

FRONTIERS IN QUESTION

Eurasian Borderlands, 700–1700

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INTRODUCTION

A. Frontiers: Terms, Concepts, and the Historians of Medieval and Early Modern Europe

Daniel Power

Anyone coming to the study of frontiers in history for the first time will be struck immediately by the diversity of the subject. Indeed, its geographical and chronological limits seem hardly less broad than those of History itself. Within a particular field of historical research, historians may have written about geographical, political, cultural, economic, linguistic, racial, or gender frontiers, to name only some of the more popular types.¹ The perceptive student may well ask three basic questions. Firstly, why do there appear to be so many different types of frontiers in historical writing? After all, at first glance a frontier appears to be a very mundane phenomenon. Secondly, how valid are comparisons between different frontiers, whether from the same or different periods of history? For much of the attraction to historians of the idea of 'frontiers' rests on the assumption that frontiers can be compared profitably with one another; yet some historians write of frontiers as political divisions between states, whereas to others a frontier is the margin of settled land in a wilderness, or is an entirely cultural division between peoples. Thirdly, how did people view frontiers and frontier societies in the past? Like all historical phenomena, contemporary and subsequent views of the frontier often diverge widely; but the ways in which people envisaged frontiers can tell us much about their concepts of identity and political control.

The nine essays in this book consider 'frontiers' that were separated widely in space and time, ranging from Western Europe to China and from the eighth to the eighteenth centuries. This introduction will place these essays in their historiographical context. The first half is a general examination of the terms and concepts associated with frontiers: it classifies the main sorts of frontiers that the student will encounter in historiography. The second half considers the themes that are common to the nine chosen frontiers in this book, and shows why this field is an important area of historical inquiry.

Classifying Frontiers

The diversity of frontiers in historiography requires some discussion. Although it is now widely accepted that each frontier is intrinsically unique and so defies simple categorisation, there have been various attempts to classify so-called 'frontiers'.² As early as 1907 Lord Curzon, no doubt reflecting on his experience as Viceroy of India, distinguished between 'frontiers of separation' and 'frontiers of contact', a contrast that geographers subsequently developed.³ More recently, German geographers have differentiated 'converging frontiers' (*Zusammenwachsgrenzen*) from 'frontiers of separation' (*Trennungsgrenzen*); while Eduardo Manzano Moreno's paper in this volume contrasts 'unstable', 'enclosing', and 'expanding' frontiers.⁴ Classification is impeded, however, by the fact that there are two quite distinct notions of what a 'frontier' comprises, corresponding more or less to a European and a North American frontier concept. The reader will be spared much confusion if this dichotomy is grasped at the outset, especially as many historians refer to 'frontiers' without defining the term – although some have carefully noted its different meanings on opposite sides of the Atlantic.⁵ These two categories shall be referred to here as *political frontiers* and *frontiers of settlement*.⁶

The British English term 'frontier' and its European cognates normally mean a political barrier between states or peoples, often militarised. The European frontier is sometimes envisaged as linear, sometimes as a zone; its political exigencies may provoke the tightening of political control in comparison with the hinterland, or conversely, it may sometimes be necessary to appease the inhabitants to retain their loyalty. In contrast, the American 'frontier' is not a barrier but a zone of passage and a land of opportunity, involving conflict with the natural

environment rather than neighbours. It is a region where the challenges of the wilderness encourage self-reliance and so individual freedom. It has occupied an important place in American history and historiography, but it has influenced the study of frontiers far beyond the shores of North America.⁷

In the English language, then, the word 'frontier' can be employed for two quite separate ideas. However, historians have sometimes applied the term in its European sense to the political borders of North America, and others have repeatedly used the American concept to study European societies. These two types of frontier often share many characteristics, such as clashes of identity, militarised institutions, or weak political control; but these should not obscure the fundamental distinction between the two types of frontier in the historiography. The essays in this book deal with primarily political frontiers, and so the term is employed in this book first and foremost in its European sense. However, the influence of the American concept upon the study of premodern frontiers will also be apparent in several essays in this volume.

European Concepts: Frontiers as Political Barriers

As might be expected, the study of political frontiers, so important in international affairs, has not been confined to historians alone. Geographers and political scientists have defined and categorised frontiers and boundaries, which they distinguish from one another: frontiers are the zones that evolve organically between states or societies, and boundaries are the artificial lines of separation which those states eventually demarcate within these zones.⁸ Although the insights of geography are of utmost importance for understanding modern frontiers and have generally had some basis in historical analysis, they cannot be easily applied to political frontiers before the modern era, for in general they require the existence of sovereign states with relatively strong central control. They also ignore the fact that potent concepts often become attached to frontiers with time, as well as the ways in which frontiers and boundaries have changed in history – except by seeing boundaries as the end result of the narrowing of a frontier. In regarding frontiers as organic and boundaries as artificial, and boundaries as a consequence of frontiers, geographers are forgetting the interplay between the two. Boundaries can take on a life of their own: the history of the border in Ireland since 1922 is an obvious example.

Historians, on the other hand, have noted that political frontiers in the past were sometimes very different from the modern state frontier, beginning with the co-founder of the *Annales* School, Lucien Febvre. Febvre traced the history of both the terms and the concepts for frontiers in European tradition; he was influenced by geographers such as Friedrich Ratzel and used their distinction between boundaries and political frontiers (in French, *limites* and *frontières*), but by unravelling the origins of the word *frontière* and its associated concepts, he showed the historical relationship between frontiers and boundaries, which, he demonstrated, had originally been distinct phenomena.⁹ He was also keen to point out that the terms used for frontiers have their own history, and since their meanings vary from language to language, they cast much light upon the varied historical experiences of different peoples and regions. In the light of his and subsequent research we can construct a history of political frontiers, which demonstrates that they did not evolve in a simple fashion from zones into lines or from being divisions of minor to divisions of major significance. The linear boundary could function as a political division in very ancient times, and often possessed great social significance in the past; but its transition to a major state border has been very interrupted.¹⁰

In Classical Antiquity there was no notion of frontiers as linear state borders. Local administrative boundaries certainly did exist and, indeed, were often hallowed with a sacral function; although sometimes defined by a broad natural feature such as a forest, these were often linear, marked by lines of boundary stones or rivers. In the more Romanised provinces of the Empire such as Gaul, these local boundaries survived as the limits of Merovingian and Carolingian dioceses and *pagi*. Even the great military works which the Romans constructed on the fringes of their empire were not imbued with the defensive significance with which we have been accustomed to view them; instead, the Romans' universalist creed divided the world into lands already conquered and lands to be conquered, rather than into the empire and its neighbours, an outlook which was essentially expansionist and ideological rather than defensive and territorial.¹¹ The very term *limes*, which historians have become accustomed to use as a paradigm for the fortified linear defences of the Empire, had a quite different meaning for most of the Roman period.¹² Our familiar picture of the Roman Empire's solid military defensive frontiers owes more to the influence of nineteenth-century Western imperialism than to the policies of the Emperor Augustus. It is worth noting that at the other end of the

Eurasian land mass, another imperial frontier usually seen as a defensive barrier, the Great Wall of China, appears never to have existed as a single wall at all.¹³

Although the Western Roman Empire disappeared as a political entity in the late fifth century, the non-territorial, frontierless concept of a universal Christian empire persisted in the Eastern (Byzantine) Empire and was revived in Western Europe by the Carolingians; like the Romans before them, Frankish rulers sought to achieve hegemony and clientage rather than to seal off their territory against their neighbours.¹⁴ As the political division of Christendom became an established fact, however, a stronger sense of territorial division did emerge, including amongst the Byzantines, as Paul Stephenson's essay demonstrates (see Chapter 4). Yet even the concept of *regnum* was less than territorial, signifying not so much 'realm' as 'rulership', whether the domination of a people or, by the Central Middle Ages, the dominion or bundle of rights which a king or prince exercised by virtue of his position.¹⁵ Linear administrative boundaries were no more absent from early medieval society than they had been from the imperial Roman world – in any case, the transition from the latter to the former was a very drawn-out process – but their significance was generally very localised; borders of greater political import were invariably ambiguous, often defined in a linear fashion but in fact functioning as a zone because jurisdictions were usually fragmented, royal or princely control was usually constrained by magnate power, and rulers were as concerned with their inherited rights as with fixed notions of territory.¹⁶ Across western Europe, there are frequent references to 'marches' but these could be both local divisions or broad, sometimes militarised zones of competing control.¹⁷ With the disappearance of the Carolingian empire political power became far more diffused, while the proliferation of castles across much of the continent from the turn of the millennium onwards also tended to break power down to a very local level. The political frontiers of sorts that did exist were a far remove from modern concepts of a linear sovereign state border.¹⁸

From the later Middle Ages onwards, however, a growing concept of territorial sovereignty conferred a more territorial definition upon political borders, which gradually heightened the importance of the boundaries of kingdoms at the expense of other divisions; local, pacific boundaries eventually merged with militarised state frontier defences into a single concept of sovereign divisions between states. In the

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the concepts of just 'natural frontiers' and of 'scientific frontiers' had a powerful influence upon the statesmen of the time, not least because of the development of scientific cartography, although the opportunities for expansion which such frontiers offered were also influential.¹⁹ In fact, it is now recognised that 'natural' frontiers are as unrealistic on the ground as they are attractive on maps.²⁰ Then, from the nineteenth century, historic, natural and scientific frontiers, all imperfect, had to contend with the newest idea of all for state borders, the national frontier. This concept triumphed at the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 and has dominated the history of the twentieth century; but the development of the political frontier into a 'major, national, inter-state demarcation' has been very tortuous.²¹

European Frontier Terms

It will be apparent from this brief survey that the changing concepts of political frontiers reveal a great deal about the societies which they served. Moreover, as Febvre noted, the terms describing these frontiers have evolved accordingly, and tell us much about notions of frontiers in the past. For instance, most of the different European words now corresponding to our 'frontier', such as *frontière* and *Grenze*, did not appear until the late Middle Ages, just when territorial borders were growing in importance. The word 'frontier' is not found in English before the early fifteenth century; in French it had appeared somewhat earlier, but not before the end of the thirteenth century. In both languages, its significance was originally military; the figurative sense now so prevalent in English dates from a much later period.²²

The French word *frontière* provides an interesting example of how a term for a political border could change in meaning as ideas of frontiers evolved. Febvre posited that the term *frontière* is both etymologically and semantically a military term, distinct from the more pacific *limite(s)*, or boundary, which it absorbed at a surprisingly recent date. The popularity of *frontière* as a term for political borders, especially the borders of the kingdom of France, seems to have arisen in the sixteenth century as military exigencies forced the Valois kings to put much effort into fortifying the boundaries (*fins* or *limites*) of their kingdom; and so the term used to describe these defences, *frontières*, began to absorb the words for lesser administrative divisions. *Fins* disappeared altogether,

and *limite* came to mean almost the same as *frontière*. That word was increasingly associated with the expansionist policies of Henri II, Henri IV, and Richelieu; when French expansion halted for a time in the eighteenth century, *limites* became the preferred Enlightenment term for political borders precisely because it was less militaristic than *frontière*. However, *limite* gave way once more to *frontière* as the chief term for a major border in the great upheavals that followed the formation of the French national state in 1789.²³ A *frontière* was and is a political frontier *par excellence*, embracing most 'borders' but with less of the figurative sense that 'frontier' enjoys in English generally, and none of the American notions of a frontier of settlement. It is chiefly with ideas of a political, often militarised border that French studies of frontiers have been pursued.²⁴

In some other languages, the equivalent terms have fewer military connotations, reflecting different historical experiences. For instance, the German term *Grenze* evolved through the *Drang nach Osten*, during which the Teutonic Knights adopted the Slavonic word for boundary-marker (*granica*) in the thirteenth century; only with Luther did it spread to the rest of the German-speaking world, including the Low Countries, replacing the older *mark*.²⁵ It was not that political borders in German-speaking lands were necessarily more peaceful than those of France; indeed, the Austrian military border with the Turks became one of the most heavily fortified barriers in Europe, defended by fearsome military colonists or *Grenzer* ('borderers').²⁶ *Grenze*, though, is as symbolic of the historical disunity of Germany as *frontière* reflects the rise of the French state: the German language continues to use *Grenze* for both local boundaries and state borders without distinction, probably because local, manorial boundaries remained the chief political divisions of the Holy Roman Empire into the nineteenth century.²⁷ Only then did the term acquire a wider political significance and consequently terms such as 'frontier zone' (*Grenzgebiet*) had to be coined; but its local, administrative and pacific meaning was by then well established.²⁸ Some Slavonic languages may reflect the instability of political borders in eastern Europe, for the words for 'country' and 'borderland' appear to be closely related, and the name of a whole country, the Ukraine, means simply 'the march' (*ukrajina*); testimony to its status as the borderland of first Poland-Lithuania and then Muscovy with the Tartars.²⁹ The same name has been given to two historical border regions of Southeastern Europe, Krajn (or Carniola, now part of Slovenia and once part of the Imperial border with Hungary) and

Krajina (Western Croatia, formerly a section of the Austrian military border), and the latter has proved itself a fiercely disputed borderland even in the 1990s.

