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How to do Transregional History: A Concept, Method and Tool for Early Modern Border Research

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Abstract

This article argues that the method of transregional history offers a valuable new tool for studying early modern territorial borders. Where existing research strands do not always suffice to accommodate the complexity of such boundaries, this new concept can serve as an alternative. Firstly, transregional history points out that early modern boundaries were not the outcome of actions that were pursued at one spatial level, be it local, regional, national, transnational, or global, but existed at multiple negotiated levels at once. Secondly, the method prompts historians: a) to not predefine “the” singular border of the region under scrutiny, but to follow historical actors as they shifted from one course of action to another in dealing with these multiple borders; and b) to question what transcended the boundaries of a region instead of highlighting how they separated one “unique” area from the next. In doing so, transregional history helps to reformulate questions about territorial boundaries, to make novel heuristic choices in research where and when borders matter, and, hence, to improve our understanding of transboundary historical change.

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Keywords

Transregional history – early modern borders – historical methodology – global history – Atlantic History – transnational history – Holy Roman Empire – Spanish Habsburg Empire

Introduction

In the last quarter of a century, territorial borders—meaning those at the intersection of land and power¹—have become a booming topic in early modern history. Following the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the publication of Peter Sahlins' *Boundaries: The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* that same year, the numerous separations that permeated the early modern world increasingly attracted attention.² Building on the work of Lucien Febvre, historians like Daniel Nordman, Isabelle Paresys, and David Potter continued studying the borders of France, whereas Steven Ellis, Jackson Armstrong, John Gray, and Anna Groundwater investigated those of the British Islands.³ In the last few years the borders of the Spanish-Habsburg Empire were granted particular attention, including its frontiers in the New World.⁴ The Holy Roman

1 On territoriality and the link between land and power, see Robert David Sack, *Human Territoriality. Its theory and history* (Cambridge, 1986).

2 Peter Sahlins, *Boundaries. The Making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees* (Berkeley, 1989).

3 Lucien Febvre, "Frontières. Le mot et la notion," in *Pour une histoire à part entière*, ed. Lucien Febvre (Paris, 1962), 11-24; Daniel Nordman, *Frontières de France. De l'espace au territoire, xvi^e-xix^e siècle* (Paris, 1998); Isabelle Paresys, *Aux marges du royaume. Violence, justice et société en Picardie sous François Ier* (Paris, 1998); David Potter, *War and Government in the French Provinces: Picardy, 1470-1560* (Cambridge, 1993); David Potter, "The Frontiers of Artois in European Diplomacy, 1482-1560," in *Arras et la diplomatie européenne—XVI^e-XVI^e siècles*, ed. D. Clauzel et al. (Arras, 1999), 262-275; Steven G. Ellis, *Tudor Frontiers and Noble Power. The Making of the British State* (Oxford, 1995); John Gray, "Lawlessness on the Frontier: The Anglo-Scottish Borderlands in the Fourteenth to Sixteenth Century," *History and Anthropology* 12 (2001): 381-408; Jackson W. Armstrong, "The Justice Ayre in the Border Sherifffdoms, 1493-1498," *The Scottish Historical Review* 92 (2013): 1-37; Anna Groundwater, *The Scottish Middle March, 1573-1625. Power, Kinship, Allegiance* (Martlesham, 2013).

4 Tamar Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession. Spain and Portugal in Europe and the Americas* (Cambridge, MA, 2015); Tamar Herzog, *Defining Nations: Immigrants and Citizens in Early Modern Spain and Spanish America*, (New Haven, 2003); María Martínez Alcalde y José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez, eds., *Felipe II y Almazarrón: La construcción local de un Imperio global. Vivir, defender y sentir la frontera* (Vestigios de un mismo mundo 7, 2 vols.) (Murcia, 2014); Amparo López Aranadia, "Pacificación y fundación de ciudades en la frontera: proyectos repobladores

Empire—as quintessential example—served to examine how borders were constructed as well as transcended.⁵ And as an accompanying trend to all these border studies, research concerning (religious) exile has currently shed new light on the impact of major cross-border refugee movements in the early modern era.⁶ But despite their groundbreaking work, these studies remain limited in two respects. First, the study of early modern borders remained firmly tied to matters of state building, with key questions being when, how, and why the state got involved in the creation and administration of its territorial limits. Secondly, and as an overarching concern here, most scholars kept silent about the concepts they used for their work, reinforcing the trend to operate within preset and often ahistorical spatial categories (such as the state). So although most historians who study borders and boundaries realize that space and territory functioned differently in early modern times, these differences are rarely given an overarching conceptual and/or methodological frame. And even when specific border concepts and methods are used, they usually derive from research on other periods—for example the transnational approach originally developed for the analysis of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Therefore, this article aims to highlight some of the hazards of research involving early modern borders and to present transregional history as a concept, method and foremost a concrete tool that can complement existing boundary studies. Borders came in many forms and depended on numerous actors, even if we leave mental and cultural fractures aside. Although historians are generally aware that territorial boundaries existed at the local (e.g. a fief or a parish), regional (e.g. a province), national (e.g. a country), and global level (e.g. a continent), these categories are traditionally studied in isolation, ignoring

en Castilla,” *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma* 24 (2011): 33-50; Susana Truchuelo García, “Fronteras marítimas en la Monarquía de los Habsburgo: el control de la costa cantábrica,” *Manuscrits. Revista d’Història Moderna* 32 (2014): 33-60; Tomás A. Mantecón Movellán, “España después de Utrecht: las fronteras del imperio,” in *Europa en torno a Utrecht*, ed. Marina Torres Arce and Susana Truchuelo García (Santander, 2014), 113-148; Miguel Ángel Melón Jiménez et al., eds., *Fronteras e Historia. Balance y perspectivas de futuro* (Badajoz, 2014). Tomás Mantecón Movellán and Susana Truchuelo García, “La(s) frontera(s) exteriores e interiores de la Monarquía Hispánica: perspectivas historiográficas,” *Historia Crítica* 59 (2015): 19-39.

5 See several of the contributions in Christine Roll, Frank Pohle and Matthias Myrczek, eds., *Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen. Bilanz und Perspektiven der Frühneuezeitforschung* (Cologne, 2010).

