BORDERS, BARRIERS, AND ETHNOGENESIS

Frontiers in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages

Edited by

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BREPOLS

What is at issue is the utility of concepts derived from frontier studies for the understanding of the early Middle Ages. In the absence of physically apparent frontiers we cannot reasonably describe Visigothic Spain as a frontier society. In the Gothic period, we have a mingling of populations, outsiders and insiders, hostile and friendly, in a polarized atmosphere of perceived ethnic difference. Their interaction produced a new society, different from anything that had gone before, and different from anything outside the zone of their interaction: no one would deny that the cultural synthesis of seventh-century Spain was a unique achievement. And yet all this took place without the benefit of a frontier zone. That is to say, the social change and cultural genesis regularly associated with the frontier experience cannot be explained by the existence of a frontier. The reason for this, I would suggest, is that the political conditions for the creation of a frontier zone were entirely absent. Without some sort of political force to impose a correlation between culture, ethnicity, and geographical limits, frontiers cannot exist in any meaningful sense. In the whole of the early Middle Ages, only the Arab and the Carolingian conquests provided this sort of stable context.[25] Elsewhere, we should try to understand early medieval history, its social change and cultural genesis, in terms of frontier studies only where they can be shown to have explanatory utility — which is to say where we have a clear idea of what we mean when we use the word frontier and a clearer sense of why, in any given case, the frontier is a useful way of trying to explain the medieval past.[26]

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[25] For the Arab-Christian frontier in Spain, studies are legion: Eduardo Manzano Moreno, *La frontera de Al-Andalus en época de los Omeyas* (Madrid, 1991); *La Marche supérieure de l'Al-Andalus et l'Occident chrétien*, ed. by Philippe Sénac (Madrid, 1991); Eduardo Manzano Moreno, 'Christian-Muslim Frontier in Al-Andalus: Idea and Reality', in *The Arab Influence in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Dionysius A. Agius and Richard Hitchcock (Reading, 1994), pp. 83–99; Philippe Sénac, 'La frontière d'Al-Andalus au haut Moyen Age', *Le Moyen Age*, 100 (1994), 249–554.

[26] An early version of this paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Medieval Academy of America held in Austin, Texas in April 2000. The present version is slightly expanded from a paper delivered at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association held in San Francisco in January 2002. I should like to thank the organizer of that session (and editor of the present volume) for his invitation to participate and the session commentator, Professor Walter Goffart, for his helpful criticism.

Frontiers and Ethnic Identities: Some Final Considerations

WALTER POHL

When Notker of St Gall was a boy, the old man Adalbert told him stories of Charlemagne's wars in which he had once fought. Much later, in the year 884, the monk Notker used these legendary narratives in the second book of his *Gesta Karoli*. The Avar campaigns (791–96) are thus described on the basis of oral lore that spans almost a century. The Avar barriers that the Frankish army had encountered had especially impressed Adalbert. Notker described them as nine rings of fortification, for which he used the German word *hegin*. Each of these (probably concentric) circles contained a space as wide as the distance between Zürich and Constance (about 50 km), and was 20 ft high and as wide, constructed from the trunks of oaks, beeches, and spruce, filled with clay and stones with trees planted on top.[1] This is one of the most detailed descriptions of a defensive construction transmitted from the early Middle Ages. Its form is not at all unlikely, although its dimensions are.

Notker's fantastic description combines two phenomena attested by contemporary reports from Charlemagne's Avar campaigns. On the one hand, in 791 the Frankish army encountered defences (*firmitates, munitiones, machinationes*) on both sides of the Danube at the Kamp River and on the slopes of the Vienna woods, at quite some distance from the frontier, which the Avars abandoned as the enemy approached.[2]

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[1] Notker, *Gesta Karoli* 2.1, ed. by R. Rau (Darmstadt, 1960), p. 376. For the Avar rings, see Walter Pohl, *Die Awaren: Ein Steppenvolk in Europa, 567–822 n. Chr.*, 2nd edn (Munich, 2002), p. 307 (an English translation is in preparation for publication with Cornell University Press). I would like to thank Helmut Reimitz for comments and Kirsten de Vries for correcting my English.

