

TRANSREGIONAL TERRITORIES

HABSBURG WORLDS

VOLUME 2

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Transregional Territories

Crossing Borders in the Early Modern Low Countries and Beyond

Edited by

BRAM DE RIDDER, VIOLET SOEN,

WERNER THOMAS & SOPHIE VERREYKEN

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Cover illustration: Peter Snayers, *The Siege of a city, probably the Siege of Jülich by the Spanish Army under the command of Count Henri vanden Bergh, 5 September 1621-3 February 1622*, c. 1622-1666, oil on canvas, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam
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D/2020/0095/69
ISBN 978-2-503-58493-5
eISBN 978-2-503-58494-2
DOI 10.1484/M.HW-EB.5.117582

ISSN 2565-8476
eISSN 2565-9545

Printed in the EU on acid-free paper.

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Preface

The editors wish to express their warmest thanks to the FWO — Research Foundation Flanders and the KU Leuven BOF — Research Council for their project funding, which made it possible for the Early Modern History Research Group at the Faculty of Arts to establish www.transregionalhistory.eu in 2012. This joint research effort focuses on the study of early modern borders and borderlands, along three thematic axes.

The scope of this volume relates foremost to investigations dealing with borders and territoriality. The FWO-doctoral fellowship of Bram De Ridder (Ph.D. 2016, supervisor Violet Soen) examined *Strategies of border management: the evolution of the boundaries between the Habsburg Netherlands and the Dutch Republic, ca. 1580–1660*, and his BOF-postdoctoral mandate of KU Leuven explored the notions of transregional territories in *Between safe haven and common ground: assuming territorial neutrality in the civil wars of early modern Europe* (KU Leuven PDM 3H160304, supervisor Violet Soen). Today, the focus on borders and borderlands is pursued within the perspective of *applied history*, through the Corvus-project, devoted to *Developing historical societal consultancy as a strategic resource in times of change* (FWO SBO-grant 5003419N, supervisors Violet Soen, Bram De Ridder and Bart Willems).

A second focus examines the fate of transregional families, both on the Franco-Habsburg border and in the wider Habsburg World. The FWO-project *Hispano-Flemish elites in the Habsburg Netherlands. Transregional marriages and mixed identities, 1659–1708* (FWO 3H130582, supervisors Werner Thomas and Violet Soen, and Ph.D.-researcher Sophie Verreyken) finds its expression in the first part of the volume. The forthcoming edited volume by Violet Soen and Yves Junot, *Noblesses transrégionales: les Croÿ et les frontières pendant les guerres de religion (France, Lorraine et Pays-Bas, XVI^e-XVII^e siècle)* (Brepols) analyses the fate of one concrete noble house in the fractured borderlands between the Low Countries, France and Lorraine.

Finally, the third research axe analyses transregional reformations. This was possible through the project *The making of transregional Catholicism. Printing culture in the ecclesiastical province of Cambrai* (KU Leuven OT/2013/33, supervisors Violet Soen and Johan Verberckmoes, and Ph.D. 2017, Alexander Soetaert). This group published *Transregional Reformations: Crossing Borders in Early Modern Europe* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), together with Wim François. The reworked version of Alexander Soetaert's award-winning dissertation has appeared as *De katholieke drukpers in de kerkprovincie*

Kamerijk: Contacten, mobiliteit & transfers in een grensgebied (1559–1659) in the KVAB series (Peeters).

This edited volume on transregional territories follows an international conference titled *Borders and Barriers in the Habsburg Worlds*, hosted on 19 and 20 November 2015 in Leuven. H.S.H. the Duke d'Arenberg, the Arenberg Foundation and KU Leuven's Doctoral School of Humanities and Social Sciences provided indispensable financial support for inviting both senior and junior scholars to Leuven. The editors wish to thank all who assisted in the preparation of this conference and volume, especially the anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments and suggestions, and Dr. Ryan McGuinness for his assistance in editing the linguistic aspects of this volume. They also thank the staff at Brepols Publishers, and especially Chris VandenBorre, for their continued support in mapping the early modern Habsburg Worlds.

