general since 1796 and commander of the fortress of Alessandria in Piedmont during the 1799 campaign. Jomini, who had previously worked in the *Dépôt de la guerre*, was aware of this. Clausewitz might have had similar awareness, potentially through consulting the fifth volume of the *Galerie historique des contemporains*, published in 1823.

The underlying rationale behind these critiques is likely not solely historical in nature. A footnote provides an important piece of information that helps to

¹⁸ CLAUSEWITZ, 1799, I, cit, p. 368.

¹⁹ CLAUSEWITZ, 1799, I, cit, p. 476.

elucidate the situation. As Jomini was unaware of the true origins of the Battle of Novi, Clausewitz invites us to judge how inconclusive his theory and criticism are.²⁰ To elaborate, the historiographical criticisms were motivated by a rivalry between two scholars of military strategy. Similarly, Clausewitz did not spare Archduke Charles.

Those who have read *On War* will recall Clausewitz's favourable portrayal of Archduke Charles, who displayed the attributes of a skilled historian, critic and, most importantly, a capable general.²¹ In his analysis of the 1799 campaign, Clausewitz is markedly more critical of this latter quality. The Archduke is portrayed as a commander who displays hesitancy and indecision, exhibiting a greater proclivity towards hesitation (Zaghaftigkeit) than prudence.²² It is evident that the argument merits further consideration. In accordance with Clausewitz's analysis, the Archduke's decision to leave the corps of General Starray in the Black Forest following the Battle of Stockach constituted a strategic error.²³ Nevertheless, Clausewitz's criticism may have been unduly severe when he claimed that the Archduke held an essentially false idea of strategy (grundfalsche Ansicht von der Strategie).²⁴ To suggest that the Archduke, who published his Grundsätze der Strategie in 1814, held erroneous notions regarding strategy was, in effect, an assertion of Clausewitz's superiority in this domain of military expertise. In what he designated as the "court of criticism" (Richterstuhl der Kritik), a term not found in On War, Clausewitz was the ultimate authority.²⁵

In Clausewitz's view, the study of past wars is thus characterised by a strict hierarchical structure with regard to the acquisition of knowledge. Narrative military history is of interest only insofar as it can provide material for criticism. Critical military history is therefore superior to it, but it is itself outclassed by criticism proper insofar as authors such as Jomini and Archduke Charles lack sufficiently enlightened theoretical concepts to rise to this level. For Clausewitz, criticism constituted his exclusive domain, thereby separating him from the realm of military history.

²⁰ Clausewitz, 1799, I, cit, pp. 518-519.

²¹ Clausewitz, Vom Kriege, cit. p. 307.

²² CLAUSEWITZ, 1799, II, cit, pp. 64-81.

²³ CLAUSEWITZ, 1799, I, cit, p. 141.

²⁴ CLAUSEWITZ, 1799, I, cit, p. 153.

²⁵ CLAUSEWITZ, 1799, II, cit, p. 81.

It would appear that Peter Paret has not fully considered this particular aspect within his analysis of Clausewitz's relationship with history. This is somewhat surprising given that Clausewitz's own position vis-à-vis military historians would appear to represent an important dimension to the question under examination. Clausewitz considered himself to be an outsider to the field of military history and to possess a superior understanding of it. As Delbrück observes, Clausewitz demonstrated a keen interest in history and had the historical sensitivity (historisches Gefühl), yet he was primarily a military writer, not a historian.²⁶

This statement is not in contradiction with Paret's assertion that Clausewitz was capable of integrating a narrow perspective, grounded solely in military history, with a more comprehensive approach encompassing political, social, and cultural considerations. It would be inaccurate, however, to characterise this historical concern as being that of a historian. This is evidenced by the three examples that Paret uses to support his argument, which are, in fact, paradoxical. ²⁷ Über das Leben und den Charakter von Scharnhorst is not a historical study per se, but rather a posthumous eulogy. The opening section of Nachrichten über Preussen in seiner grossen Katastrophe is more akin to a political essay than an objective historical analysis, while the subsequent section, entitled Kritische Übersicht des Feldzuges 1806 (critical overview of the 1806 campaign), adheres to the same methodology employed by Clausewitz in his examination of other military campaigns. With regard to section 8.4.B of On War, Clausewitz himself indicates that it offers only a fleeting glimpse of history (einen flüchtigen Blick auf die Geschichte). ²⁸

Historical narrative and critical analysis

Conversely, Paret duly acknowledged the pivotal role played by Scharnhorst's teachings in shaping Clausewitz's historical outlook.²⁹ In *On War*, Clausewitz himself makes a brief mention of the matter, but does not provide any further

²⁶ Hans Delbrück, "General von Clausewitz", in *Historische und politische Aufsätze* von Hans Delbrück, I, Berlin, Walther & Apolant, 1887, p. 219.

