Low Countries Histories - General

Page published by System Administrator on Thursday, July 16, 2015


This comprehensive survey divides the history of the Low Countries into five distinct periods: “A Long Beginning” (7th century B.C.E.–1000 C.E.), “Counts, Cities, and Clerics” (1000–1300), the “Formation of a Political Union” (1300–1600), the “Dutch Republic” (1588–1780) and the “Spanish and Austrian Netherlands” (1585–1780), and the “Revolution in the North and South” (1780–1830). In the end, the editors asserted that although they have been politically directed from the outside, which prevented the development of a strong political union, the Low Countries have been economically and culturally unified. This vitality, they maintained, has had a lasting and profound influence on the rest of Europe (463).


Written by two leading scholars from the University of Ghent and first published in 1988 as In de ban van Bourgondië, this exhaustive event history explored the relation between the cultural, economic, and political evolution of the Low Countries under the rule of the dukes of Burgundy. Blockmans and Prevenier maintained that the formation of the Burgundian state—an association of principalities—not only homogenized its institutional organizations and cultures, but also prevented this densely populated and prosperous territory from being annexed by France, England, and the German Empire. This formation, they argued, was the result of the shrewd manipulation of international politics and demography by the Burgundian dukes at the expense of many local and regional interests (xii, 3).


Although recent historiography has tended to stress short-run factors, chance, and contingency, this macrohistory is based on the premise that great events necessarily have deep and important roots. In this broad, chronological work, Israel divided the history of the early modern Low Countries into four periods: “The Making of the Dutch Republic, 1477-1588,” “The Early Golden Age, 1588 - 1647,” “The Later Golden Age, 1647-1702,” and “The Age of Decline, 1702-1747.” Utilizing sources from the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, and England, Israel maintained that there existed no real political, economic, or geographic uniformity between the northern and southern provinces before the revolt against the Habsburgs in 1572. By 1570, however, there existed, Israel argued, a uniformity of religion, ideas, and art that resulted from the decisive break between the Calvinist north and Catholic south.

Return to Index