The Editors

July 2019/January 2020



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Transregional History

New Perspectives on Early Modern Borders and Borderlands in the Low Countries and the Habsburg Worlds

Today, early modern history can no longer be considered to be borderless, as older studies about globalization and overseas trade may have suggested. Contemporary concerns have enticed scholars to reconsider their ideas about pre-modern connectivity and networks. Recent debates about walls, (il)legal migration, and territorial geopolitics reveal that even a highly globalized society such as our own does not stop to consider division and separation on a spatial basis, regardless of its interconnectivity. It was no coincidence that the 2017 *American Historical Review Conversation* focused on the topic of ‘Walls, Borders, and Boundaries in World History’.¹ As such, historians currently question if the field of early modern global history might have placed too much precedence on connection over division and entanglement over disentanglement, or if it perhaps glossed over the territorial boundaries that were part and parcel of the early modern world.

Largely preceding these present-day concerns, however, was a small subsection of early modernist historians who have already engaged with the classic historiographical debate concerning the origins of borders and territoriality. The commonly accepted starting point for this revival is Peter Sahlins’s 1989 book *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees*, a work that discredited the idea that only central governments created national borders. Sahlins replaced the old top-down view on border formation with a story that paid particular attention to the interaction between rulers and their subjects in the borderlands, showing how nations and territories actually grow bottom-up.² Gradually, a wider range of scholars adopted his argument

- 1 Uncoincidentally, the conversation opened with a reference to US President Donald Trump’s ‘build that wall’ mantra: Suzanne Conklin Akbari and others, ‘AHR Conversation: Walls, Borders, and Boundaries in World History’, *The American Historical Review*, 122 (2017), 1501–53.
- 2 Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). More recently: *Frontiers and the Writing of History, 1500–1800*, ed. by Steven G. Ellis and Raingard Esser (Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2006); *Les Sociétés de frontière de la Méditerranée à l’Atlantique (XVI^e-XVIII^e siècle)*, ed. by Michel Bertrand and Natividad Planas (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2011); and Charles S. Maier, *Once within Borders: Territories of Power, Wealth, and Belonging since 1500* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016); *Fronteras. Procesos y prácticas de integración y conflictos entre Europa y América (siglos XVI-XX)*, ed. by Valentina Favaro, Manfredi Merluzzi, and Gaetano Sabatini (Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2017).

Transregional Territories: Crossing Borders in the Early Modern Low Countries and Beyond, ed. by Bram De Ridder, Violet Soen, Werner Thomas, and Sophie Verreyken, HW 2 (Turnhout, 2020), pp. 13–19.

by examining border formation in pre-modern and early modern societies, as these were periods when people were not yet (fully) wedded to the idea of the nation-state. More often than not, as Lauren Benton and Tamar Herzog make clear in their pivotal monographs of 2010 and 2015 respectively, agent-driven networks formed the basis for a renewed conception of early modern territoriality, one in which kings and governments appear as reactive forces when compared to their more proactive subjects.³ Moreover, the fundamental tension that existed between division and encounter is by now quite well known amongst modern and early modern historians, as the associated field of border(land) studies strongly emphasizes that territorial boundaries both separated and connected people, and usually did both simultaneously. The geographical location where two (or more) polities, religions, mentalities, or ethnicities split was also the place where they met, forcing border historians to incorporate all of these aspects into their work and to discuss the combined mechanics of dissociation and association.

To capture the ambivalent impact of borders, most early modernists turned to transnational history as a useful methodological tool. This concept had been explicitly designed to study cross-border movements and connection from the early nineteenth century to more contemporary times, as it offered a powerful counter-narrative to dominant national histories of borders, as well as to the associated narrative that most countries have natural boundaries.⁴ However, this use of transnational history introduced a new ambiguity in early modern border research, namely the difference between pre-modernity and modernity. The fact that there were not yet fully developed nations in the sixteenth or seventeenth century makes it difficult to explain what exactly trans-national history is supposed to supersede for this period. Scholars such as Bartolomé Yun Casalilla argued that, in order for transnational history to apply before the nineteenth century, the notion of nation simply needs to be re-defined according to early modern principles. Despite such arguments, transnational history remains a borrowed term, one that was never intended to fully fit with the border mechanics of the early modern period.⁵ As such, instead of being a conceptual help, transnational history risks to distort our view of some key aspects of pre-nineteenth century territoriality.

