H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Kathryn A. Edwards. *Families and Frontiers: Re-Creating Communities and Boundaries in the Early Modern Burgundies.* Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2002. xiv + 431 pp. $128.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-391-04106-6.

Reviewed by Thomas Max Safley (Department of History, University of Pennsylvania)

Published on H-German (May, 2004)

Frontiers, Oligarchs, and Adaptation

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Kathryn Edward's dissertation is an interesting study that raises questions about boundaries, communities and identities. It is not, however, about families and frontiers. Title notwithstanding, it takes as its subject the social networks of late-medieval and early-modern oligarchs and the changes to those networks wrought by the division of the old Valois territories, following the death of Duke Charles the Bold in 1477, into the Duchy of Burgundy, which devolved to the Kingdom of France, and the Franche-ComtÃ©, which became part of the Holy Roman Empire. Thus, it explores some of the many and complex ways political elites reacted to political realignments in early modern Europe.

When it holds to its empirical findings, *Families and Frontiers* is an impressive and convincing study. It focuses on three principal cities of modern-day Burgundy: Dijon, Dole, and BesanÃ§on. Among their elites, Edwards identifies no less than 150 oligarchic lineages, defined by political participation, established ancestry, economic wealth, and marriage connections, whose memberships extend to 1500 members over 5 generations. She then examines "residence patterns, parish organizations, patronage networks, professional affiliations, and noble affinities" in the conviction that "reorganization of familial concerns could reflect the impact of broader political realignments" (p. 18).

Many readers would not be surprised by her conclusion that elite "concerns" gradually shifted to reflect new political realities. Things changed when the SaÃ´ne became a political as well as geographical divide, but those changes occurred neither immediately nor directly. The process was gradual and complex. The new border split some families, separating branches and straining associations. For a time, they confronted these problems by communicating and negotiating across it. Yet, patterns of marriage and alliance gradually acknowledged it by focusing such connections and associations within the county or duchy, what Edwards calls "the increasing conservatism and insularity" of Burgundian elites (p. 52). They rationalized property holdings in much the same manner. By the end of the sixteenth century, most Burgundian oligarchs "avoided accumulating lands in the other Burgundy ... were even chary of financial links between the two provinces that might complicate allegiances and divide loyalties (p. 149). Patterns of employment changed likewise. Oligarchs gradually shifted their economic basis from commerce, which tended to be carried out across borders, to office holding, which attached the oligarchs ever more intensely to the institutions and rulers of France or the Empire respectively. Given that offices were "essential to their livelihood and reputation ... Burgundy's oligarchs appeared willing to accept the status quo, seeking reconfirmation of existing privileges and ranks with each change in ruler" (p. 245). Such findings might have achieved a broader significance through close attention to Wolfgang Reinhard's classic study of Roman elites.[1] They remain, however, useful contributions to an important field of inquiry.

In all these oligarchic engagements and activities, Edwards sees a gradual shift from flexibility–a word she uses repeatedly–to rigidity and restriction. Burgundian oligarchs eventually made their peace with a Burgundy divided and ceased to negotiate or act across the new borderline. Their choice of partners, regardless of purpose, became narrower. Their focus of interest and engagement became more local. Their sense of identity–social as well as political-became more insular. For Burgundy, this is "the period when relationships, institutions, and attitudes are being renegotiated to reflect this division" (p. 5). According to Edwards, from the time of its division in 1477 until the point at which that division became both permanent and impermeable, Burgundy was a "frontier."

And therein lies the book's single greatest problem. Borrowing heavily from the scholarship of Frederick Jackson Turner, Richard White, and Patricia Limerick, Edwards sees the "frontier" as "both a specific time and place, experiencing political and/or military tension [and] a heuristic, standing for the hermeneutical processes that create and distinguish a frontier" (p. 5).[2] In other words, the "frontier" is both a contested space of transaction and negotiation and the very processes of transaction and negotiation themselves. When those processes cease, the "frontier" becomes solid and impenetrable; it ceases to be a "frontier" and becomes a "boundary."

