« Transnational » nobilities in Europe

(13th-20th centuries)

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Proposal submission :

- Proposals for papers should be returned by email to the three organisers by 15 December 2021.

- The proposal should specify the corpus studied, the sources used and the main perspectives considered (text of 5000 to 7000 signs or 1000 to 1200 words).

- Proposals, as well as papers, should preferably be in French or English.

Scientific committee : Eloise Adde (Université Saint-Louis de Bruxelles) ; Nicolas Bourguinat (Université de Strasbourg) ; Jean Boutier (EHESS, Marseille) ; Nancy L. Green (EHESS) ; Mark Hengerer (LMU München) ; Paul Janssens (Ghent University) ; Petr' Mat'a (Österrreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften) ; Marco Meriggi (Università degli studi di Napoli-Federico II) ; Thierry Pécout (Université d'Aix-Marseille) ; Lina Scalisi (Università degli studi di Catania) ; Violet Soen (KU Leuven) ; Jonathan Spangler (Manchester Metropolitan University) ; Anne-Catherine Wagner (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne) ; Martin Wrede (Université Grenoble-Alpes) ; Bartolomé Yun (Universidad Pablo Olavide de Sevilla).

The history of noble elites has long been confined to the territorial limits of the territorial states, except when dealing with very specific circumstances, such as new dynasties acceding to thrones left vacant, the arrival of foreign princesses with their retinues, or periods of conflicts, resulting in the redrawing of borders and consequently, transforming former **loyalties** and stimulating mobility. This approach failed to recognize the transnational character of nobilities, their multiple local attachments, and, furthermore, the very idea of an **aristocratic "international".** The influence of comparative history has been crucial in encouraging scholars to cast a fresh look at the mobility of noble elites by looking beyond national borders and studying the subject on multiple levels. Individual and family relations have been reconsidered from the perspective of "dynastic solidarity". Reexaminations of the modern state, understood less as an agent of centralization than coordination, have also produced new readings of its relationship with noble elites. It is no coincidence, then, that these new approaches should have developed in spaces in which the State had remained weak and loyalties looser: the Spanish, then Austrian Netherlands, the Italian peninsula or the Austrian monarchy. These studies have shed light on **the capacity of certain families to establish relations, beyond national borders,** with other sovereigns or nobility groups, although their differences, expressed in multiple ways depending on the circumstances, might have proved at times unbridgeable. The concept of "substance" developed by R. Descimon to understand the family, viewed as a legal entity, endowed with social, political, cultural, economic and symbolic capital, points to the great variety of levers that could be used by noble lineages. The contributions of the social sciences, especially of historical anthropology, have opened up new approaches to the study of noble lineages, from the perspective of alliance, transmission of inheritance or the economics of kinship, in order to assess the scope for action of these families, given that the rules of access and preservation of their noble status were often very strict, differed depending on place, and that any recognition they were granted was by no means permanent.

The "transnational" character of noble families generally **originated** in international marriages or their commitment to serve "foreign" sovereigns (in military, diplomatic, legal or administrative offices). In "composite monarchies" (J.H. Elliott), royal service could more naturally assume a transnational dimension across different territories. In these cases, the relationships established by the family could result in the acquisition and/or the transmission of goods and distinctions, and, as a consequence, the growth of material and symbolic roots in other states (land, fiefs, titles of nobility, specific privileges, dynastic knighthood…). Significantly, the most widely studied transnational lineages belong to the upper strata of the nobility, aristocratic families powerful enough to be able to obtain advantages in exchange for their loyalty, who developed their territorial hold across national borders, from the Netherlands towards the kingdom of France or the Empire, and used these different affiliations, as circumstances allowed, to elaborate and maintain an opportunistic policy of

multiple loyalties. Do these lineages, however, only stand for **particular cases**, or might their behaviour have been **more diffuse** than it would seem **among the nobility as a whole**? Whatever the case, they built up a vast marriage network that was to unite a number of lineages, whose genealogies and alliances are detailed in the *Almanach de Gotha*, inviting examinations of the genesis of this European transnational "gotha" in the early modern era, or even before that during the medieval period, and of the way it perpetuated and reinvented itself into the modern and contemporary period.

