

SUBSIDIES, DIPLOMACY, AND STATE FORMATION IN EUROPE, 1494–1789: ECONOMIES OF ALLEGIANCE, ed. by Svante Norrhem and Erik Thomson (Lund University Press, 2020), pp. 296; ISBN: 978-91-984698-3-7 (hardcover), and 978-91-984698-4-4 (eBook)

Henri Hannula

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3182-1800>

This volume brings together ten essays, addressing a highly important theme in early modern European history. Subsidies as a means of resource allocation and dynastic alliance formation are indeed something that most of the historians of early modern Europe do recognize as pivotal for the ascent of the European fiscal military states on the one hand, and broader international state system on the other. As this volume shows, however, the subject matter deserves undoubtedly more serious scholarly attention. It is, therefore, a great pleasure to read in-depth case studies by specialists treating subsidies from a variety of perspectives.

Even though the introduction defines subsidies primarily as ‘the payment of money by one sovereign to another in return for military and political aid, typically agreed upon by means of a formal agreement and even treaty’ (p. 3), the contributions do not solely focus on the high diplomatic alliance formation between the greater powers and lesser powers. Instead, the essays of the volume offer crucial insights to the role of non-state actors (merchants and intermediaries), mercenaries and individual beneficiaries in the European dynastic constellation.

Given the role of France as a significant subsidy power from the late fifteenth to the late eighteenth century, most of the contributions add to the understanding of the manifold repercussions of French subsidy policies in Europe. Anuschka Tischer’s essay on the role of subsidies in seventeenth-century French foreign relations offers both a more general observation on the development of the subsidy payment system and an analysis of its role in the state-building processes around Europe. For her part, Tryntje Helfferich treats the internal tensions caused by French subsidies among the German princes. Subsidies and general adoption of French cultural elements in the German elite culture were seen as highly desirable and even necessary tools in striving for sovereignty and improved princely honour. French influence provoked criticism amongst the contemporaries: French money was also seen as a tool for weakening and damaging the German princely and imperial sovereignty. Interestingly, some early seventeenth-century German intellectuals even called for a more unified German nation to resist this French economic and cultural influence.

The similar twofold character of subsidies is emphasized in Svante Norrhem’s and Erik Bodensten’s essays analysing the French-Swedish subsidy relationship.

French subsidies had a crucial role in both creating the Swedish power political expansion in the seventeenth century and seeking revenge against Russia after losing its great power status in the eighteenth century. Norrhem estimates that it was approximately 15 per cent of the cost of war and 9 per cent of the cost of revenue, which was covered by French subsidies in 1630–34. Subsidies from France reached as much as 20 per cent of the state revenue during the ambitious fortification projects along the Finnish Baltic coast between 1747 and 1776. After the Great Nordic War, the strategic aims of Sweden – especially the offensive ambition toward Russia – were merely impossible without help from France. This dependency of French money, however, caused many problems and dilemmas for the receiving lesser power, especially in the eighteenth century as Bodensten shows. Norrhem concludes that resources ‘contributed to moving people geographically as well as socially’ and offered many opportunities for ‘career and social climbing, as well as financial profit’ (p. 117).

However, as Peter Wilson shows in his essay, official subsidy treaties were only one ‘Fiscal-Military Instrument’ used by the state actors to harness the resources for dynastic strife as troop conventions and mercenary contracts were not usually part of any official agreement (p. 78–79). While there is a danger of bias toward state centrism, Marianne Klerk reminds that there are shortcomings in focusing on the individual fiscal-military entrepreneur, i.e. overstating the role of any particular individual. To avoid this trap, Klerk suggests a shift from entrepreneurs to ‘fiscal-military hubs’. Erik Thomson’s essay on the part of the Calvinist merchant and intermediary Johan Hoeffft as the most important organizer of subsidies from France to her allies during the Thirty Year’s War offers further insights to Klerk’s methodological considerations. What makes Hoeffft’s career particularly interesting is the fact that he not only successfully exploited the period when France needed her allies to establish a business model of remittances but also built the pivotal connections for his merchant empire. Thus, Hoeffft’s success in gaining a monopoly over the subsidy remittance as an individual entrepreneur and his access to the fiscal-military hub (larger structure) mattered, and were inseparable.

Brokerage, one of the key elements of dynastic relations, is well illustrated in both Andreas Flurschütz da Cruz and Tilman Haug’s essays. Cruz’s focus is on the development of the minor German principality of Waldeck from early seventeenth-century military project and dynastic troop broker to a hereditary principality. For his part, Haug presents three case studies analysing Duke of Neuburg and the career of Georg Christian von Hessen-Homburg as a negotiator, Prince-Bishop of Münster Christoph Bernhard von Galen and his subsidy alliance with England, and the involvement of German princes in the Dutch War of 1672 (and Wilhelm von Fürstenberg as a diplomat striving for subsidy alliance). Both

essays show how minor players in European power politics could enhance their status by brokering alliances.

By treating solely the sixteenth century, the essay of Philip Rogger, addressing the pensions paid to the Swiss cantons, offers an interesting perspective to the essays presented above. Rogger intriguingly shows how cantons became a competitive platform for patronage markets already early on. Here, France's role as a patron power was significant. However, in exchange for a clientist relation to France, elites with transnational connections benefited from this patronage.

As a whole, the volume offers a great point of departure for further discussion about early modern economic dependencies on the one hand, and about the role of different non-state actors, brokers and intermediaries in the European dynastic relations on the other. Occasionally, some of the contents might be relatively cumbersome for those readers not specialised in the seventeenth-century German dynastic struggles and abundance of principalities and sovereigns. Thus, some illustrative timelines, tables and even maps would have clarified the message considerably. Nevertheless, since the contributions are based on extensive archival research, they do offer a great deal of important novel insights into the paradox of early modern European history: the absolute necessity of co-operation in fighting for greater sovereignty. The book is highly recommended reading to all early modernists, especially for those working in the fields of new diplomatic history and state formation.