²⁷ Peter Paret, Krieg, Geschichte, Theorie: Zwei Studien über Clausewitz, Berlin, Miles-Verlag, 2018, pp. 15-16.

²⁸ CLAUSEWITZ, Vom Kriege, p. 450.

²⁹ Peter Paret, Understanding War, Princeton, PUP, 1992, pp. 138-139.

details in his *Portrait of Scharnhorst*. Nevertheless, it is clear that the notion of establishing a link between the study of military strategy and the historical analysis of warfare as a basis for theoretical comprehension was initially put forth by Scharnhorst.³⁰ It can be further proposed that the ideas put forth by Scharnhorst in his manuscript *Nutzen der militärischen Geschichte* were known to Clausewitz. These included the utilisation of military history to establish the art of war on the basis of its inherent nature (*Natur der Sache*) and accumulated experience (*Erfahrung*). Additionally, the inapplicability of fanciful, sensational narratives that border on the implausible and the necessity of precise data to refine the art of war were also known to him.³¹

The application of military history in the development of theory is not immediately evident in the examination of the 1799 campaign. Clausewitz does not provide an explanation of the rationale behind his work until page 147. He states that his aim is to elucidate the ambiguous concepts that pervade the conduct of war. Nevertheless, the relationship between criticism and theory is not as straightforward as this passage suggests. Indeed, there is a two-way dynamic between criticism and theory. The existence of a usable theory (brauchbare Theorie) is a prerequisite for the effective exercise of criticism. This is explicitly stated in On War. Although this is less explicit in Die Feldzüge von 1799, the argument of authority that Clausewitz deploys against Jomini and the Archduke Charles cannot be understood otherwise. The author's assertion of the superiority of his theoretical approach indicates that the potential issue may lie not in the relationship between criticism and theory, but rather in the relationship between criticism and historical narrative. As Scharnhorst observed, an objective historical account is at odds with the presentation of facts from an erroneous perspective, which are subsequently transmitted to posterity in a distorted form.³²

Scharnhorst's "critical realism" was in accordance with the methodological developments of historical science at the time.³³ In this regard, it can be proposed

³⁰ Gerhard von Scharnhorst, "Denkschriften und Vorträge zur Ausbildung" [1801?], in Johannes Kunisch (Hg.) *Private und dienstliche Schriften*, III, Köln, Böhlau Verlag, 2005, p. 318.

³¹ SCHARNHORST, "Nutzen der militärischen Geschichte; Ursach ihres Mangels" [1796/1797?], in KUNISCH, VIII, cit, pp. 537-540.

³² Scharnhorst, "Nutzen der militärischen Geschichte", cit, p. 538.

³³ Friedrich Forstmeier, "Tendenzen amtlicher militärgeschichtsschreibung in Preussen/

that Scharnhorst's pupil was less isolated from the "methodological revolution" in German historiography than Paret suggests. Similarly, it is unreasonable to assert that Clausewitz references were "sparse," particularly in relation to the 1799 campaign. In addition to the works of Jomini and Archduke Carl, Clausewitz drew upon a wide range of references available in his day. The following is a non-exhaustive list of some of the works he consulted: Jourdan's *Précis des opérations de l'armée du Danube*, the *Politisch-militairische Geschichte des merkwürdigen Feldzuges vom Jahre 1799* by Chevalier de Seida de Lansberg, the official history of the 1799 campaign published in the 1812 issues of the *Neue Militärische Zeitschrift* of Vienna, Dedon's *Relation détaillée du passage de la Limmat*, Alphonse de Beauchamp's *Campagne des Austro-Russes en Italie*, the information and reports published in the summer and autumn of 1799 in the *Allgemeine Zeitu*ng, the reports by Massena and the Directoire published in the *Moniteur* and the sources published by Jomini as an appendix to his work.