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- 3 Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Tamar Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession: Spain and Portugal in Europe and the Americas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015). Compare with: Cátia A. P. Antunes, *Cutting Corners: When Borders, Culture and Empire do not Matter*, Inaugural lecture by Prof. dr. C. A. P. Antunes on her acceptance of the position of professor of History of Global Economic Networks: Merchants, Entrepreneurs and Empires at Leiden University on Friday, 9 June 2017.
 - 4 Pierre-Yves Saunier, *Transnational History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Bernhard Struck, Kate Ferris, and Jacques Revel, 'Introduction: Space and Scale in Transnational History', *International History Review*, 33 (2011), 573–84.
 - 5 Bartolomé Yun Casalilla, "'Localism", Global History and Transnational History: A Reflection from the Historian of Early Modern Europe', *Historisk Tidskrift*, 127 (2007), 659–78.

Over the past few years, members of the Early Modern History Research Group at KU Leuven have made it their shared endeavour to deal with these methodological, theoretical, and historiographical challenges.⁶ Through their research, they explored the advantages that the concept of ‘transregional history’ might offer for the study of barriers, borders, and borderlands. Transregional history points out that early modern boundaries were not the outcome of actions pursued at one spatial level (be it local, regional, national, transnational, or global), but simultaneously existed at multiple negotiated levels.⁷ This focus on multiple levels and different types of (overlapping) constructed spaces — which contrasts with the nation-oriented focus of transnational history — highly enriches our view of the open versus closed dynamics of the particular borders and borderlands under scrutiny. Effectively, by incorporating a spatial ‘sliding scale’, transregional history makes it possible to observe how one border meant different things to a variety of actors, ranging, for example, from government officials who unsuccessfully enforced control measures over religiously and commercially inspired book traders exploring cross-border markets to noblemen encountering cultural and linguistic boundaries associated with a territorial barrier. For some actors, a border could be temporarily ‘closed’, whereas for others it was permanently ‘open’. Moreover, while one could easily cross a territorial boundary at one place, one often found it difficult to circumvent at others. Transregional history thus avoids the periodical focus on national boundaries engrained in transnational history, even though it still requires the definition of the multiple spatial and social levels it encounters. In this sense, the transregional method avoids two particular biases: one that sees the early modern states and their borders as foreshadowing the strong divisions that we encounter today; and another that sees early modern globalization as easy and unhindered by territorial constraints.

Within its shared focus on transregional history, the Early Modern History Research Group convened an international conference on 19 and 20 November 2015, titled *Borders and Barriers in and around the Habsburg World*, in order to experiment with the Low Countries as an apt ‘laboratory’ for

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- 6 We recommend viewing our website www.transregionalhistory.eu to learn more about projects and publications related to the theme of crossing borders in early modern times, and our two corresponding conference volumes *Transregional Reformations: Crossing Borders in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Violet Soen and others (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), and *Noblesses transrégionales: les Croÿ et les frontières pendant les guerres de religion (France, Lorraine et Pays-Bas, XVI^e-XVII^e siècle)*, ed. by Violet Soen and Yves Junot (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming 2020).
- 7 Violet Soen, Bram De Ridder, and others, ‘How to do Transregional History: A Concept, Method and Tool for Early Modern Border Research’, *Journal of Early Modern History*, 21 (2017), 343–64. The connection with borders and borderlands also makes this approach different from that of Mona Hassan, who used the term ‘transregional history’ for a study that was both geographically and temporally wider: Mona Hassan, *Longing for the Lost Caliphate: A Transregional History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

border formation and border management in the early modern era. We asked participants to reflect upon two guiding principles from our ongoing research. First, just as transnational history aims to negate or circumvent the dominant idea of the nation-state and its interest in creating and maintaining territorial divisions, transregional history wants to avoid a simplified focus on singular early modern separations, be they political, cultural, or confessional, by tracking what moved along and across these boundaries. This first transregional guideline served primarily as an invitation to question what transcended the boundaries of a region instead of highlighting how they separated one 'unique' area from the next. The second guideline requested that participants follow historical actors as they shifted from one course of action to another in dealing with the multiple borders of the Low Countries and their connected territories. For example, by following a single discontent inhabitant from the Low Countries in his or her dealing with the border, one can see how this boundary was perceived and operated by the inhabitant him- or herself, while also examining the judicial courts he or she solicited and the governor who had to instruct these courts. In other words, through this one actor, we not only observe how the border 'worked' at the local level, but also how it functioned at an intermediate level, and even at the level of the highest authorities within the Low Countries.