[2] *Royal Frankish Annals* a. 791, ed. by F. Kurze (Hannover, 1895), MGH SS rer. Germ. 6:88; *Annals of Metz* a. 791, ed. by B. de Simson (Hannover, 1905; repr., Stuttgart, 1979), MGH SS rer. Germ. 10:79; Pohl, *Die Awaren*, p. 316.

On the other hand, contemporaries called the Avar residence 'ring' without mentioning any defensive constructions or any attempt to defend it in 795, when a small Frankish force plundered it, or in 796, when Pippin's army occupied it.[3] It is possible that it was surrounded by a demarcation similar to, though not as durable as, the dike around Pliska (see Paolo Squatriti's contribution in this volume), which may have delineated the zone of the qagan's residence, called *ordu* in central Asian sources. The Arab traveller Tamim ibn Bahr, for instance, has described the circular shape of the residence of the Uyghur qagan in the 830s, with an outer ring formed by subordinate troops at a distance of four days' marches from the centre.[4]

The late Carolingian idea of a huge wall that surrounded the country of the Avars (that Frankish authors identified with the Huns) stuck. Characteristically, views could become rather blurred as to whether the Avars had built the barriers to defend themselves or whether Charlemagne had built them to protect the Christian countries from the Avars. Some time later, after the Hungarian raids, the wall acquired an apocalyptic significance and provided a model to explain where this new people had come from. In the 960s, the Saxon historiographer Widukind explained that the Avars (whom he traditionally calls Huns) had not been destroyed by Charlemagne, but just 'pushed across the Danube and locked inside a huge wall, so that they were prevented from the usual raids against other peoples'.[5] Only King Arnulf at the end of the ninth century had carelessly destroyed that wall in his wars against the Moravians, and the Avars-Hungarians could resume their raids. At about the same time Liudprand of Cremona told a similar story about the Hungarians being separated from the Carolingian Empire by barriers (*clusae*).[6] This is in fact an apocalyptic motif based on the Bible. In the book of Revelations (20. 2–8), an angel binds Satan for one thousand years, at the end of which he breaks loose and collects the hordes of Gog and Magog to attack the holy city. In the early Middle Ages, many believed that Alexander the Great had shut the apocalyptic steppe peoples Gog and Magog behind the Caucasus, but that they would eventually break loose. It is an idea that also became current in medieval Hungarian historiography, for instance in the thirteenth-

century *Gesta Hungarorum*.[7] There was in fact an actual wall in the Carpathian basin that could inspire such ideas: up to this day, there are ancient dikes, or earthen ramparts, east of the Danube and along the Tisza River, stretching for many miles. These walls have variously been dated between the fourth and the eleventh centuries AD, and attributed to Romans, Sarmatians, Avars, Bulgars, Moravians, or Hungarians.[8]

The example of the 'Avar walls' is a good starting point for raising one more time some of the central questions of this volume.[9] First, there were visible walls or dikes in the landscape that might stretch for dozens of miles. Second, these were often attributed to prestigious rulers of the past, as in the case of the Dobrudjan dikes that were supposed to have been built by Khan Asparuch.[10] But attributions could change over time, up to the point that Avar defences were reinterpreted as walls built by Charlemagne to keep them at bay. Such retrospective explanations need not always be true, and in reality, systems of dikes may have grown over many centuries, and some of them may go back to prehistoric times. Third, not least because there was a lasting reputation to be won, some rulers actually seem to have sought the prestige that erecting such an imposing structure could confer, even if their military use was at least doubtful (which is the well-argued explanation Paolo Squatriti offers for the dikes in Dobrudja). Fourth, such structures did not necessarily run along actual political borders, but they must have derived some of their impact from representing a symbolic boundary, the significance of which can hardly be deciphered. Some may have marked off an inner sphere of power or a hierarchic order of space, as in Notker's example.

That much at least has become clear by now: barriers do not necessarily mark, or help to defend, boundaries between powers. Still, we know that some borders might become highly charged with symbolical meanings. Thus the frontier between Franks and (Avar or Magyar) 'Huns' was not only a dividing line between Christians and pagans, but could come to be regarded as the border between good and evil, salvation and apocalypse altogether. Such frontiers, as in the examples cited above, tended to be pictured in terms of walls or other visible structures that might prevent

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[3] *Royal Frankish Annals* a. 796, MGH SS rer. Germ. 6:98; Pohl, *Die Awaren*, p. 306.