To elucidate questions of toponymy and troop movements, Clausewitz also consulted maps of both theatres, in particular Meyer's Atlas of Switzerland. His discussion of Suvorov's options when he was in Glarus on 1 October is a case in point, as he mentions a place name – Mullihorn – that does not appear in Jomini's or the Archduke's account. The cross-checking of the sources used and the verification of the geographical locations provide evidence of a meticulous and discerning examination of the accounts of the campaign. Clausewitz was not remiss in noting the deficiencies in the documentation, as exemplified by the lack of clarity regarding operations in the Italian theatre from October onwards. In other instances, he was able to circumvent the missteps made by Archduke Carl and Jomini as a result of his meticulous examination of the available sources. Both authors had stated that the French had destroyed the central arch of the Devil's bridge with the intention of impeding the advance of Suvorov's army. Clausewitz's analysis of the sources led him to conclude that, contrary to what had been previously assumed, it was not the arch of the bridge itself that had been destroyed, but rather an arch that supported the road after the bridge.³⁵ In this instance, Clausewitz demonstrated a superior utilisation of his sources in compar-

Deutschland", in Hans Fenske, Wolfgang Reinhard, Ernst Schulin (Hg.) *Historia Integra*, Berlin, Duncker, 1977, p. 370.

³⁴ PARET, Understanding War, cit, p. 141.

³⁵ Clausewitz, 1799, II, p. 186.

ison to Jomini. This is evidenced by the fact that it was Jomini who incorporated the Count of Venanson account into his work as an appendix.

Clausewitz does not advance the argument to the extent of questioning the silence of the sources. Indeed, there is no reference whatsoever to a battle on the Devil's Bridge in the Count of Venanson account. However, Clausewitz, in a manner similar to Jomini, was to adopt Archduke Charles's account of a battle that may never have occurred, or at the very least, took a markedly divergent course. While it is difficult to pinpoint the origin of the Archduke's tale, it is safe to say that images of an epic battle on Devil's Bridge were soon invented. The publication of Suvorov's somewhat fanciful report to Paul I in Posselt's *Europäische Annalen* in 1799 is the source of these representations, which were reflected in painting in particular: by Johann Baptist Seele (1802), Johann Heinrich Bleuler (1802) or Robert Carr Porter (1805).

In this instance, it is not the historical approximation proposed by Clausewitz that is of primary importance; rather, it is the dependence that he found himself in relation to the accounts of those he referred to as the historians of the campaign. His account of the events in question is identical to that of the Archduke, albeit with a slight augmentation in the degree of dramatisation. This intertextual dependence is also evident in all of the factual passages comprising his analysis. From a purely narrative perspective, the Archduke and Jomini's account may be considered more engaging: the former includes an intriguing self-critical component, while the latter exhibits a more fluid and engaging style of writing. Clausewitz's work is only truly original and thought-provoking when he assumes his critical position, either by identifying and challenging problems inherent to a historical narrative or by diverging from a historical narrative through the exercise of intuitive insight or the application of counterfactual reasoning.

³⁶ The diary of Captain Grjazev, who was positioned at the forefront of the Russian contingent and who characterises Suvorov's account as a rhetorical expression (риторическое выражение), does not make any reference to the combat that took place on Devil's Bridge. "Tagebuch von Nikolaj Alexejewitsch Grjazew", in Jürg Stüssi-Lauterburg et al (Hg.), Mit Suworow in der Schweiz, Lenzburg, Merker im Effingerhof, 2013, pp. 145-149.

Intuition and counter-factuality

The most noteworthy sections of the book are the divergent analyses conducted by the Archduke, Jomini and Clausewitz concerning the strategic decisions made throughout the campaign. In the context of one of these controversies, Clausewitz displays a notable degree of insight, which he encapsulates in a concise phrase: Suwarow oder vielmehr sein Generalstab (Suvorov or, more accurately, his staff). The Archduke's censure of Suvorov for his failure to commence an offensive operation against the Walensee at the outset of October was predicated upon a misapprehension. He was unware that this was Suvorov's initial intention.³⁷ In regard to Jomini, although he endorsed Suvorov's decision to retreat to the valley of the Anterior Rhine via the Panix Pass, he was unaware that this course of action had been imposed upon him by his staff, particularly by the Grand Duke Constantine.³⁸ Of the three authors, Clausewitz was the only one to suggest that the selection of the army's strategic direction was no longer within Suvorov's purview at the Glaris War Council on 2 October. The role of Grand Duke Constantine was not revealed until the publication of two important historical sources. The first of these was the correspondence of Lord Wickham, Britain's envoy extraordinary to the coalition armies, which was published in 1870. The second was the diaries of Colonel Weyrother, Austria's liaison officer to Suvorov, which were published in 1900.³⁹ These two documents provided the evidence that Clausewitz's intuition was correct.

