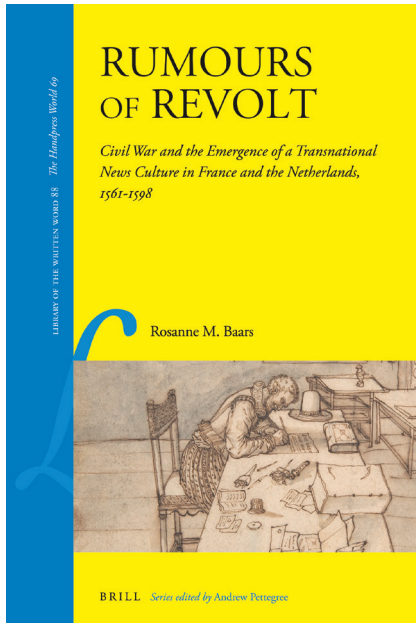


Review

Rosanne M. Baars, *Rumours of Revolt. Civil War and the Emergence of a Transnational News Culture in France and the Netherlands, 1561-1598*, Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2021, 267 pp., ISBN 9789004423329.



In this highly innovative study, Rosanne Baars investigates the resonances between the French civil wars and the Dutch Revolt during the second half of the sixteenth century. Rather than examining the two conflicts from a strictly political perspective, the author adopts a more original approach by focusing on the use and circulation of official and unofficial information during the conflicts in France and the Netherlands. Her interest lies more specifically in how information networks were interwoven between these two countries as the wars unfolded. Her goal is to shed light on how the people of the sixteenth century relied on foreign news to better understand their own realities and make sense of the events taking place. The wars at home and abroad meant that people were dealing with a constant flow of information that they had to assess critically and put into perspective. As such, this book is a study of how a

transnational news culture emerged in France and in the Netherlands.

Baars contributes to the recent historiographic renewal among scholars of the sixteenth-century civil wars. By studying the networks linking France and the Netherlands, the author highlights the European and international dimension of the French Wars of Religion and the Dutch Revolt. Even though these conflicts occurred at a local level, foreign events also impacted the turn of events. To illustrate her argument, Baars discusses several examples, such as Gaspard de Coligny's plans to support the Dutch Revolt against Philip II, or the military campaign of the Duke of Anjou in the Netherlands in the early 1580s. As she centres her analysis of these events on the many exchanges of information they implied, Baars adopts a transregional approach of the civil wars. She convincingly demonstrates that the two theatres of operations (national and transnational) did remain

distinct but could, to some extent, also impact each other. Contemporaries did not perceive the conflicts in the other country as a mirror but instead as a warning about what could possibly happen at home. Indeed, the news that the French and Dutch received made it apparent that they were going through very different war experiences.

This book is also a fascinating study of the production and circulation of information in the sixteenth century. Thanks to her meticulous exploration of the chronicles and pamphlets printed in several French and Dutch cities, Baars is able to reconstruct the intricate process through which a piece of news would become credible: from peaking the authority's interest, to being transformed to fit their purpose, and finally being altered again when shared with a wider community. This work highlights the chain of production of information and the editorial strategies of the elites. There is no question that these strategies impacted the proceedings of the war, and Baars proves that information was a matter of necessity when it came to waging war or negotiating peace. Even though propaganda by the authorities played a significant role, a variety of unofficial actors were also directly or indirectly involved in the process of shaping and sharing news internationally, through letters, chronicles, and pamphlets, but also through (false) rumours.

The author relies on an impressive number of sources in this study, examining around sixty chronicles in French, Dutch, and German. A detailed list of these documents and their respective mentions of international news is given in the book's appendix (211-224). This list contains the names of well-known diarists such as Pierre de L'Estoile, Jean de Pottre, and Godevaert van Haecht, but also rather unexpected names, such as an anonymous Calvinist chronicler from Millau in the southwest of France, who penned an original account of the wars. These chronicles are also compared to the letters of several eminent contemporary politicians, such as the Duke of Alba, William of Orange, and the Cardinal de Granvelle. Poems and songs are also part of the body of documents under study. This diverse range of sources also demonstrates the importance of orality and letter-writing to the circulation of news, even before such information would be couched in chronicles and pamphlets. The purely material and technical aspects of the news are meticulously explored, so much so that this book gives a comprehensive description of the construction and diffusion of the information in early modern Europe.

Baars has chosen to adopt a chronological and thematic approach throughout the six chapters of her book, and in doing so insists on the slow process which led to the emergence of a transnational culture of information in France and the Netherlands. Each chapter opens with a clear and quick explanation of each period studied. The maps and illustrations which accompany the text clearly illustrate her argument, even for non-experts. Every chapter sheds light on a specific theme: the first discusses the iconoclasm of the 1560s, followed by chapters on news about key figures during the wars and the credibility of news during and after the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Chapter four focuses on information in times of peace, chapter five meticulously analyzes the military campaign of the Duke of Anjou in the Netherlands, and the last chapter explores the many rumours on the 1588 Armada and the beginning of Henry IV's reign.

While each chapter centers on a specific topic, the ensemble proves that the emergence of a transnational news culture in the two countries consisted of a very complex process that was everything but linear. For instance, whereas iconoclasm was common to both

countries in the 1560s, it was perceived first and foremost as a national event and did not cause any specific reaction in the other country. Similarly, the French chroniclers were only rarely interested in the Dutch Revolt, except in 1567, when the Duke of Alba passed France on his way to the Netherlands. Contemporaries did not always realize that decisions made abroad could have direct consequences on their own lives. News about the peace treaties signed in France allowed the Dutch to develop strategies to face the ongoing war at home. The chroniclers thus painted the events they had heard about on an international canvas. In the process, the news changed to meet the public's expectations: the movement of troops, the religious massacres, and the activities of noblemen were deemed worthy of interest. Finally, all kinds of news, be it rumours or alternative facts, deserved to be related, as they always impacted people's actions and the decisions they would make.

In sum, one of the main achievements of this work is the light it sheds on figures that are usually relatively understudied, namely the urban elites who managed to grasp, produce, and spread the news about the civil wars. Rosanne Baars likewise explores the emergence of an information culture, drawing attention to a public of critical news consumers eager to know more about the events they heard or read about. As such, Baars brings to light a dimension of the societies of the sixteenth century that is often left in the dark.

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