Through the study of **the practices and markers of "transnationality",** this symposium aims to explore the processes by which such noble families **developed and perpetuated themselves** across plural spaces, as compared to exclusively "national" nobilities. Did transnational affiliations lead to new types of behaviour, habits or mindsets? The question can also be raised whether "transnationality" constituted **an advantage or a disadvantage**, an opportunity for advencement or a decision made due to a lack of gaining the desired positions at the regional or "national" level. Did it translate a wider strategic vision or was the choice dictated by circumstances alone, beyond the will of individuals? How did individuals deal with the situation? What uses did they make of it, by playing on their different affiliations as the context required?

Nobilities are characterized by strong **local roots,** due to their long-time ownership of lands and fiefs, and by a specific relationship to the sovereign, which can be traced back to vassalage and which was extended in the notions of service and courtly attachment. This social reality is also closely linked to political institutions, since it was the prince who defined the nobility and controlled the means of access to the group, which was also skilled in its own self-representation. Such features may account for differences in behaviour from great merchants – who also navigate a "transnational" space for other reasons - but also from the reigning families, the "society of princes" whose transnational character is linked to diplomatic questions in particular and which has already been widely studied.

Similarly, travelling to foreign countries, pursuing studies abroad or taking part in an international correspondence network will not qualify here as "transnational" practices. This symposium does not aim to confront two national realities, or to address all the different forms of circulation across national borders or the different types of relationships established beyond them. **Proposals must focus on individuals and/or families with multiple local attachments, due to origins, marriage with a foreigner, property or titles, service to another sovereign (or State)**. Multiple affiliations to the different territories of a **"composite" monarchy** will also be considered. Particular attention will also be paid to families established in border areas, endowed with a peculiar geopolitical importance due to the fluctuation of territorial boundaries.

A **long-term time frame** has been chosen to encourage considerations of the impact the religious breakup of Christian Europe, the differing evolutions of States, nobility statuses and the concept of nation may have had on the transnational character of noble families.

Possible areas of study :

1) **The articulation of lineages and matrimonial alliances**

At first sight, it appears that "transnational" connections enabled a family to accumulate goods, honours and dignities and were translated into political, economic and cultural capital. Yet, this raises the issue of **how these different affiliations were articulated** for the lineages and individuals belonging to **a House – in the anthropological meaning of the term,** i.e. "a corporate body holding an estate made up of both material and immaterial wealth, which perpetuates itself through the transmission of its name, its goods and its titles" (C. Lévi-Strauss). The coexistence of several family branches established in different countries seems to have been the most frequent occurrence, yet only when the "House" managed to maintain **lineage solidarity** in the long run, so that its *name* could preserve its transnational meaning and did not suffer from the demographic extinctions massively affecting noble families. Can the division, which can be observed in some Flemish and Central European lineages, between an (usually) elder branch assuming a transnational dimension and other branches more strongly rooted in regional areas and favouring more exclusive loyalties, be found elsewhere? **What link can be found between noble rank and the transnational dimension?** Can "transnationality" be used to distinguish a type of noble elite, whose field of action extended beyond their local environment?

The limits to this expanding field of operation should however not be understated: homogamy and endogamy seem to have been the rule, whether they were a deliberate choice in order to remain part of a group with a strong identity (even if it was not exclusive), or whether they were required by institutions (chapters, military orders, princely courts....) whose rules of access governed matrimonial alliances to a large extent and imposed that nobilities be formed within a specific socio-cultural ecosystem. The requirements, in terms of noble ancestry, often implied remaining within more or less narrow family circles, where mutual recognition, over the long term, ensured social stability. A study of these alliances can also raise the question of **the specific role played by women** within these families.

Such questions need to be situated within **an evolving and fragmented European social context**, in which variations in the status of the nobility were extremely diverse and still lacked precise definition at the end of the Middle Ages. To what extent did different internal and external factors favour homogeneization of noble status (State centralisation,

role of military orders...)? How did they contribute to the development of a "noble international", the "gotha", which may have materialized in people's minds even before the Almanach was published? What was the link between the development of primogeniture and the territorial strategies of the aristocracy? Proposals may also tackle the consequences of the dissolution of the diverse forms of noble status after the French Revolution and the Napoleonic period.

2) Transnational nobilities and state structures

The study of « transnational » elites is inseparable from that of their **relation to the State, the nation or territorial boundaries**. How was loyalty to the sovereign and/or to the homeland understood? This question is all the more significant when it comes to the nobility, who were by nature very much involved in military, aulic or civil offices, at the highest level of the State.

