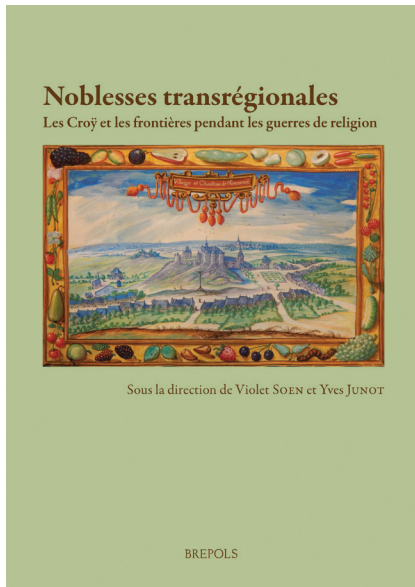


Review

Violet Soen and Yves Junot (eds.), *Noblesses transrégionales. Les Croÿ et les frontières pendant les guerres de religion*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2021, 431 pp. ISBN 9782503582993.



This themed volume edited by Violet Soen and Yves Junot is the result of a conference about the noble family Croÿ on the occasion of the 450th anniversary of the death of Antoine of Croÿ and the quincentenary of Luther's posting of his theses. These two anniversaries unveil already the aim of the edited volume and its most central topic: to contextualize the history of the Croÿ family and the political and cultural actions of its members, allied families, and rivals in a dynastical, political, and religious border region between France, the Holy Roman Empire, and the Seventeen Provinces during the wars of religion in the sixteenth century. The volume aims to promote a new interpretation of this region as a border region (236) with a frontier society that works upon logics beyond national historiographies. Multiple and shifting loyalties; changing confessions within one biography; micro sovereignties,

scattered estates, and ownerships next to regional powers such as Lorraine; different family branches tied to the major powers (France and the Habsburgs, either as emperor or as Spanish king); and different forms of biconfessional coexistence – these all help to understand the families' strategies as a constant border-crossing that makes vanishing frontiers which seem to have a posteriori become relevant or constructed. One of the most important outcomes of the entire volume, almost part of each of the fifteen chapters, is that family strategies worked and played with these constraints. The families seldom favoured one of the major powers but deepened their standing within the border region and their rights by even more dispersed properties, biconfessional marriages, or border-crossing alliances and networks (259).

With the focus on early modern noble family strategies in border regions, the volume follows in the wake of Jonathan Spangler's contribution on the Salm and Croÿ families from

1477 to 1830, which was part of a 2011 themed volume on transregional and transnational families in Europe and beyond, edited by Christopher H. Johnson, David Warren Sabean, Simon Teuscher and Francesca Trivellato.¹ This volume, and in particular Spangler's contribution, have become a fruitful source of inspiration to reinterpret noble family history, and to evaluate the organization of families along dynastic, political, religious, and language frontiers as well as the traumatic implications of the nationalization of these border spaces due to the French Revolution. Different themed volumes and articles about the Arenberg family, heirs of one of the Croÿ branches, have used this approach either as an argument or as the basis for a deeper analysis of family identities well into the nineteenth century.²

The current edited volume by Soen and Junot enhances this field by adding religion and confession as an essential parameter of loyalty, identity, and networking. Whereas the Arenberg's religious affiliation was more or less consistently Catholic, the Croÿ family was divided into Calvinists and Catholics, but this does not mean that the loyalties were easily positioned along a religious demarcation line. In a frontier society, being Catholic did not necessarily mean being loyal, and being Calvinist was not per se evidence of rebellion. Three different lines of conflict were permanently intertwined: the political conflict to defend traditions and local rights against royal power in France and the Spanish Netherlands, the political strife between Habsburg and Bourbon, and the religious struggle for religious liberty and free exercise of religion. Understanding this complexity provides more comprehensiveness of the frontier society and its actions, networks, marriages, changes, and rechanges of religion as well as negotiations, breaks, and reconciliations with the sovereign.

Methodologically, the volume presents a series of micro-histories of places and people. It is organized into three sections, each with four or five contributions. The four articles in the first section each focus on one particular geographical setting of frontier space, with contributions on the Moselle valley (Jonathan Spangler), the sovereign seigneurie of Sedan (Aurélien Behr), the nobility in Picardy (Alain Joblin), and towns in Picardy and Champagne (Olivia Carpi). Joblin shows that the Protestant Prince of Condé rallied a considerable network of Catholic and Protestant nobles, which together in a 'national reconciliation' (99) helped the Dutch Revolt against the Duke of Alba and the hereditary Habsburg enemy in a private venture. Carpi argues that the towns in Picardy and Champagne became Catholic bastions, as she uncovers the step-by-step discrimination and repression of Protestants from participation in the town security system and the towns' magistrate and administration, and by paying more taxes.