It is evident that Clausewitz's insight is not without its shortcomings, which serves to illustrate that incomplete historical sources are not a reliable basis for criticism. One such example is provided by a case described as "without parallel in the history of warfare", which aroused the greatest astonishment in Clausewitz: Suvorov's choice of his line of operation in the Swiss Alps. It can thus be seen that

^{37 [}Erzherzog Carl], Geschichte des Feldzuges von 1799 in Deutschland und in der Schweiz, II, Wien, Straus, 1819, pp. 254-259.

³⁸ Antoine Henri Jomini, *Histoire critique et militaire des guerres de la Révolution*, XII, Paris, Anselin et Pochard, 1822, pp. 278-279.

³⁹ Wickham to Lord Grenville, 17th October, 1799, in *The Correspondence of the Right Honourable William Wickham*, II, London, Richard Bentley, 1870, pp. 284-285. [Franz von Weyrother], "Tagebuch des Heerzuges der Russen unter dem FM. Suworow aus Piemont über den Gotthard nach Schwaben", in Hermann Hüffer (Hg.), *Quellen zur Geschichte der Krieges von 1799 und 1800*, I, Leipzig, Teubner, 1900, p. 47.

the case was of great consequence to Clausewitz and that he did not hesitate to condemn the error committed by the coalition staff. Furthermore, he asserted that historians of the campaign must also bear some responsibility, given that their account omitted any mention of the precise nature of this error. What was the nature of the misjudgement? The fact that the Gotthard route terminated at Altdorf meant that the army had to embark on the lake or traverse steep mountain paths (*Jägersteigen*) to reach Schwyz. Consequently, Clausewitz observed that Suvorov only became aware of his strategic error upon reaching Altdorf, due to the recklessness (*Leichtsinn*) and wrongness (*Verkehrtheit*) exhibited by the Austrians.⁴⁰

Although Clausewitz was correct in his assertion that Austrian officers exerted a significant influence on military operations, his assessment of the information available to Suvorov was erroneous. By consulting sources that Clausewitz did not have access to, it has been possible to ascertain that the Russian general was fully aware of the situation he would encounter at Altdorf before the start of his army's movement. In addition, it can be concluded that he made this decision with full awareness of the facts. As early as mid-September, he was informed that the march from Altdorf to Schwyz would be particularly challenging (pénible), given that the entire column would have to march along a single trail (un seul chemin), with each man proceeding one at a time (un homme après l'autre).⁴¹ It seems plausible that at this juncture, Suvorov was still considering the possibility of a direct advance towards Schwyz from Altdorf via Sisikon (Sissigen) or the Riemenstalden valley and Morschach. Indeed, an operational plan dated 20 September indicated that the army would depart from Altdorf on the 26th and arrive at Schwyz that same evening. 42 Although the precise moment at which Suvorov opted to eschew this route is unclear, it seems probable that he was made aware prior to the army's advance that the route from Altdorf to Schwyz, traversing the Schächental, Kinzig Pass and Muotatal (via Mutten), represented a superior alternative. 43 The most direct route was considered to be unduly challenging and risky, and the movement could not be concealed from the French forces on the other

⁴⁰ Clausewitz, 1799, II, cit, p. 191.

⁴¹ Sarret to Hotze, 16 September 1799, in Hüffer, cit, p. 363.

⁴² Entwurf zum allgemeinen Angriff auf den in den kleinen Kantons der Schweiz vorgedrungenen Feind und zur Fortsetzung der Operationen nach dem Gelingen des ersten Schlages, 20 September 1799, in Hüffer, cit, p. 368.

⁴³ Mémoires de F. de Rovéréa, II, Berne, Stämpfli, 1848, pp. 241-242.