Terms for frontiers have many derivations and appeared at different times, and it is not always easy to trace their changing meanings over time; nevertheless, some common patterns do emerge from the terms discussed in the essays in this volume. As we might expect, many terms suggested demarcation, such as Latin *terminus*, Slavonic *granica* and hence German *Grenze*, and Greek *horos* ('marker'), or a fringe or outer limit, such as Greek *akra* and Latin *finis* (hence Old French *fin*). Several seem to have passed from the meaning of a local boundary to that of a whole border territory: examples are found as far apart as Chinese *jing* 境, Germanic *mark*, Turkish *uj* and the Slavonic *krai* discussed above. These terms all imply some concept of territorial division or control. Perhaps more surprising to the modern mind are those terms which imply passage and contact, such as Arabic *thagr* ('mouth', 'breach') and Chinese *guan* 關 ('gate' or 'passage'), while an early meaning of the Latin *limes* was a road, albeit usually in a military context.³⁰ Some words for frontier seem to have come to relate to specific natural features: in Old French *marche* ('march') also meant the entrance to a forest in 1200,³¹ and a further meaning of the Slavonic *krai* was likewise 'forest'. Moreover, some terms for borders and borderlands acquired very specific connotations or resonance. Although the importance of the term *limes* in Classical Roman history has recently been disputed, Michael Bonner has shown how the Arabic term *thughūr* came to be applied chiefly to the great zone of conflict between the Muslims and the Christian Byzantine Empire, and was popular in an age of chronic Muslim division because it harked back to a time of Islamic unity against the infidel. As Bonner notes, 'disagreements over names point[ed] to deeper conflicts'.³² The Spanish term *frontera* also gradually acquired the notions of a militarised borderland through Spain's situation as a permanent battleground, at least in Reconquista ideology, between Christians and Muslims.³³ It is surely no coincidence that one of the earliest attested appearances of *frontière* in French concerned the 'Saracen frontier' (*frontière de Sarrizins*) in Spain.³⁴ The term 'march' came to be especially important on the Anglo-Welsh borders, where between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries, the 'Marches' had their own customs and a strong sense of 'Marcher' identity.³⁵ In all these instances, a general term for a borderland was developing a particular significance.

We can conclude that political frontiers before the modern era have a far more intricate and evolved history than simply the evolution of linear state barriers from vague border zones; and the terms and concepts relating to these frontiers are as susceptible to change – and historical interpretation – as the realities on the ground. The essays in this volume examine nine regions at various stages in this development and illustrate a number of ways in which contemporaries and historians have viewed these borders and borderlands.

North American Concepts: Frontiers of Settlement

Many of the 'frontiers' encountered in historiography cannot be easily classified amongst the political frontiers discussed so far. These generally correspond much more closely to North American ideas of frontier, namely a sparsely populated zone located between a metropolitan culture on one side and a wilderness on the other. These three zones are not independent of each other: the wilderness influences the frontier, which in turn affects the metropolis. This American frontier-type, or *frontier of settlement*, is best known from the work of Frederick Jackson Turner, who in 1893 drew attention to the dynamic role of an 'open' frontier of settlement in the formation of American society. Historians have comprehensively summarised the implications, strengths and weaknesses of his thesis, which will not be reconsidered in detail here; but all discussion of the Turner thesis, whether favourable or hostile, focuses attention upon American ideas of the frontier as a zone of settlement and struggle with nature, rather than as a political division.³⁶

Turner wished to point out that the American 'frontier', hitherto 'open', was now 'closed', and explicitly stated that this frontier experience was a uniquely American historical phenomenon; however, he admitted that his thesis had comparative potential in the conclusion to his paper,³⁷ and historians eventually began to apply his theories to other periods and continents. Soon they also used the notion of a frontier of settlement for colonisation amongst established populations as well as in empty territory; once divorced from the specific context of environmental struggle, this American frontier-type mingled with and was reinforced by the strongly figurative connotations of 'frontiers' in modern English. American notions of frontiers have other attributes. The frontier has often been given a moral quality: Turner, for instance, described it as 'the meeting point between savagery and civilization'. It

was also generally an expanding phenomenon, since the settlers had an overwhelming superiority over indigenous populations. Recently, however, the belated recognition of the presence of the Native Americans in the American 'wilderness' has reoriented historiography towards the more stable phases in the American frontier's history, such as the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when a 'middle ground' developed between Native Americans and Europeans. Since these two cultures were then in relative equilibrium, the middle ground was characterised by what Richard White calls 'creative misunderstandings' which enabled the two societies to overcome their cultural differences. The concept of the 'middle ground' as a zone of interaction to be considered in its own right is the latest notion to flourish in frontier historiography.³⁸

How has the concept of a frontier of settlement been used to interpret premodern Europe? There does not seem to have been any contemporary term for such a frontier; the nearest equivalent in medieval western Europe was probably 'waste' (for example, *vastum, gast*). Nevertheless, the concept has had profound implications for medieval European historiography, on both sides of the Atlantic.³⁹ Studies of frontiers in this sense may be divided for our purposes into three main groups: those which consider the frontier of settlement literally; those which consider the expanding 'frontier' of a society, such as Latin Christendom as a whole; and those which have reinterpreted political borders as zones of passage and contact rather than as merely fortified lines.

The first, perhaps most direct use of ideas from the American West assesses the effects which the conquest of the great wildernesses wrought upon medieval European society. For instance, the taming of the Dutch boglands between the tenth and fourteenth centuries triggered an agricultural revolution that radically altered the society and culture of Northwest Europe, encouraging huge increases in population, in contrast to the Mediterranean lands where there were fewer opportunities for internal colonisation.⁴⁰ The effects of the presence of an untamed wilderness have been discerned in regions as far apart as Kievan Russia and South Wales, and in the early modern period in the steppe corridor north of the Black Sea, where the Cossacks, as heralds of settled, agricultural society, had some interesting parallels in their lifestyle with American frontiersmen.⁴¹ More specific comparisons are also possible; one such study has compared ranching in the Spanish frontier zone with later American experiences.⁴²

The second group is not concerned primarily with the effect of the natural environment upon the development of society, but borrows from the American West the themes of colonisation, settlement, and cultural interaction, which, it has recently been suggested, were intrinsic features of all medieval frontier societies.⁴³ It concentrates in particular upon the sharp clash at the fringes of expanding societies. Medieval European examples include the *Drang nach Osten* of German settlers and knights into the Slavonic and Balt peoples of Eastern Europe,⁴⁴ the activities of the Normans from the British Isles to Syria in the eleventh century,⁴⁵ and the Spanish frontiers between Christians and Muslims, at once political, cultural, and economic frontiers as well as frontiers of settlement.⁴⁶ Robert Bartlett has recently drawn together these various fringes of Latin Christian society into a single 'frontier' experience, apparently as formative in the moulding of Western Europe before 1500 as Turner believed his frontier was in the shaping of American society. In contrast to Turner, though, Bartlett considers the effects of the metropolis (the Franks' homelands) on the frontier (the fringes of Latin Christendom) more than the reverse, although he does assert that this common experience forged a distinctive European society and identity.⁴⁷ This notion of a single Latin 'frontier' allows Bartlett to make fruitful and informative comparisons of specific social traits, such as language or personal laws, from Ireland to Poland, and from Scandinavia to Spain and Outremer. In stressing the unity of this shared European experience, Bartlett was prefigured by A. R. Lewis (1958), who portrayed the halt to Western European expansion from the late thirteenth century onwards as the 'closing of the medieval frontier', as opportunities for colonisation on the fringes of Latin Christian society were apparently exhausted.⁴⁸

To see Latin Christendom as a single expanding 'Frankish' society marginalises political frontiers *within* Western Europe where, for all its religious unity and shared aristocratic culture, society was in many ways still deeply fragmented. However, the third group of studies arising from American ideas of frontier does not restrict itself to the limits of whole societies, but reinterprets political borders, some of which indeed coincided with deep cultural divisions whereas others cut across populations that were broadly very similar to each other in their history and culture, but separated by political organisation and often by a 'rhetoric of identity'. In some cases, such as Wales after 1066 (as well as several of the regions discussed in this volume), political borders overlapped with frontiers of settlement; regions of competing political con-

trol were therefore also regions of colonisation and often of cultural interaction.⁴⁹ But even in fairly densely populated areas, the idea of a frontier as a zone of passage and interaction rather than as a barrier can show a political border in a rather different light, offering opportunities for reinterpretation. In effect, such a frontier zone is a hybrid of the two different concepts of frontier.

Frontier zones of interaction between political units may be found in many parts of Europe. Some were quite stable regions of passage and contact. The 'land of war' in fourteenth-century Ireland was in many ways a frontier zone between two metropolitan cultures, the Gaelic kingdoms in the west and the Anglo-Norman Pale;⁵⁰ as such, it bears a striking similarity to the militarised borderlands between the Byzantines and Arabs some centuries earlier, which were likewise locally unstable and prone to violence but regionally stable.⁵¹ Others, like Turner's frontier, were dynamic and expanding; the 'frontiers' of the Carolingian empire have recently been depicted as regions in this mould, comprising not merely the empire's external borders with Slavs or Muslims but also a ring of subject groups within the empire, such as Aquitanians, Saxons, and Bavarians, who dwelt around the Frankish heartlands and who had previously been subjected to a rather looser Merovingian hegemony.⁵² So the historiographical distinction between European and American concepts of the frontier is often blurred where a political division is concerned. In both sorts of frontier, questions of identity arise; in both, state control and its effectiveness is often an important dimension, usually with military considerations. Settlement, a prerequisite for the American type of frontier, can also be a feature of the European frontier type. Nevertheless, a basic distinction between frontiers which are zones of settlement and frontiers which constitute political barriers is apparent in most frontier historiography.

This brief survey demonstrates the breadth of research into premodern frontiers, and it is clear that terms and concepts as well as the realities of the frontier vary from language to language, region to region, and period to period. Yet it is precisely in this diversity that the opportunities for illuminating comparisons and contrasts lie. Students who are aware of the various concepts behind the innocuous word 'frontier' and its equivalents will not only avoid making invalid comparisons, but also discover fascinating parallels between frontiers widely separated by time or space.

B. Nine Case Studies of Premodern Frontiers

Naomi Standen

Political geographers believe that premodern zonal frontiers developed into modern linear boundaries and draw a clear distinction between the two. Much to their chagrin, the lay audience treats 'frontier', 'border' and 'boundary' as synonyms, while retaining a profoundly persistent conception that all three are linear. Thus we are accustomed to thinking of a 'frontier' as an enforceable boundary line that not only marks the territorial limit of a particular state's authority, but also divides that state peacefully from its neighbouring states. However, neither the clear separation made by geographers nor the popular conflation of terms that they deplore does justice to the complexity and fluidity of premodern frontiers.

This part of the introduction will survey the nine essays presented here, and then draw out some common threads which illustrate the importance to contemporaries, both of defining the frontier and of blurring that definition. Frontier inhabitants had their own conceptions of where the divisions between them and their neighbours lay. Rulers wishing to maintain or extend their control over their frontiers had to work with these local understandings in a highly flexible and creative manner. Historians, however, along with modern geographers and lay people, have had a tendency to 'tidy up' the processes involved so that the complexities and manifold nature of the frontiers are obscured.

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Eduardo Manzano Moreno opens this volume (see Chapter 2) with a discussion of several issues that will recur in subsequent chapters. Manzano uses the case of the frontier between Muslim and Christian in Spain to argue that such simple dichotomies are so misleading that the notion of 'frontier' as a category of analysis is thrown into question. We cannot ignore the fact that there are divisions between groups of people, but these require a detailed and sophisticated analysis which they have not always received. Manzano states clearly the important point that frontiers will always exist because there will always be

antagonisms between groups with different values, languages, religions, allegiances, and so on, and these antagonisms will create limits that will be apparent to those who live with them. He also emphasises that this awareness did not create homogeneous or distinctive groupings, nor did it result in a clear differentiation between groups such as that implied by a bounding line drawn on a map. Yet this is the view purveyed by many previous students of medieval Spanish frontiers: that we are discussing a phenomenon that clearly divided one group from another, and that accordingly it had a linear manifestation as a boundary. This general perception is mirrored by the subject divisions within academe, which lead to the Christian side of the border being the province of medieval historians, while the Arab side of the border is the terrain of Area Studies specialists. This disciplinary boundary reinforces the commonplace perception of frontiers as clear-cut lines, when in reality neighbours, although conscious of being from different groups, were still able and willing to find accommodations and exploit opportunities that cut across any kind of neat and mappable boundary line. Although the Arab and Christian rulers established ideological barriers through their respective rhetorics of *jihād* and *reconquista*, the social and political realities of the peninsulā were far more complex, and were played out despite and not because of religious differences.

The second essay (see Chapter 3) looks at a somewhat different situation. The author sees the regimes of tenth-century north China as a collection of poorly bounded units – ill-defined and somewhat unstable, both socially and politically – in which the strength of ever-present antagonisms varied in significant ways. The north China frontier developed from a highly confused and complex zone, such as that described by Manzano in Spain, towards a much more clearly defined entity that could be conceptualised as a line, and agreed as such in a treaty that went on to keep the peace for a century. The transformation of the frontier from a zone of political volatility, local control, and ever-changing allegiances into a relatively neat division between neighbouring centralised regimes was obviously something that rulers of these nascent states desired and worked towards: the clarification and simplification of the frontier into a border both contributed to and arose from an increase in effective central authority. In the early part of the tenth century the emperor's position depended upon the tacit support of powerful provincial governors, who could place their allegiance with various competing or neighbouring regimes

if they were not kept happy. Such changes of allegiance were made without reference to other markers of identity such as culture or ethnic origin, so that a Han Chinese could serve a nomadic Kitan without concern on either side. However, the later historical records for this period tend to make the early-tenth-century frontier appear clearer than it actually was, emphasising aspects of individual stories that suggest those concerned were more governed by their perception of their ethnic identity than the earlier records show. The historiography thus conceals the flexibility of early-tenth-century frontier inhabitants, who, while clearly understanding the differences between Chinese and non-Chinese, did not turn this awareness into insurmountable antagonism.