[4] V. Minorsky, 'Tamim Ibn Bahr's Journey to the Uyghurs', *Papers of the British School for Oriental and Asian Studies*, 12 (1948), 275–305. For further examples, see Svetlana A. Pletneva, *Die Chasaren* (Leipzig, 1979), pp. 47 and 79.

[5] Widukind, *Res Gestae Saxonicae* 1.19, ed. by A. Bauer and R. Rau (Darmstadt, 1997), p. 46: 'Victi autem a Magno Karolo et trans Danubium pulsi ac ingenti vallo circumclusi, prohibiti sunt a consueta gentium depopulatione.'

[6] Liudprand, *Antapodosis* 1.5, ed. by A. Bauer and R. Rau (Darmstadt, 1997), p. 254: 'Ungariorum gens [. . .] nobis omnibus tunc temporis [i.e., of the Byzantine emperor Leo VI (886–912), and of King Arnulf (887–99)] habebatur ignota. Quibusdam namque difficillimis separata a nobis erat interpositionibus, quas clusas nominat vulgus, ut neque a meridianam neque ad occidentalem plagam exeundi habuerit facultatem.'

[7] *Gesta Hungarorum* 1, ed. by Gabriel Silagi, *Die Gesta Hungarorum des anonymen Notars: Die älteste Darstellung der ungarischen Geschichte* (Sigmaringen, 1991), p. 32: 'Ab orientali vero parte vicina Scithie fuerunt gentes "Gog et Magog", quos inclusit Magnus Alexander.'

[8] A recent but not very convincing hypothesis: Martin Eggers, *Das 'Großmährische Reich': Realität oder Fiktion? Eine Neuinterpretation der Quellen zur Geschichte des mittleren Donauraumes* (Stuttgart, 1995).

[9] See also two recent collections of studies on this topic, *Grenze und Differenz im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. by W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (Vienna, 2000); and *The Transformation of Frontiers: From Late Antiquity to the Carolingians*, ed. by W. Pohl, I. Wood, and H. Reimitz (Leiden, 2001).

[10] In the eleventh-century *Vision of Isaiah*; see Paolo Squatriti, 'Moving Earth and Making Difference: Dikes and Frontiers in Early Medieval Bulgaria' (in this volume).

enemies from crossing them even by their sheer presence or their magic quality. Perhaps we should not discuss the strategic and symbolic significance of dikes and barriers as alternatives. Symbolic certainly did not mean ineffective in the early medieval world. Even very well-fortified cities needed supernatural protection to withstand attacks, for instance Constantinople, which was protected by the Virgin Mary against the Avar siege of 626, or Thessalonica, which many believed owed its invulnerability in many attacks to St Demetrius.[11]

The many impressive walls of defence, dikes, earthworks, and other defensive constructions have not been taken into account sufficiently in most recent debates about early medieval frontiers. They usually defy precise dating, but many can roughly be dated back to Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. The Danevirke was erected near Schleswig in at least three successive stages between the ninth and the eleventh centuries.[12] Paolo Squatriti and Rasho Rashev discuss some striking examples from Bulgaria. Barbarians must have constructed many of these dikes. In most cases, these walls cannot easily be identified with any stable political frontiers (for instance those in Hungary or in Dobrudja). It is up to debate whether or not they resulted from specific military situations that prompted an intense defensive effort, or set out to create symbolic obstacles for enemies.

Two of the rare examples where defensive walls can be traced in written sources seem to provide contradictory evidence in this respect. One is the long wall constructed by the Tervingi led by Athanaric when an attack from the Huns was imminent in *c.* AD 375: 'This new situation and the fear that there was worse to follow constrained him to erect a high rampart extending from the Gerasus (Siret) to the Danube and skirting the territory of the Taifali. He believed that this hastily but carefully constructed barrier would ensure his security.' But in spite of this ambitious construction, most of the Goths decided to abandon him for the security the Roman Empire could offer.[13] Another famous example is 'Offa's Dyke', an earthen construction stretching for over 100 km, roughly along the modern Welsh borderline. According to Asser's late ninth-century *Life of King Alfred*, it had been constructed by King Offa of Mercia (757–96) against the Welsh kingdom of

