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Editorial Introduction

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Maarten Prak's *Citizens without Nations* is a book with a long history, in more than one sense of the word. For one, it covers a very substantial period of time: the aim of the author is to analyze the premodern tradition of urban citizenship that preceded modern national citizenship. *Citizens without Nations* discusses the dimensions and varieties of urban citizenship as it existed in Europe and elsewhere between the eleventh and eighteenth centuries. In a narrative that is rich in detail the book not only demonstrates the geographical and temporal varieties of citizenship, but also discusses the effects of these variations: Prak argues that inclusive urban citizenship through easily accessible civic institutions, if effectively connected to state power, promoted economic prosperity. The book also has a long history in that the ideas and arguments that are at its core have developed over many years. As the author explains in his foreword, the foundation was laid at the very beginning of his career as a social historian: with his PhD thesis on the eighteenth-century Leiden elite. In the decades that followed, he published on various aspects of citizenship. They include political culture and urban identity, but most of Prak's work examines the concrete practices that formed the nuclei of citizenship: political institutions such as local councils, but also guilds, militia and poor relief organizations.

Citizens without Nations argues, firstly, that these institutions allowed urban citizens to participate in public life and gave them agency. The importance of practices rather than formal status lies at the core of a second assertion: that citizenship in the non-western world was not fundamentally different from patterns found in Europe. The short concluding chapter presents two other arguments: first, that the dissolution of local civic institutions after the French Revolution implied a decline rather than an increase of agency and public participation,

and second, that premodern local citizenship can serve as a source of inspiration today, not as an alternative but as a complement to national citizenship. *TSEG - Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* has invited four experts to express their views on *Citizens without Nations*, each based on their own field of expertise: Phil Withington (University of Sheffield), Tamar Herzog (Harvard University), Christine Moll-Murata (Ruhr Universität Bochum) and Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch (Université Paris Didérot). Together, the four contributions cover the main themes discussed in the book: premodern versus modern citizenship, local versus national citizenship and western versus non-western citizenship.

Phil Withington raises a number of issues related to the first two themes. Withington's expertise lies on the crossroads of social, political and cultural history and includes urbanism, social practices and citizenship in early modern England. He positions Prak's treatment of citizenship between Weber and his traditional corporatism on the one hand, and Habermas's concept of the 'public sphere' as it emerged in the eighteenth century on the other. Withington also points out the downsides of the collectivist and particularist institutions of premodern local citizenship, and questions whether present-day society, with its culture based on individualism and universalism, can actually make use of experiences from a very different past. Premodern versus modern citizenship and local versus national citizenship are also at the core of Tamar Herzog's contribution. Herzog has published on Spain, Portugal and their American colonies; much of her work deals with the everyday functioning of colonial institutions. In her review article of Maarten Prak's book, however, she primarily discusses Spain, which, she argues, clearly demonstrates the important role of local citizenship in the early modern period; a citizenship that was founded in practice and behavior rather than in formal status. On these points she agrees with Prak, but on another she differs: in Spain local and national citizenship were not opposed, nor was the increase of state power in the nineteenth century marked by any fundamental change in the nature of citizenship.

The other two reviews concentrate on the third theme: western versus non-western citizenship. Christine Moll-Murata discusses the evidence for forms of citizenship in China. Moll-Murata has written extensively about guilds and labour in East Asia and particularly about the relationship between guilds and the state in Qing China. Her latest book on this topic, *State and Craft in the Qing Dynasty* (Amsterdam 2018) appeared almost simultaneously with Prak's monograph. While

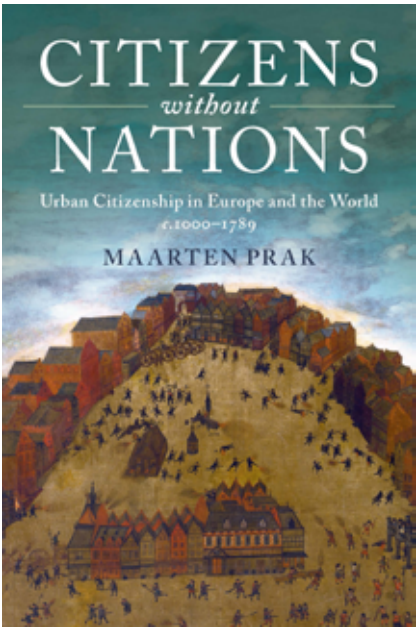

Illustration 1 Bookcover Citizens without Nations (source: Cambridge University Press)

Moll-Murata values his comparative approach, she also points out that the comparison is skewed because of the greater attention paid to Europe. In her view, differences between Europe and China were even less prominent than Prak already demonstrates. A similar conclusion is drawn for sub-Saharan Africa by Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, author of monographs on, amongst others, African urban history and women in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Africa. She fully agrees with Maarten Prak that citizenship was not an exclusively European phenomenon, but regrets the fact that he did not include Africa in his comparison. She argues that pre-modern African urban communities developed mechanisms for participation from below that transcended clan structures and supported local autonomy; in other words, that Africans were no less citizens than the inhabitants of European, Asian or American towns.

In his reaction, Maarten Prak focuses on one substantive point in each of the contributions; points that allow him to clarify his views on the core issues in his book. The merits of local citizenship, then and now, are revisited, as are similarities and differences between citizenship in Europe and elsewhere, and the transition from premodern to modern citizenship. Prak does in fact more than just clarify the views expressed in his book; on some aspects he also refines them. He concludes by expressing the hope that his book will encourage others to investigate aspects of citizenship as yet not sufficiently researched. The editorial board of *TSEG,* in turn, hopes that the discussion on the following pages will contribute to achieving that goal.

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