Paul Stephenson's essay (see Chapter 4) on the Byzantine frontier at the Lower Danube illustrates a central authority's response to the problem of maintaining control at the frontiers of a geographically large empire that is not increasing its control as in north China, but gradually losing it. A militaristic approach that focused on strong points along natural barriers – that is, fortified towns along the Danube – was effective when the empire was strong, but it required a large investment of resources. Byzantium's 'civilian emperors' saved themselves enormous expense by deliberately not maintaining defences against their nomadic neighbours. Instead they spent what were probably far smaller sums on paying annual subsidies both to the Byzantine townsfolk on the Danube, and to their Pecheneg neighbours. Stephenson argues from archaeological, largely numismatic, evidence that these payments were intended to shore up the loyalty of the Byzantine citizens, and to provide the Pechenegs with incentives to replace raiding with trade and employment in the frontier towns of the Lower Danube. This policy was a remarkably intelligent and tolerant approach, and it proved at least as effective as the military alternative. This example shows that we cannot simply assume that premodern governments were always bound to behave in a reactive and crudely, ideologically driven manner, but could sometimes display a sophisticated understanding of what made their neighbours tick, and an imaginative approach to handling this in terms of frontier policy. However, when the emperors ceased to maintain their chosen methods – fortifications or subsidies – both approaches failed, and Byzantine authority in the frontier was diminished or lost. The frontier here, as in China and elsewhere, had centrifugal tendencies that could only be overcome through continuous effort on the part of the central authorities.

All the essays in this volume are at some level asking the question 'what is a frontier?' but Daniel Power's chapter (see Chapter 5) on the frontier between Normandy and its neighbouring provinces focuses on this explicitly. Modern French historiography has tended to focus attention on the external borders of France, whereas in fact the internal divisions were far more politically significant. At the same time, the external borders had a changing meaning which could be far from negligible. But the question 'what is a frontier?' arises particularly clearly from the curious position of Normandy. The militarised nature of the borderlands of Normandy and her neighbouring principalities, and the close coincidence of administrative, legal, and ecclesiastical boundaries create what has appeared to historians to be a remarkably well-defined frontier, and Power agrees that indeed the term is justified in this case. In examining whether it is applicable, however, Power reveals, once again, the complexity and multiplicity of what is usually depicted as a linear boundary. In fact, the vagaries of lordship combined with a conception of the frontier that, once again, stressed particular fortifications rather than some abstract border line, producing even here the characteristic medieval European frontier of enclaves and exclaves belonging to a variety of lords. Furthermore, as in China, and indeed in the rest of France, it was not clear just how far beyond any given fortification the occupier's writ actually ran. Co-existing with a fairly clear sense – ideological, practical, or simply conventional – of where the limits of one lord's jurisdiction met the limits of his neighbour, there was an immensely complex, greatly varied, and highly localised collection of rights, duties, and privileges. As in Spain, this tangled web defies the drawing of neat boundary lines, but because the sources allow us to achieve such a level of detail, it is a particularly useful example of what constituted a premodern frontier in reality.

Reuven Amitai-Preiss's contribution on the Mamluk-Mongol frontier (see Chapter 6) provides a clear illustration of the way in which a linear frontier – initially defined in this case by military means – could be reinforced by ideological divisions based on religious differences and particularly on the concept of Holy War. This case illustrates at greater length a phenomenon that is mentioned briefly in other chapters, such as the Chinese and Norman examples: that groups, not least among them centralised regimes, will go to considerable lengths to develop or maintain antagonisms that will help to reinforce the political boundary, even if those antagonisms are based on features that in other circumstances would tend towards greater unity and co-operation. Hence the

common steppe origins of Mamluks and Mongols did not prevent them being implacable foes, and after the Mongols converted to Islam, the Mamluks maintained the religious divide between the two groups by denigrating the Mongols' Islam as inferior. This makes clear the important point that frontiers, and the mechanisms by which they are created and maintained, are wholly and absolutely constructions made by human beings. Where groups within a frontier have differences, these can be overcome; where groups divided by a frontier have similarities, differences can be found. Expediency is all.

The British example (see Chapter 7) is of a state already formed, centralised, and relatively strong, but which still had problems with its frontiers. Instead of the successful move from militarised border to 'frontier of peace' that we have seen in north China, the Lower Danube, and Syria – all under central guidance – the English borderlands saw increased state involvement *reducing* the effectiveness of frontier control. Steven Ellis argues that the Tudor crown brought most of these problems upon itself through an impatience with the apparent laxity and local disruption that characterised decentralised marcher methods of handling its land frontiers. The Tudors feared the threat posed to the crown by the overmighty wardens, who traditionally superintended the frontier regions, and so attempted to replace the familiar set of accommodations and regular frontier breaches with a centralised system of local government, in the belief that this would automatically produce a situation of 'English civility' in their Scottish and Irish borderlands as it had in Wales. In fact, the wardens' frontier defences proved to have been essential to maintaining any semblance of law and order in the borders; without them, the military situation on both Scottish and Irish frontiers deteriorated, leading, in Ireland, to the English conquest of the whole island. The Tudor crown had a clear vision of its frontiers, but the attempt to impose that vision took no account of the realities and uniqueness of different frontier situations, nor of the fact that the frontier inhabitants saw things differently. It was difficult to impose frontiers on an unwilling population, at least for any length of time. The techniques and resources which, for instance, maintained the Iron Curtain for four decades, were simply unavailable.

Even where frontiers divided groups who agreed that they were different, communication across the divide was always necessary. S. C. Rowell's discussion of the Lithuanian-Prussian frontier (see Chapter 8) provides a highly detailed picture of how this local accommodation

influenced, and was influenced by, the existence of an agreed boundary line. Operating under conditions of peace, the inhabitants and rulers of this frontier zone nevertheless sought to extend their grip on the area, less in terms of control judged militarily than of 'ownership and occupation'. Such gradual extension was possible because the agreed definition of the overall boundary line was actually rather vague when it came to certain details on the ground. At the same time, questions of ownership were of crucial importance when it came to deciding who had what rights to exploit which resource, so at a minute level very precise divisions could be agreed when economic advantage was at stake. The Lithuanian case shows particularly clearly the functioning and importance of the frontier as a location of crossings and points of access, in both the absence and presence of effective central control. It also shows the effects created by the imposition of a borderline across what could, politics aside, easily have been a geographically unified region.

According to Ann Williams (see Chapter 9), the Mediterranean frontier, defended for Christendom chiefly by the Order of St John, was another militarised frontier not only reinforced, but created by a strong ideological-religious division between Christianity and Islam. Often under the implicit or overt direction of the papacy, the efforts of the Order were expended on defending their holdings in the Mediterranean or trying to win control of larger possessions, but the Order, with or without allies, was never able to sustain the military effort required. This was partly because of a lack of coherent policy and of adequate logistical support from its *Langues* (regional organisations) in mainland western Europe, but mostly because of the special nature of the sea as a frontier, and the position of the Knights within that sea. The Order's 'centre' on its tiny island homes was also its frontier, and at the same time constituted the frontier of (Catholic) Christendom. The Order was perpetually pushing out against the ever-encroaching sea-borne perils represented by the maritime arms of the Islamic powers bordering on the Mediterranean. While strategically important, the islands of Rhodes and Malta were nevertheless isolated, and even though Islamic maritime strength fluctuated, the Order was rarely in a position to dominate the sea effectively. Unlike many other small border powers working to retain their autonomy in the frontier zone, the Order did not have the option of placing its allegiance with the other side – the ideological frontier was too strong for that – although it did resort to indiscriminate piracy on grain ships, Christian and

Muslim alike, when the supply situation was particularly desperate. Still, the Order fell unequivocally on the Christian side of the border; but it was not only a frontier outpost imposing a Christian presence to challenge the Muslims for control of the sea, it was also, during its extended periods on Rhodes and Malta, an enclave struggling for survival. The necessarily uncompromising nature of the Order's mission in the Mediterranean contributed greatly to its problems, but the Order did not have the resources to follow this rigid line through to its logical, military conclusion.

The strength of an ideological frontier is also the issue underlying Colin Heywood's discussion of the historiography of the Ottoman frontier (see Chapter 10). The 'traditional' view expressed by Paul Wittek was that the Ottomans' empire was a frontier polity, founded upon a *ghāzī* ideology that demanded an ongoing Holy War against the infidel. This frontier ideology affected the whole state: policy, military organisation, and sociopolitical structure. It contrasts with the notion of centralised 'civility' on which the Tudor state was based. Wittek also felt that Ottoman frontier society, in constant contact with the infidels, partook of so much cultural influence that it became almost as 'uncivilised' as the infidels themselves; without careful handling, the mixed society could contaminate the hinterland and drag down its culture. The ghazis, though, were so devoted to their mission of Holy War that they preserved their own purity while driving the boundaries of the empire outwards. As the empire grew so the expanding frontier was repeatedly peripheralised by the centre, both institutionally and ideologically, but to Wittek the ghazis remained holy heroes. In such a situation the relationship between the state and its frontier was particularly vital. Critics of Wittek have questioned whether the ghazis really played such a crucial role on the frontier, and also whether the Ottoman state really did depend for its justification on the ideology of Holy War. The Turkish frontier lords, who were 'contaminated' by their accommodations with neighbouring cultures, appear to have been more significant than ghazi activity, and the Ottoman Empire continued to exist for over two centuries after it accepted a demarcated borderline that denied subsequent 'ghazis' a legitimate zone of operations. Heywood's historiographical emphasis reminds us how much frontiers are constructions not only of those in the past, but of subsequent accounts and analyses that may, like Wittek's, owe as much to the circumstances of the writer as to any kind of recoverable historical reality.

Human Frontiers

These essays reinforce our understanding that frontiers will always exist because there will always be antagonisms between groups, but there is an ever-shifting relationship between: (a) the real differences between groups of people; (b) the degree of antagonism they feel towards each other; and (c) the extent to which they nevertheless interact peacefully. It is worth emphasising that this will be so regardless of the strength of rulers or governments at any given time, and that although language and ecological factors such as the pastoral-sedentary divide created differences it was hard to ignore, other aspects of culture became important only because human beings decided that this would be so.⁵³

The most striking of these 'human frontiers' is religion. Different categories of religion could be grounds for major antagonism, as in the medieval Spanish peninsula. These same differences could be overlooked when it was convenient: in Spain, Muslims lived voluntarily under Christian rule and vice versa. What is more, similarities of religion were not necessarily enough to bind two groups together: the antagonism between Mamluks and Mongols did not diminish when the Mongols converted to Islam, and a shared Christianity did not prevent conflicts in central medieval France. Ethnic identity could also be ignored or brought into play as circumstances required. Hence the 'ethnic affinity' between Mongols and the Turkish Mamluks – both originally nomadic – could become an argument used to entice Turks over to the Mongol side, but it did not prevent a Mamluk of Mongol origin from abandoning family and high status with the Mongols for a return to Mamluk allegiance.

Antagonisms could be created and maintained on a local level,⁵⁴ but, as is now well known, they always coexisted with a need for interaction, mostly for purposes of trade. The societies that developed on the frontiers had their own leaders who understood how to work with the ambiguities of their particular frontier situation in order to maintain their own authority over their own communities, as well as the crucial command of the resources – chiefly people – from which that authority was derived. This meant striking a balance between defence and accommodation, between encroachment from outside and their own people's needs for economic exchange. It also meant serving as the intermediary between the leader's own district and any neighbouring powers: centralised regimes, would-be centralisers, or other border leaders. This role was highly significant.

Frontier Leaders and 'Superior' Authorities

Before the modern era we cannot always make a clear distinction between the 'centre' and the 'frontier', and levels of political control cannot always be clearly distinguished either. The political centre did not have to be physically located in the middle of the territory it sought to control, but could easily be in the frontier zone, rendering it open to attack. Even where the political hub was distant from the borderlands, ideology could still give the frontier a central role, as with the ghazi ideology of the Ottoman empire. If the political 'centre' might actually be located in the periphery, so, too, the levels of authority might not be as clear-cut as the terminology of 'centre' and 'periphery' might suggest. The distributed nature of power is very clear in the Lithuano-Prussian border region, where authority in any one place rested on what rights a particular nobleman held there; but it is also a feature of north China and of the Tudor land frontiers. In these places governors and marcher lords could hold so many *de facto* powers that they sometimes had to be treated almost as if they led independent regimes. Frontier lords acknowledged the overlordship, however nominal, of one (or more) 'central' ruler, whom they thus acknowledged as their superior, but they remained under 'superior' control only while it suited them; their allegiance could change if it seemed advantageous. In some cases, such as tenth-century north China, frontier lords were distinguished from their superior rulers by little more than title: an 'emperor' might be able to exercise no more practical authority than a 'governor'.

Such a situation shows the validity of treating the frontier zone as a distinct area. However, although the culture, customs, and economic arrangements of frontier societies can profitably be studied with little or no reference to their relationship to the central – or superior – authorities between which they sat, the same is not true when those societies are regarded as political entities. Frontier lordships, by definition, were not politically self-sufficient. They could not exist without the presence of superior authorities. Hence the relationship between frontier lords and superior authorities was a crucial factor in maintaining the superior authorities' claims to the frontier region. This could give the frontier leaders far more bargaining power with their overlords than their formal relationship implied. The very fact that such local leaders were located on the frontier immediately gave them more leverage than a local leader in the interior, because a disgruntled

frontier leader could provoke disturbances in a vulnerable area, which at worst could result in the complete loss of that region (along with the people and resources that made it a desirable possession) to a neighbouring power. Accordingly, rulers could rarely risk trying to impose their will on the frontier lords by force. The military effort required to bring them or their territories under closer control was too great to be worthwhile, even if victory were feasible. In order to maintain their claims to the frontier, rulers were forced to persuade and negotiate.