Fig. 3 August Alexander von Kotzebue (1815-1889), *Suvorov Crossing St Gotthard Pass on 13 September 1799*. Hermitage, St Petersburg. Wikimedia Commons.

side of Lake Lucerne. Furthermore, there was significant uncertainty regarding the French response to the deployment of the army on its right flank during the movement. These factors were identified by Rudolf von Reding-Biberegg as the rationale behind the selection of the longer route.⁴⁴

From a critical standpoint, the use of incomplete sources is also detrimental to the construction of a counterfactual argument. Paul Schuurman has emphasised the importance of *evaluative counterfactuals* in Clausewitz's analysis of the 1815 campaign. ⁴⁵ The concept of counterfactual reasoning permits the apportionment of praise and blame. In this respect, Schuurman offers a correction to a hasty

⁴⁴ Rudolf von Reding-Biberegg, "Der Zug Suworoff's durch die Schweiz", *Der Geschichtsfreund: Mitteilungen des Historischen Vereins Zentralschweiz*, 50, (1895), p. 52.

⁴⁵ Paul Schuurman, "What-if at Waterloo: Carl von Clausewitz's use of historical counterfactuals in his history of the Campaign of 1815", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 40, (2017), p. 2.

interpretation by Paret. 46 In light of the pivotal nature of the events in question, it can be argued that counterfactual reasoning plays a more pivotal role in the analysis of the 1815 campaign than in the 1799 campaign. Nevertheless, in the analysis of the 1799 campaign, counterfactual reasoning is also present due to its function within criticism. In addition to the elements of this function set out by Schuurman, it is possible to include Clausewitz's conception of the causal relationship as a causal chain. Modifying one of the links in the chain and considering the consequences of this modification allows for the assessment of the contribution of this link to the overall solidity of the causal relationship.

The strength of the chain is contingent upon the reliability of the historical information on which the counterfactual reasoning is based. Before proceeding to examine two illustrative examples, it is essential to elucidate the particularity of Clausewitz's approach. It is evident that he was not the sole author to employ counterfactual arguments, as evidenced by the writings of Jomini and the Archduke Charles, as well as the testimony of the Count of Venanson, who inquired as to which of the three lines of operation available to Suvorov's army when it departed from Italy was the most prudent. From Clausewitz's perspective, his own approach is more relevant than that of the military historians of the campaign, as it is based on a more robust theoretical foundation.

The initial example concerns the selection of the Alpine route, which permitted Suvorov's army to traverse from Italy to Switzerland. Similarly, Clausewitz considered the three options available to the coalition staff, as had the Count of Venanson and Jomini. On the right, the Great St. Bernard Pass offered a line of operations extending from Martigny to Bern via Vevey. On the left, the Splügen Pass, Chur, then Walenstadt. In the centre, the Gotthard Pass, Andermatt, Altdorf, then Schwyz. It was this final line of operations that Suvorov's army actually pursued, halting its advance at Muota (Mutten) before retreating to Glaris and then to the Rhine Valley.

Clausewitz dedicates an entire chapter to an in-depth examination of the initial option, which the Count of Venanson deemed the most optimal insofar as it suc-

⁴⁶ Paret used a quotation from *Der Feldzug von 1815* to argue that Clausewitz's criticism was more about understanding what had happened than expressing approval or disapproval. However, there is a misinterpretation of the notion of truth (*Wahrheit*), which should be understood as a theoretical rather than a historical truth. Peter Paret, *Clausewitz and the State*, Princeton, PUP, 1985, p. 354.

cessfully caught Massena's army from the rear, ultimately forcing the French to evacuate Switzerland. It is therefore evident that this chapter is entirely counterfactual. Subsequently, Clausewitz defines this movement as strategic envelopment (*strategische Umgehung*) and presents a compelling argument that it would have been less favourable than a superficial examination would suggest.⁴⁷ In the absence of the requisite sources, Clausewitz was unaware that a plan of operations of this nature had been submitted to Suvorov by the end of August.⁴⁸ The pivotal issue for critical analysis was, in fact, the reason why this plan was not adopted.

Clausewitz's counterfactual reasoning was incomplete due to a lack of access to the necessary sources, which would have allowed him to consider the existence of a fourth option. In fact, a letter from General Hotze's liaison officer indicates that in mid-September, Suvorov had contemplated taking the Gotthard Pass and subsequently "passing through Graubünden" (rather than proceeding up the Reuss valley). The document does not provide any details regarding the subsequent movement of the troops, which, following the capture of the pass, should have continued as far as Andermatt and then proceeded towards Dissentis, via the Oberalp Pass, then Chur. This fourth option ultimately aligned with the Splügen operational approach, which both Clausewitz and Jomini deemed the most reasonable.

