

Book Review – Connected Mobilities in the Early Modern World: The Practice and Experience of Modernity, edited by Paul Nelles and Rosa Salzberg.

Amsterdam University Press, 2023. 280 pp. €121.99

Brian de Ruiter

Brock University

Connected Mobilities in the Early Modern World contests the perception of a static early modern European society by highlighting the integral nature of its mobility through an examination of various understudied topics. The book explores this mobility and the (potential) limitations imposed on it by focusing on the following interrelated themes: ‘Moving Bodies,’ ‘Crossing Borders,’ and ‘Networks, Distance, and Circulation’ (p. 7). These themes are explained in three chapters each, thus engaging with the topics at great length. The research contributes to more recent scholarship by analysing the subject of mobility and the ways in which it has been perceived, facilitated and experienced by exploring a range of areas related to religion, physical being including aspects of gender, and extending to discussions of infrastructural development. The introduction to the volume identifies some of the existent research and frameworks that have explored this field of inquiry, including a “framework of circulation,” which is important since Paul Nelles and Rosa Salzberg differentiate ‘circulation’ from ‘movement’ (p. 25). In this regard, the editors note applicable frameworks can move this field from being primarily descriptive to providing greater analysis. The introduction also presents potential pathways for future scholarship and a lengthy bibliography, which provides a firm foundation for additional research in this field.

The first three chapters by John Gallagher, Gerrit Verhoeven and Carolin Schmitz engage with the theme ‘Moving Bodies’ by focusing on the “motivations and experience of movement” (p. 26). Gallagher examines Fynes Moryson’s *An Itinerary* (1617) as a case study to probe into early modern language acquisition and how such knowledge of languages and gestures could shape one’s interactions and mobility in culturally and linguistically diverse areas. Verhoeven delves deeper into investigating the “experience of movement” through his study of the Grand Tour. He examines a vast range of travel journals written by Netherlandish burghers to give an account of how developed infrastructure and mobility created “a more positive framing of the landscape” (p. 75). The fact that these sources spanned a period from the late sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth century gives Verhoeven a sampling to chart the shifts in infrastructure, traveller experience and changes to itineraries. Verhoeven presents a lengthy

discussion on the evolving nature of transportation and its associated experiences, followed by a shorter section on how communication “created a virtual community” of individuals connected on an emotional level through letters while being physically distant (p. 77). Schmitz’s chapter engages with motivation as she explores the factors that drove “ordinary patients” (p. 88), predominately in rural Spain, to travel for health reasons and the arrangements they made to meet these practitioners by studying Spanish Inquisition records and an assortment of other documentation. Schmitz illuminates the existence of “medical pluralism” in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Spain and recognises that “walking between 10 and 25 kilometres seems to have been typical” to seek out a diagnosis and/or treatment (pp. 104–105). This more or less aligns with Michael MacDonald’s (1981) research that provides data on the approximate number of miles people were willing to travel to seek the services of Richard Napier, a fact noted by Schmitz. Although this helps lead Schmitz to conclude that “proximity seems to have played a secondary role,” she recognises further research needs to investigate how ‘proximity’ was conceptualised in the early modern period (p. 105).

The second theme engages with borders and the various means “to channel and control the movement of people, goods, and information over distance” (p. 27). The theme of control and monitoring of those who crossed borders is particularly emphasised in the chapters by Irene Fosi and Darka Bilić as they analyse the mechanics of such control within the Papal States and Venetian Dalmatia, respectively. Fosi notes the distinction between “papal policies and their enforcement” (p. 114) when looking at the Roman Inquisition’s policies towards Protestant merchants and students during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Fosi’s use of documents from the Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede reveal how the Inquisition sought to restrict and monitor these Protestant movements due to concerns about heresy. Her research also demonstrates that civic authorities were reluctant to enforce the Inquisition’s policies since they had concerns that it could adversely affect universities and local economies. Paola Molino engages with the question of how mobility affected sixteenth-century handwritten newsletters by examining three topics: the “infrastructure of circulation” for these newsletters, their “translation,” and the “technologies of [their] production” (p. 135). By examining newsletters housed at the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Archivio Mediceo del Principato and Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Molino was able to analyse the quality of handwriting to determine some “were copied in haste” and compare copies of newsletters to determine if alterations were made and to what extent (p. 145). Molino puts forward potential explanations to account for these variations, which include copying errors and deliberate decisions on the part of newswriters to alter or omit content. Bilić takes an engaging look at

how and why the *lazzaretto* transitioned from “a plague hospital” to “managing the movement of people and goods” (p. 157) with the flow of goods being prioritized. Bilić delves into the development of the Dubrovnik and Split *lazzarettos* to conclude they were “shaped” to accommodate Ottoman traffic and by “the need to maintain order, security, and peace along a volatile border” (p. 177).