6 Cfr. Geert Janssen, *The Dutch Revolt and Catholic Exile in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, 2014). Some of the other recent examples are Nicholas Terpstra, *Religious Refugees in the Early Modern World. An Alternative History of the Reformation* (Cambridge, 2015); Jesse Spohnholz and Gary K. Waite, eds., *Exile and Religious Identity, 1500-1800* (London, 2014).

the fact that these levels all coexisted and were constructed through a complex and enduring dialogue between individuals, especially within the context of composite and polycentric states. So in contrast to focusing on actors moving across the borders of one distinct spatial category, the concept of transregional history has at its core the observation that early modern borders did not necessarily reflect the organization of territory according to singular separations but that they were much more variable and layered. In order to better capture, analyze, and present this complexity, the method of transregional history prompts historians *not* to predefine the spatial scale of their research and to focus more on those elements that moved along, across and beyond the borders early modern actors set *for themselves*. As we argue here, in doing so historians will gain better insight into how a multitude of people simultaneously constructed and transcended early modern boundaries.

Explaining the benefits of both concept and method, the first part of this article will further problematize the conventional use of space and scale in early modern research, especially at those instances where borders and boundaries are involved. In the second part, transregional history is presented as a concept that will allow historians to avoid some of the problems highlighted in part one. In the third and last part we turn our attention to how transregional history can serve as a method, and how its implementation can shift attention from traditional interpretations of space to alternative ones that are particularly related to cross-border interaction and exchange.

History, Space, and the Problem of Studying Early Modern Borders

From the 1980's onwards, the "spatial turn" made historians increasingly aware of the geographical scale of their research. This growing attention unraveled the hidden assumptions behind historical studies on a local, national and global level, while questioning the role and impact of space from an epistemological perspective. Whereas historians have always been identified as the experts of time, they also became masters in studying various geographical levels, following up on Fernand Braudel's appeal to wide spaces and taking into account the famous plea of Jacques Revel and his colleagues: *how* something was cannot be studied in isolation of *where* it took *place* and to *whom* it mattered.⁷ Yet the spatial turn might not have changed historical method as much as anticipated by its advocates. Besides the continuing impact of history that employs

⁷ Bernhard Struck, Kate Ferris and Jacques Revel, "Introduction: Space and Scale in Transnational History," *The International History Review* 33 (2011): 573-584.

modern (nation-state) categories, most often early modern historians approach the spatial dimension of their investigation in two different yet complementary ways. On the one hand, scholars aspire to situate historical structures, actors and events on specific spatial levels and locations. Here, the challenge becomes to examine the spatial outreach of persons and of movements in the past, for example by tracking the radius of Tridentine reform across the globe. On the other hand, they look for the distinct features, particularities, or similarities of certain geographical entities in the past, often drawing on a much older tradition of nationalist, regionalist, or local historiography. These studies can relate to spatial units as tiny as a single villages, parishes, or lordships, or to entities as impressive as continents and marine basins such as the early modern Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea, but in each case they aim to find the peculiar characteristics which distinguish the area under scrutiny from its wider surroundings.

This last approach has been particularly dominant in the field of early modern border studies. Despite the often repeated assertion that borders, which according to such studies should be seen more as zones than as lines, both separated and connected territories, the general focus has been on their disruptive qualities. Scholars like Sahlins, Ellis and Nordman certainly all recognized that an early modern border was different from a modern one, but by examining them from the perspective of state formation, they confirmed one idea in particular: that a territorial border is in the first place the exclusive limit of one entity, most often the state, that needs to be guarded and defended.⁸ Since then this focus on singular spatial areas has not really disappeared: recent volumes about early modern borders have taken up a more comparative perspective, but even here the border serves essentially as a clear separation between the region under evaluation and that which lay outside of it. Such studies continue to center on the borders *around*, for example, Guipuzcoa (in the Basque Country), Navarre, England, Bavaria, Venice, Picardy, or Holland, but rarely on the border *between* such areas, which would mean taking the “other side(s)” into account.⁹ Early modern border research so far primarily aimed to explain why a boundary helped to identify one region from the neighboring one,

8 Historians generally share this problem with the wider field of non-historical border studies: Liam O'Dowd, “Contested States, Frontiers and Cities,” in *A Companion to Border Studies*, ed. Thomas M. Wilson and Hastings Donnan (Malden, 2012), 172; Anssi Paasi, “A Border Theory: An Unattainable Dream or a Realistic Aim for Border Scholars,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies*, ed. Doris Wastl-Walter (Farnham, 2011), 21.

9 Such volumes are, amongst others, Michel Bertrand and Natividad Planas, eds., *Les sociétés de frontière de la Méditerranée à l'Atlantique (XVI^e-XVIII^e siècle)* (Collection de la Casa de

focusing more on how borders created separations rather than on what transcended these limits or on how they could function as places “in between” or as zones “sui generis.” Only in relation to the frontiers of the new world, where the traditional category of “the state” seems redundant, Lauren Benton and Tamar Herzog have truly developed new conceptual approaches to border spaces as distinct yet negotiated zones.¹⁰

This focus on separation instead of connection is even more unfortunate given some of the other effects of the spatial turn. The reevaluation of space certainly did challenge some historians to think out-of-the-boxes of contemporary and historical boundaries. Through the spatial turn, space no longer appeared as a neutral or unbiased factor but as having a certain agency: it forced people to adapt or to react. Historians realized that space always influenced the course of events, and it definitely set the scene for historical actors.¹¹ So, a maybe unintended but welcome side-effect was that the spatial turn created incentives towards entangled, global and world history. Indeed, if we have already come to understand the early modern past as an interplay of connections, exchanges and confrontations, then this is a tangible result of the booming historiography in these fields. Global and world history have helped to deconstruct the Westphalian myth, as if by 1648 a system of international relations was ever since defined by clear borderlines and corresponding sovereignties.¹² A major implication of this is that academic history is changing and involves today plural conditions of historical research and pleas for an ecumenical understanding across regional specializations. The *Journal of World History* and the *Journal of Global History* have been the defining academic nodes in this unprecedented historiographical shift to define when and

Velazquez, volume 122) (Madrid, 2011); Steven G. Ellis et al., eds., *Frontiers, Regions and Identities in Europe* (Pisa, 2009), xiii-xxii.