Two elements were therefore absent from Clausewitz's critical approach. Suvorov's rejection of the fourth option and his comprehensive understanding of the inherent challenges of a direct offensive on Switzerland via the Reuss valley. In light of these circumstances, the objective of the critique was not to take offence at the egregious error (*riesenhafter Mißgriff*) committed by the Russian general. The objective was thus to examine why a strategic manoeuvre towards Chur, which could have been executed in a cautious manner, was abandoned in favour of greater risk-taking. In his analysis, Clausewitz posits the beginning of an answer to this question when he writes that Suvorov was concerned to put an end as quickly as possible (*so früh als möglich*) to the dangerous situation that

⁴⁷ CLAUSEWITZ, 1799, II, cit, pp. 227-233. From a strategic perspective, a movement on the Swiss plateau from the south did not directly threaten Massena's line of communication, thus negating the necessity for an evacuation of Switzerland by the French. However, the line of operations of Suvorov's army had to be protected, necessitating the deployment of troops in the Rhone valley and a reduction in the strength available for the battle that would take place on the plateau.

⁴⁸ Melas to Suworow, 27 or 28 August 1799, in Hüffer, cit, pp. 319-321.

prevailed in Switzerland for the coalition armies.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, he was lacking the necessary data to fully comprehend that on 20 September, Suvorov had determined that the incendiary advance of the Russian troops would have to surmount the impediments confronting them in inaccessible terrain (*unwegsamen Lande*) in order to swiftly and decisively overwhelm the right wing of the French army.⁵⁰

The second example concerns Clausewitz's counterfactual arguments, which posit that Bonaparte would have made optimal choices if he had been in action. The citations in question are generally concise, yet they are derived from Clausewitz's previous examinations of Bonaparte's military operations. Of particular relevance is Clausewitz's analysis of Bonaparte's campaign in Italy in 1796. Consequently, when Clausewitz contemplated the deployment of allied forces in Italy during the spring of 1799, he observed that Bonaparte's capacity to regulate the economy of his forces (*Ökonomie der Kräfte*) would have permitted him, as in 1796, to refrain from dispersing them and to have three-quarters of his force available for combat. The observation itself is, of course, accurate. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the analyses presented by Clausewitz regarding the 1796 campaign are open to question. His assertion that there was a superior alternative to the lifting of the siege of Mantua in July 1796 serves to illustrate this issue in a notable manner, thereby exemplifying the necessity for a more nuanced analysis.

In his analysis, Clausewitz failed to consider the necessity of safeguarding the army's line of retreat. He proposed that Bonaparte could have established a line of circumvallation rather than recalling his troops to confront the relief army.⁵¹ The case of the siege of Mantua is discussed at length in *On War* in order to illustrate the necessity for critics to consider all possible means, and therefore to resort to counterfactual reasoning. Nevertheless, Clausewitz maintains that it is necessary to provide evidence of the relevance of the alternative procedure identified by the critic.⁵² However, this is not the case, as he fails to consider the factor of the army's line of retreat and the long developments given by Napoleon in his *Précis des guerres du maréchal de Turenne* to the lines of circumvallation. In his analysis, Napoleon defended the continued utility and necessity of such

⁴⁹ CLAUSEWITZ, 1799, II, cit, p. 229.

⁵⁰ Suworow to Hotze, 20. September 1799, in Hüffer, cit, pp. 365-366.

⁵¹ CLAUSEWITZ, Der Feldzug von 1796 in Italien, Berlin, Dümmler, 1833, p. 150.

⁵² CLAUSEWITZ, Vom Kriege, p. 82.

lines of defence, while also specifying that it was the specific circumstances and the balance of forces at any given time that determined whether it was more advantageous to wait for the enemy attack within these lines or to leave them to confront the attackers. It is worthy of note that he makes reference to the efficacy of the Mantua circumvallation line – in reality the fortification of the suburb of Saint-Georges – during the 1797 campaign. This line of defence prevented General Provera's relief army from reaching Mantua, allowing Bonaparte to return from the Battle of Rivoli and to participate in the Battle of La Favorita.⁵³ In contrast, Napoleon did not discuss the 1796 campaign, as there was no interest in implementing defensive tactics within a line of circumvallation. Instead, his strategy centred on attacking portions of the enemy's army and safeguarding the French army's line of communication.