Thus, the objective of the studies gathered in this volume is to reflect upon the case of the lowlands at the North Sea as borderlands and, by doing so, to (re-)evaluate the working and impact of early modern borders more generally. By the sixteenth century, the southern and eastern regions of the Low Countries had already existed as borderlands for centuries, as the area had functioned as a frontier since at least the Roman era. During the Middle Ages, the position of the Low Countries as borderlands of France and the Holy Roman Empire continued to shift, a process that culminated in the establishment of the Burgundian-Habsburg territory during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. To the west and north of these lands lay the North Sea, which both separated them from and connected them to important trading partners in England, Scotland, Scandinavia, and the Baltic. Starting with the reign of Charles V, the Low Countries gradually transformed into the northern 'bulwark' of the polycentric Spanish monarchy and became gradually known as the 'Seventeen Provinces'. Yet, a new border emerged when the Eighty Years' War of 1568-1648 came to separate the Dutch Republic of United Provinces from the remaining Spanish Habsburg Netherlands. Progressing on the example of earlier edited collections, this volume shows that the early modern Low Countries were indeed a region where borders constantly shifted due to incessant war; where new and old boundaries raised crucial questions of loyalty; and where ruling a territory depended upon constant administrative innovation based on the legitimacy of older laws and practices.⁸

8 *Boundaries and their Meanings in the History of the Netherlands*, ed. by Benjamin Kaplan, Marybeth Carlson, and Laura Cruz (Leiden: Brill, 2009); *Networks, Regions and Nations: Shaping Identities in the Low Countries, 1300-1650*, ed. by Robert Stein and Judith Pollmann

The contributions in this volume reveal when, where, and how actors, ranging from kings to carpenters and from merchants to artists, influenced the territorial divisions they encountered.

With the Low Countries forming the geographical focal-point to this volume, the contributions circle around the region, offering a comprehensive view on how these lands were connected to and separated from other territories. In the east, Raingard Esser focusses on the contested border region of Guelders, whereas Annemieke Romein discusses the nearby German Duchy of Jülich. To the south, Yves Junot and Marie Kervyn debate the border between the Spanish Habsburg Netherlands and France. Even further south, Patricia Subirade discusses the Franche-Comté as a borderland, a region that was geographically detached from the Spanish Habsburg Netherlands yet had close connections with them through shared institutions. Looking westward, Victor Enthoven studies the North Sea and the Scheldt river as maritime borders between the Spanish Habsburg Netherlands and the Dutch Republic, a separation which Bram De Ridder also examines regarding the Habsburg-Dutch land border to the north and east. Finally, Sophie Verreyken and Fernando Chavarría Múgica go overseas and over rivers, as they discuss how the borders of the Spanish empire as a whole were enforced and overruled.

Three conclusions emerge out of this geographical tour along and across the borders of the Low Countries. The first is that transregional history reinterprets territorial practices by connecting them to what is happening across the border. The chapters of Raingard Esser and Sophie Verreyken best illustrate this idea, and they are placed into a first part dedicated to transregional families.⁹ As transregional history seeks to connect what are otherwise strictly delineated territories with what is happening outside of them, Esser's chapter exemplifies the impact of cross-border influences between the Low Countries and the neighbouring principalities of the Holy Roman Empire. The contribution of Esser shows how historiography in contested border regions, such as Habsburg Upper Guelders, proved to be important in creating open-ended accounts of changing borders in the past. As such, it accommodated the ambitions of and weathered the backlashes from local elite and noble families, which had become transregional because of the region's ever-changing borders. Next, Sophie Verreyken highlights that especially the Arenberg dynasty, tied to both the Spanish and Austrian Habsburgs, navigated the many boundaries of continental Europe to enhance its own glory, while the Spanish Crown

(Leiden: Brill, 2010). *L'Identité au pluriel: Jeux et enjeux des appartenances autour des anciens Pays-Bas, XIV^e-XVIII^e siècles / Identity and Identities: Belonging at Stake in and around the Low Countries, 14th-18th Centuries*, ed. by Violet Soen, Yves Junot, and Florian Mariage (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Revue du Nord, 2014).

9 For more on this, also see *Transregional and Transnational Families in Europe and Beyond: Experiences since the Middle Ages*, ed. by Christopher H. Johnson and others (New York: Berghahn, 2011).

was forced to recognize the mobility of the aristocracy and elites within its boundaries and tried to handle the multiple identities that resulted from this.

