

Bram De Ridder, Violet Soen, Werner Thomas, and Sophie Verreyken (eds.), *Transregional Territories: Crossing Borders in the Early Modern Low Countries and Beyond*. Habsburg Worlds 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020, 262 pp., ISBN 9782503584935).

The volume *Transregional Territories: Crossing Borders in the Early Modern Low Countries and Beyond* resulted from a conference convened in November 2015 by the Early Modern History Research Group at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. Since 2012, this group has prioritized the study of early modern barriers, borders and borderlands, and it has been associated in particular with the concept of ‘transregional history’. Accelerating processes of globalization have inspired historians in recent decades to look beyond the nations and national borders that defined the writing of history for much of the twentieth century. A vast literature now exists on cross-border entanglement and connectivity, both in the modern and pre-modern worlds. The Leuven concept of transregional history is an original contribution to the debate and a valuable methodological alternative to the idea of transnationalism, which many early modernists have borrowed from modernist colleagues as a heuristic device for compassing cross-border movements and relations. These often remained all but invisible through the modern national prism and in the absence of modern-style nations and nation-states, it was unclear precisely what phenomena the transnationalist approach might transcend. The notion of ‘transregionalism’, while itself ambiguous in meaning and implications – as the title of this volume suggests – offers a less anachronistic perspective on early modern reality.

The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Low Countries, with their numerous and changing boundaries, furnish the experimental space in which this volume evaluates borders and the movement around and across them. The three sections into which it is divided derive from distinct, if related research areas supervised by Violet Soen and others at the KU Leuven. The first examines ‘transregional families’, the second concerns ‘circulation’ along and across borders, and the third analyzes strategies of ‘border management’. As is often true of published conference proceedings, the individual chapters differ in terms of quality and the extent to which they address common questions. Some indicate promising work-in-progress, while others present more advanced research findings. The two chapters that comprise the section on ‘transregional families’ illustrate this circumstance. In the first, Raingard Esser raises the question of the significance of confession-based historiography for noble identity in Upper Guelders, a contested border region that lay at the intersection of the Spanish monarchy, the Dutch

Republic and the Holy Roman Empire. She draws attention to the way that the diocesan boundaries of the bishopric of Roermond trumped the political framework of Upper Guelders in a unique work of explicitly Catholic historiography, whose actual reception is still in need of investigation. In the other chapter, Sophie Verreyken discusses what might be labelled the trans-imperial marital strategy of the Arenbergs, the leading noble family in the Southern Netherlands, in the last two generations before the extinction of the *Casa de Austria* in Madrid. Verreyken first describes how the marriage between Magdalena Francisca de Borja y Doria and Philippe François, the first Duke of Arenberg, in the 1640s restored the links to the Spanish court that had been disturbed during the time of Philippe François' father Philippe-Charles. Next, she shifts her attention to the double marriage in the 1680s that redirected political loyalties of the Arenbergs toward what would soon be the only surviving branch of the Habsburgs, in Vienna. On the basis of the Arenberg example, Verreyken takes exception to the conventional view that a conscious imperial strategy lay behind such unions, arguing instead that they 'were indirect representations of loyalty' (68) by the family itself.

The volume's most innovative section deals with the problem of early modern 'border management', a recent concept that refers 'to both [the] top-down and bottom-up handling of territorial divisions' (Bram De Ridder, 185). It usefully differentiates early modern boundaries from what appear to be the centrally controlled ones of modern states and spotlights an issue that has been comparatively neglected in transnational scholarship devoted to connectivity. Two of the three chapters in this section discuss the consequences of the rise of major new divisions in the early modern Low Countries as a result of the Dutch Revolt (1568-1648). Victor Enthoven examines how the magistrates in Zeeland dealt with the transformation of the Scheldt estuary from an internal fiscal barrier to an external border. Closing it would have meant economic suicide for both sides, while the continuation of commerce ran the risk of war supplies reaching the opposing side. In the end, the introduction of trade licensing did not prevent severe economic dislocation all around. In the next chapter, De Ridder shifts the emphasis from the passage of goods to that of persons across the border. The tightly controlled frontier between the Spanish Netherlands and the Dutch Republic entailed a new passport system on both sides, which also served both official and other financial interests. This chapter offers an additional novel perspective by focusing on the people trying to get across the border, rather than on norms and authorities. Five different strategies for dealing with the multifarious challenges of border-crossing are identified, from simply paying whatever was demanded to attempting to incite the compassion of border officials. Finally, Fernando Chavarría Múgica offers another prospect from below, this time from the Franco-Spanish border during the period usually associated with Louis XIV's *réunions* in which this ruler notoriously annexed territory by force to round off the northeastern frontier of his kingdom.

By zeroing in on the town of Fuenterrabía and the Bidasoa river region, Chavarría Múgica shows how early modern borders can be seen ‘as scenarios of complex interactions’ (212) between customary local arrangements and central power.

The focus on specific actors, human agency, and local society in all of these chapters reflects the recent advances in the field of interstate relations, which has moved away from the older stress on faceless polities and high-level decision-makers. More generally, this volume demonstrates that borders were places of encounter and exchange as well as ones of division and disentanglement, also in the early modern world. It opens up avenues of further research in at least three ways. First, it shows how practices in one polity might be connected to what was going on across the border in a neighboring territory. Second, the approach of transregional history offers a new way of thinking about the function of borders in the construction of identity. Third, the transregional focus on borders offers a useful way of keeping the various levels of responsible authority – from the locality to the central government – firmly in view. To conclude: the huge topicality of historical border research – and this volume in particular – has recently been reinforced by both the COVID-19 pandemic and the invasion of the Ukraine. In different ways, both events have tragically made us conscious again of the continuing significance of borders in a world in which globalization is slowing down.

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