10 Lauren Benton, *A Search for Sovereignty. Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400-1900* (Cambridge, 2010); Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession*.

11 Gwendolyn Wright, “Cultural History: Europeans, Americans, and the Meanings of Space,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 64 (2005): 436-440.

12 For a recent treatment of them see Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Global Perspectives on Global History. Theories and Approaches in a Connected World* (Cambridge, 2011). More specifically about the link between the Westphalian Treaties and territorial sovereignty: Andreas Osiander, “Sovereignty, International Relations, and the Westphalian Myth,” *International Organization* 55 (2001): 251-287.

where globalization took place, while this *Journal for Early Modern History* has questioned this for the early modern era.¹³

Attempts to regard the early modern world as driven by mobility and connectedness through *passeurs culturels* (cultural transmitters) have thus greatly enhanced our sensitivity to cross-border thinking, and these have mainly—but certainly not exclusively—found applications in globally scaled research.¹⁴ Here too, the categories at stake prompt more reflection. The field of global history itself uses the term transregional predominantly with respect to large swathes of territory on a continental scale, or across continents and oceans. In this sense the word transregional (most often transoceanic or transatlantic) directly refers to the cross-cultural and interactional aspects of evolutions that are tied up with spatial processes in a large order of magnitude.¹⁵ For the early modern times the colonial trade routes, slavery systems and knowledge transfers are evident examples.¹⁶ But due to the focus on such a large geographical scale—a strategy specifically intended to “connect” histories across national borders¹⁷—almost all reference points seem to vanish. Especially in the fields of economic, religious, and cultural history the early modern world literally became borderless, at least in the territorial sense. The Atlantic proletariat has, for example, been described as both landless and mobile, drifting from one side of the ocean to the other in a continuous borderless movement

13 Simon Ditchfield, “Preface to the 20th Anniversary Issue: The Pasts and Futures of Early Modernity in Global Perspective,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 20 (2016): 509–511, and the contributions to that thematic issue.

14 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *From the Tagus to the Ganges: Explorations in Connected History* (Oxford, 2005); Serge Gruzinski, *Les quatre parties du monde: histoire d'une mondialisation* (Paris, 2004).

15 Jerry H. Bentley, Renate Bridenthal and Anand A. Yang, *Interactions: Transregional Perspectives on World History* (Honolulu, 2005). Transregional history as conceptualized at Georgetown University is situated somewhere between global and transnational history, but its strong focus on the frontiers around and between oceanic basins and larger landmasses demonstrates a disposition towards the history of wide geographical areas, limiting the inclusion of other types of early modern boundaries. See <https://history.georgetown.edu/doctoral-program/areas/transregional>.

16 For example: Michiel van Groesen, “Officers of the West India Company, their networks, and their personal memories of Dutch Brazil,” in *The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks* (Intersections 14), ed. Siegfried Huigen, Jan L. de Jong and Elmer Kolfin (Boston, 2010), 39–58.

17 Serge Gruzinski, “Les mondes mêlés de la Monarchie catholique et autres ‘connected histories,’” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 56 (2001): 85–89.

that stimulated all sorts of global connections.¹⁸ Similarly, research on migration has mainly focused on the adaptations in identity, mentality and culture of expatriates but far less on how they dealt with the territorial boundaries they encountered.¹⁹ So, while the impact of transcultural processes is by now well established, it is less clear how this kind of global or connected history positions itself towards the territorial separations it crosses. When trans-oceanic connections manifested themselves, was the ocean itself the only (maritime) boundary that mattered, or did other (territorial) borders influence exchanges as well? If global exchanges crossed borders, should these be seen as linear demarcations, zones, or “corridors”? If people fled from one country to another, did they see themselves as crossing a “national,” “regional,” or “local” territorial border, or did this depend on the specific circumstances of each individual?

So far, early modern border research seems to be torn between two approaches: on the one hand classic border research strongly focusses on territorial and jurisdictional separation, and state formation and difference; on the other global/transcultural history thrives on the image of an almost borderless world. Providing a potential middle ground as a somewhat “reduced” (or “doable”) version of global history, transnational history has been a major motor for historical studies trying to describe connections along and across the territorial borders of nations and states.²⁰ It first developed as an alternative to international history between states, but gradually transnational history conceptualized cross-border transfers and migrations between states as preferred topics of analysis. The European integration and its prescribed free circulation of goods and persons certainly fostered a search for ancestry of these processes. Institutes as the European University Institute and journals such as the *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire* have contributed to spur research in transnational history, and continue to do so.

18 Examples of such a borderless global world are found in Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra. The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London, 2000); Janet Polasky, *Revolutions Without Borders: The Call to Liberty in the Atlantic World* (New Haven, 2015); Geoffrey C. Gunn, *History without Borders: The Making of an Asian World Region, 1000-1800* (Hong Kong, 2011).

19 An exemption to such an approach is Anton Caruana Galizia, “Family Strategies and Transregional Mobility: The de Piro in Eighteenth-Century Malta and Sicily,” *European History Quarterly* 44 (2014): 419-438.

20 Two early modern examples: Ana Crespo Solana, “Elementos de transnacionalidad en el comercio flamenco-holandés en Europa y la Monarquía hispánica,” *Cuadernos de Historia Moderna* 10 (2011): 55-76; Christopher H. Johnson, David Warren Sabean, Simon Teuscher, Francesca Trivellato eds., *Transregional and Transnational Families in Europe and Beyond: Experiences Since the Middle Ages* (New York, 2011).