Methods of Frontier Control

Since persuasion had to play such a large role in superior authorities' handling of their frontier regions, it is no surprise that symbolism and ideology were important tools of frontier control. At the same time, the idea of the frontier was itself an important contributor to the establishment or development of regimes that attempted to transcend the personality of a particular ruler and develop into more powerful, centralised polities. Clearly defined frontiers showed that a ruler was strong enough to enforce his will at the border (and even beyond), and thus demonstrated a greater degree of political control. The ruler aimed to define the frontier so as to include the territories of the frontier lords, and then to persuade those lords to accept this definition. In the essays collected here we repeatedly see would-be state-builders seeking to create or maintain a virtuous circle in which they define the borders of their regime more clearly, thereby exhibiting their own legitimacy and attracting more loyalty from the frontier inhabitants and their leaders, which has the effect of defining the borders more clearly, and so on. Although the discussion below relates to superior authorities, frontier lords could also attempt to employ at least some of the same methods in their own districts.

There were various concrete ways in which rulers attempted to tighten their control over their borderlands, and thus to clarify the division between their spheres of authority and those of neighbouring rulers. Most of the rulers discussed here made treaties with their neighbours, which often demarcated a linear boundary as depicted in Figure 1.1(a). Defences, though, were always established independently of any agreed borderline at discretely located strategic spots, many of which were some distance from any agreed lines. They indicated what was to be protected (Figure 1.1(b)). Rulers also instituted communications

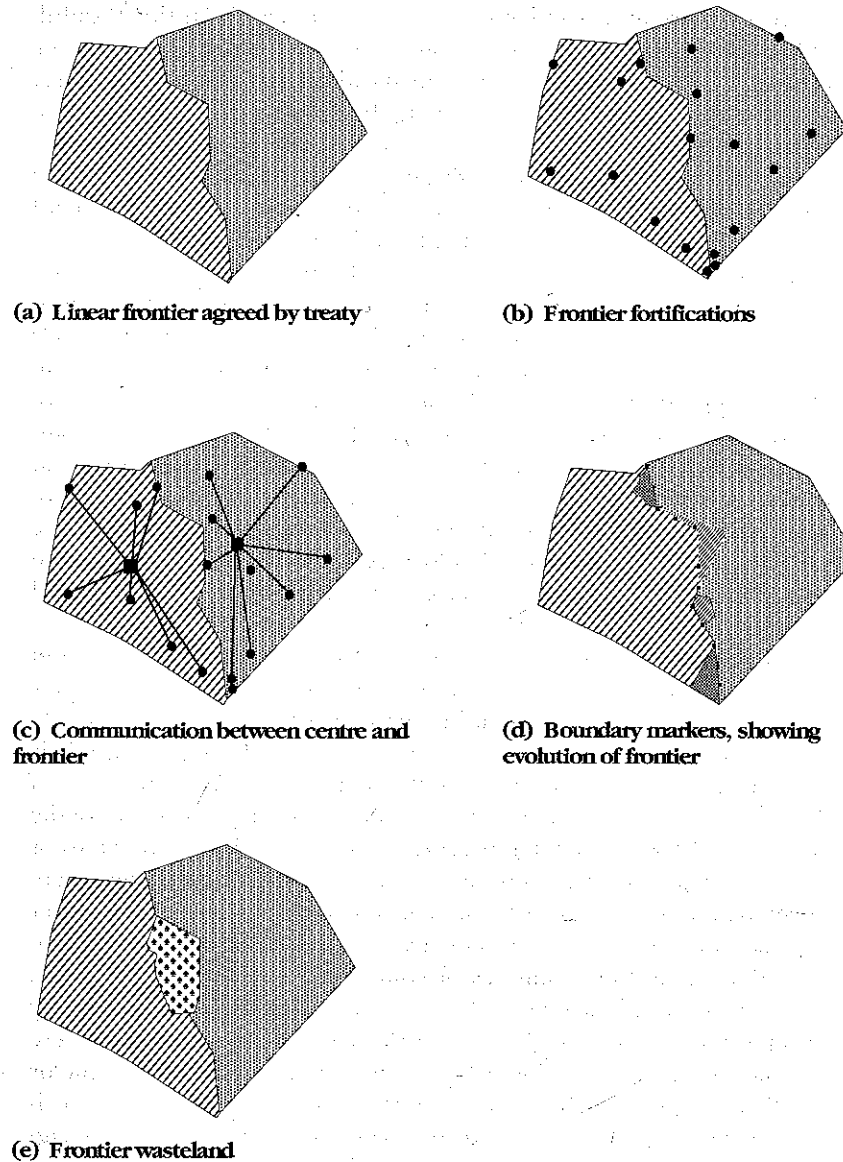


Fig. 1.1 Methods of frontier control and definition.

between centre and frontier – particularly noticeable in the Mamluk Sultanate – which was a way of asserting direct central control over frontier-based institutions such as fortifications and frontier lordships, and thus denying such control to neighbouring rulers (Figure 1.1(c)). Some rulers set up border markers, which attempted to make concrete the provisions of treaties, although they often also took on a life of their own, as seen on the Lithuano-Prussian border (Figure 1.1(d)). And some deliberately created or maintained a frontier wasteland, as in Syria and the lower Danube region, which formed an effective divide and defence, but also denied either contiguous regime the use of the territory and resources involved (Figure 1.1(e)). These methods tended to produce rather diffuse frontiers, but these were by no means insignificant: frontier inhabitants noticed the positive effects of frontier defences (including wastelands) and their attendant communications systems in preventing the cross-border raids that could paralyse economic life. Geographers and social scientists have noted the dynamic relationship between a boundary or frontier line given physical form – ‘border landscapes’ – and the people who live in that landscape,⁵⁵ and the Lithuanian case provides a straightforward example.

Beyond such practicalities, however, one of the most effective ways of clarifying where the limits to the ruler’s authority lay was to foster antagonism towards the neighbouring group or groups, chiefly through the creation, revival, and maintenance of ideologies, with their accompanying myths and symbols, that emphasised the uniqueness of the in-group and a negative picture of the out-group,⁵⁶ and most of the cases here show rulers doing precisely these things. Where religious or cultural distinctions were less apparent, ‘rhetorics of difference’ were developed which overcame the similarities between Normandy and her neighbours, and between Mongol and Mamluk.⁵⁷ By contrast, Lithuania offers some fine examples of complaints by central authorities, political and religious, that the frontier inhabitants lacked any ideology of separation, even though cross-border conflicts at a local level were commonplace. The ideologies thus developed masked the ethnic or social confusions which are such a noticeable feature of frontier societies. Rulers sought to harness differences – real, accentuated, or imagined – for divisive ends, exposing the ambiguities of the frontier society and trying to force its inhabitants to choose clearly which side they were on. The complex interplay of frontier accommodations and antagonisms were overlaid with a much simplified rhetoric which

stressed the unity of Us as against the parallel unity of Them. Hence the regular recurrence of the idea of ‘our’ country as civilised, in opposition to ‘the barbarians’ on the other side of the frontier.

Although in many ways it was in the government’s interests to define the frontier as unambiguously as possible within the logistical limitations of the time, at the same time it could not afford to make that definition too inflexible, as the early Tudor crown found to its cost. The trick for rulers was to define the frontier sufficiently closely that its existence served to bolster the government’s justification for ruling, chiefly through ensuring the safety of the frontier inhabitants, while allowing enough slack for those same inhabitants to carry on their daily lives in a profitable manner. Most strikingly in north China and on the Lower Danube, government action, direct or indirect, not only prevented raids but also established markets, and sometimes even supplied the cash to spend there. While these things were done, both frontiers enjoyed peace. As soon as governments neglected their frontier provisions they disrupted the delicate equilibrium of the frontier; they could never afford to relax.

The question remains, however, of whether different forms of polity and different methods of state formation affected the frontier situation. The regimes discussed here range from princely fiefs to bureaucratic states with imperial ideologies, but their frontier experiences, while they contain many comparable features, do not seem to fall into categories according to type of polity any more than they fall into groupings based on religious, ecological, ethnic, or cultural criteria. Nevertheless, comparison of frontiers in terms of political organisation is an area which has been scarcely touched upon, at least in the historical literature, and it would be a fruitful area of enquiry.

Historiography and the Imagining of Frontiers

It is clear that the historian, past or present, plays a vital role in representing what we know of any particular frontier, and in several of the cases here it is argued that the conception of the frontier as derived from the records is an invention. All too often, the chroniclers’ records were at least partly intended to bolster the vision of the frontier that a contemporary ruling power was trying to impose, and subsequent historians have had agendas of their own. Modern historians, too, have sometimes been greatly influenced by current political situations, as is most striking in the case of Paul Wittek. Even where historians

have no particular axe to grind, frontiers can still be viewed somewhat anachronistically.

But the problem is more complicated still. We have seen that frontiers could be clarified without recourse to modern concepts such as nationalism, but the fact remains that our current structures for thinking about historical issues are still constructed on remarkably strict national grounds, taking the modern nations of the world as the basis for dividing up the history of the world into slightly less unmanageable chunks. We mark ourselves as historians of China, France, Spain, and so on. British frontiers have been shared out amongst historians of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, while the Byzantine Lower Danube is split between scholars from different modern nations, chiefly Romania and Bulgaria. The divisions are not just between historians of or from different regions, but between academic disciplines too. The Danube frontier is divided between historians, classicists, and archaeologists. The Christians in Spain have been studied by European medievalists, but the Arabs in Spain have been studied by language specialists with a distinctly philological bent. Normandy is one of the few places that might be said to have benefited from divisions between modern nations: it is studied by medievalists, some of whom focus on France and others on England, providing an unusually rich selection of approaches.

These modern divisions can make it hard to see, let alone begin to think about, frontiers that may or may not have existed in previous times, as several of the essays in this volume make clear. Looking from within our modern states, under the pervasive (even if unwanted) influence of nationalism, it can be hard to dislodge ourselves from the teleological view that all of history was leading to this moment when we can call ourselves a citizen of this state, or a historian of that state. But in fact, there is nothing inevitable or permanent about the situation we have arrived at. England was once a possession of dukes of Normandy, Spain was divided between Arab and Christian rule, Beijing is now the capital of the People's Republic of China but for hundreds of years was under non-Chinese rule, what we now call the Middle East was once divided up very differently, while the Byzantine and Ottoman empires straddled the traditional division, and thus formed a long-lasting join between Europe and Asia. Many of these situations obtained for hundreds of years – for much longer, in fact, than the current arrangement of 'nation-states'. The problem (and its cause too) is that the idea of the nation-state was dominant at precisely the time that the relevant aca-

demical disciplines were born, so that not only were the divisions between nation-states particularly clear, but they also appeared particularly inevitable and appropriate, and were duly enshrined in the structuring of the academy. Interdisciplinary efforts are slowly becoming more popular, and several of the contributors here have made deliberate efforts to cross the disciplinary boundaries in their particular area.

Conclusion

We are looking at premodern frontiers through the eyes of people accustomed to national frontiers, which may help to explain why this subject is so difficult to grasp. Our present-day conceptions of frontiers are firstly as lines, and the ramifications of their existence flow from that: the line is drawn and then border functions are applied there.⁵⁸ In the premodern case government functions – such as defence and the facilitation of trade – came first, and, in practice if not in theory, were all based upon discrete places. Though there often was a line, it was secondary to other considerations, even though, as in Lithuania, it could have an impact of its own. In the modern world it has been possible to divide communities with concrete and barbed wire regardless of the inhabitants' views. The ability to create such clear lines, coinciding with the rise of nationalism, has shifted the priorities of states away from the premodern necessity of achieving the best accommodation with the manifold realities of the frontier situation, and onto a concern to force those realities to conform to the rigid line of the state boundary.⁵⁹

To say exactly when and why this happened is, however, beyond the scope of a mere nine essays covering a millennium of Eurasian history, although the themes explored here may hold some clues. What our cases do show is that each individual frontier was subject to change over relatively short periods of time, and that change could increase the vagueness of frontiers as well as their clarity. Above all, a frontier was not a singular entity, but was formed from the conjunction of many coexisting institutions, practices, ideologies, and so on. It was conceived by contemporaries in both linear and zonal terms – often simultaneously – but furthermore, as whole sets of lines and zones amongst which frontier inhabitants and rulers could pick and choose according to circumstances. Teasing out the empirical details and theoretical implications of such complexity is a task which is still far from complete.