The example of the siege of Mantua illustrates not so much the methodical approach of Clausewitz's criticism as it does the potential for a certain circularity in his methodology. The study of military history provides a rich source of material for criticism, which in turn informs the theory of war. This theory serves as a guiding principle, ensuring the continued relevance of counterfactual reasoning, which enables critics to engage in rigorous analysis of military history. Müller presents the argument in a slightly different manner, stating that theory serves as both the point of departure and the conclusion of the critical process.⁵⁴ Consequently the counterfactual constructions employed in the critique of the 1799 campaign are contingent upon the relevance of the critical judgments made in the analysis of the 1796 campaign. On occasion, Clausewitz's insights are particularly perspicacious, as evidenced by his analysis of Bonaparte's ability to manage the economy of forces. Conversely, there are instances where Clausewitz's arguments lack sufficient empirical support. This was the case when he questioned Bonaparte's capacity to make a more advantageous decision than Suvoroy, given that the latter was unable to utilise strategically his victory at the Battle of Trebbia. 55 The perplexity articulated by Clausewitz was inextricably intertwined with the quandary of simultaneous sieges, that is to say, a strategic configuration that bore striking resemblance to that of the siege of Mantua in 1796.

⁵³ Charles Tristan de Montholon (dir.), *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de France sous Napoléon*, V, Paris, Firmin Didot, 1823, p. 91.

⁵⁴ MÜLLER, cit, p. 88.

⁵⁵ CLAUSEWITZ, 1799, I, cit, p. 492.

Theoretical contribution

The objective factual content of Clausewitz's historical studies is not the primary focus of interest. With regard to the 1799 campaign, more recent works, such as that by Christopher Duffy, provide a considerably more robust historical foundation.⁵⁶ One might posit that the primary interest of his historical works lies in their confrontation with *On War*. The drafting of the 1799 campaign was completed with some haste in April 1830.⁵⁷ This may explain why the conclusion is somewhat disappointing in relation to some of the promises made in the book. Nevertheless, it is clear that this text was composed concurrently with the revision of *On War*, functioning as a kind of reflection or counterpart to the theoretical work in question.

An examination of the 1799 campaign demonstrates the applicability of several concepts articulated by Clausewitz in his seminal work. A detailed analysis of the Battle of Novi reveals the strategic advantage of employing successive applications of force, a concept referred to as *sukzessiven Kraftanwendung* in *On War* and *successiven Kraftgebrauch* in *Die Feldzüge von 1799*. With regard to the criticism levied at Archduke Charles' inaction following the Second Battle of Zurich, this presented Clausewitz with an opportunity to illustrate the deleterious impact of an excessive reliance on material factors (*materiellen Dingen*), coupled with an insufficient appreciation of the role of moral factors (*moralischen Größen*), in military strategy. A more comprehensive examination of the conduct of the generals-in-chief and the generals of division enables the author to underscore the indispensable function of the warrior spirit (*kriegerische Geist*) as a moral imperative, in addition to the energy (*Energie*) and deftness (*Industrie*) that facilitate the concentration of forces. On the concentration of forces.

In other instances, historical analysis serves not merely to illustrate the ideas presented in *On War*, but also to clarify them or render them more intelligible. The concept of the interior line represents a suitable initial example. In his anal-

⁵⁶ Christopher Duffy, *Eagles over the Alps. Suvorov in Italy and Switzerland, 1799*, Chicago, The Emperor's Press, 1999.

⁵⁷ Eberhard Kessel, *Militärgeschichte und Kriegstheorie in neuerer Zeit*, Berlin, Duncker & Humbolt, 1987, p. 141.

⁵⁸ CLAUSEWITZ, 1799, I, cit, p. 536.

⁵⁹ CLAUSEWITZ, 1799, II, cit, p. 268.

⁶⁰ Clausewitz, 1799, I, cit, p. 287.



Fig. 4 View of the Devil's Bridge on September 6, 1799. Diorama painted in 1952 by Russian battle artists of the Moscow-based Grekov studio: Arkady Ivanovich Intezarov (1909-1979), P. I. Maltzew, F. Usipenko and since 1975 at A.V. Suvorov' museum-estate, Novgorod region, Borovichy district, 174435 Konchanskoe-Suvorovskoe. Selected for Google Maps and Google Earth. Panoramio and Wikipedia Commons. "Your Imperial Majesty's troops — Suvorov wrote in a report to Paul I — passed through a dark mountain cave, occupied a bridge, an amazing trick of nature built from two mountains and called Teufelsbrücke. It was destroyed by the enemy. But this does not stop the victors, the boards are tied with officers' scarves, they run along these boards, descend from the top into the abyss and, reaching the enemy, strike him everywhere... Drowning in slippery mud, they had to rise against a waterfall, which fell with a roar and furiously brought down terrible stones and snow and earth blocks, on which many people with horses flew into the abyss of hell..."

