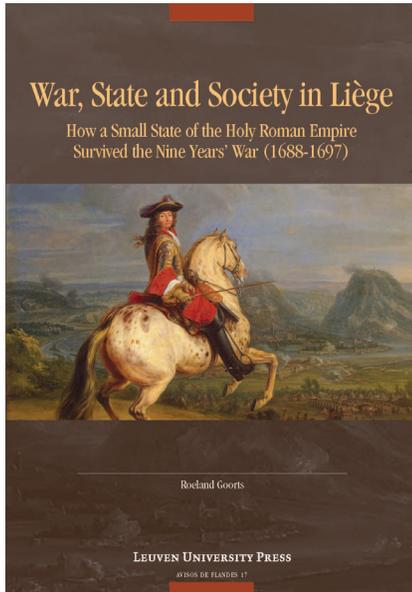


Review

Roeland Goorts, *War, State and Society in Liège. How a Small State of the Holy Roman Empire Survived the Nine Years' War (1688-1697)*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2019, 417 pp. ISBN 9789462701311.



As its title suggests, this book has been designed in the tradition of the ‘war and society studies’ inaugurated by Contamine (1972) and Corvisier (1964, 1985) in the French-speaking world, and by Hale (1985) and Tallett (1992) among others in the anglophone world. The aim of this approach is to examine warfare in its broader political, social, economic, and cultural context, beyond the history of battles, tactics, and strategy as has been practised by military historians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Prince-Bishopric of Liège, an ecclesiastical principality renowned for its arms industry and, to a lesser extent, for its soldiers hired throughout early modern Europe, constitutes an outstanding case study to examine current assumptions regarding the relationship between warfare, society, and state-building. The stated ambition of the author, indeed, is to uncover ‘significant new

theoretical insights and [to] provide important information on a very specific state structure yet unknown to early modern scholars’ (19).

In practice, the author successively addresses a wide range of relevant issues relating to politics (chapter two), financing (chapter three), recruitment and command (chapter four), fortification (chapter five), diplomacy (chapter six), operations (chapter seven), and socio-economic impact of warfare (chapter eight) in the Prince-Bishopric of Liège during the Nine Years’ War (1688-1697). The book’s structure foreshadows an in-depth study of what may have been a crucial decade for the loss of the principality’s long-term neutrality. The author does indeed provide a first approach to historiographical questions applied to Liège as well as to varied scattered source material in local, regional, and national archives in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, France, Spain, and even the United Kingdom. Besides unpublished archival material, early modern printed and published sources are

taken into account to examine desertion, troop movements and tactics, the economy of war, and fortification.

Throughout, the impression arises that the successive reigns of Jean Louis d'Elderren (1688-1694), descending from a Liégeois noble family, and Joseph Clemens of Bavaria (1694-1723), from the Wittelsbach family, may have been at odds with each other regarding the polity's policy and its related military organization. One is first struck by d'Elderren's strong reliance on Dutch loans, whereas Bavaria seemed keen to avoid this dependency on the allied United Provinces (chapter three). Similarly, the first prince-bishop's local army recruitment seems to contrast with the second one's use of external military contractors financed by his own electoral treasury of Cologne. The different relationship of both princes to their cathedral chapter and the estates of the principality may explain these contrasting financing and recruitment practices (143), but unfortunately Goorts does not explore this in any depth (chapter 4). He highlights how Liège progressively lost its neutrality during the Nine Years' War, shifting from a 'permeable neutrality' to an 'armed neutrality'. Goorts opposes d'Elderren's insufficient international contacts to Bavaria's strong network and dynastic interests. However, as both rulers are equally blamed for Liège's loss of neutrality, this leaves the reader wondering about the strength of the argument and its opposite within the same chapter. Factionalism within Liège is hinted at but not thoroughly explored, and one wonders how Catholicism played into the warmer feelings of some Liégeois social groups towards France (chapter six). Finally, it seems possible that the Bavarian reign inaugurated a longer-term shift in Liégeois political and military organization, which only fully matured during the War of Spanish Succession in the early eighteenth century, as hinted upon in the conclusion (chapter nine).

Despite its meritorious efforts, this book regularly fails to engage with the existing historiography and to explore the full implications of its findings. In quite long and undivided chapters (twenty to forty-five pages), the author addresses subsequent but intermingled topics within a general theme. Hence, chapter three probably contains the richest amount of interesting detail on financing warfare through taxation and loans, as well as on the resistance to these funding mechanisms. Yet its presentation suffers from blurriness and lack of argument: one would, for instance, like to understand whether there is a distinction to be made between loans from the Dutch polity through the Estates-General, via the stadholder, and via the private credit market, and how this affected the prince-bishopric's financial policies. Similarly, as the polity repaid its war debts by 1731 and seemed less crippled than other small states involved in war, one is left wondering about the reasons for this quick recovery beyond a general reference to the nature of the principality's diverse economy. In chapter four, devoted to the Liégeois army, the author jumps from pillar to post on recruitment, command, desertion, discipline, and payment, as well as on the tactical and strategic role of the Liégeois as auxiliary and garrisoned forces. The latter element returns in chapter seven, when the author offers a chronological overview of war events going beyond the aspects of 'petty warfare' hinted at in the chapter's title ('Den kleinen Krieg in the Prince-bishopric') to examine Liégeois and allied operations in the principality.

Despite a rich bibliography attesting to awareness of essential works, referencing throughout the monograph is regularly erratic, incorrect, or not really relevant. For

instance, already in the introduction's second footnote, while referring to Charles Tilly's famous aphorism that 'war made the state and the state made war', no reference to this author can be found (17). Addressing Dutch historiography, Michiel de Jong becomes 'Marion' (34). Setting the stage in chapter two, a short description of Liège's economy refers to three books on political institutions, architectural relations between the Northern and Southern Low Countries, and a *Kurfürst*, but fails to acknowledge the renowned standard works by Claude Gaier on the principality's arms production when addressing this industry (48, footnotes 11 and 12).

Both language (grammar, vocabulary, and syntax) and final editing (orthography and typos) are problematic. It would be both impossible and pointless to reference every error, but the monograph makes a good case for publishing houses to hire professionals to copy-edit texts by non-native speakers, especially for languages that, although dominant in contemporary academia, may not be as well-mastered as their authors and editors may think.

In conclusion, despite the author's painstaking efforts to consider a wide range of source material and synthesize the existing literature, this book does not meet its ambitious aims. No 'significant new theoretical insights' emerge, and the relationship between warfare and Liège's 'very specific state structure' is at best implicitly addressed. This is a missed opportunity, as Liège would constitute an excellent case study to examine the impact of warfare on state-building and society in an early modern ecclesiastical principality with a wealthy arms industry and a demographic pool for soldier recruitment. Nevertheless, this book will undoubtedly spur researchers to more in-depth investigation, analysis, and comparison with other ecclesiastical and imperial, comparatively less neutral and more militarized, states.

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