

A polycentric war and its narratives – a new approach to the Thirty Years War

Trevor-Roper's "General Crisis of the 17th century", published in 1959, has haunted historians for decades. It has been accused of its oversimplification, its ignorance on economic, political and cultural growth in some parts of Europe coinciding with times of war and crisis in other parts, and of course for its disregard of the very fact the fourteenth or sixteenth century were anything but more peacefully compared to the seventeenth century. The theory was put aside and rightfully it has been done so. Historians have become less focused on political history. Instead, the social and cultural impacts of war were analyzed and discussed intensely with remarkable results. Simultaneously almost silently however a return to traditional, national approaches is evident. Especially in the German speaking research community the thirty years war once again has become an imperial war – or even a "German" war. Of course, important changes of these traditional narratives have been made. 19th century historian had interpreted the war in an almost dialectical way – as the end of imperial splendor on the one hand and as the beginning of the rise Prussia's power on the other. 20th and 21st century studies have focused on the reestablishing of a peace order after the war and its importance for the development of a system of European powers. From this point of view the war ended with the reintegration and Europeanization of a proto-national German state.

It is an approach that tends to underemphasize the openness of the imperial system, the multiplicity of allegiances of the powers and actors at the imperial periphery, and especially the interdependency between Europe's innumerable regional conflicts. On the other it overemphasizes the role of the emperor in the conflict, and it tends to create a causal association between events that is anything but compulsive. As matter of fact a simple change of the perspective – for instance from a Scandinavian, a Hungarian or a French point of view could lead to a completely different reconstruction of events.

In a way we are back at the dilemma of national narratives Trevor Roper tried to escape from. It is thus most probably time to look for different approach, an alternative way to analyze a war as complex as the Thirty Years War.

Focusing on regional conflicts is anything but new nor surprising. Local and regional studies have been done on this subject ever since. Traditionally however they had to fit into a national narrative, they had to serve the higher purpose of national sense-giving. The examples of the war in the Grison or in Lorraine demonstrate not only the deficits of this approach, but they also provide us with clear evidence of the entanglements of regional conflicts.

Looking at the Thirty Years War from a regional perspective calls in question well established narratives and reopens the debate on alternative interpretations. Instead of emphasizing certain conflicts and battlefields while disregarding others, the regional perspective points to a complex network of interrelated European conflicts. If we take the tendency of the smaller and bigger, the imperial and the nonimperial conflicts more seriously thus a new picture arises – this picture of a polycentric war that in its core was not held together by political conflict lines but by diverse forms of interaction. One of them was evidently the forming, the transfer, the accumulation and the storage of information, of knowledge, of narratives – of everything that helped contemporaries to make sense of the conflicts, to predict the future developments or to influence the decision-making-process of others. This conference is therefore intended to analyze the Thirty Years War from a polycentric perspective that is focused on the evolution and the impact of the contemporary news market. Contributions most welcome being concerned with the entanglement of regional

conflicts, the polycentric character of the war, the analysis of the war news market, the development of narratives that had an impact on the behavior of the contemporaries, their self-perception and their attitude towards the military conflicts.

The conference languages are English, French, and German. The conference will take place at the university of Fribourg on 14 and 15 November 2024.

This call for papers is open to doctoral and post-doctoral students.

If the conference topic is relevant to your research and you are a doctoral or post-doctoral student, please send a one-page abstract and CV to claire.gantet@unifr.ch and thomas.lau@unifr.ch by 30 October.