But taking a national border as unit of analysis is of course particularly indebted to the rise of the historical sciences in service of the (mainly Western) nations that originate between the late eighteenth and twentieth centuries, and early modernists have therefore developed a kind of love-hate affair with this booming field of research. As transnational history originally focused on interaction and cross-border exchange between the nation-states of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, most modernists continue to claim that the term only applies to these centuries.²¹ For most early modernists, though, situating transnationalism only in the nineteenth century is somehow nonsensical as the early modern world was essentially a transnational one—state borders were porous enough to be transcended by countless actors and institutions.²² Bartolomé Yun-Casalilla thus incited early modernists to provide the *longue durée* and ancestry for evolutions in modern times.²³ Other early modernists challenge the assumptions of modernists by applying the tools of transnational history into their research.²⁴ Still, most will agree that the heuristic value of “transnational history” remains problematic for the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries (and before), as it is not even clear if a “nation” in the early modern era refers to a social or political organization or to a concept of identity, a problem it shares with international history.²⁵ For one, recent work on the right of passage and safe conducts (*Geleit*) across the Holy Roman Empire would be rendered much more difficult if it only limited itself to the crossing of “national” borders, as it is highly unclear where exactly this “national” element should be situated in Germany.²⁶ So because the notion of transnational

21 Pierre-Yves Saunier, *Transnational History* (Basingstoke, 2013), 6 and 8.

22 Matthias Middell and Michel Espagne, *European History in an Interconnected World: an Introduction to Transnational History* (Basingstoke, 2014); Peter Van Dam, “Vervlochten geschiedenis. Hoe *histoire croisée* de natiestaat bedwingt,” *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 125 (2012): 97-109; Thematic issue “Une histoire à l’échelle globale” of *Annales. Histoire, Sciences sociales* 56 (2001).

23 Bartolomé Yun-Casalilla, “Localism. Global History and Transnational history. A Reflection from the Historian of Early Modern Europe,” *Historisk Tidskrift* 127 (2007): 659-678.

24 E.g. Ole Peter Grell, “The Creation of a Transnational, Calvinist Network and its Significance for Calvinist Identity and Interaction in Early Modern Europe,” *European Review of History* 16 (2009): 619-636, and Jeffrey D. Burson and Ulrich L. Lehner eds., *Enlightenment and Catholicism in Europe: a Transnational History* (Notre Dame, 2014).

25 See, for instance, Peter Burke, *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2004), 161-163.

26 Luca Scholz, “Le passeport insulté. Lettres de passage et ambiguïté territoriale dans le Saint-Empire au XVII^e siècle,” in *L’historiographie du Saint-Empire à l’époque moderne*, ed. Falk Bretschneider, Christophe Duhamelle and Guillaume Garner, forthcoming.

history is only capable of capturing a part of the variety in pre-modern territorial boundaries, many early modernists again turned to more “borderless” alternatives such as *histoire croisée* (entangled history, *Transfergeschichte*) or to cross-cultural history and mobility studies.

Concept: How to Think Transregionally?

With transnational history not entirely fitting the realities of the *Ancien Régime* boundaries, the field is still open for early modern historians to create their own alternative. In developing a concept through which early modern territorial borders can be better understood, the first question is of course how these separations can best be defined. Leaving aside modern terminology—we have so far consciously used borders and boundaries interchangeably, and only made a distinction between territorial and mental/cultural separations—the most important notion when early modern governments spoke about their borders is that of the *frontier/frontière*. This word should not be confused with Frederick Jackson Turner’s idea of the frontier²⁷ but first and foremost represented the site of war: the broad zones of territory were cities needed to be defended, were soldiers moved to, and where the actual fighting between rulers occurred. Making war in middle French was nothing less than *faire la frontière* (making the frontier); as such, the frontier also became a type of space, one that was characterized by continuous military activities and martial conditions of life.²⁸ In this sense the word also differed markedly from the term *limits/limites*, which was a much less tangible notion and primarily referred to the bilaterally agreed lines delimitating a particular jurisdiction. These limits formed the fictional tools with which governments carved out their territory in terms of political and legal international relations, making them the subject of peace rather than war.²⁹ But if these two combined terms best reflect what is now considered a modern state border, in the early modern period they were certainly not interchangeable: each reflected a different interpretation, or better said, a different construction of the same geographical space (i.e. zonal vs. linear, war vs. peace). Moreover, the frontiers and limits of a realm were permeated and sometimes even crossed by numerous other boundaries, which in French were described as *bornes*. Originally referring to the wooden

27 Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1921).

28 Nordman, *Frontières de France*, 27-29.

29 Michel Bertrand and Natividad Planas, “Introduction,” in *Les sociétés de frontière de la Méditerranée à l’Atlantique (XVI^e-XVIII^e siècle)* 9.

or stone markers that physically signaled the extent of a particular piece of land, by the seventeenth century they could describe the extremities of countries, provinces, fiefs, towns, villages, parishes, hunting grounds and numerous other territorial circumscriptions, all of which could or could not coincide with the frontiers or limits of a particular country. Other terms, each with their distinct meaning, can be found in numerous different languages: Germany had its *Grenzen* and *Marken*, England its *marshes*, the Dutch their *paelen* and the Poles their *granitsa/granica*, whereas in Latin we find amongst others the words *limes*, *terminus*, and *finis*.

Early modern territorial separations were indeed not singular, but manifold, layered, overlapping, and connected to many people and social roles. As Kathryn Edwards demonstrated in her work on eastern France, the frontier between the “two” Burgundies (French and Habsburg) cannot be reduced to a singular line: fractures between identity, jurisdiction and society did not simply correspond to those imposed by the “sovereign” powers but took on a reality of their own.³⁰ Likewise, during and after the Eighty Years War in the Low Countries (ca.1568-1648), frontier cities such as Antwerp, ‘s-Hertogenbosch and Maastricht not only had to deal with directives about the “national” border coming from Madrid/Brussels or the Hague but were equally concerned about the actions of neighboring border towns (especially if these switched sides during the conflict). Early modern borders can therefore best be described as a set of overlapping Russian *matryoshka* or nesting dolls: the border between two states was also that between two provinces, two towns, two landowners and two fields. At the same time, the boundaries between two ecclesiastical provinces (and thus two dioceses, two parishes, etc.) might not have corresponded to those of this first doll. Crucially, and in contrast to today, state boundaries were not necessarily supreme, as people easily switched between levels or even constructed entirely new categories.³¹ Effectively, for anyone living in the early modern period, be it a merchant, a craftsman, a farmer, a clergyman, or even a king, “the” border did not exist; there was no singular boundary to be crossed, no specific type of separation that dominated all others. Instead, according to circumstances, individuals and communities negotiated their space

30 Kathryn A. Edwards, *Families and Frontiers. Re-Creating Communities and Boundaries in the Early Modern Burgundies* (Leiden, 2002), 1-13.