The second conclusion is that transregional history allows us to analyse matters of identity together with social and spatial influences. This is primarily observable in the contributions of Yves Junot and Marie Kervyn, Patricia Subirade, and Annemieke Romein in the second part. These four authors illustrate the idea that territorial borders function as focal points for the separation and connection of (emerging) identities. Junot and Kervyn, for example, show that border identities in the French-speaking provinces of the Low Countries became an interesting laboratory for making or breaking loyalty to the dynasty. In the polycentric Spanish monarchy, ideological identification with both the Crown and Catholicism was crucial, but for those living in the border zones this identification was intertwined with their struggle against France, the dynasty's arch-enemy. Nonetheless, consensual practices and cross-border migration mitigated some of the ideological divisions in these frontier societies. Likewise, Patricia Subirade shows how the Spanish monarchy might have formed the background of a shared Marial devotion between the Low Countries and the Franche-Comté, but at the same time she also illustrates how the concrete adaptations and variations of this devotion fostered new regional and local identities. Through this process, the border with Protestant Swiss cantons proved to be both a geographical and symbolic division, yet one that was transcended by Catholics in times of crisis, or by artists, specifically, in times of opportunity. Next, Annemieke Romein shows how Dutch elites became very interested in what appeared to be a matter of local concern in a neighbouring territory. A conflict between the nobility and the overlord of the Duchy of Jülich spilled over into next-door Cologne, where disgruntled Jülich nobles started to assemble, and into the Dutch Republic, since pamphlets discussing the Jülich crisis also targeted a Dutch audience. Hence, transregional history illustrates the complexity of social and geographical levels on which historical actors operated when dealing with borders.

As a third conclusion, transregional history offers a unique multi-level view of governmental and institutional innovation through the lens of border management, which is illustrated in the last part of the volume. This argument connects the contributions of Victor Enthoven, Bram De Ridder, and Fernando Chavarría Múgica, as all authors of the third part show that the management of a border stimulates change in the political and legal administration of the adjacent territories. Given the fact that a state, whatever its form and purpose, cannot claim to exist without a territory, border management increasingly became a key focal point for many early modern governments. It is therefore no coincidence that Enthoven's and De Ridder's chapters, which deal with the creation of two new territorial entities (i.e. the Dutch Republic and the Spanish Habsburg Netherlands), both observe that a variety of governing practices grew out of the need to defend and control the borders of these polities. This focus on two new territories should, however, not obscure

the fact that border management in older states also led to political and legal innovations. Fernando Chavarría Múgica's arguments concerning the Franco-Spanish border are illustrative, as he shows how a new French political and legal strategy forced the Spanish government to adapt its own management strategies and the narrative behind them. Crucially, all three authors also stress the role of local actors living along the border, as they not only reacted to the steps taken by governments, but also took action on their own and thereby affected the results of the confrontation between the states. Echoing arguments from recent early modern border studies as well as from studies on state-building from below, transregional history offers a new conception of 'border-building from below'.¹⁰

Taken together, all of the volume's authors demonstrate that the borders of the early modern Netherlands became a constituent part of the life of the people living along these frontier regions. The chapters combine to show that historical actors were highly conscious about the presence of borders and that these separations offered them both limitations and opportunities. In fact, all borders, even those sometimes considered as 'natural' frontiers, were clearly man-made. Since they were made by people, some used the separation to gain an advantage, whereas others sought to avoid or negate its influence. Hence, borders could be barriers as well as enablers, shaping early modern interaction in either case. Moreover, all of the chapters in this volume highlight what can be gained by applying transregional history to the study of the early modern period. They illustrate how the presence of levelled and multiple borders forced actors to choose between several options to cross, circumvent, contest, challenge, or ignore the territorial boundary. Since they had to decide on a course of action, borders, such as those of the Low Countries, offer a unique view into the operations of and changes within early modern society: some strategies of border management remained available during the early modern period, whilst others became gradually closed-off, and still others were newly established. It is this variation and variability that transregional history reveals.

10 Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession: Empowering Interactions: Political Culture and the Emergence of the State in Europe 1300-1900*, ed. by Willem Pieter Blockmans, André Holenstein, and Jon Mathieu (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).