

Mario Damen and Kim Overlaet (eds.), *Constructing and Representing Territory in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021, 366 pp., ISBN 9789463726139).

Histories of territorial constructions are on the rise, ever complicating our sense of political spatiality – ongoing and foregone. With each new study, the once flattening account of the homogenous territoriality of sovereign nation-states seems quaint in its assumptions of spatial simplicity.

In *Constructing and Representing Territory in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, sixteen scholars take part in this task by reflecting on pre-modern territorial institutions, practices, and representations across the Low Countries, Italy, and the Holy Roman Empire between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. This range, as one may suspect, invites readers to engage with a diversity of connected regional contexts, and takes an array of topical foci – from legal practices concerning jurisdiction to uses of censuses, cartography, court itinerancy, heraldry, and vernacular chronicles. This varied focus makes for an interesting representation of the range of cultural registers regarding conceptions of territory but poses challenges in terms of analytical coherence and in understanding how different practices came together.

Alongside introductory and concluding essays by the editors, the book divides into three parts. Each part holds four chapters sharing a conceptual theme. The first part illustrates the politico-legal diversity of pre-modern territorial institutions. The first chapter, by Duncan Hardy, provides a helpful and critical overview of historiographies of territoriality in the Holy Roman Empire before 1600. The second, by Luca Zenobi, discusses the shifting territoriality of Italian communes from the eleventh to fifteenth century, and their use of legal constructions such as ‘*territorium castrum*’ and ‘*civitas cum comitatus*’ (60–61). A third chapter, by Bram van Genderen, examines ecclesiastic territories in the Low Countries prior to 1559. Interestingly, Van Genderen connects this study with Florian Mazel’s *L’Évêque et le Territoire*. In a fourth chapter, Jim van der Meulen discusses *liminal lordships* in the principality of Guelders. Together these chapters successfully show the multifarious character of territorial authority in pre-modern Europe, and emphasize the driving force of corporative competition amidst lords, communes, bishops, and princes. This competition, as the authors show, was marked by many innovative territorial practices, from creating smaller parishes, to the employment of land surveyors or the writing of lordly ‘land constitutions’.

The second part of the book turns to ‘construction of territory’ in pre-modern Europe. The fifth chapter, by Arend Elias Oostindier and Rombert Stapel, cross-references Brabantian fiscal censuses (‘hearth counts’) with GIS

tools to reconstruct taxation maps. The sixth chapter, by Sander Govaerts, investigates princely and municipal efforts to constrain soldiers' itinerancy in the Meuse and Rhine regions from 1250 to 1550. Chapter seven, by Neil Murphy, follows the court itinerancies of Margaret of Austria and Mary of Hungary to think through shifting ties between the regency and territories. Collectively, these four chapters show how administrative practices can be read anew as gradually constitutive of centralized territories in Europe. This is valuable as obsessions with Westphalian sovereignty have prized attention to diplomatic legal fictions, to the detriment of examining evolving administrative practices.

In a third thematic part, the book discusses representations of territory. Chapter nine, by Mario Damen and Marcus Meer, engages coats of arms and heraldry as representational devices to spatialize authority, from cities burning lordly banners to signal freedom to great lords embedding their claims to foreign lands. In chapter ten, Bram Caers and Robert Stein examine vernacular epic literature and canonical historiography as registers for 'battles in ink' between noble houses vying to legitimize themselves through spatial narratives of ancestry and regional rootedness. Chapter eleven, by Lisa Demets, analyses Flemish prophecy and chronicles as devices to build regional identity around the unity of Flemish cities, led by Ghent, Bruges, and Ypres. The twelfth and final chapter, by Marianne Ritsema van Eck, engages early modern Franciscan maps of Palestine and their imagined biblical topographies.

After twelve chapters, the book ends with conclusion by the editors, summing individual contribution and restating the collection's overarching argument. This argument, as they state it, is that 'research on the concept of territory in pre-modern Europe should go beyond the "great thinkers" who operated in princely and royal settings' and focus instead on a variety of 'power groups such as urban elites, clerics, and the nobility' (357). This orientation, they claim, contrasts with Stuart Elden's focus on 'the great names of Western political thought' in *The Birth of Territory* (357).

To my mind, though founded this contrast eludes Elden's purpose in writing a genealogy of territorial sovereignty. Arguably, by focusing on territorial *sovereignty*, it is not surprising that he focused on canonical thinkers on *temporal power* to the detriment of alternative lineages of political thought. More importantly, his *genealogy* also implies a particular relation to historical material. Under a Foucauldian approach, a genealogy provides a self-consciously illustrative and episodic account of conceptual change designed to upset dominant narratives of historical progress. This implies an open-ended account, rather than a comprehensive and closed one, which courses through familiar and unfamiliar sites in canonical accounts. In this light, the purpose is to cultivate skepticism towards received wisdoms on the development of territorial statehood. This skepticism is oriented towards making room for pluralist investigations of territory, recasting its history as one of dispersed

origins, improbable destinations, multiple rewritings, and manifold political contests. In this regard, *Constructing and Representing Territory*'s explorations of late medieval territorial practices, and its emphasis of struggle between communes, lords, bishops and princes, complements rather than opposes the spirit of Elden's work. No doubt, this edited volume still locates a significant empirical gap in *The Birth of Territory*'s scope, but this can be said in many regards, such as regarding colonial and extra-European territorial practices (which this volume also does not do). Inevitably, no work can be total.

Beyond Elden, however, this edited volume arguably misses an opportunity to engage a burgeoning literature on political concepts of space in the early modern period, such as in thought provoking works by Annabel Brett, Lauren Benton, Tamar Herzog, Charles Maier, and Benno Teschke. Engaging these scholars might have been worthwhile in providing a broader sense of differing approaches and contentions in rewriting histories of territorial ideas and practices. Whilst such literature might not provide an account focused on medieval Europe, its articulations of how to think through legal texts, political calculations, and spatial interventions might have been useful to unpack. Through this engagement, the peculiar and fascinating character of the territorial history of the Low Countries might have been fleshed out even more effectively.

In sum, *Constructing and Representing Territory in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* offers an interesting collection of studies concerning the many-headed cultural, political and legal fabrication of territory. Many of its chapters are as illuminating as they are inspiring in their creative use of varied historical sources to reconstruct the late medieval sense of space – be it through heraldry, vernacular epics, or even prophecy. Such case studies are persuasive in opening up our horizons and making way for new accounts of late medieval and early modern territories, be it through legal enactments, cultural representations, or technical inventions. The street is slowly cobbled anew, paving the road for us to revisit a livelier past.

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