The third theme focuses on “how long-distance networks were activated in the context of early modern religious mobility” by examining three topics: the circulation of *agni dei*, the mobilities of Franciscan friars, and charting and analysing the mobilities of alms collectors with a focus on the travels of a Catholic Armenian one by the name of Father Andreas Ouzounean (p. 28). On this point of circulation, Paul Nelles probes into the uses of whole and fragmented *agni dei* in the sixteenth century as he seeks to showcase the importance of mobility in the study of this object. Nelles identifies various uses of *agni dei*, including “as markers of contact and conversion” (p. 28), but he particularly notes how these wax objects “furnished tangible links to Rome” (p. 187). Although research exists on what *agni dei* potentially symbolised in local and regional contexts, including in early modern England (Muller, 2008), Nelles is more interested in charting the global mobility of these objects. Felicita Tramontana explores how “overlapping networks” that were not primarily meant to transport people and “the existence of a continuum between short- and long-distance movement” (p. 232) shaped and assisted the movement of Franciscan friars and their possessions from Europe to the Holy Land and back during the seventeenth century. Tramontana identifies the ports used by these friars, particularly Livorno, and the travel dynamics that were influenced by natural and human factors and ship availability, which meant “journeys had to be constantly negotiated and decisions continuously modified” (p. 224). The last chapter focuses on the mobility of Father Andreas Ouzounean, as Sebouh David Aslanian traces the wide extent of this alms collector’s movements in Europe and Asia by examining documents from archives of the Bzommar Congregation and the Antonine Archives. Although Aslanian examines the use of infrastructure for movement, he homes in on the importance of paperwork, such as certificates and letters, which he stresses “facilitate[d] both their [the alms collectors] fund-raising and their movement” (p. 253).

Connected Mobilities in the Early Modern World contributes to the growing body of literature in this field, as it explores the nuances of mobility for a variety of different social groups including rural, students, merchants and religious figures. Some of the authors in this text greatly contribute to the existing research on their topics through the sources they have uncovered, particularly Verhoeven whose content analysis of over 150 travel journals has

allowed him to present statistical data on the shifting nature of traveller experiences and mode of travel on the Grand Tour over time. His examination of letters has allowed him to engage with the questions on communication that he posed near the beginning of the chapter. The number of letters he has collected can potentially lend themselves to additional studies to further flesh out the communication aspect of the Grand Tour and how “letters and gifts created an emotional community” (p. 79). In addition, some of the authors identify potential pathways for further research. Such is the case with the questions Gallagher put forward at the end of his chapter and by Schmitz, who identified the need for further inquiry into the connections between gender and health-related mobility in rural Spain and Europe in general. Although the nature of the topics in this book and the identified pathways for future research are valuable for academics and students of early modern history, the language of the text makes it accessible for a general audience. This collection of essays makes a great contribution to current and future scholarship, and it is expected that future inquiry into this field of study will continue this trajectory as it uncovers new and underutilised sources and new ways of understanding and conceptualising early modern mobilities.

Dr Brian de Ruiter has been an adjunct professor at Brock University since 2008, teaching in the Centre for Digital Humanities, Department of History, the Centre of Intercultural Studies, the Centre for Canadian Studies and the Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies. In 2018 he was awarded the Clarke Thomson Award for Excellence in Sessional Teaching for this work. He received his PhD in 2014 from Swansea University focusing on North American Indigenous Cinema.

Works Cited

- MacDonald, M. (1981) *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety, and Healing in Seventeenth-Century England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Muller, A. (2008) “The *Agnus Dei*, Catholic Devotion, and Confessional Politics in Early Modern England”, *British Catholic History*, 34(1), pp. 1–28.