Yet, one wonders whether the term "frontier" clarifies or even applies to the historical processes at work in early modern Burgundy. Can a thing be both place and process? Whether defined in the more traditional sense of a region where two distinct cultures meet or in the more modern sense, captured by Richard White, of a middle ground of contact and cooperation as well as conflict and confrontation, the notion of a frontier in Burgundy raises a number of questions.[3]

Did Burgundians see themselves in these terms? Edwards offers no evidence to suggest they did. They experienced no pronounced, chronic political or military tensions along the so-called "frontier." Those living in the duchy did not view residents of the county as politically hostile, much less culturally, ethnically, or racially "other." That is not to say that a "synthesis" existed among them (p. 5); the Valois territories were always a congeries of different cultural and geographic regions held together by the power and skill of the ruling house rather than by any intrinsic sense of identification. Yet, such differences as existed among them stopped well short of the policies of expropriation, subjugation, acculturation, or extermination that characterized the American frontier. The unique quality of that borderland, both in its historical reality and in its scholarly interpretation, must be born in mind here because the term loses its descriptive quality otherwise. A "frontier" refers not to every middle ground but rather to particular ones.

If every form of exchange or contact does not a frontier make, which ones do? With the emphasis on negotiation and transaction without further differentiation, all divides tend to become frontiers. And, indeed, at points the differences among frontiers, borders, and boundaries become blurred. Edwards repeatedly emphasizes permeability as the characteristic that distinguishes a frontier: "While a frontier's permeability thus characterized their social world, Burgundy's oligarchs used boundaries and barriers to maintain their control" (p. 312). By 1674, however, when Vauban begins fortifying the cities of Burgundy, the region had become "a *frontiÃ¨re* but a different frontier from the one that existed in 1477" (p. 347). It had become a "border" (p. 348). Yet, it remains altogether unclear what Edwards means by permeability and its lack. At no time, not even when Henri Pirenne described Burgundy as a "frontier state," (p. 7) between the Franco-Prussian War and World War I, when France had experienced one catastrophic invasion from the East and was not too many years from another, was this frontier/border impermeable. Few dividing lines are so, whether in early modern or in modern Europe. Negotiation and transaction, licit and illicit, occur regardless of barriers; especially where both sides believe there is something to be gained. What seem to distinguish frontiers, therefore, in keeping with the thinking of Turner, Pirenne, White, and Limerick, are not the transactions between parties but rather the relationships between parties. Frontiers exist where those transactions are marked by risk and hostility because each side views the other as fundamentally alien and dangerous.

Where, then, were "frontiers" to be found in early modern Burgundy? The physical walls and suburbs that separated city from country take on interesting connotations, as Edwards rightly points out, when cast in these terms. Likewise the social barriers between the mainstream and the margin, between settled communities and the vagrant poor or between the so-called honorable and dishonorable gain new aspects, when thus viewed. Edwards seems to find frontiers everywhere she looks, however, alleging some instances that are less convincing. She applies it so often and in so many ways that its loses its value as an interpretive tool. The social space between elites and commons squares poorly with the notion of a

frontier because each viewed itself and the other as intrinsic to the hierarchical society of their day. The psychological spaces that separated parishes or neighborhoods suffer the same limitations. Though competition and hostility might erupt between them, these conflicts tended to be transitory and ephemeral, not fundamentally disrupting a larger sense of urban community and identity. What is more, the kind of boundary-keeping implied by the existence of a "frontier" is utterly out of place, when applied to Catholic parishes before 1563 or Reformed churches at any time. Finally, there was no frontier between the Burgundies. Even by the end of the period of study, after the oligarchs of each had reorganized their families and realigned their interests, they had more in common than otherwise.

This is a useful study of social networks and elite adaptation. The insistence on "frontiers" simply gets in its way.

Notes

[1]. Wolfgang Reinhard, *Freunde und Kreaturen: Verflechtung als Konzept zur Forschung historischer FÃ¼hrungsgruppe: RÃ¶mische Oligarchie um 1600* (Augsburg: Schriftenreihe der philosophischen FakultÃ¤t, 1978).

[2]. Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *American Historical Review* (1894): pp. 199-227; Richard White and Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Frontier in American Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); and Patricia Nelson Limerick, "Turnerians All: The Dream of a Helpful History in an Intelligible World," *American Historical Review* 100 (June 1995): pp. 697-716.

[3]. Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

Citation: Thomas Max Safley. Review of Edwards, Kathryn A., *Families and Frontiers: Re-Creating Communities and Boundaries in the Early Modern Burgundies.* H-German, H-Net Reviews. May, 2004.

URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=9275