

War and Conflict in
Premodern Societies



ARMIES AND ECOSYSTEMS IN PREMODERN EUROPE

THE MEUSE REGION, 1250–1850

by
SANDER GOVAERTS

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PREFACE

THIS BOOK IS the result of a life-long interest in biology as well as military history. Premodern warfare and animals have always fascinated me, but I never thought about examining armed forces from an environmental point of view until the summer of 2009. At that time I visited the military domains known as the “Kamp van Beverlo” with other members of an environmentalist youth movement, the Jeugdbond voor Natuur en Milieu (JNM), and observed to my astonishment that military training exercises made the survival of rare animal and plant species possible.

I started studying history at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel in September of that same year, and initially focused on eighteenth-century military personnel records. It was only in 2013–2014, my final year as a research master’s student at the University of Amsterdam, that I felt ready to undertake a proper historical investigation of armies’ ecological impacts in the medieval and early modern period. I am indebted to the selection committee of the Faculty of Humanities for allowing me to pursue this rather ambitious project in the context of a PhD thesis, to the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful advice and comments, and to Dr. Anna Henderson, Arc Humanities Press’s acquisition editor, for her enthusiastic response to my book proposal, and assistance throughout the publication process.

During my research I have benefitted from the support of many people. I would like to thank Leon Engelen, Paul and Colette Magotteaux-Monier, and Steven Vandewal for sharing their archival research, Jop Mijwaard for making three original maps of the Meuse Region, Gabriël and Remar Eerens for introducing me to the unique grasslands of the Sint-Pietersberg, and the many researchers and teachers at the University of Amsterdam, the Huizinga Institute, and the Research School of Medieval Studies for their suggestions and critical remarks. I am grateful to my supervisors, Prof. Mieke Aerts, Prof. Guy Geltner, and Dr. Mario Damen, for their backing of the initial research proposal, for helping me to bring my PhD thesis to a successful conclusion, and for introducing me to the unique research environment known to the outside world as the History Department of the University of Amsterdam.

I want to express my gratitude to my mother and brother, for their aid, advice, and encouragement on innumerable occasions, for being the best reviewers and strongest supporters I will ever have, and for being just who they are. Without them doing this research would simply not have been possible. I am also thankful for the support I have had throughout the years from my grandparents, Paul and Catherine, and my granduncle and grand-aunt, the late Guillaume and Rosa. Mathieu Kunnen, a passionate researcher and a very good friend, passed away just a few days after submission of the final manuscript. No words can describe how much I appreciated his help and guidance.