Powys.[14] Apart from the remains of impressive earthwork, little has been left there to prove that it was ever manned, or acquired any defensive significance. Remarkably, the sources talk about raids by the Mercians in the period of its construction, more than about the threat from Powys, which the Mercians overran in 822. The attribution to Offa might very well be a retrospective explanation. But if we believe it, the wall was part of an affirmative strategy by an expansive power rather than a defensive measure in the face of an aggressive, stronger neighbour. It demonstrated the power of the Mercians, marked off a zone of expansion, and 'it created a border' that served as legal boundary in later English law.[15] Both defensive constructions, different as their aims may have been, were built systematically in a planned effort which was attributed to the decision of an important ruler.

Offa's Dyke is often compared to Hadrian's Wall, and perhaps Offa wanted to imitate the imperial grandeur of the Roman defences in northern England. The Roman *limes*, in spite of all its fortifications, was not just a line of defence, but had symbolic functions as well as that of control of movements on both sides and maintenance of communication along the frontier; it also created a highly romanized frontier zone that attracted barbarians and facilitated economic exchange and cultural transfer.[16] Florin Curta has summarized the recent discussion in his introduction to this volume. It is a matter of debate in what ways the Franks of the ninth and tenth centuries modelled the organization of the Elbe frontier after the example of the Roman *limes*, as Matthias Hardt shows — the *limes* ideology was available, but were there comparable forms of defensive architecture and frontier organization?[17] Joachim Henning impressively demonstrates in his contribution how similar the forts on both sides of the border looked. Recent scholarship has also deflated the old idea of the Carolingian and Ottonian march as a definite and stable form of defensive organization along the eastern frontier of the Frankish realm.[18]

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[11] Pohl, *Die Awaren*, p. 252; Paul Lemerle, *Les plus anciens recueils des Miracles de Saint Démétrius et la pénétration des Slaves dans les Balkans*, 2 vols (Paris, 1979–81).

[12] H. H. Andersen, 'Danewerk', in *Reallexikon der germanische Altertumskunde*, ed. by Heinrich Beck, Dieter Geuenich, and Heiko Steuer, vol. VI (Berlin, 1984), pp. 236–43, and 'Danevirke – nye perspektiver: Das Danewerk – neue Perspektiven', in *Wall und Graben: Befestigungen von der Steinzeit bis ins Mittelalter in Schleswig und Holstein*, ed. by V. Arnold, J. Kühl, and A. Thygesen (Rendsburg, 1995), pp. 43–46; D. Unverhau, *Das Danewerk 1842: Beschreibung und Aufmaß* (Neumünster, 1988).

[13] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae* 31.3, English trans. by W. Hamilton (Harmondsworth, 1986), p. 415. See also Herwig Wolfram, *Die Goten*, 4th edn (Munich, 2000), p. 80; Radu Vulpe, *Le vallum de la Moldavie inférieure et le 'mur' d'Athanaric* (The Hague, 1957), who associated Athanaric's wall to the remains of earthworks between Ploscuțeni and Stoicani.

[14] Asser, *Life of Alfred* 14, trans. by Simon Keynes, in *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (London, 1983), p. 71. See also W. Davis, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1982), pp. 109–10; C. Fox, *Offa's Dyke: A Field Survey of the Western Frontier Works of Mercia in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries AD* (London, 1955); D. Hill, 'Offa's and Wat's Dykes – Some Exploratory Work on the Frontier between Celts and Saxons', in *Anglo-Saxon Settlement and Landscape*, ed. by T. Rowley (Oxford, 1974), pp. 102–07.

[15] Davis, *Wales in the Early Middle Ages*, p. 110. See also C. A. Snyder, *The Britons* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 178–79.

[16] C. R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study* (Baltimore, 1994).

[17] See also Hansjürgen Brachmann, 'Der Limes Sorabicus: Geschichte und Wirkung', *Zeitschrift für Archäologie*, 25 (1991), 177–207.

