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Thomas Maissen, Niels F. May, Rainer Maria Kiesow (Hg.), Souveränität im Wandel. Frankreich und Deutschland. 14.–21. Jahrhundert, Göttingen (Wallstein) 2023, 518 S., 3 Abb., ISBN 978-3-8353-5455-5, EUR 39,90.

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At first perusal, this book may give rise to some misgivings. The story of sovereignty tends to be told as if it were a fixed, well-defined idea which first occurred to Jean Bodin in the sixteenth century and then disseminated around the world by a process of *rayonnement*. The ritual citing of Bodin when speaking of sovereignty gives the impression that there is a canonical point of origin we can always return to when confusion arises about this fundamental concept. This book also starts by evoking the primal scene the modern idea of sovereignty supposedly originated from: France divided by religious struggles, massacres in the streets of Paris, yearning for a ruler that could offer protection in such conditions. As Thomas Maissen, one of the editors, shows in the opening chapter, this was a moment of rupture that led to a revision of older ideas about power. Although Maissen's introductory overview is exemplary in synthesising the historical trajectory from Bodin to the twenty-first century, it might produce the feeling that the rest of the volume will move in familiar, unsurprising directions. Not so, fortunately.

The reader will soon discover that sovereignty has been invented and re-invented multiple times, that there is a great variety of places from which to view it, indeed, that the idea of an origin, or some immutable core, gradually fades away as we move around Europe and discover not only such centres as Paris but also more peripheral historical settings. The editors might not have meant to do so, but the end-result is an interesting deconstruction of the conventional story. The road from Bodin proves to be so convoluted, so contested at almost every point, that the chapters in the book rather keep us searching for other lines of historical development, causing a sense of almost labyrinthine complexity. In the end, not much is left of the impression that thinking about sovereignty can be traced back to any simple idea.

In another respect, too, the volume reveals itself to be much more subtle in approach than first meets the eye. Judged by its cover, it is about France and Germany, the two countries mentioned in the title. Many of the chapters, in fact, do have such a national orientation, and this does not diminish their value in any way. For example, the volume enables us to observe the idea of European sovereignty in a more multifaceted way by alternating between German and French viewpoints, or more precisely, by treating this topic against the background of what sovereignty has meant in

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different national contexts. National political cultures often turn out to be less uniform than believed, as demonstrated here by several chapters. To choose one example, Yannick Bosc shows that revolutionary France was not dominated from the beginning by a centralising interpretation of popular sovereignty but rather witnessed a set of radically different views about the constitutional implications of the general principle that all power originates from the people. Christoph Möllers recounts how unsuccessful efforts have been made to apply a French conception of sovereignty in the German Federal Republic. This harks back to an earlier case of mismatch when Bodin's writings were adapted to make sense of the Holy Roman Empire. In his chapter, Guido Braun says that Bodin's concept of sovereignty penetrated this constitutional structure like a bomb. Christophe Duhamelle evokes a more peaceful metaphor for describing the same process, ranging his chapter under the notion of »entangled history«.

The volume is indeed a good starting point for thinking about what it really means to adopt a transnational approach to studying the history of such political and legal ideas like sovereignty. Coupling France and Germany is a beautiful symbolic gesture but it doesn't, on its own, work as a convincing methodology. The editors of this book have shown good judgement in allowing their authors to experiment with various techniques to conjoin national frames. The reader can thus compare different ways to tell the history of something that doesn't seem to be able to have a history, namely, a concept.

More generally, the book also offers ideas about how France and Germany might be coupled in historical research in the mode, not of an amicable embrace, but of a true *histoire croisée*. One chapter (by Benoit Vaillot) describes how the Franco-German border was extended vertically upwards after long discussions about whether the principle of sovereignty also applies in the air. Another (by Laurent Jalabert) presents sovereignty from the point of view of the Duchy of Lorraine, a polity that sat across jurisdictional boundaries between France and the Empire. Lennart Schmidt and Guido Thiemeyer allow us to see the relationship between sovereignty and the Peace of Westphalia in a new light, pointing out that this instrument led France to be involved in managing the navigation on the Rhine, and eventually to participate in a novel experiment with supranationality at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Rhine thus exemplifies not only how French and German history can be enmeshed by focusing on a shared – and contested – object but also how the contours of sovereignty can become blurred when it is seen embodied in a river that is both a state border and a transnational waterway.

While this may not be evident at first sight, all chapters in the book are, then, indeed, about France and Germany, so that the general title does not feel out of place. In his contribution, which is placed near the end, Rainer Maria Kiesow takes the reader to a place where sovereignty is no mere theory, or a postmodern construct, but something for which war is being waged. He describes this

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place as Kiev, until other names start to disorient the map, and the reader is left unsure whether Kiev is also Lemberg or perhaps even France or any other place where »Galician sovereignty«, as Kiesow calls the resulting confusion, feels like an appropriate category. It is an intriguing thought that this might be the result if we tried to synthesise the »Germano-French discussion on sovereignty« which the introductory chapter presents as the topic of the book.

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