ysis of the positioning of troops in the Italian campaign in early autumn, Clausewitz articulates this concept in relation to that of enveloping positions (*umfassende Form*). This results in a more transparent and coherent analysis than that presented in the different sections of *On War*. In this text, it is not always evident whether the author's intention is to challenge the concept, as in Book II, or to evaluate it in terms of its utility as a heuristic device, as in Book VI. A second example is mountain warfare. In contrast to the analysis presented in *On War*, Clausewitz introduced a significant distinction between defending high moun-

⁶¹ CLAUSEWITZ, 1799, II, cit, pp. 357-358.

tains and defending mountains of medium height. The former presented far greater challenges than the latter. Furthermore, the analysis is less convoluted than in *On War*, offering a different perspective on the mountain. In that work, the mountain is defined as a perennial source of negative influences and a secret workshop (*verhüllte Werkstätte*) of hostile forces. ⁶² In contrast, Clausewitz's examination of the 1799 campaign led him to conclude that the Alps could not effectively control the lower regions (*keine solche Herrschaft über die niederen Gegenden*). ⁶³

A comparative analysis of the two texts demonstrates that some of the fundamental concepts present in On War are either absent or only marginally developed in the other work. The concepts of friction (Friktion), probability calculation (Wahrscheinlichkeitskalkül), decreasing force of attack (Abnehmende Kraft des Angriffs), culmination point of the victory (Kulminationspunkt des Sieges) and culminating point of attack (Kulminationspunkt des Angriffs) are not considered in the analysis of the campaign. Conversely, concepts that are absent from On War are incorporated, including the notion of the culmination point of reinforcement (Kulminationspunkt seiner Verstärkung) and the concept of strategic calculation (strategischen Kalkül).64 With regard to the concept of the centre of gravity (Schwerpunkt), it is noteworthy that it is mentioned on only three occasions. The initial two instances correspond to the same interpretation presented in Book VIII of On War, namely, a hub of power and movement (Zentrum der Kraft und Bewegung) that can be the focal point for concentrating forces with the objective of destabilising the opponent. 65 As for the third occurrence, it has the same restrictive meaning as in Book VI, where Clausewitz identifies the centre of gravity solely with the concentration of the physical forces of the two opponents. From this perspective, a decisive battle is defined as a clash between two centres of gravity (der Stoß des Schwerpunktes gegen den Schwerpunkt). 66 Conversely, the author does not utilise the term in the other two meanings identified in On War: the centre of gravity as a synonym for the main battle and as the decisive moment in the battle 67

⁶² CLAUSEWITZ, Vom Kriege, cit, p. 309.

⁶³ CLAUSEWITZ, 1799, II, cit, p. 389.

⁶⁴ Clausewitz, 1799, cit, I, p. 277, II, p. 86.

⁶⁵ CLAUSEWITZ, Vom Kriege, cit, p. 459.

⁶⁶ CLAUSEWITZ, *Vom Kriege*, cit, p. 366. The term is used in reference to the Battle of Stockach in Die *Die Feldzüge von 1799*, II, p. 373.

⁶⁷ CLAUSEWITZ, Vom Kriege, cit, pp. 163, 276.

Conclusion

Adopting Delbrück's perspective over that of Paret allows us to posit that Clausewitz was a military writer with a pronounced awareness of historical approach. His approach is inextricably linked to the relationship between criticism and theory, as outlined in On War. The act of criticism represents an intellectual pursuit that extends beyond the mere narration of historical events; it is a process of critical analysis and evaluation. It is thus imperative that any criticism be founded upon a robust theoretical framework that informs the analysis of war. In this regard, Clausewitz's superior theoretical understanding enabled him to establish a hierarchy of expertise above other prominent critical military historians of his era, such as Jomini or Archduke Charles. Consequently, he was situated in a superior position within the field of historical analysis of war, specifically as a military writer and not as a historian. However, Clausewitz was confronted with an intrinsic challenge pertaining to the quality of the historical data on which his critique was based. Consequently, his analysis of the 1799 campaign is no longer of primary interest from a strictly historiographical perspective. Nevertheless, it remains a topic of considerable conceptual interest when viewed in comparison with Clausewitz's theory of war.

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