

Job Weststrate and Dick E.H. de Boer (eds.), *Begrensd beeld. Identiteit in grensregio's omstreeks 1800* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2021, 231 pp., ISBN 9789087049331).

Despite, or maybe because of, the increasing attention for global history, the region as a topic of historical research has continued to be a relevant theme for Dutch as well as foreign historians. Recent books and volumes attest to this.<sup>1</sup> *Begrensd beeld. Identiteit in grensregio's omstreeks 1800* is the last product of the Dutch branch of the ESF-funded research project on 'European Comparisons in Regional Cohesion, Dynamics and Expressions' (EUROCORECODE). In the subproject 'Cuius Regio', coordinated by Dick de Boer, Professor Emeritus of Medieval History in Groningen, investigators from eight countries researched regions straddling present-day national borders, asking how inhabitants of these regions felt or were involved in these territories. De Boer edited the current volume with Job Weststrate, postdoc researcher in this subproject.

*Begrensd beeld* contains eight case-studies dealing with historical examples of regional identity formation. The chapters specifically focus on the ways in which the inhabitants of Dutch-German border regions dealt with the relation between their regional and political loyalties between 1750 and 1825. The project as a whole was inspired by recent theories on regional political and social identities as formulated by the geographer Anssi Paasi, among others. These theories have shown the present-day relevance of regions as territories with historically embedded identities. They result from the interaction of several dimensions: social, political, cultural, and cognitive. Therefore, historians analyse case-studies of regional identification in two intertwined contexts: cultural-historical and political-economic. These theories have resonated in recent studies by Dutch regional historians studying regional identity building such as Maarten Duijvendak, Ad Knotter, Dolly Verhoeven, and myself.

In her introductory chapter, Dolly Verhoeven masterfully reviews the use of theories on (regional) identity formation by historians. Her article constitutes the theoretical framework for the empirical studies that follow. Verhoeven uses her field of expertise, which is the history of the regions within the Dutch province of Gelderland, as a testing ground for the description and analysis of identity construction, regional historiography, and of regions and borders as historical constructs. Although these processes of political, social, and cultural identity formation may be considered to have started as early as the late Middle Ages, this volume focuses on the border areas of the eastern part of the Netherlands at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. During this period, the relation

between state and region changed considerably as a result of revolution, wars, and the formation of new nation states, resulting in the revision of regional identities and allegiances.

Job Weststrate analyses the historiography in and about the former duchy of Guelders after the establishment of the Batavian Republic (1796) and especially of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (1813-1815). He shows how the common perspective on the history of Guelders became national in character, neglecting earlier territorial connections and highlighting the fact that Guelders had 'always' been an integral part of the Dutch state. By analyzing four newspapers published in the provinces of Groningen and Frisia, Joop W. Koopmans shows how the rising local and regional press during the eighteenth century contributed to the shaping of regional awareness across the northern provinces of the Dutch Republic. By combining (inter)national news with regional and local news and advertisements, the newspapers offered a symbolic framework of reference. Hence, newspapers became binding agents of a regional 'imagined community'.

By looking at the political choices and group formation among noblemen in the provinces of Overijssel and Guelders during the patriot phase of the Dutch Revolution (1783-1787), Joost Rosendaal illustrates how these were determined by family relations and class solidarity. Remarkably, the noblemen identified more with issues at a local rather than at a provincial level. Yet, through their contacts at a national and even international level, they shaped a transregional patriot movement, enhancing a growing national, Dutch consciousness.

The town of Cleves, principal town of the medieval duchy of the same name which had been in Brandenburg-Prussian hands since the early seventeenth century, was overrun by the French army in 1794. After 1814, the town and its surroundings would become part of the Prussian realm once again. After a long review of the historiography, Bert Thissen looks at the shift in political loyalty of the Cleves elites, which appears to have been determined by fear and pragmatism, such as concerns about property and social relations, and commitment with the region more than by Prussian patriotism.

The Cleves enclave of Huissen went through several territorial rearrangements in the course of the seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries, changing hands nine times between 1795 and 1816. Emile Smit describes how the Catholic majority among the inhabitants of Huissen lost

1 See, for instance, Xosé M. Núñez Seixas and Eric Storm (eds.), *Regionalism and Modern Europe. Identity Construction and Movements from 1890 to the Present Day* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), reviewed in *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 133 (2020) 155-157; and the review by William D. Godsey of: Bram De Ridder, Violet Soen, Werner Thomas,

and Sophie Verreyken (eds.), *Transregional Territories: Crossing Borders in the Early Modern Low Countries and Beyond*. Habsburg Worlds 2 (Brepols, 2020), in *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 137 (2022). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51769/bmgn-lchr.12064>.

political control as the town government was taken over by a small group of well-to-do Protestants. Yet, despite the geopolitical turmoil, local politics remained stable. Whereas the Protestant inhabitants identified with Prussia, the Catholics mainly identified along local and religious lines and restricted themselves to passive resistance, particularly when their economic interests came under threat.

While Rosendaal focuses on family networks among the nobility, Olga Weckenbrock looks at individual political strategies of noblemen, specifically two generations of the ruling von Vincke dynasty. Originating from the town of Osnabrück, they traditionally occupied several governmental posts in and around Minden, in the Prussian region of Westphalia. Around 1800, father and son von Vincke succeeded in holding on to their status and position by adapting their primarily regional loyalty to the demands of the Prussian state bureaucracy.

In the last contribution, Maarten Duijvendak and Raymon Middelbos investigate social and demographic patterns in the Cleves enclaves in the Liemers region between 1770 and 1860. These differed from the surrounding regions in religion, politics, and administration until their incorporation into the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1816. Yet, despite these borders and institutional differences, the inhabitants on both sides of the borders were quite similar in language, culture, and socio-economic development. Their marriage pattern shows similarities too, showing a gradual increase in marriage migration comparable to developments in other parts of the Netherlands at the time. This analysis shows that changes in territorial borders did not immediately lead to changes in spheres of operating of the people living there.

In short, this volume shows that the historical identities of all provinces and regions situated on the borders of the Dutch Republic and later Kingdom of the Netherlands essentially are transborder and transnational in character. The eight well-crafted essays show how individual identification and collective identity constructions are always layered or 'nested'. In the past, too, people never exclusively identified along familial, local, or regional lines, but also did so at national and even international levels, all levels influencing each other. In other words: glocalization, that is, the interaction of globalizing developments with local living environments and their local structures, cultures, and histories, is of all times. One point of criticism: in a book on border regions, maps might have been quite helpful.

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