NOTES

1. For example, *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity*, ed. R. W. Mathisen and H. S. Sivan, Aldershot 1996, examines a variety of frontiers in the period AD 200–700.
2. S. B. Jones, *Boundary-Making: a handbook for statesmen, treaty editors and boundary commissioners*, Washington 1945, 7, 9–11, sees every boundary as unique; L. K. D. Kristof, 'The nature of frontiers and boundaries', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, XLIX (1959), 273, depicts 'frontiers' (of settlement) as unique but 'boundaries' (including political frontiers) as artificial and hence open to generalisation.
3. See J. R. V. Prescott, *Boundaries and Frontiers*, London 1978, 17–18, 20.
4. Kristof, 'Nature of frontiers', 259, n. 27; see in this volume, 35–6.
5. For instance, J. L. Wieczynski, *The Russian Frontier: the impact of borderlands upon the course of early Russian history*, Charlottesville, Virginia 1976, 6–7; T. F. X. Noble, 'Louis the Pious and the frontiers of the Frankish realm', *Charlemagne's Heir: the reign of Louis the Pious*, ed. P. Godman and R. Collins, Oxford 1990, 334. Cf. A. Hennessy, *The Frontier in Latin American History*, 54–109, esp. 106–9. The third, figurative meaning of the term now so prevalent in English needs no discussion here.
6. Cf. Prescott, *Boundaries*, 33–48.
7. See in this volume, 9–12.
8. Kristof, 'Nature of frontiers', 269–82. For a useful summary of geographical analysis of boundaries and frontiers, see Prescott, *Boundaries*, 13–32.
9. L. Febvre, 'Frontière' [1928], trans. as 'Frontière: the word and the concept', *A New Kind of History: from the writings of Lucien Febvre*, trans. K. Folca, ed. P. Burke, London 1973, 208–18; 'The problem of frontiers and the natural bounds of states', in L. Febvre, *A Geographical Introduction to History*, trans. E. G. Mountford and J. H. Paxton, London 1932, 296–314.
10. For what follows, see R. J. W. Evans, 'Frontiers and national identities in Central Europe', *International History Review*, xiv (1992), 480–502; P. Sahlins, *Boundaries: the making of France and Spain in the Pyrenees*, University of California 1989, 1–7; *idem*, 'Natural frontiers revisited: France's boundaries since the seventeenth century', *American Historical Review*, xcvi (1990), 1423–51; C. R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: a social and economic study*, Baltimore and London 1994; cf. D. H. Miller, 'Frontier societies and the transition between Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages', *Shifting Frontiers*, ed. Mathisen and Sivan, 158–71.
11. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, 1–97.
12. B. Isaac, 'The meaning of the terms *limes* and *limitanei*', *Journal of Roman Studies*, LXXVIII (1988), 125–47.
13. A. Waldron, *The Great Wall of China: from history to myth*, Cambridge 1990.
14. For Carolingian frontiers, see J. M. H. Smith, 'The *fines imperii*: the marches', *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, II (c. 700–c. 900), ed. R. McKitterick, Cambridge 1995, 169–89; for recent case studies, *idem*, *Province and Empire: Brittany and the Carolingians*, Cambridge 1992; C. R. Bowlus, *Franks, Moravians, and Magyars: the struggle for the Middle Danube, 788–907*, Philadelphia 1995; cf. M. Innes, 'Franks and Slavs,

- c. 700–1000: European expansion before the millennium?', *Early Medieval Europe*, vi (1997), 201–15.
15. Noble, 'Louis the Pious', 337–8; C. T. Wood, 'Regnum Francorum: a problem in Capetian administrative usage', *Traditio*, xvi (1967), 117–47.
16. Evans, 'Frontiers and national identities', 481–3.
17. Smith, '*Finis imperii*', 176–7; see in this volume, 111–12.
18. See in this volume, 109–12.
19. Sahlins, 'Natural frontiers revisited', 1424–43.
20. Jones, *Boundary-Making*, 7–9; 108–33 advises that river boundaries should not be used as political borders wherever possible; cf. Evans, 'Frontiers and national identities', 489.
21. Evans, 'Frontiers and national identities', 480–1.
22. 'Frontier' in a territorial sense is first recorded in English in 1413, but its figurative meaning only in 1672–73 (*OED*, vi, 218). The English word originally meant 'front part of an army' (c. 1400).
23. Febvre, 'Frontière', 208–11; Sahlins, 'Natural frontiers revisited', 1435–43.
24. Febvre, 'Frontière', 216–17; M. Foucher, *L'invention des frontières*, Paris 1986, 97–110. Like its English counterpart, *frontière* had previously meant 'front part of the army', attested as early as 1213.
25. *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jakob und Wilhelm Grimm*, 1935 edn., Leipzig, iv, cols. 124–5; Febvre, 'Frontière', 217; Evans, 'Frontiers and national identities', 481. For its spread into Dutch (*grens*) through Luther's Bible, see *Woordenboek de Nederlandsche Taal*, 37 vols, The Hague and Leiden 1882–1956, v, col. 661.
26. G. E. Rothenberg, *The Austrian Military Border in Croatia, 1522–1747*, Urbana 1960; Evans, 'Frontiers and national identities', 490–1.
27. *Ibid.*, 481–4.
28. *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Grimm*, iv, col. 161.
29. *Ukrainian-English Dictionary*, ed. C. H. Andrusyshen and J. N. Krett, 2nd edn, Toronto 1957, 1069; Kristof, 'Nature of frontiers', 269, n. 7. Cf. Polish *kraj* ('country'). I am grateful to Neil Bermel of the Department of Slavonic Studies, University of Sheffield, for his assistance in this matter. For Ukraine as both a defensive march (that is, a political frontier) and a frontier of settlement, see W. H. McNeill, *Europe's Steppe Frontier 1500–1800*, Chicago 1964, for instance 111–23.
30. Isaac, '*Limes*', 126.
31. *Très Ancien Coutumier*, ed. E.-J. Tardif, 1 vol. in 2, Rouen and Paris 1881–1903, I:II, 25, c. xxxiii. Cf. *OED*, ix, 377.
32. Isaac, '*Limes*'; M. Bonner, 'The naming of the frontier: *awāsīm*, *thughūr*, and the Arab geographers', *BSOAS*, LVII (1994), 17–24.
33. The early history of *frontera* is very contested. *The Poem of My Cid*, ed. and trans. P. Such and J. Hodgkinson, 2nd edn, Warminster 1991, line 840 (written in 1207?), mentions the 'Moors of the frontiers', but P. Linehan, *History and the Historians of Medieval Spain*, Oxford 1993, 263, dates the term's adaptation to the divide between Muslims and Christians to the 1220s. Cf. *ibid.*, 205–9, for the ideological context of the Reconquest; for the complexities of the Spanish 'frontier' in reality, see Eduardo Manzano Moreno's essay, Chapter 2 in this volume.

34. F. Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française*, 10 vols, Paris 1881-92, iv, 163.
35. See the many works of R. R. Davies, including 'The Law of the March', *Welsh History Review*, v (1971), 1-30; *Lordship and Society in the March of Wales 1282-1400*, Oxford 1978; 'Kings, lords and liberties in the March of Wales, 1066-1272', *TRHS*, 5th ser. xxix (1979), 41-61. For Marcher identity, see R. Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, Oxford 1982, 20-6.
36. The first century of Turnerism has produced an immense bibliography, beginning with his paper (1893), reprinted as F. J. Turner, 'The significance of the frontier for American history', *The Frontier in American History*, New York 1921, 1-38.
37. *Ibid.*, 38.
38. R. White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815*, Cambridge 1991, for instance x-xiv.
39. For Turnerism and medieval studies, see R. I. Burns, 'The significance of the frontier in the Middle Ages', *MFS*, 307-30.
40. W. H. TeBrake, *Medieval Frontier: culture and ecology in Rijnland*, Texas University 1985.
41. Wiczynski, *Russian Frontier*, 17-25; L. H. Nelson, *The Normans in South Wales*, Austin, Texas 1966, 60-1, 76-8, 176-84; McNeill, *Europe's Steppe Frontier*, 111-15.
42. C. J. Bishko, 'The Castilian as plainsman: the medieval ranching frontier in La Mancha and Extremadura', *The New World Looks at its History: Proceedings of the Second International Congress of Historians of the United States and Mexico*, ed. A. R. Lewis and T. F. McGann, Austin, Texas 1963, 47-69.
43. *MFS*, v-vii. Another common feature mentioned was the development of military institutions.
44. See the articles by P. Knoll and F. Lotter in *MFS*, 151-74, 267-306.
45. See in this volume, 105.
46. See Chapter 2 by Eduardo Manzano Moreno in this volume.
47. R. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: conquest, colonization and cultural change 950-1350*, London 1993, esp. ch. 11; cf. R. L. Reynolds, 'The Mediterranean frontier', *The Frontier in Perspective*, ed. W. D. Wyman and C. B. Kroeber, Madison 1957, 33.
48. A. R. Lewis, 'The closing of the mediaeval frontier, 1250-1350', *Speculum*, xxxiii (1958), 475-83.
49. D. Walker, 'The Norman settlement in Wales', *ANS*, 1 (1978), 131-43; for the Anglo-Scottish border, see G. W. S. Barrow, 'Frontier and settlement: which influenced which?', *MFS*, 3-21.
50. P. M. Duffy, 'The nature of the medieval frontier in Ireland', *Studia Hibernica*, xxii-xxiii (1982-83), 21, but cf. 36-8, where he doubts the utility of the frontier for interpreting medieval Irish history. See also *Colony and Frontier in Medieval Ireland: essays presented to J. F. Lydon*, ed. T. Barry, R. Frame, and K. Simms, London 1995, and Chapter 7 by Steven Ellis in this volume.
51. J. F. Haldon and H. Kennedy, 'The Arab-Byzantine frontier in the 8th and 9th centuries: military organisation in the Borderlands', *Recueil des travaux de l'Institut d'Études Byzantines*, xix (1980), 79-116.

52. Noble, 'Louis the Pious'; cf. Smith, '*Fines imperii*', 169-71.
53. The discussion that follows has been greatly influenced by J. A. Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism*, Chapel Hill 1982, which sets out a broadly based, formal, theoretical framework for premodern frontier studies from a social science perspective. It should be compulsory reading for any historian interested in this topic.
54. For instance, Sahlins, *Boundaries*, ch. 4, shows how Pyreneans adopted French and Spanish identity for their own ends.
55. J. R. V. Prescott, *Political Frontiers and Boundaries*, London 1987, ch. 6; Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism*, esp. ch. 2, 51-2; and in this volume, 26-7.
56. For an exhaustive survey of the available methods for doing this, see R. A. LeVine and D. T. Campbell, *Ethnocentrism: theories of conflict, ethnic attitudes and group behavior*, New York 1972.
57. The 'myth-symbol complex' underlying ethnic identity is discussed at length by A. D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford 1986, and also by Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism*.
58. Prescott, *Political Frontiers and Boundaries*, 80-1.
59. Cf. Evans, 'Frontiers and national identities', 480-502.

distinction between them derives from the systematic antagonism between Islam and Christianity, usually presumed to be in conflict because of the incompatibility of their mutually exclusive creeds and civilisations.

The disciplinary division between Arabist and Medievalist has thus extended the medieval rift to the present, by fostering a dual perception of historical processes affecting the same territory. These two disciplines do not always have matching interests, and in many cases have developed quite different epistemological approaches to their specific subjects: different kinds of evidence, different languages and different terminology make any attempt to relate them difficult. The strong philological bias which has pervaded Arabists' works on al-Andalus is criticised by Medievalists, who insist on the necessity of deeper historical interpretations. Reasonable though it is, this argument is counterbalanced by the lack of interest that Spanish Medievalists have generally shown in the Muslim side of the frontier. As a consequence, Christian kingdoms seem to exist in Arabists' eyes only as reference points providing a chronological context, or as recipients of Islamic cultural transfers. By contrast, Medievalists tend to consider al-Andalus as a historical vacuum doomed to be conquered by the Christians in the process of the Reconquista.

Despite serious efforts made by both Medievalists and Arabists in the last two decades to overcome this state of affairs, the breach still exists.¹ The 'gap' created by the disciplinary frontier has produced a fragmented historical interpretation which makes difficult any attempt to correlate processes on both sides of the frontier or to establish continuities in conquered areas. The obvious approaches of military history or cultural studies have prevailed over attempts at building up a coherent and comprehensive historical reconstruction, and disconnected bibliographies epitomise the failed attempts to span both sides of the border.

This brief historiographical overview is enough to show the consequences that the existence of a conspicuous frontier in the Iberian peninsula during the Middle Ages has produced in our historical perception. A closer look at this historiography reveals that a good number of its premises are based on the assumption that this remarkable 'frontier' is a useful conceptual tool for historical analysis. The following discussion aims to demonstrate that this conception is based on blatant essentialism and an uncritical assessment of available evidence. As I hope to show, the case of the Iberian peninsula in the Middle Ages as a

frontier territory *par excellence*, the arena for confrontation between two opposing civilisations, hides what in fact seems to have been an ambiguous and problematical frontier.

Frontiers and 'the Frontier'

As Daniel Power has shown in the Introduction to this volume, frontier studies have produced different 'models' of characteristic frontiers, which have been described for different times and places. The obvious question is, what kind of 'frontier' has produced the traditional historiography of medieval Spain outlined above?

In frontier studies three divergent notions of frontiers can be discerned. The first is what I will call the 'unstable frontier', meaning those frontiers whose limits change constantly depending on political, military, or diplomatic factors. The shaping of modern European states is full of disputes concerning portions of their highly volatile frontiers, which nevertheless tended to be more and more precise – though not necessarily more homogeneous or universally recognised – as those states consolidated.² The second model is that of the 'enclosing frontier', a limit separating two distinctive and well-defined political, economic, social, or cultural areas. Both areas are mutually exclusive, for the same political, economic, social, or cultural reasons, and their limits tend to be highly stable unless sudden events (like invasions or migrations) rip them open. When described from a political point of view, these frontiers usually have strong military implications and consequently their limits become a defensive or offensive line where hostile contacts take place. Perhaps the best example of an 'enclosing frontier' is the imperial Roman system of the *limes*, as portrayed by traditional historiography.³ The third model is that of the 'expanding frontier'. These are frontiers of potential colonisation, where the extension of limits may be achieved by military means, but whose main feature is the occupation of land by settlers, so as to make the frontiers' limits broadly coincide with those of settlement. Obviously, the model of the expanding frontier is one sided, as it is always described from the settlers' perspective, thus implying that the colonised territories were either deserted or inhabited by trifling populations, which quite 'naturally' disappeared, or were absorbed or removed during the process. F. J. Turner's description of the western American frontier in the nineteenth century – described not as a limit but as an access – remains the paramount example of an expanding frontier characteristically associ-

ated with cultural values such as individualism or 'love of freedom', and to broad historical interpretations which stress the 'manifest destiny' of the people who forged it.⁴

These three basic models of frontier have one thing in common: they always define a fringe, whose territorial shaping is determined by a number of natural or human elements. These overlap, producing a neat borderline which, in turn, can be either 'unstable', 'enclosing', or 'expanding'. The idea of premodern frontiers as borderlines is sometimes criticised as a transposition of today's concept of state boundaries on to societies which lacked the means of territorial control available to present-day states. Nevertheless, frontiers are still basically viewed as fringes or outer boundaries.⁵ Febvre's assertion, that historians should look more for frontier regions and less for rigid boundaries, has not always been taken into account since the notion of boundaries provides for easier historical interpretation than the inextricable, paradoxical, and confusing idea of commingled areas.⁶ In this way, frontiers in history have become artificial lines drawn in order to recognise distinctive patterns of human experience.