31 See Günter Vogler, “Borders and Boundaries in Early Modern Europe: Problems and Possibilities,” in *Frontiers and the Writing of History, 1500-1800, The formation of Europe. Historische Formationen Europas*, volume 1, ed. Steven G. Ellis and Raingard Esser (Hannover-Laatzten, 2006), 25-30.

as either the *bornes* of the province, the frontier of the kingdom, the limits of the bishopric, or indeed everything combined.

As a concept, transregional history therefore aims to go beyond “the” singular border by widening the perspective to all levels of the *matryoshka* combined: what historians so far might have considered a conflict over state boundaries and thus studied at the level of international relations, contemporaries might have simultaneously perceived as a regional and even an individual problem. Another example from the Eighty Years War helps to illustrate this. Both during the Twelve Years Truce (1609-1621) and after the Peace of Munster (1648) the Dutch city of Nijmegen complained that its citizens had to pay tolls on the rivers Rhine and Waal, something which they had been exempted from in the decades before the war. Due to the Treaty of Munster, which divided the Low Countries into a Habsburg and a Dutch part, these tolls were now administered by “enemy” Habsburg subjects on the “other side” of the state border, implying that the dispute could easily be classified as a purely “international” matter, which would be in line with most research on the Habsburg-Dutch boundary.³² Yet, the way in which the problem was addressed suggests that this was not how the local city magistrate constructed the conflict at the time. Nijmegen certainly brought the dispute to the attention of the Dutch Estates General but simultaneously started a legal procedure before the Habsburg provincial Council of Guelders.³³ In a later stage they even introduced the matter before the *Chambre mi-Partie*, an extraordinary court of arbitration designed to solve border disputes related to the Peace of Munster, and which often enough tried to solve conflicts locally without involving either the Dutch Estates-General or the Habsburg Governor-General.³⁴ Nijmegen’s political strategies to solve this dispute were thus not limited to those typically associated with a state border: by switching between the involvement of their own sovereign, a “foreign” (but once shared) provincial Council, and a court literally placed in between the

32 Examples are Griet Vermeesch, *Oorlog, steden en staatsvorming. De grenssteden Gorinchem en Doesburg tijdens de geboorte-eeuw van de Republiek (1572-1680)* (Amsterdam, 2006); Leo Adriaenssen, *Staatsvormend geweld. Overleven aan de frontlinies in de meierij van Den Bosch, 1572-1629* (Tilburg, 2007); René Vermeir and Tomas Roggeman, “Implementing the Truce: Negotiations between the Republic and the Archducal Netherlands, 1609-10,” *European Review of History: Revue europeenne d’histoire* 17 (2010): 817-833.

33 Regionaal Archief Nijmegen, *Bestuurlijk archief der stad Nijmegen, 196-1810*, No. 2656.

34 Algemeen Rijksarchief, Brussels, *Archives de la jointe des terres contestées*, No. 496. On the *Chambre Mi-Partie*, see F.J.K. Van Hoogstraten, *De Chambre Mi-Partie Van Het Munstersche Vredestractaat. Eene Bijdrage Tot De Geschiedenis Der Nederlandsche Diplomatie* (Utrecht, 1860) and more recently Bram De Ridder, “Sustaining the Munster Peace: The *Chambre Mi-Partie* as an Experiment in Transnational Border Arbitration (1648-1675),” *Journal of Modern European History* 14 (2015): 35-53.

parties, the city easily “transformed” its perspective on the border from the “national,” to the “provincial,” or the “local” level.

As an alternative to global and/or transnational history, transregional history therefore does not start from a predefined scale, be it local or national, regional or global, but focusses on the ways in which different spatial levels coexisted and how different actors constructed the manifold boundaries that permeated their world.³⁵ This approach enables us to study the internal and external boundaries of the composite and polycentric monarchies/states of the time while deconstructing state-centered (or region- or community-centered) narratives. With regard to the history of the British Islands for example, seeing the Stuart monarchy as a conglomerate state could be perfectly complemented by a transregional perspective on how the Anglo-Scottish marshes were not only the borders between two distinct parts of the Stuart state but also between different lordships, jurisdictions, towns and villages.³⁶ Much the same goes for the polycentric Spanish-Habsburg Monarchy and *a fortiori* for the Holy Roman Empire, with their numerous internal jurisdictional and political boundaries.³⁷ By opening up to more than one spatial level at once, transregional history avoids the predisposition towards stable, preexisting borders and takes into account the origins and transformation of various historical boundary regimes, making the concept exceptionally fit for early modern dynamics.

Drawing upon this realization, transregional history assumes a strongly agent-driven perspective on territorial borders. As in many non-historical border studies where all boundaries turn into a type of actor—a “living” structure that enabled and disabled options for human behavior and prompted social (inter)action—in transregional history borders are allowed to appear as “relational constructs”: crucial vectors that influenced the behavior of the historical actors depending on the specific ideas people chose to associate with a particular separation.³⁸ Borders marked by rivers, mountains or seas, hills or flat land all “worked” differently depending on who ascribed meaning to

35 Kenneth E. Foote and Peter J. Hugill eds., *Re-reading Cultural Geography* (Austin, 1994).

36 Harald Gustafsson, “The Conglomerate State: a Perspective on State Formation in Early Modern Europe,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 23 (1998): 189-213; John Morrill, “Uneasy Lies the Head that Wears a Crown: Dynastic Crises in Tudor and Stewart Britain, 1504-1746,” *The Stenton Lecture 2003* (Reading, 2005).

37 Pedro Cardim, Tamar Herzog, José Javier Ruiz Ibáñez and Gaetano Sabatini eds., *Polycentric Monarchies. How did Early Modern Spain and Portugal Achieve and Maintain a Global Hegemony?* (Eastborne, 2012). Giuseppe Marocchi, “Too Much to Rule: States and Empires across the Early Modern World,” *Journal of Early Modern History* 20 (2016): 511-525.