The constitution of "transnational" elites was also the result of **a deliberate policy led by empires and "composite monarchies"**, who sought to unify in this way various territories: In the 16th and 17th centuries, Spanish sovereigns sought to integrate the elites of their States by means of international marriages, which were closely supervised from the court of Madrid, or through the use of distinctions such as the Golden Fleece or the title of Grandee which were instrumental in creating an "imperial" nobility. How can this apply to other imperial political structures developing over a longer time period (the Holy Roman Empire) or a shorter time frame (the Napoleonic Empire)? Were transnational features more marked in the Holy Roman Empire, in which particular state regimes were conceived, with "incomplete" States being viewed either as individual semi-sovereign or as part of collective bodies, such as the Imperial Circles? Did this "transnationality", intimately bound to political fragmentation, constitute a strength or a weakness for the Empire as a whole? In this respect, the title "prince of the Holy Roman Empire" could be used to gloss over the mediate status of their other territories, but could also conceal political divisions that could prove to be crippling to the overall unity of the Empire, as demonstrated by the large-scale mediatisation of the smaller German principalities at the time of the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, then during the Congress of Vienna.

Finally, important **geopolitical and religious reconfigurations** stimulated the mobility of noble elites and thus contributed to the shaping of the transnational character of some Houses. Exile and migration, and confiscation of property, were directly responsible for creating new balances and new territorial arrangements. Dynastic loyalties could thus be significantly redefined following wars of succession, territorial partitions, waves of repression or the fall of empires.

The **long-term time frame** should encourage participants to study **the continuities or evolutions** in the strategies of families and States while remaining attentive to the specificities of each situation and political configuration. It can help, for example, get a more balanced view of the **resistance** to the integration of foreign families and of the resulting processes of conciliation. Proposals may, for instance, consider the smaller or greater leeway that was given to foreign dynasties to recruit councillors from outside the Kingdom and to the reactions this may have triggered (Bohemia, Brabant, Tyrol....).

3) **Feelings of belonging and cultural perspectives**

The development of a transnational identity generated **a particular way of being, of behaving or thinking – in other terms, a habitus, whose specificity must be explored**. How did the members of the family deal with their multiple affiliations, and what was the perception of outsiders? What image did these families seek to project? While the answer may obviously differ depending on the context and dynastic configuration, it is quite certain that **moments of crisis** must have caused particular tensions. This symposium will therefore pay particular attention to issues of **representation**. Linguistic or religious differences, whether important or not, might also have made the situation more complex. Did the feeling of belonging to the Gotha replace other, former collective identities or affiliations? Did transnationality amount to a weakening or dilution of identity, or did it result in the articulation of multiple affiliations or coexisting identities? Was it a structural or circumstancial characteristic, whether one considers matrimonial policies directed outside the immediate environment or translocations of the lineage – whether total or partial, periodical or definitive - to other States?

Attention must be paid to the intellectual and cultural **education** of transnational elites, whether as a theoretical ideal or an actual reality. The command of foreign languages was certainly not their exclusive domain (nor is it a sufficient criterion to indicate transnationality), but it must unquestionably have been an important part of their education, just as they must have learned about the history and geography of the different countries to which their families were connected. How did transnational nobilities contribute to the emergence of a dominant language and culture in some contexts? To what extent did the linguistic and cultural convergences they favoured stimulate processes of internationalization?

Travel abroad, which Enlightenment cosmopolitanism considered an imperative, should probably be considered here less as an opportunity for education than as a common practice linked to the management of patrimony, the reactivation or preservation of family

ties and attendance at royal or princely courts. Light could thus be shed on the role played by transnational families in **international sociabilities and cultural circulations** (the development of collections and libraries, patronage).

Proposals can also focus on **the inscription practices and written traces** which materialized and made this internationalized dimension visible, such as the publication of lists of the patrons of European spa towns, almanacs and gazettes, or society columns in the press of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Heraldry can also be included in the possible areas of study.

In the study of these different subjects, particular attention should be paid to **place** and to **inscription in space**. How was the multiplicity of local attachments dealt with? Can multi-territoriality amount to ubiquity? Moreover, in the polycentric environment which transnational nobilities navigated and which extended beyond the limits of the family property, what poles (courts, capital cities, resorts...) could function as sites of amplification or acceleration of transnationality? Did transnational nobilities adopt in these places specific, distinctive and/or exclusive practices in comparison with other types of elites? Borders could constitute other possible sites of observation: while they could be barriers to circulation, could they not also appear as favourable factor to the development of transnationality?