These general considerations are particularly relevant for the study of frontiers in the European Middle Ages. In principle, there are a good number of medieval frontiers which seem to be well defined. Frontiers between kingdoms, frontiers against foreign peoples, or frontiers between contending civilisations (for instance, Christianity and Islam) are commonly described in contemporary accounts, openly portraying cultural perceptions of difference or antagonism. However, things are not so simple. By using the word 'frontier' we are automatically accepting two ideas implicit in it: on the one hand, the existence of distinctive, homogeneous, and clearly differentiated political, economic, or cultural realms and, on the other, the recognition of a more or less open antagonism or violence between them. The latter premise is easily recognisable, but the former hardly fits in the medieval world.

It is frequently forgotten that one of the essential features of the medieval European landscape was its lack of cohesion and unity; its discontinuity and disordered character. This ambiguity meant that the whole territory of medieval Europe was, in itself, a frontier. One can find this pervasive frontier in feudal enclaves, which fragmented and divided the territory in such a way that crossing from one to another meant passing through the jurisdictions of different lords; in the limits between towns and rural areas, with the former often having their own

laws and enjoying special privileges; or even in the political arena, where stability, a basic constituent of a homogeneous realm, was always greatly under threat, since it depended on a lord recognising the authority of someone above him. Lack of such recognition meant immediately the formation of an internal frontier, a development rarely perceived by contemporaries as less relevant than the threat posed by 'external' enemies to the frontiers of a given kingdom.

None of these frontiers, examples of which could be multiplied, is likely to be reflected in the textbook political map of the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, they show how difficult it is to draw a homogeneous picture of the kingdoms girdled by conventional medieval frontiers. The prevalence of violence or personal ties of dependence, to name just two key elements of medieval society which tended to create frontiers of their own, renders impossible a clear-cut definition of the realms which those frontiers created. Therefore, the emphasis laid upon the 'external' frontiers in medieval historiography merely reflects convention; frontiers are a convenient tool for historical interpretation, which demarcates fields of analysis by over-simplifying a richer reality, and by stressing the most apparent, political, level to the detriment of other aspects.

The Case for the Frontier in the Iberian Peninsula

Interestingly, the two historiographical traditions which have been mentioned above – Medievalist and Arabist – have developed different models of 'frontier' for the Christian kingdoms and for al-Andalus. The Christian frontier clearly fits the model of the expanding frontier, whereas the 'Muslim frontier' can be portrayed as a typical enclosing frontier. Furthermore, frontiers between Christian kingdoms correspond to the model of unstable frontiers described above.

The characterisation of the Christian frontier as an expanding line is best portrayed in the works of Sánchez Albornoz, one of the most influential historians of the Spanish Middle Ages. According to him, the creation of the frontier against Islam was the crucial event in the history of Spain in general, and of Castile in particular. It was indeed a very special frontier. As early as the mid eighth century the lands lying south of the mountains that sheltered the kingdom of Asturias, and more particularly the Duero river valley, became a desert: a no-man's land consciously created as a buffer area by the kings of Asturias in order to protect their territories. The rapid consolidation of this kingdom raised

the population in a mountainous area, and encouraged a southward flow of people who started a process of colonisation known as *re población*. The massive movement of population which constituted the colonisation of these lands produced a distinctive society in which the prospect of empty lands attracted peasants from the north, who were prepared to endure the dangers of a frontier always exposed to Muslim raids. In these conditions the acute need for a workforce in such hazardous areas inhibited the emergence of a feudal society, as kings were unable to draw settlers to these lands unless they were granted privileges and freedom. These freeholders were partly responsible for strengthening the frontier from the Christian side as they combined colonisation duties with military expansion.⁷

The dynamics created by the *re población* of the Duero valley became a distinctive feature of the Christian frontier in the following centuries. Once the Duero valley had been occupied there was no further need for a buffer zone, but by then the Reconquista had become closely associated with *re población*. The declared aim of the Christians was the expulsion of the infidel intruders, and therefore the Muslim populations of the lands of al-Andalus conquered by the Christians were either expelled or greatly reduced. The demographic vacuum left by Muslim emigrants was filled by waves of northern immigrants, attracted by the prospects of new lands. When the Reconquista came to an end in 1492, the process was temporarily interrupted, but the spirit of the Castilian as a frontiersman did not die out, as a new frontier was found in the continent discovered the same year.

Although there is no clear evidence that Sánchez Albornoz was acquainted with Turner's ideas, the picture he drew of the Christian medieval frontier in the Middle Ages bears a clear resemblance to the American historian's view of his country's western frontier. Ideas such as individual freedom (for instance, the absence of feudal social structures) or 'manifest destiny' (the Castilian frontiersman as the ancestor of the *conquistador*) are perfectly interchangeable between the western American frontier and medieval Spain. This conception has also proved to be extremely successful, as a long historiographical tradition has stressed the uniqueness of medieval Spain on account of the peculiarities imposed by the frontier, and by the necessity of constant warfare against the Muslims.⁸

In contrast with the Christian frontier of expanding limits, its Muslim equivalent is an illustrative case of an enclosing frontier. *Thagr* (plural, *thugūr*) is the most common word used to refer to it in medieval Arab

sources. Although the word also has other meanings, like 'mouth' or 'breach', 'frontier' is the most frequent. Arabic dictionaries clearly specify that *thagr*, when meaning 'frontier', is the area which separates the *dār al-Islam* (literally, the 'abode of Islam') from the *dār al-ḥarb*, (literally, 'the abode of war').⁹ In other words, *thagr* is the territory that marks the limits of the Muslim lands, beyond which lies the land of the unbelievers.

There is strong evidence showing that this neat dichotomy was only formulated once the early Arab conquests had come to a halt and the new Islamic empire had been consolidated. It was then, in the first half of the eighth century (second century Hegira), that Muslim legal theorists elaborated on the dichotomy by defining the conditions which had to prevail for a given territory to be considered as *dār al-Islam*. Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767/150H), one of the leading jurists of this period, set forth three cases in which *dār al-Islam* became *dār al-ḥarb*: enforcement of non-Muslim laws, proximity to *dār al-ḥarb*, and a lack of security for the life and safety of Muslims. The model for this definition was based on the life of the prophet Muḥammad himself, who also had his own *dār al-Islam* in his city of Medina, in conflict with the *dār al-ḥarb* of his Meccan enemies.¹⁰

This particular formulation of the dichotomy had a strongly militant character, which is also reflected in the works of Islamic political theorists. According to these theorists, prominent among the duties of any Muslim ruler was the sustenance of religion, the maintenance of a fair fiscal administration, and also the safeguarding of the *thugūr al-muslimīn*, the frontiers of the Muslims. Moreover, the *thagr* also marked a line of political behaviour, because once the frontier had been breached the Holy War (*jihād*) became an unavoidable obligation for the ruler.¹¹ Hence, in medieval Islam *thagr* had a wider meaning than mere territorial demarcation, because its militant character served as a means of political legitimisation for Muslim rulers.

The concept of *thagr* was elaborated in the Islamic East, but was rapidly transferred to al-Andalus, a region of close contact with the 'unbelievers'. The deep meaning of the notion of *thagr* was taken up by Andalusian writers who worked in the service of the Umayyads and can be assessed in the chronicle accounts that describe the efforts and energies devoted by Umayyad rulers to the defence of their frontiers. In this connection, Arab sources written in Umayyad Cordoba never fail to note the importance and success of the military campaigns against the Christian kingdoms, the fortification of frontier enclaves, or the

concern shown by Cordoban rulers over the issue of Muslim captives in the north, a recurrent topic closely associated with the necessity of frontier defence.¹²

Despite the much more sophisticated definition of the idea of frontier on the Andalusian side in comparison to its Christian counterpart, the *thugūr al-Andalus* lack a comprehensive historical interpretation similar to the one set out by Sánchez Albornoz and other Spanish medievalists. One thing, however, seems to be certain: after the defeat at Poitiers in 732, the Muslim land frontier never expanded again. The defensive character of the al-Andalusian *thagy* clearly appears in the Umayyad period, when numerous military expeditions against the north never produced a significant territorial expansion of the *dār al-Islam*. Accordingly, most studies of the Andalusian frontier have stressed its defensive disposition and have suggested, more or less openly, the existence of a line of fortifications against the expanding Christian frontier. The main characteristics of these fortifications were the primacy of the military administration, due to the defensive function of these territories, and lower taxes than in other areas of al-Andalus, owing to the preponderance of warfare in these regions.¹³

Although this line successfully resisted Christian expansion throughout the Umayyad period, it gradually broke down after the collapse of the Caliphate in 1031. Later efforts by the North African dynasties – the Almoravids (1086–1118) and Almohads (1147–1212) – to reverse this trend failed resoundingly after some initial, short-lived successes. Its survival throughout the fourteenth and most of the fifteenth centuries was more the result of the political complexities of the period than of the line's effectiveness.

The Ambiguities of the Frontier

The historiographical perception of the Christian frontier as 'expanding' and of the Muslim frontier as 'enclosing' has provided the general framework for historical interpretations of the Iberian Middle Ages. Furthermore, this frontier had a militant and legitimising ideology behind it as medieval writers, both Arab and Christian, widely referred to and justified the conflict by resorting to notions such as *jihād* or Reconquista, and to contentious confrontations of a religious kind.

Few will deny that this picture lacks coherence, even though it corresponds to a long-term trend ending in the last decade of the fifteenth

century. Moreover, a closer scrutiny of its premises and a critical approach to the evidence upon which it lies reveals serious inconsistencies, which should lead us to rethink the whole framework.

These inconsistencies can first be grasped at the ideological level elaborated on each side of the frontier. At a basic level, the notion of *jihād* is conveniently simple: it makes clear the duty to fight the unbelievers in obedience to God's commands. In fact, if we were to believe the Arab chroniclers, then all the wars waged by Muslim rulers against infidels were Holy Wars, prompted by the necessity of fulfilling a religious command. However, present-day historiography would hardly agree that the objective of all Islamic wars was always to wipe every infidel off the face of the earth, and would instead maintain that such wars served to demonstrate the just and divinely inspired nature of the rulers' actions. Although it is true that there were specific moments when the spirit of *jihād* played an important role in fostering military expansion or defence, it would seem more reasonable – at least from a secular historical viewpoint – to assume that at each historical juncture there was an interplay of political, economic, and ideological conditioning factors, and that it was these which were decisive in producing confrontations with the Christians.¹⁴

Besides, the general idea of *jihād* had practical applications, and these did not always correspond to the strict principles from which they sprang: In al-Andalus the notion of *jihād*, though widespread, never developed any further. Andalusian legal theorists consistently repeated the same definitions and legal enforcements associated with this concept, exactly as they had originally been formulated by their peers in the Muslim East. This lack of innovation in a notion supposedly ever-present in Andalusian society is noteworthy. It has been suggested that it mirrors the considerable distance existing between an imported militant theory and a complex and difficult reality.¹⁵

This distance can be perceived in some revealing details. The Umayyads never encouraged the use of elements typically associated with the Holy War. Fortifications which sheltered pious Muslims devoted to praying, ascetic exercises, and the practice of the Holy War, the so-called *ribāts*, are almost completely absent from the map of the *thugūr al-Andalus*, a situation that was in strong contrast with the Islamic frontiers in the contemporary Near East. Geographical and historical accounts describe the frontier against the Byzantine Empire as bristling with *ribāts* sustained from the incomes of inalienable foundations

(*wuqūf*). Although sources from the Umayyad period in al-Andalus do contain mentions of individuals who were eager to settle in the 'frontier' in order to practise the Holy War and eventually to find martyrdom, such references are relatively few and never allow us to construe that their initiative was encouraged by the central government.¹⁶

The prevalence of the idea of Holy War associated with the need of defending the frontiers is also closely associated in the East with the enrolling of 'volunteers' (*mutaṭāwwi'a*) imbued with the idea of religious expansion through Muslim campaigns. In al-Andalus there is ample evidence of the presence of these volunteers, who joined the regular army out of religious zeal and were not regularly paid, but had a right to a share of the booty in the campaigns against the North.¹⁷ However, these volunteers never seem to have played an important role in the campaigns – the chief burden rested on the regular troops and the frontier inhabitants who agreed to take part – and sometimes they even seem to have been considered as cannon fodder by unscrupulous military commanders.¹⁸

Accordingly, Andalusian *jihād* was not so impressive as a mere theoretical disquisition would lead us to believe. It was conditioned by the specific circumstances which prevailed in al-Andalus. As will be made clear below, these circumstances did not allow the theoretical principles which backed the idea of Holy War to be easily implemented. It was only at some particular junctures – like the campaigns of al-Manṣūr (end of the tenth and beginning of the eleventh centuries), the first moments of Almoravid and Almohad expansion (twelfth and thirteenth centuries), or at the time of strong military pressure by the Christians – that this idea seems to have imbued cohesive force into and acquired paramount importance in Andalusian society.¹⁹

The concept of Reconquista is equally misleading. As early as the second half of the ninth century, Latin chroniclers remarked on the continuity between the defeated kingdom of the Visigoths and the new kingdoms which had emerged in the north and were portrayed as the natural successors of the defeated. These chroniclers conferred a providentialist spirit on the enterprise of recovering the lost land of their ancestors by considering the Saracens as invaders, who would be expelled with the aid of God.²⁰ However, modern Spanish scholarship has demonstrated that what is commonly called the Reconquista originated in a very different way and that it is hard to see these northern kingdoms as the successors of the Visigoths. The northern parts of the peninsula where the Reconquista is said to have primarily begun were

occupied by peoples (in particular, the Astures) who had persistently opposed Roman and Visigothic rule. The resistance that Arab conquerors met here was similar to the difficulties that their predecessors had encountered in subduing these areas. The battle of Covadonga (725), usually considered as the starting point of the Reconquista, was probably nothing more than a successful skirmish which convinced the Arabs of the difficulties of an effective occupation of these marginal areas. A century and a half later, the Asturian kingdom had consolidated and its rulers sought to legitimise their rule. How better to do this than to establish a link of continuity between them and the Visigoths? Ecclesiastical writers working in the royal court proclaimed that their frequent struggles with the Muslims were guided by God, who was ready to forget the sins committed by the Visigoths and help their successors to recover their land.²¹

These remarks should warn us against applying indiscriminately categories which seem to be well founded in the written sources. Obviously, it would be absurd to deny the existence of an ideology of the Reconquista throughout the Middle Ages or to reject the impact of the idea of Holy War in particular circumstances. What is at stake here is to what extent these ideological notions, when taken at their face value, provide an accurate framework for historical interpretation. The preceding discussion has clearly shown that they do not provide such a framework, unless we consider the historian's task as merely the reiteration of the contents of their sources. Reducing medieval Spanish history to a long enterprise aimed at recovering a lost land is no less misleading than framing historical interpretation on the Muslim side within the notion of *jihād*.