38 Wilson and Donnan, *A Companion*; Wastl-Walter, *The Ashgate Research Companion*; I. William Zartman ed., *Understanding Life in the Borderlands: Boundaries in Depth and Motion* (Athens, GA, 2010).

them, just as did military, jurisdictional and ecclesiastic boundaries.³⁹ In late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Paraguay for example, rivers were generally seen as a means of communication that allowed the crossing between all kinds of boundaries, both mental and territorial. Even so, the bodies of those among the Catholic missionaries, who died as “martyrs,” were buried on the riverbanks, a practice intended to transform those very same rivers into temporary spaces where the territorial boundary between their ways of living and preexisting patterns was established.⁴⁰ Similarly, during the Thirty Years’ War the Rhine crossing the Holy Roman Empire, the Habsburg Low Countries and the Dutch Republic constituted a ‘fliessende Grenze’ (flowing border), providing from the German perspective a logistical axis of commerce and troop movements, from the Spanish Habsburg point of view the primary inroad to the heart of the Dutch Republic, and from Holland’s perspective a clear defensive bulwark, while for the *riverains* (people living on the banks or using the river for economic purposes) it was a jurisdictional boundary submitted to violence and chaos. And in the course of Louis XIV’s reign, the famous Isle of Pheasants in the River Bidasoa (in the Basque Country) transformed from an “isle of peace” to an “isle of discord.”⁴¹ Moreover, rivers were often seen as useful tools for demarcating territory, despite the fact that they regularly changed their course and thus required extensive juridical debate about past and present.⁴² In order to deal with this variety and change, transregional history conceptualizes how historical actors lived and experienced their own geographical setting and how they themselves erected, circumvented and/or transcended the manifold boundaries that surrounded them. In doing so, the concept moves away from superimposed interpretations and categories (such as the state) and concentrates on those spatial fractures that mattered to the contemporaries themselves.

39 In this respect Tamar Herzog pointed out that “Historical records indicate that the territorial dynamics that unfolded were substantially more complex because the extension of communities also constantly mutated in accordance to who their members were and what they sought to achieve [...] These constant mutations involved a plethora of agents, interests, and developments, some local, some royal, and some even global”: Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession*, 137-138.

40 *Histoire du massacre de plusieurs religieux*, Valenciennes, J.B. Vervliet, 1620, I, 18; J.T. Carson, “Ethnogeography and the Native American Past,” *Ethnohistory* 49 (2002): 769-788.

41 Fernando Chavarría Múgica, “La frontera ceremonial y la frontera real: el Tratado de los Pirineos y la reavivación del conflicto por el dominio del río Bidasoa (1659-1668),” in *Del tractat dels Pirineus a l’Europa del segle XXI: un model en construcció?: actes del congrés; Barcelona-Perpinyà, 17-20 juny de 2009*, ed. Òscar Jané (Barcelona, 2010), 86.

42 Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession*, 207-208.

Still, due to the fact that transregional history explicitly avoids the ontological orientation towards predetermined borders and places the actor at the center of research, it remains important to clarify that—at least in our view—the concept primarily remains a means for assessing the role and impact of *territorial* separations. Despite current trends in (historical) border studies to investigate all sorts of non-spatial separations—e.g. between identities, mentalities and cultures—our concept of transregional history limits itself to boundaries with a clear territorial component. If the notion of “border” is defined too narrowly, say only as those separations backed up by one spatial level of a particular *matryoshka*, we certainly run the risk of confirming restricted visions of the past, but encompassing every possible mental boundary would make the concept of transregional history equally void of heuristic potential. At the same time, however, this does not mean that there needs to be an absolute separation between mental and territorial boundaries—this would simply be impossible for the early modern period. As such, studying the confessional and cultural separation between Muslims and Christians in Al-Andalus does by itself not require a transregional approach—a transcultural method can suffice here. But if this religious divide is simultaneously reflected in a clear territorial composition, say a jurisdictional boundary between town districts, the notion of transregional history can help to flesh out these particular elements of making and breaking boundaries by the contemporaries.⁴³ Benjamin Kaplan, for example, re-established such a connection between space and religion by pointing out how in Northern Europe some Catholics preferred to continue residing in Protestant territory, crossing borders to Catholic territory on Sundays for mass and procession.⁴⁴ In such cases, applying the concept of transregional history can help historians to better grasp the nature of the territorial fracture and of the confessional boundaries that ran across or along it,

43 On the relation between legal and mental boundaries in Al-Andalus, see Janina M. Safran, *Defining Boundaries in al-Andalus. Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Islamic Iberia* (Ithaca, 2013). For other cases see Philip Benedict, “Une roi, une loi, deux fois: Parameters for the History of Catholic-Reformed Co-existence in France, 1555-1685,” in *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation*, ed. Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner (Cambridge, 1996), 65-93; for England, chapter 3 in Walsham’s *Catholic Reformation in Protestant Britain* (Farnham, 2014); Jill Fehleison, *Boundaries of Faith. Catholics and Protestants in the Diocese of Geneva* (Kirksville, 2010).

44 Benjamin Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 144-171. More recently for eighteenth-century borderlands, Benjamin Kaplan, *Cunegonde’s Kidnapping. A Story of Religious Conflict in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven, 2014).

adapting, circumventing and appropriating the power claims associated with the dividing lines.

Method: How to Do Transregional History

Moving on from the question of what transregional history *is*, it is equally important to explain what *doing* transregional history means. Because transregional history shifts the historian's view from a singular and pre-set border to multi-scale, multi-level, and actor-determined boundaries, it also entails a different methodological approach. As was highlighted earlier, the focus on the borders of one specific region caused scholars to primarily investigate the boundaries around this area. Even Peter Sahlins, who took the Franco-Spanish border as his topic, was first and foremost interested in what eventually separated these two states/nations rather than in what happened "in between" them.⁴⁵ Conversely, in transregional history the point of departure for the analysis is exactly transcending the spatial boundaries of a region.⁴⁶ In other words, transregional history still departs from a specific place—a city, a province, a borderland, a composite monarchy, etc.—but a) realizes that the borders of this "region" were multiple, layered, and actor-based; and b) seeks out how this "region" related to what lay outside of it, not to what made it particular or unique.

From the outset, transregional history affects historical method by reformulating research questions and heuristics. More specifically, the transregional method is aimed exactly at what the notion itself signifies: to cross the boundaries of the variable spatial scales at which the topic of interest is situated and to examine the historical *transitions* resulting from this process, such as the possible switches in codes and cultural values by historical actors. When asking "how did X evolve in place Y in time Z," historians most often presume that the boundaries of this "place Y" are well-known and consequentially do not venture beyond them in their research. When questioning on which scale Y did X evolve in time Z, they generally remain convinced that in studying X scale Y develops along the borders of some pre-set geographical areas. And even if early modern historians are aware that many of these delimitations are

⁴⁵ Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession*, 239.