[18] Matthias Hardt and Hans K. Schulze, 'Altmark und Wendland als deutsch-slawische Kontaktzone', in *Wendland und Altmark in historischer und sprachwissenschaftlicher Sicht*, ed. by R. Schmidt (Lüneburg, 1992), pp. 1–44; Karl Brunner, *Herzogtümer und Marken: Vom*

Normally, late Romans, Byzantines, and most post-Roman kingdoms in Western Europe did not seek to protect their frontiers by 'long walls', but relied on forts, walled cities, and on fortifications that guarded access roads or mountain passes.[19] The *kleisurai* mentioned by Ralph-Johannes Lilie are a case in point. Another one are the *clusae* at the end of the Alpine pass roads in Northern Italy, for instance in the Val di Susa east of Torino, in the Adige Valley north of Verona, or the *claustra Alpium Iuliarum* to the east.[20] The Italian *clusae* fell into partial disuse after the Gothic war. But in the middle of the eighth century, the Lombard kings Ratchis and Aistulf, under the threat of Frankish attacks in conjunction with papal Rome, used them to establish a sophisticated system for the control of travellers, using sealed letters and a royal visa that had to be shown on the way back.[21] Pragmatic and ideological uses of frontiers clearly differ in this example. What mattered in practice was the control of movements throughout the kingdom, and the *clusae* were ideal for that purpose (although most of them were quite a way inside the kingdom). In the frontier zone adjacent to the duchy of Rome, travellers had to be controlled along the main roads, and border posts were not even envisaged in the laws issued by Ratchis and Aistulf. The *clusae* were also used to bar the way for invading Frankish armies, but could too easily be avoided. 'Single significant localities', for instance the Suleyman Köy pillar, also mattered along the Bulgar-Byzantine border, as Paolo Squatriti argues in this volume. In antiquity, large and intermediate spaces were perceived by single landmarks, and by routes that linked them (as shown, for instance, on the *Tabula Peutingeriana*).[22] This does not mean that conceptions of space were undifferentiated, and sufficed to maintain Roman rule in a vast Empire for half a millennium. But it is a cognitive mode that is very different from our perception of geographical space by maps drawn to scale.

Ungarnsturm bis ins 12. Jahrhundert (Vienna, 1994); Herwig Wolfram, 'The Creation of the Carolingian Frontier System c. 800', in *Transformation of Frontiers*, ed. by Pohl, Wood, and Reimitz, pp. 233–46; Gerd Althoff, 'Saxony and the Elbe Slavs in the Tenth Century', in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, ed. by T. Reuter, vol. III (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 267–92.

[19] A basic study is C. Foss and D. Winfield, *Byzantine Fortifications: An Introduction* (Pretoria, 1986).

[20] S. Gasparri, 'La frontiera in Italia (sec. VI–VIII): Osservazioni su un tema controverso', in *Città, castelli, campagne nei territori di frontiera (sec. VI–VII)*, ed. by G. P. Brogiolo (Mantova, 1995), pp. 9–19; E. Mollo, 'Le chiuse: realtà e rappresentazioni mentali del confine alpino nel medioevo', *Bollettino storico bibliografico subalpino*, 84 (1986), 333–90; Jaroslav Šašel, 'L'organizzazione del confine orientale d'Italia nell'Alto Medioevo', in his *Opera selecta*, ed. by R. Bratož and M. Šašel Kos (Ljubljana, 1992), pp. 813–29; Peter Štih, 'Die Ostgrenze Italiens im Frühmittelalter', in *Grenze und Differenz*, ed. by Pohl and Reimitz, pp. 19–38.

[21] Walter Pohl, 'Frontiers in Lombard Italy: The Laws of Ratchis and Aistulf', in *Transformation of Frontiers*, ed. by Pohl, Wood, and Reimitz, pp. 117–42.

[22] K. Brodersen, *Terra Cognita: Studien zur römischen Raumerfassung* (Hildesheim, 1995).