If the contemporary ideological understandings of the frontier cannot withstand a serious critique, the same goes for further assumptions partly derived from them. This is the case with the association between Reconquista and *repoblación* which lies at the core of the idea of a Christian 'expanding frontier'. As we have seen, Sánchez Albornoz considered that this process originated at a very early stage, when the kings of Asturias started the occupation of the areas of the Duero valley which their predecessors had consciously depopulated in the middle of the eighth century. But were those areas really depopulated?

In a celebrated article, R. Menéndez Pidal challenged the view of his former student, arguing the practical infeasibility of a purposeful depopulation of such a huge area by the feeble kings of Asturias, which is what Sánchez Albornoz had suggested. Menéndez Pidal thought that

the information gleaned from two Latin sources, describing a campaign by the king Alfonso I (739–57) in the course of which he 'depopulated' this region, should not be taken literally.²² In fact, it is difficult to imagine how Alfonso I was able to uproot such a huge population from their dwellings and to bring them with him to the kingdom of Asturias. Both texts are likely to be embellishments by the chroniclers of a particularly successful campaign. What this campaign probably produced was disarray in the administrative organisation of the area which neither the rulers of al-Andalus nor the northern kingdoms were able to control for more than a century. This would explain why this area virtually disappears from our sources throughout this period. When it appears again in Christian documents of the tenth century, landholders occupying these areas are said to be 'populating' them (Latin: *populare*). However, Menéndez Pidal held that this verb should not be understood as describing the colonising of hitherto deserted lands, but as portraying a process of bringing back to political and social control lands which had hitherto remained out of bounds. This would explain why many documents which mention the 'population' of the Duero Valley refer to water mills or fisheries in areas which otherwise are described as deserted.²³

Despite Sánchez Albornoz's efforts to answer these criticisms, the origins and true character of the *repoblación* of the Duero Valley remain highly controversial.²⁴ Neither archaeology nor analysis of place names has demonstrated the existence of a population vacuum which would justify the conclusions of the Spanish medievalist. In fact, if we accept that the population remained in place, it would be necessary to explain how it was integrated into the political and social structures of the northern kingdom.²⁵

In the last two decades, Spanish historiography has ignored what Sánchez Albornoz used to consider the cornerstone of his interpretation of the Spanish Middle Ages, and has tried to answer some of the implications of this question by demonstrating that the social processes in the Iberian peninsula had their own dynamics, notwithstanding the existence of a frontier against the infidels. The spread of links of dependence as the general form of social organisation followed a variety of patterns, resulting in the widespread adoption of feudal forms of production. In this way, the idea of a Castilian free peasantry as the vanguard of the frontier expansion has also been put into question. This leaves the Christian frontier denuded of one of its most conspicu-

ous features: far from being the expanding line of a colonising and enterprising movement, the *repoblación* is now considered a typical example of feudal expansion which can be compared with similar cases of expanding societies in the rest of medieval Europe. Under this new light Christian expansion is considered a by-product of feudal conflicts which set dominant groups in mutual opposition for the control of limited resources. The need for new lands to increase the availability of such resources was the main aim of an expansion actively encouraged by kings eager to reduce internal strife in their domains.²⁶

The Muslim 'enclosing frontier' also reveals numerous inconsistencies when carefully analysed. One of these inconsistencies is related to the very notion of a *thagr* that neatly divides the territory into two distinctive parts. As mentioned above, the quest for homogeneous realms in the medieval world is an attempt doomed to fail, due to the lack of internal coherence in medieval polities. This is also true for Islamic political formations, despite the fact that they tend to be defined within an ideological construct, in this case Islam. However, Muslim medieval theorists were aware that this ideology was not completely dominant and had to recognise that the lands of the *dār al-Islam* were far from constituting a homogeneous realm: this is why they elaborated the notion of *dār al-'ahd* (literally, 'abode of the pact') which designates the 'abode' which had been conquered by the Muslims, but whose populations had established a pact by which they had submitted to the conquerors, and had kept their properties and creed in exchange for the payment of certain taxes. *Dār al-'ahd* was included within the *dār al-Islam*, but was clearly differentiated from it, because breach of the existing pact led immediately to its transformation into *dār al-harb*, and consequently liable to attack by Muslim armies.²⁷

These subtle distinctions indicate that *thagr* cannot be taken as a simple boundary. Pacts with non-Muslim populations living under Muslim rule were a constituent part of Islamic political formations. It was not so much territorial dominion as recognition of rule by conquered communities that engendered political limits. The definitions of Muslim theorists identified this rule with Islam, but obviously this was a legitimating device, by virtue of which the dominant political formation that ruled the *thagr* defined itself in ideological-religious terms. These terms allowed the existence of non-Muslim communities within the 'abode of Islam', but also defined the exclusion of other non-Muslim communities by stressing the militant character of the frontier. This

dual attitude is well attested in al-Andalus where there is evidence showing that Christian communities lived under Muslim rule in regions of the *thagr* that bordered the Christian kingdoms.²⁸ In this connection, A. K. S. Lambton's remarks on the nature of Islamic political formations are particularly enlightening. According to Lambton the basis of the Islamic state was essentially ideological, 'not political, territorial or ethnical [*sic*]'.²⁹

That the Arab *thagr* embodies a broad, ill-defined meaning of territory may also be traced to the etymology of the word. It is noteworthy that the root of the word *th.g.r.* appears in other Semitic languages with the meaning of 'opening', 'gate', and 'pass'. We do not know exactly how it came to mean 'frontier' in Arabic, but I think it is significant that the Latin word for frontier, *limes*, also originally meant 'military road' or 'pass'.³⁰ Arab authors in the East used the word *thagr* in relation to the frontier separating the Byzantine Empire and in particular, when referring to the mountainous regions of the Taurus and the Anti Taurus, which constituted the dividing line between Arabs and Byzantines. Curiously enough, the Byzantine authors used a term with a very similar meaning, *kleisurai*, to refer to these areas. This word is originally found meaning 'pass' or 'defile' and at least until the tenth century it served to designate the fortifications built at a frontier mountain pass.³¹ Another word used in Arab sources to refer to the frontier regions in Asia Minor was *darb* (plural, *durūb*). The origins of this word are obscure: it could have come from a local dialect, or was perhaps borrowed from Persian. Whatever the case, the important thing is that this word developed two meanings: the idea of 'gate', 'way', or 'pass'; and a meaning synonymous with *thagr*.³²

This brief incursion into philology reveals a perception of frontier which is clearly linked with the idea of 'pass' or 'opening'. It is significant that this coincidence occurs both in a Semitic language (Arabic) and in Indo-European languages. The reason behind this is simple: a frontier was not a line, a distinctly defined demarcation; instead, it consisted of a series of strategic points which all provided access to the territory. It is not at all surprising therefore to find that, for example, the word *thagr* sometimes refers to a single castle or a particular city (for instance, *thagr Saraqusta*: frontier of Zaragoza). The *thugūr* were perceived as a series of 'passes' which controlled the access to a given territory. This perception fits well with the character of the frontier described above, as it highlights the discontinuity and irregularity of the frontier landscape.

The al-Andalus Frontier at the Time of the Umayyads (755–1031)

The aim of the Andalusian Umayyads in regard to these *thugūr* or 'passes' was twofold: on the one hand, to control them in order to check the advances of the Christians, and on the other, to portray themselves as defenders of the Muslim community sequestered behind the *thagr* in order to legitimise their own rule. The latter was easier to achieve than the former. The frontiers of al-Andalus were always rife with political instability, and Cordoba was not always able to exert its authority on the peripheral areas which were supposed to be the defending walls of the *dār al-Islam*.

The frontier regions were in fact the quintessence of al-Andalus' internal divisions, as is demonstrated in the numerous references in the sources to 'rebellions' against central authority in these areas. When describing such revolts these sources, written from a pro-Umayyad perspective, usually portray them as 'separations of obedience' or as 'breaches of existing pacts', expressions which bring us back to the ideological basis of Islamic political formations as described by Lambton.

In some cases these internal rebellions were particularly persistent. This was the case with Toledo, the former capital of the Visigoths, located in a strategic area of the Andalusian frontier. Toledo led constant uprisings against the authority of the Umayyad amirs between the eighth and tenth centuries. The precise causes of these rebellions are never explicitly attested in the sources, but we can infer from some scattered references that the Toledans refused the fiscal duties that the Umayyads tried to impose upon them. Be that as it may, revolts in the city were persistent and sometimes attracted military support from the northern kingdoms. The growing threat that these rebellions posed to Umayyad rule in the central peninsula in the mid ninth century forced the Cordoban amir Muḥammad I (852–86) to fortify a series of enclaves (Madrid, Peñafora, Talamanca, Calatrava, and Talavera) which ultimately constituted a formidable ring around the city. The aim of this internal frontier was twofold: to protect the crucial routes which crossed the central plateau of the peninsula from Toledan expeditions, and to prevent Toledan communications with the north.³³

Other sectors of the *thugūr al-Andalus* were in the hands of aristocratic families who, from the eighth to the tenth century or even beyond, managed to seize and hold most of the key strongholds of these areas and to carve themselves a strong position *vis-à-vis* the Umayyads.

Against a background of ill-defined boundaries, these families built up a complex network of political alliances and personal loyalties which ran across both sides of the frontier, much to the despair of the Umayyad rulers. These networks need to be carefully analysed in order to understand the significance of the frontier.

The ethnic origins of these families were not homogeneous. Some of them belonged to indigenous stock, others were of Arab or Berber descent. Nevertheless, they came to find themselves in very similar situations, and having similarly troublesome relations with the Umayyads. Part of the indigenous aristocracy had managed to survive the Arab conquest, thanks to pacts with the conquerors and conversion to Islam. These agreements secured their social position, probably in exchange for political recognition entailing fiscal payments to Cordoba. Some of these indigenous families were settled in the frontier areas. This was the case with the Banū Qasī, the Banū 'Amrūs, and the Banū Šabrīt, who played a prominent military and political role during the ninth and tenth centuries in the frontier regions of the Ebro valley. The complex history of each of these lineages turns on two fundamental axes: on the one hand, their relations with the other local powers (including the Christian kingdoms), and on the other, their relations with the Umayyads. The complex – and not always clear – network of alliances or enmities into which these families entered helped to create ambiguous situations, in which more complex factors than mere religious affinities played a prominent role.

The case of one of these frontier families, the so-called Banū Qasī, illustrates the intricacies of this situation well. They were the descendants of a certain Casius, a military commander who had been in charge of the system of frontier defences that the Visigoths were compelled to set up against the restless Basque populations of the northern peninsula. At the time of the Arab conquest Casius surrendered to the newcomers and converted to Islam. The conquerors probably allowed him to keep the same territories he had been ruling up until then. These fortresses were Arnedo, Olite, Viguera, and Calahorra, all of them well documented in the Visigothic period as part of the defences against the Basques, and all of them firmly in the hands of members of the Banū Qasī lineage until its disappearance in the tenth century.

In the aftermath of the conquest an interesting development took place: in the first half of the ninth century, the Banū Qasī entered into an alliance with the Basque family of the Arista, who ruled the neigh-

bouring city of Pamplona, the embryo of the future kingdom of Navarra. The alliance lasted more than seventy years and resulted in joint political and military actions, and in a series of marriages between the families. It only came to an end when the Arista were overthrown by the rival family of the Jimenos in 905.

The ambiguous loyalties of the Banū Qasī were a constant source of trouble for the Umayyads. The chronicles describe countless rebellions by members of this family against the Cordoban rulers and ambitious attempts to extend their territories against other frontier families. These rebellions always followed a similar pattern: one of the descendants of Casius takes over a stronghold or a city, or defies the authority of the Umayyads by refusing to take part in a military campaign; an expedition is sent from Cordoba; and the rebel finally agrees to acknowledge Umayyad rule once more. Sometimes sources inform us that this surrender – at least from the Cordoban perspective – is accompanied by the former rebel taking a new oath of allegiance. It is also worth mentioning that these rebellions never resulted in the dispossession of the Banū Qasī of their original lands: the family was so firmly rooted through its control of strategic enclaves in their sector of the *thagr* that the Umayyads had no choice but to have dealings with them.