⁴⁶ See in this respect also Angelika Epple, "The Global, the Transnational and the Subaltern. The Limits of History beyond the National Paradigm," in *Beyond Methodological Nationalism: Research Methodologies for Cross-Border Studies*, ed. Anna Amelina, Devrimsel D. Nergiz, Thomas Faist and Nina Glick Schiller (New York, 2012), 155-175.

arbitrarily determined or turn out to be ahistorical, they still handle them with ease, taking into account logical pragmatic considerations or complying with demands of funding institutions operating within current borders. As was argued in the first part of the article, this matter-of-fact approach to scale and space in historical studies diminishes rather than expands the variety of borders and boundaries in the early modern era.

As a complement to the traditional questions asked above, transregional history thus explicitly studies the past of multi-scaled “regions” along, across and beyond their different territorial (again: not mental or cultural) boundaries, charting how these exchanges affected human behavior and led to historical *transition*. Uncovering the processes of mobility, transfer and translation that were influenced by the territorial composition of former societies, it seeks to uncover the different actions and ideas with which historical actors engaged the boundaries they themselves constructed or noticed, highlighting the switches in codes and cultural values this process entailed. So rather than using either of the two above-mentioned research formulae, transregional history asks the question: how did exchanges along, across and beyond the borders of place Y and in time Z lead to transitions within X?, with X now to be examined from a territorial perspective without being predetermined or characterized by a singular spatial delimitation of place Y. Questioning what moved beyond the manifold boundaries of a region thus brings us to a more holistic study of the past.

An example helps to illustrate this formula. The study of the printing press in the ecclesiastical province of Cambrai, a border region located right at the intersection between England, France, the Holy Roman Empire and the Habsburg Low Countries, can serve as a case study. The research questions asked about this topic and region have so far generally followed either of the two traditional X-Y-Z formulae. French and Belgian historiography primarily reflected on the scale at which Catholic books were produced in Cambrai, presenting the region as literally marginal and peripheral compared to bigger printing centers such as Antwerp, Lyon, Paris and Cologne. Reciprocally, British historians mostly questioned the extent to which the print production in Cambrai influenced confessional developments on the British Islands themselves, sometimes as part of the aim to distinguish a distinct “English Catholicism.”⁴⁷ In the first case Cambrai’s position as a border zone is almost entirely submerged as part of a national or international comparative exercise; in the second it is replaced with a solitary focus on the connection between

47 Christopher Highley, *Catholics Writing the Nation in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2008).

Britain and the British expatriates on the continent. This not to say that these are not valid approaches, but in both historiographies many of the exchanges related to the specific nature of Cambrai as a border zone have remained unaccounted for, as did the instances when societal changes occurred clearly as result of this position “in between.” As such, transregional history deems the crucial question to be how the exchanges along, across and beyond the borders of the Habsburg Low Countries, France, and England influenced print culture in Cambrai. If reframed in this way, it becomes apparent that the typographic centers in the Cambrai Province certainly might have been smaller than other printing centers but nevertheless filled a gap in the market due to its cross-border resources, and that the production of English translations of Catholic books was not only influenced by English demand but also mirrored the production of French books in the Cambrai province.⁴⁸ Reframing the traditional research questions with a transregional perspective thus opens up a new way of looking at the past from differentiated spatialities; by challenging the classic methodological “emplotment” of events in a limited time and limited area, new aspects of the exchanges along, across and beyond territorial borders emerge.

As a second aspect, the method of transregional history also implies a shift in the way empirical sources are selected. If early modern borders are conceived as *matryoshka* dolls, all related spatial layers need to be accounted for when studying them: an individual nesting doll has little significance; only taken together do the dolls constitute a recognizable *matryoshka*. Doing transregional history thus involves an increased awareness of how borders “worked” in early modern times and how they impacted historical events, trends, and evolutions. For example, applying a transregional method to the creation of the Habsburg-Dutch boundary during and after the Eighty Years’ War means widening the research framework enough to include the above-mentioned strategies used by the city of Nijmegen. So far most historians saw this border as the top-down creation of the respective governments in Madrid/Brussels and The Hague, downplaying the other spatial scales—provincial, municipal, individual—where this division had to be enforced and/or could be ignored. As a result, the primary sources consulted were either those created by the central institutions or those created by local and intermediary administrations

48 Alexander Soetaert, “Printing at the Frontier. The Emergence of a Transregional Book Production in the Ecclesiastical Province of Cambrai (ca. 1560-1659),” *De Gulden Passer: Journal for Book History* 94 (2016): 137-163. For a specific case-study regarding French translations printed in the Cambrai province, see *Ib.*, “Translating and distributing Italian religious literature in the ecclesiastical province of Cambrai (late 16th, early 17th century),” *Incontri: Rivista Europea de studi Italiani* 30 (2015): 29-40.

describing their relation to the central government. Moreover, because the historiography of the Eighty Years' War focused so much on top-down border creation, it nearly entirely ignored questions about the cross-border contacts that continued to exist between the two Netherlands, thus confirming the "bounded entities" logic of traditional border studies.⁴⁹ In contrast, Tamar Herzog's recent work on the Spanish-Portuguese border demonstrates that historians should not automatically predefine "the" border of the region under scrutiny but expand their spatial reach according to how the actors themselves did. In practice, this means that if a border conflict along the Spanish-Portuguese border was fought out before a provincial court, we should include this provincial perspective, and if it was negotiated by royal envoys, we should include the royal as well (and vice-versa). Likewise, it is not enough to consult only material from either the Spanish or the Portuguese side or to describe the available sources only in relation to one country in particular: both sides contributed equally to the creation and maintenance of the border and thus need to be incorporated equally.⁵⁰

In doing so, transregional history again places the actor at the very center of the research. It makes available a laboratory to study how historical actors aimed to increase their hold over the boundaries which they encountered and how they sought to gain profit from their geographical position near them; it is important to whom the border matters and when it did so. The above-mentioned examples whereby different people interpreted river boundaries differently are cases in point, but similar shifts in perspective could occur within any institution, group, or even individual. In this sense, one of the main questions to be asked is if and how the patterns of creating, crossing and transcending boundaries affected action and behavior, and how local actors engaged in *jeux des appartenances* according to the border concerned.⁵¹ These "games of belonging" were switches in identification, ideas or actions that depended on the specific interlocutor and geographical location involved, sometimes played at a conscious level, mostly embodied in unconscious behavior. One and the same governor of a border area could defend decentralization

49 Bram De Ridder, "Benchmarking the Past: Politico-Legal Connotations of Tradition, Custom and Common Practice in the Diplomacy of the Eighty Years War," *Dutch Crossing: Journal of Low Countries Studies*, published online 25 February 2016 (<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03096564.2016.1143285>).