Concepts of linear frontiers played little part in post-Roman political reality.[23] When territories changed their ruler, the sources as a rule do not talk about the new frontiers but about the fortresses, *civitates*, or provinces concerned. Again, eighth-century Italy is a good example, where the popes started a campaign for the recuperation of territories that had once belonged to the Byzantine exarchate but had fallen under Lombard rule. The papal agenda always consisted of lists of forts and cities, sometimes explicitly specifying that their respective territories were included.[24] Interestingly, the modern German word for 'border', *Grenze*, is a Slavic loan-word that came to be used in the later Middle Ages, parallel to the diffusion of the concept of a linear frontier.[25] All this has often been taken as proof of the incapacity to use the abstract concept of a delineated territorial realm in the early Middle Ages.[26] Were those who built the dikes in Dobrudja, Schleswig, the Carpathian basin, or the foothills of Wales better equipped to comprehend the idea of the territorial state than the heirs of Roman cities and provinces? Rather, the attitudes towards frontiers in the early medieval West indicate a sophisticated concept of political space, a differentiated landscape of power. A kingdom was not simply a definite stretch of territory in the way in which modern nations are shown in uniform colours. It was perceived as a complex structure, a network of centres of power and lines of communication. Notionally, it was defined by its frontiers — *fines*, the plural of 'frontiers', was the most common word for 'territory'. There is clear evidence for a territorial notion of the *regnum* and the *patria* in the early Middle Ages.[27] But in practice, it was regarded as a complex political landscape.

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[23] This may have been a little different in Byzantium. The term *horos* in Byzantine Greek carried a linear connotation. See Paul Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier: A Political Study of the Northern Balkans, 900–1204* (Cambridge, 2000).

[24] Pohl, 'Frontiers'.

[25] H.-W. Nickels, 'Von der "Grenitze" zur Grenze: Die Grenzidee des lateinischen Mittelalters (6.–15. Jhdt.)', *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte*, 128 (1992), 1–29; see also R. Schneider, 'Lineare Grenzen: Vom frühen bis zum späten Mittelalter', in *Grenzen und Grenzregionen. Frontières et régions frontalières. Borders and Border Regions*, ed. by W. Haubrichs and R. Schneider (Saarbrücken, 1994), pp. 51–68.

[26] For a critical discussion, see H. W. Goetz, 'Concepts of Realm and Frontiers from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages: Some Preliminary Remarks', in *Transformation of Frontiers*, ed. by Pohl, Wood, and Reimitz, pp. 73–82. See also *Regna et Gentes: The Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World*, ed. by H. W. Goetz, J. Jarnut, and W. Pohl (Leiden, 2003).

[27] See, for instance, Paul the Deacon, *History of the Lombards* 1.24, 2.4, 3.6, 4.46, 5.34, and 5.36, ed. K.-L. Bethmann and G. Waitz (Hannover, 1878), pp. 61–62, 74, 95, 135, and 156. See Walter Pohl, 'Staat und Herrschaft im Frühmittelalter: Überlegungen zum Forschungsstand', in *Staat im frühen Mittelalter*, ed. by S. Airlie, W. Pohl, and H. Reimitz (Vienna, forthcoming).

Frontiers acquired, as we have seen, many ideological and symbolic meanings, and tended to become boundaries of significance.[28] From Antiquity to the Middle Ages, one boundary ran across Europe and the Middle East that was especially charged with meaning. In Antiquity, it was the Roman frontier, regarded and stylized as the boundary between civilization and the barbarians, between the *populus Romanus* and the *gentes*, the barbarian nations. Late Antiquity transformed this notion, and as the Roman order dissolved in many parts of Europe and new kingdoms established their power, the boundary that counted became that of Christendom: between the *populus Christianus* and the *gentes*, the pagans.[29] It is no coincidence that most of the contributions in this volume deal with this boundary that was so deeply rooted in the hearts and minds of contemporaries. It was a dividing line that was intended to include all who belonged to a divinely sanctioned order with a sense of mission and superiority and to exclude barbarians and pagans who were regarded as barely human in their ignorance of all that represented a higher form of humanity. But even on the ideological plane, this distinction was sometimes criticized by contemporaries (such as Salvian of Marseille in the fifth century) as too conveniently masking the moral insufficiency of Christians and Romans.[30] The frontier was also bridged by ethnographic curiosity and the wish to establish some conceptual order in a potentially threatening world beyond civilization. And it was permeable to political alliances and military needs, to trade and migration. What Roman authors tended to picture as 'the Other', contrary in almost all respects to the Roman order, was linked in many ways to the late antique world. Perhaps the most important link between the Empire and its barbarian periphery was the growing need for barbarian soldiers in the Roman army.