In fact, the Banū Qasī disappeared from the frontier only when the rival Arab family of the Tujībids emerged at the end of the ninth century. The Tujībids were initially backed by the Umayyads, who used them as allies to counteract the growing power of the Banū Qasī. This policy proved successful, and during the tenth century the Tujībids became masters of the frontier section which had previously belonged to their rivals. They were even able to extend their control considerably. Not surprisingly, perhaps, relations with the Umayyads became increasingly strained due to the reluctance of members of this family to comply with fiscal and military demands from Cordoba, and the caliph 'Abd al-Raḥmān III had to face a number of rebellions led by them.

The most important of these rebellions ended in 937 when Zaragoza, the main city in the hands of the Tujībids, surrendered to the army of the Cordoban caliph after a long siege. Despite this surrender the Tujībids were not overthrown; instead a treaty was concluded between 'Abd al-Raḥmān III and Muḥammad b. Hāshim al-Tujībi, the leading member of the family at that time. The latter was obliged to swear an oath of allegiance (*bay'a*) to the caliph, to take part in his military campaigns, to send fiscal contributions to Cordoba, and to refuse any alliance with the Christians. In exchange for this he was granted full

authority in his domains for his lifetime, and permission to bequeath them to his descendants.³⁴

Berber groups in al-Andalus tell a different story, though with a similar ending. At the time of the conquest they settled in areas of the Levante, Spain's central plateau, and the valleys of the Guadalquivir and Guadiana. We do not know exactly what their social structures were, but judging from the vocabulary of the sources it has been suggested that tribal structures were prevalent among them at this early period. However, in the aftermath of conquest, at least some of these structures disintegrated. A good example of this process is provided by the Banū Zannūn, a Berber group which settled in the frontier region of Santaver. In the middle of the ninth century these Berbers arabised their name, thus becoming the Banū Dī l-Nūn. This coincided with the emergence of a chieftain, named Sulaymān b. Dī l-Nūn, who came to terms with the Umayyad amir of Cordoba. In exchange for political recognition Sulaymān was granted the whole territory under his rule.

If there was a tribal component in the internal organisation of this Berber group, this quickly disappeared in the following years as Sulaymān's successors established a well-defined territorial domain. This included a certain number of castles and fortifications which impeded the entrance of the amirs' armies, and related rural settlements where the Banū Dī l-Nūn exercised 'oppression over the people'. Our sources also inform us that the Banū Dī l-Nūn could raise an army of 20 000 soldiers in their territories, a figure probably exaggerated, but which corroborates the strength of their resources.³⁵

Despite their different ethnic backgrounds, all these families reached a similar degree of power in the sectors of the frontier they controlled. However, the pre-eminence of these (and many other) frontier lineages was tested during the first third of the tenth century, when the Umayyad caliph 'Abd al-Rahmān III tried to curtail their power in the frontier after having defeated a number of rebellions in the interior regions of al-Andalus. In 939 this policy suddenly came to an end. In that year the caliph suffered a severe defeat while campaigning in Christian territory. Part of his army was annihilated and he narrowly escaped death. Arab sources speak of treason among the caliphal ranks and point to frontier chieftains as the main culprits, since they left the camp when the attack against the Umayyad column was at its fiercest. In the aftermath of this disaster 'Abd al-Rahmān III took a bold decision: he would campaign no more, and decided to entrust the defence of the frontier to the local aristocracy who 'inherited their tracts from

their ancestors, the brave and tough Tujībids, Banū Zirwāl, Banū Gazlūn, Banū al-Ṭawīl, Banū Razīn and others'.³⁶

'Abd al-Rahmān III's acknowledgment of his defeat amounted to recognition of the total impossibility of adapting the frontier to the theoretical requirements of the Holy War. If we are to believe the vocabulary of the Cordoban sources written under Umayyad patronage, the caliph's aim was a *thaghr* geared to the Holy War and bristling with *ribāt* foundations full of volunteers seeking martyrdom on the path of God. Reality was a quite different matter. Whole sectors of the frontier were in the hands of powerful families with very different backgrounds, but with a common aversion to political control exerted from Cordoba. In fact, some of these families, for instance the Tujībids or the Banū Dī l-Nūn, managed to survive after the fall of the Umayyads and governed some of the Taifa kingdoms which succeeded them.

Conclusion

In examining the formation of the frontier between Islam and Christendom in the Iberian peninsula, several points have been clarified. First is the necessity of abandoning ideological premises drawn from contemporary accounts. The uncritical acceptance of these premises has led historians to draw a linear demarcation in which political boundaries mirror the clear-cut ideological division of our sources. This *emic* (see Glossary) approach hinders any attempt at rational historical interpretation because it overlooks an important fact: that it was easier for medieval political formations to set out their ideological and exclusive legitimation than it was for them to exert control on a frontier reality full of unholy alliances, rebellions, and internal strife.

The traditional notions of the Christian frontier in Spain as 'expanding' and the Muslim as 'enclosing' also cannot withstand a serious critique. The Christian frontier was not an autonomous historical entity, but rather the by-product of a strong feudal society which sought to resolve its own contradictions through expansion, a process which bears strong similarities with well-known processes of feudal expansion like the Crusades or the German *Drang nach Osten*. The Muslim frontier was not a neat line of division between believers and unbelievers, but a complex abode of mixed loyalties and aristocratic rule, with which the central government had to deal in order to attract its leaders into the centre's political sphere.

However, it is important to bear in mind that these conclusions do not attempt to deny the existence of a difference, of an antagonism or a confrontation between the realms of Christianity and Islam in the Iberian peninsula. More or less continuously, more or less apparently, conflict did exist, and took a variety of forms throughout the eight centuries of Muslim rule. It is obvious that this strife produced frontiers, but it seems clear that these frontiers cannot be assessed by projecting present-day notions of borders on to the Middle Ages. Medieval society was heterogeneous and diverse, and frontier areas were no exception to this. In fact, their complex peculiarities increased their fragmented character: loyalties swung, territorial control was always highly unstable, and religious or ethnic ascription never meant much when confronted with other factors, including material ones. From this perspective it is difficult to see how borders can be considered as a useful tool for historical analysis. The result of such a view is an essentialist discourse which rests upon seemingly coherent premises, but lacks a sound historical basis.

NOTES

1. See esp. T. H. Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain in the Early Middle Ages: comparative perspectives on social and cultural formation*, Princeton 1979. Interestingly, Glick does not believe there was a permanent confrontation along the border, but rather an 'ecological frontier', 103–5.
2. M. Foucher speaks of a 'sacralisation' of boundaries in modern states, *L'invention des frontières*, Paris 1986, 27.
3. This standard conception has provoked considerable debate among historians of the ancient world, C. R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: a social and economic study*, Baltimore and London 1994; B. Isaac, *The Limits of Empire*, revised edn Oxford 1992.
4. F. J. Turner, 'The significance of the frontier in American history', *The Frontier in American History*, New York 1920, 1–38.
5. J. C. Hudson, 'Theory and methodology in comparative frontier studies', *The Frontier*, ed. D. H. Miller and J. O. Steffen, Oklahoma 1977, 5–35.
6. L. Febvre, *A Geographical Introduction to History*, trans. E. G. Mountford and J. H. Paxton, Westport, Conn. 1932, 296–315.
7. Sánchez Albornoz's ideas are summarised in C. Sánchez Albornoz, 'The frontier and Castilian liberties', *The World Looks at its History: Proceedings of the Second International Congress of Historians of the United States and Mexico*, Austin 1963, 27–46.
8. S. de Moxó, *Repoblación y sociedad en la España cristiana medieval*, Madrid 1979; M. González Jiménez, 'Frontier and settlement in Castile (1085–1350)', *MFS*, 49–74.

9. Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, Beirut 1935, iv, 103–4.
10. R. Peters, *Islam and Colonialism: the doctrine of 'jihād' in modern history*, The Hague 1979, 11–12.
11. A. K. S. Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam. An Introduction to Islamic Political Theory: the jurists*, Oxford 1981, 18–19, 91.
12. Occasionally this was accomplished through the incorporation of literary *topoi* which bore little relation to fact, E. Manzano Moreno, 'Oriental *topoi* in Andalusian historical sources', *Arabica*, xxxix (1992), 42–58.
13. J. Boch Vilá, 'Algunas consideraciones sobre el *Ṭagr* en al-Andalus y la división política administrativa de la España Musulmana', *Etudes d'Orientalisme dédiées à la mémoire de Lévi Provençal*, Paris 1962, 23–33; P. Chalmeta, 'El concepto de *Ṭagr*', *La Marche Supérieure d'al-Andalus et l'Occident Chrétien*, ed. P. Sénac, Madrid 1991, 23.
14. Peters, *Islam and Colonialism*, 6.
15. D. Urvoy, 'Sur l'évolution de la notion de Gihād dans l'Espagne Musulmane', *Mélanges de la Casa de Velazquez*, ix (1973), 335–71.
16. E. Manzano Moreno, *La frontera de al-Andalus en época de los Omeyas*, Madrid 1991, 60–9.
17. C. Bosworth, '*mutajawwif'a*', *EI*, new edn.
18. P. Chalmeta, 'Simancas y Alhándega', *Hispania*, xxxvi (1976), 359–444.
19. Al-Manṣūr's campaigns: E. Lévi Provençal, *Historia de la España Musulmana, Historia de España Menéndez Pidal*, iv, Madrid 1950, 410–29. Almoravids and the Almohads: ed. M. J. Viguera *El retroceso territorial de al-Andalus: Almoravides y Almohaes, siglos XII–XIII, Menéndez Pidal*, viii–ix, Madrid 1997.
20. *Crónica de Albelda*, ed. E. Gómez Moreno, 'Las primeras crónicas de la reconquista: el ciclo de Alfonso III', *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia*, c (1932), 601.
21. A. Barbero and M. Vigil, *Sobre los orígenes sociales de la Reconquista*, Barcelona 1974, and *La formación del feudalismo en la Península Ibérica*, Barcelona 1978.
22. *Crónica de Albelda and Crónica de Alfonso III*, 'Primeras crónicas', 601ff.
23. R. Menéndez Pidal, 'Repoblación y tradición en la cuenca del Duero', *Enciclopedia Lingüística Hispánica*, Madrid 1960, i, xxix–lvii.
24. C. Sánchez Albornoz, *Despoblación y repoblación del valle del Duero*, Buenos Aires 1966.
25. Barbero and Vigil, *La formación del feudalismo*, 224–8. The remarkable occurrence of Arab personal and place names in the tenth-century Latin documents of this area may be due not to the immigration of Mozarabs, as traditionally thought, but to a process of arabisation of the local populations, a hypothesis given some support by an Arab source: E. Manzano Moreno, 'Christian-Muslim frontier in al-Andalus: idea and reality', *The Arab Influence upon Medieval Europe*, ed. D. A. Agius and R. Hitchcock, Reading 1994, 95.
26. A. Rodríguez López, *La consolidación territorial de la monarquía feudal castellana: expansión y fronteras durante el reinado de Fernando III*, Madrid 1994, 15.
27. Peters, *Islam and Colonialism*, 11.
28. Manzano Moreno, 'Christian-Muslim frontier', 92.

29. Lambton, *State and Government in Medieval Islam*, 13.
30. B. Isaac, 'The meaning of the terms *limes* and *limitanei*', *Journal of Roman Studies*, LXXVIII (1989), 125–47.
31. Procopius, *De aedificiis*, III, 3:2; III, 7:5.
32. R. Hartmann, 'darb', *EI*.
33. Ibn Hayyān, *al-Muqtabis min anba' ahl al-Andalus*, ed. Mahmūd 'Alī Makki, Cairo 1390/1971, 132, repeated in the late chronicle of Ximenez de Rada, *Historia Arabum*, ed. J. Lozano Sánchez, Seville 1993, 43.
34. Ibn Hayyān, *al-Muqtabis*, ed. P. Chalmeta, F. Corriente, and M. Sobh, Madrid 1979, v, 275–9.
35. Ibn Hayyān, *al-Muqtabis – fi ta'rij rijāl al-Andalus*, ed. M. Martínez Antuña, Paris 1937, 17–18.
36. Ibn Hayyān, *al-Muqtabis*, ed. Chalmeta et al., v, 296.

3

(RE)CONSTRUCTING THE FRONTIERS OF TENTH-CENTURY NORTH CHINA

Naomi Standen

The northern frontier of China is frequently equated with the Great Wall. The line of the Wall is widely regarded as delimiting 'China proper' (see Map 3.1), separating 'civilisation' from the 'barbarian' lands of the steppe nomad since the third century BC.¹ In fact, the Wall tourists visit today was not built until the Ming 明 dynasty (1368–1644), and a recent book by Arthur Waldron argues that it represents a uniquely sustained effort at creating long-term, static, linear defences, contrasting sharply with earlier Chinese wall-building, which tended to happen in brief bursts, producing only short sections of wall which were generally not maintained.² For most of its history then, China's northern frontier has *not* been marked by a physical wall, and although the *idea* of a Great Wall crops up from time to time in the sources, it is far more common to find references to fortifications of quite specific kinds than to a generalised 'Great Wall'. In the absence of a Wall or even references to it, how were the northern frontiers of China defined and maintained? The tenth century provides examples of frontier construction and maintenance, both real and theoretical, and, as we shall see, extending beyond the tenth century itself to the vital question of the depiction of the northern frontier in later historical records.

Both the frontier events and the record of them must be seen in the context of the state-building efforts of the regimes that competed for control of north China in the tenth century. The words used to signify the frontiers suggest their essential relationship with a 'central' government, and this chapter begins with a discussion of the terminology. I then argue that in the early tenth century the breakdown of central

27669, 27670, 27874, 27879, 27945, 28156, 28183, 28189, 28190, 28196, 28200.

Ordensfolianten (OrdF) 14, 15, 16, 18b.

Ostpreussische Folianten (OstF) 42, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 911a.

RIGA, Latvijas valsts vestures arhiva:

F673 ap.1 liet.307.

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