50 For various examples, see part II in Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession*.

51 Violet Soen, Yves Junot and Florian Mariage, eds., *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 the Low Countries 14th-18th Centuries* (Villeneuve-d'Ascq, 2014).

and particularism when counselling his King and guard royal centralization when dealing with local cities and authorities. Rather than as agents in the constructions of state building or proto-nationalism, these actors appear as resilient actors with a rich *stock identitaire*—a reservoir of codes and actions which they used at their own convenience depending on the circumstance and location.

As a key example, the aristocratic dynasty Croÿ, which is traditionally associated with the Burgundian-Habsburg composite state, held (and sometimes purchased) territories beyond the borders or spheres of influence of this early modern polity. At times they pledged themselves as loyal vassals to the French King (even when the suzerainty over the county of Flanders was vanquished with the peace treaty of Cambrai in 1529), and resorted in French jurisdiction and customs before the *Parlement de Paris*. At the court in Brussels and before the Great Council of Malines, they acted in the inverse way, though often taking a rather Francophile stance. Finally, on the battlefield at the border, they were to be found in each camp. Were the Croÿ then French or Habsburg vassals, agents in French or Habsburg state building and warfare? In fact, they were all of these, but their actions intrinsically depended on location and situation.⁵² In studying these kinds of early modern elites in particular, historiography has thus too long focused on the encapsulation of elites within states, bringing variations to the thesis of Norbert Elias on the domestication of the nobility at court. However, in recent decades historians have argued for a reinterpretation taking into account the composite nature of some dynastic states. In contesting the idea of a sedentary proto-national elite, they stressed their circulation within government and bureaucracy, either travelling with an army or following their precious goods across the empire. Elite families bent kinship strategies to religious, political or economic opportunities outside of their ancestral region, branching out into the territories of the empire and even beyond. It seems unfortunate to follow the footsteps of the Castilian Francisco Delrío to the Netherlands and describing his family's rise and fall as merchants in Bruges and Antwerp, leaving aside the broader spatial and social network that unfolded when cadet branches of the family relocated to Naples and Portuguese

52 Jonathan Spangler, "Those in Between: Princely Families on the Margins of the Great Powers—The Franco-German Frontier, 1477-1830," in *Transregional and Transnational Families in Europe and Beyond*, 131-154; Violet Soen, "The Chièvres Legacy, the Croÿ Family and Litigation in Paris. Dynastic Identities between the Low Countries and France (1519-1559)," in *Dynastic Identity in Early Modern Europe: Rulers, Aristocrats and the Formation of Identities*, ed. Liesbeth Geevers and Mirella Marini (Farnham, 2015), 87-102.

Goa.⁵³ Taking a transregional approach to these elite families therefore not only allows us to study migration as a geographically linear movement from one place to another, but also to take into account how migration patterns appear different if we observe members of a family at different spatial levels, over several generations and in relation to different negotiated borders and boundaries. By following these kind of actors, and finding out how, when and why borders mattered to them, transregional history searches for patterns as well as dynamics. As such, transregional history changes both the way of formulating research questions, the heuristics, and most importantly, the research results making clear how, when, and to whom borders mattered.

Conclusion

As a concluding remark, transregional history first and foremost serves as a tool that historians can add to their already extensive conceptual and methodological repertoire. Earlier and certainly still useful tools include global history, transnational history, transcultural history, “traditional” border studies, and the notion of transregional history draws explicitly on all of them. What we therefore primarily aim to do with our concept and method is complement the research conducted in these fields by pointing historians specifically to the complicated nature of early modern borders, and demonstrate how these separations differed markedly from our still staunchly “modernistic” idea of what a border constituted and how it supposedly functioned. Transregional history indeed derives from the observation that early modern borders have not yet been studied to their full potential, mainly because much of the existing research either limited itself to one spatial level (the state, the province, the town, the parish, etc.), and historians have thus forgotten about the connective role a border played, or conversely focused so much on exchange that the early modern world became essentially borderless. Serving as a sort of middle ground and meso-level, transregional history thus points out that pre-modern borders certainly did separate one territory from the other, but that they at the same time were overlapping and layered, almost representing Russian nesting dolls whereby each spatial level is part of a larger whole. Turned into practice, this observation implies two important methodological shifts. One is that, in order to fully grasp how early modern borders “worked,” historians should question

53 Part of the personal family archive of the Delrío family is preserved at the State Archives in Bruges. Bernadette Roose, *Inventaris van het familiearchief Rio, heren van Egem (fonds van den Gracht d'Eeghem)* (Brussels, 2007), 68.

how the contemporary actors themselves constructed the particular boundary their research encounters. If the scale of a particular research project is no longer predefined but adapts itself according to the different individuals, groups and institutions encountered, it will quickly become apparent that a separation that might look primarily “national” or “local” from our perspective might in fact have been both for one early modern actor and neither for another. As a second shift, a transregional methodology also asks exactly what the notion itself signifies: to cross and transcend the multilayered boundaries encountered, and to examine the historical *transitions* resulting from this process, such as the possible switches in codes and cultural values historical actors used to deal with such borders. Although historians certainly can still focus on one entity (the Holy Roman Empire, Cambrai, Mexico-City, etc.), doing transregional history means: a) recognizing that the borders of these entities were not merely situated at a “national,” “regional,” or “local” scale, but at all of these at the same time; and b) questioning how the exchanges along and across these layered boundaries impacted all sorts of aspects of “life at the border.”