In these respects, the Romans 'created' their barbarians, as Florin Curta argues in his contribution to this volume.[31] This is not to say that barbarians had no way in which to establish communities, develop ethnic identities, or even form wide empires (as Huns or Avars did). But such processes of identity formation happened in the shadow of Rome. They were in many ways, and to a different extent, entangled with the deliberate aims and the less obvious needs and dynamics of the Roman system. Roman diplomacy polarized barbarian societies by looking for dependable allies and treating others as enemies, establishing kings and stamping out potentially

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[28] Helmut Reimitz, 'Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen im karolingischen Mitteleuropa', in *Grenzen und Grenzregionen*, ed. by Haubrichs and Schneider, pp. 105–66.

[29] See Ian N. Wood, 'Missionaries and the Christian Frontier', in *Transformation of Frontiers*, ed. by Pohl, Wood, and Reimitz, pp. 209–18.

[30] See Michael Maas, 'Ethnicity, Orthodoxy, and Community in Salvian of Marseilles', in *Fifth-Century Gaul: A Crisis of Identity?*, ed. by J. Drinkwater and H. Elton (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 275–84.

[31] See also Hugh Elton, 'Defining Romans, Barbarians and the Roman Frontier', in *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity*, ed. R. W. Mathisen and H. S. Sivan (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 126–35.

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dangerous power centres. For many generations, the Empire's demand for military manpower attracted the most ambitious and active elements from barbarian societies, enhanced the prestige of successful warriors, and thus gradually militarized the barbarian frontier societies. It treated barbarians according to ethnic definitions and privileged stable communities. Even those who opposed and attacked the power of Rome needed to rally more firmly around their common purpose and sense of identity. These are the processes that Florin Curta detects in the cases of the fourth-century Tervingi and the sixth-century *Sklavenoi* alike. Only the results differed, once Goths and Slavs had settled in Roman provinces. The Goths generally sought integration in the late Roman infrastructure and the privileges that the Roman tax system could offer to soldiers who were supposed to uphold the imperial order; eventually, they became masters of Roman provinces. Gothic identities in Spain — Michael Kulikowski's example in this volume — and elsewhere were created and transformed in this process and soon involved Roman and other inhabitants of the provinces where Goths now ruled. The notion of a distinctive Gothic identity had been sharpened in the course of their conflicts with the Empire, both by Roman observers and, presumably, by Goths themselves. This symbolic capital allowed Gothic diversity to become the focus of a system of military rule in which in reality ethnic boundaries became quite blurred.[32] The notional divide that had once separated Romans and barbarians crumbled, and almost vanished once the Third Council of Toledo had re-established confessional unity in the Visigothic kingdom in 589.

The Slavs obviously did not strive to, or at least did not manage to, take over the Byzantine infrastructure; even if they came as warriors, they settled as peasants, and the tax system, together with the cities and hierarchies that depended on it, collapsed. It seems that in the absence of a close coexistence with the late Roman order, Slavic political structures and ethnic identities were generally slower to evolve. For centuries, Latin and Greek authors designated these barbarians quite generally as Slavs (or, using the Germanic heteronym, Wends), and only rarely used more specific ethnic names. The Slavs north of the lower Danube in the sixth century were not perceived as having any particular ethnic identity, just as Samo's *Sclavi coinomenti Winedi* in the western fringes of the seventh-century Avar qaganate.[33] Their barbarian otherness was thus fixed by the ancient ideological boundary between civilization/Christianity and barbarians/paganism. Perhaps this was also the result of a temporary decline of the ability of the early Byzantine and the Merovingian world to organize and comprehend the barbarians beyond their borders in the way the Romans had done. When St Columbanus, in the early seventh century, intended to

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[32] Walter Pohl, 'Telling the Difference: Signs of Ethnic Identity', in *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800*, ed. by W. Pohl and H. Reimitz (Leiden, 1998), pp. 17–69. For the Goths, see Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths* (Berkeley, 1988).

[33] Samo: Fredegar, *Chronicon*, 4.48, ed. by B. Krusch (Hannover, 1888), MGH SSRM 2:144. See Pohl, *Die Awaren*, pp. 256–61.

travel to the Slavs to preach the gospel, an angel appeared in his dream with a map of the world and said: '"You see that this whole part of the world should remain desolate." [. . .] Thus he [i.e. Columbanus] realized that this people had not become ready for faith.'[34] Only gradually, closer centre-periphery relations resumed between Byzantium and the *Sklaviniai* in the seventh-century Balkans, between Bavarians and Carantanians in the later eighth century, between Franks and Moravians, Bohemians, and many other specific Slavic peoples in the ninth century.