The second section is dedicated entirely to members of the Croÿ family. Odile Jurbert offers a biography of Antoine de Croÿ, Prince of Porcien, who converted to Protestantism, held an extended network among the German princes, and actively promulgated the Protestant faith in his possessions. Gustaaf Janssens's contribution focuses on Philippe III of Croÿ, one of the most important political figures in the Netherlands under Philip II.

1 Christopher H. Johnson, David Warren Sabean, Simon Teuscher, and Francesca Trivellato (eds.), *Transregional and Transnational Families in Europe and Beyond. Experiences Since the Middle Ages* (New York 2011).

2 Claude-Isabelle Brelot and Bertrand Goujon, *La maison d'Arenberg en France* (Enghien 2018); Mark Derez, Soutkin Vanhauwaert, and Anne Verbrugge (eds.), *Arenberg. Portrait of a Family, Story of a Collection* (Turnhout 2018); Willam D. Godsey and Veronika Hyden-Hanscho, *Das Haus Arenberg und die Habsburgermonarchie. Eine transterritoriale Adelsfamilie zwischen Fürstendienst und Eigenständigkeit (16.-20. Jahrhundert)* (Regensburg 2019).

Philippe and his son Charles, the last Croÿ of the Aarschot branch, are the protagonists of Violet Soens's chapter on the political breaks, negotiations, and reconciliations with the Habsburg sovereign for the local traditions and rights in the Habsburg Netherlands, in which religion again appears as a parameter. This idea is continued by Sanne Maekelberg and Pieter Martens, in a sometimes rather speculative essay about the role of the frontier in the architectural heritage and the library of the Croÿ family.

The volume's last section focuses on women and their important role as mediators and driving force behind conversion, marriage alliances, and the securing of possessions. Tomaso Pascucci shows how Françoise d'Amboise, the mother of Antoine of Croÿ, preferred him as son from her second marriage over the children from her first marriage for territorial expansion in the frontier region via the marriage with Catherine of Cleve, and how she governed him through the logics of social rank, investments, debts, and family negotiations. Two contributions focus on Marie of Brimeu, Princess of Chimay and Duchess of Aarschot, in particular her interest in gardening and her correspondence with one of the most important botanists of her time, Charles de L'Escluse. Whereas the first article by Sylvia Van Zanen descriptively analyses the correspondence, Anne Mieke Backer interprets the small gardens in courtyards as the output of the Protestant ideals of freedom, and as a recipe against war and for the release of flowers from the Catholic order of mythological meaning. Nette Claeys and Violet Soen close the volume with a chapter on Diane of Dommartin, a daughter heir from a Lorraine family who first married into the Salm-Dhaun family and then into the Croÿ family. Her conversion to Catholicism strengthened the Catholic cause in a fragmented region between France, the Holy Roman Empire, and the Swiss cantons.

Microhistory is undoubtedly the appropriate method to entangle such complicated relations between politics, religion, and family history. This approach helps the reader to delve deep into the incentives and motifs by which the protagonists were driven. However, the constraint that every contribution should also be readable as a stand-alone article produces lots of repetitions. Much of the information in the two chapters on Marie of Brimeu overlaps, and there are other examples where the reader has a *déjà-vu* when reading the entire volume from cover to cover. In a themed volume about a single family there are always topics a reviewer can claim as wanting. With regard to religion, one could for example ask for more on the activities of beneficence by women and men. Dedicating a whole volume to one family binds the authors to the richness of sources left by this one family and what has survived in archives until today. The footnotes make clear that profound research on the family history preceded the writing. However, the first chapter by Spangler on the Moselle valley opens the field not only to the time of the wars of religion but also draws attention to a particular transregional identity of nobles until the French Revolution and considers it essential for problems that are still relevant in the nineteenth century. The nationalization of the old Burgundia as a frontier space whets the reader's appetite for questions concerning the post-confessional era. I recommend this richly illustrated book to a wide readership, specialised historians as well as people interested in one of the treated research fields such as borders, family history, and religion.