

Introduction

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Historical scholarship is being transformed by the 'Transnational Turn'. For the moment at least, the more traditional study of diplomatic or international history seems for some to have had its day. Whether scholars are examining ancient, mediaeval, early modern, or contemporary periods of the past, the ways in which we work, and the assumptions we bring to our scholarship have changed dramatically over the last decade. Why this is so is itself an interesting question, and one that is wide open to speculation. That speculation has given rise to many interpretations: the possibilities presented by a new globalisation that followed the end of the cold war; a greater appreciation of the consequences of the rise and fall of empires old and new; a new concern for the underdogs and the understudied in history; the greater availability of sources that technological change and with it the rise of the capacity of the internet gives to scholars; and finally a sense that commodities and markets have never in reality conformed to the iron laws of the nation-state, any more than have ideas and ideologies. The study of European integration has not escaped this great shift. Indeed, it can be cogently argued that supra-national integration is of itself a transnational phenomenon, and that the study of the development of European integration is an area of research that has effectively been at the cutting edge of research for scholars who wish to understand how international relations and the modern state have changed over the past half century.

Whilst the articles that follow make this an eclectic number to say the least, Transnationalism and its problems remains a powerful underlying theme. There are two articles that remind any reader who needs reminding that the phenomenon of power and political and technical management across borders is not just a post-World War Two phenomenon in Europe. Marko Kreutzmann takes the reader back to the Zollverein – much quoted in textbooks as some kind of pre-experience for later integrationists, but under-studied in its own right. Here it is looked at with a view to establishing clear links over time to later integrative efforts on customs unions across borders, and the spill-over impulse that they can bring. Gabriele Balbi et al reveal the diplomacy that underpinned the creation of the Telegraph Union, showing how the demands of technological innovation and technical modernisation stimulated the Union and cooperation across borders, while at the same time, allowing a small country – in this case Switzerland –, to exercise more leverage and leadership than one might have expected. The article by Nicolas Marty develops this new approach to integration with an examination of a commodity rather than a study of high diplomacy. The article shows, a hundred years later after the creation of the Telegraph Union, supranational policies emerged and were instrumentalised at the European Community level towards water – and specifically, bottled water, which is now the indispensable and must-have staple of just about every Union citizen. Such technical

micro studies show that the study of a commodity can help us to understand more about markets as well as international institutions in Europe.

Religion, like commodities, does not truly recognise borders, although the cultural influence of different religions still characterises and informs secular politics for many if not most countries. The integration project has frequently and insightfully been labelled as a moderate Roman Catholic one, with strong practical foundations in the continental European Christian Democratic parties that themselves often transcend borders. However, the role of Christian Democracy as a propelling force behind West European integration has never been entirely satisfactory for the whole of Europe, not least given the role of protestant thinking and protestant politicians in the integration process. The article by Pauline Beaugé de la Roque steps back to an examination of the place of religious culture in integration in a different way by throwing a different light upon this issue: that from the perspective of the Irish Roman Catholic Church and its attitudes to Europe and European integration. Without using state papers, but exploring Church-based sources, Beaugé examines on the assumptions of Irish Catholics, as well as the constant interplay between Irish politics and religion.

Yet transnational approaches cannot remain entirely detached from the cut and thrust of national politics, as states certainly seek to instrumentalise their power and influence through integration and cooperation. Vincent Genin reminds us of this by revisiting of one of the early European integration crises, the Empty Chair crisis of the mid-1960s. As states and supranationalists found themselves in conflict, the importance of individual actors as well as states (in this case, Belgium) in resolving conflict is clear. In a way that reflects the aspirations of those who seek soft security solutions to contemporary problems without factoring in the place of hard power, soft supranational institutions – in this case the European Commission – are not capable of solving problems without (hard) state involvement. This is especially the case when the problem is created by a member state, as was the case with France in the Empty Chair crisis. In a similar vein, Hartmut Kaeble's magisterial overview of the notion of crisis over time stands back from the concern with contemporary national economic crises, (Greece, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Italy and others), and tries to set out a typology of post-World War Two integration crises that are European in nature. This ambitious exposition of the phenomenon of the European Crisis (at once the progenitor of integration, as well as its potential destroyer) fits nicely with the ongoing crisis in Europe, and the current debate that surrounds not only the structure of European banking systems, but also the very foundations of European institutional integration as we now understand it.

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