Many of the boundaries discussed in this volume are imperial frontiers of some sort, deep zones of expansion or control whose inhabitants, however rebellious they might occasionally be, moved within the orbit of a supraregional power. Such asymmetrical relationships influenced both parties. Frederick J. Turner's much-discussed model, first presented in 1893, assumed that the European immigrants in the United States of America had only truly become Americans through the experience of the frontier and the appropriation of the wilderness beyond.[35] Perhaps the experience of the Roman *limes* or the Frankish and Saxon encounters with the Elbe Slavs had their effects on the late antique and early medieval mentalities of empire, too. But no doubt what lay behind these frontiers was not, as Turner had so neatly pictured the American West, a pristine wilderness waiting for civilization. Many contributions in this volume demonstrate that both sides of the border were not so different after all. Especially in the largely civil societies of late Rome and early Byzantium, the frontiers provided opportunities for ambitious warlords of Roman or barbarian origin to accumulate military potential and create expandable positions of power. Military manpower was cheap in the swamps and woodlands east of the Rhine or north of the Danube where the benefits of Roman civilization had only trickled down insufficiently (as the archaeological evidence presented in this volume by Sebastian Brather and Eugen Teodor seems to indicate). And the forces accumulated to prevent barbarian invasions provided an unrivalled potential to negotiate or grab power in the heartland of the Empire. Ambitious barbarian warlords could also pursue their own agenda in this environment. Whether the Slavic raiders on the Danube in the sixth century or on the Elbe in the tenth, whether Hospitallers or Karamanids in Cilicia in the thirteenth, they all exploited the open spaces that frontier zones offered. On a smaller scale, the late antique *scamarae* or the *akritai*, the

[34] Ionas, *Vita Columbani* 1.28, ed. B. Krusch (Hannover, 1902), MGH SSRM 4:1–294, p. 104: 'Cernis quod maneat totus orbis desertus [. . .] Intellexit ergo ille, non esse gentis illius in promptu fidei profectus.' This was clearly an excuse for Columbanus not embarking on any ambitious missionary project. For the interpretation of the passage, see I. N. Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelisation of Europe, 400–1050* (Harlow, 2001), p. 34.

[35] Frederick J. Turner, 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History', *Annual Report of the American Historical Association 1893*, pp. 199–207, and *The Frontier in American History* (New York, 1920). For the ensuing debate, see G. H. Nobles, *American Frontiers: Cultural Encounters and Continental Conquests* (Harmondsworth, 1997); *The American Frontier – Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. by M. E. Jones (San Diego, 1994).

'bordermen' between Byzantium and the Caliphate (see the contribution by Ralph-Johannes Lilie), lived their lawless lives out of reach of imperial administration. Of course, empires and kingdoms always strove to keep the forces they had unleashed, the aggressions they had provoked, and those who had fled their rule under control. Both in the landscape and in texts, they sought to delineate borders, create barriers, erect defences, and define friends and foes. The texts that have resulted from this continuous effort to draw lines may give us a misleading impression of clear boundaries and identities. Dikes, walls, barriers, and border stones may often have had a similar function that is, however, less accessible.

Thus, the perception of frontiers and the construction of identities were closely related. Territorial boundaries are only one specific case of social boundaries in which systems perpetuate themselves by a continuous process of inclusion and exclusion.[36] This volume provides manifold evidence for the new paradigm in the study of frontiers: boundaries do not 'naturally' exist between peoples and states, between social groups and religious confessions. They tend to fade out and become permeable. Thus, the effort of maintaining boundaries and investing them with ontological significance is an essential part of the construction of communities. This, however, does not mean that early medieval societies were open and fluid and frontiers and communities only 'imagined'. Violent conflict and chauvinism haunted Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages no less than the modern world. Borders and barriers did matter. But they are not an expression of clear, unproblematic categories and identities, but part of the effort to establish appropriate distinctions in a puzzling world.

[36] Walter Pohl, 'Soziale Grenzen und Spielräume der Macht', in *Grenze und Differenz*, ed. by Pohl and Reimitz, pp. 11–18.