Conclusions

by Giuseppe Albertoni

The summary provides an overview of the essays collected in this volume and places them in the context of research that has innovatively redefined the theme of the "frontier" in the Early Middle Ages in recent decades. In doing so, it shows how the concept of border is used in the essays not only in its political, but also in its ideological and cultural sense. Despite the diversity of perspectives and themes, however, a common feature emerges: the prevalence of "porous" and "blurred" borders that testify to a dynamic political and cultural reality that is constantly being redefined.

Middle Ages; 9th century; Carolingian Empire; Italy; frontiers; borders.

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Referee List (DOI 10.36253/fup_referee_list)
FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing (DOI 10.36253/fup_best_practice)

Giuseppe Albertoni, *Conclusions*, © Author(s), CC BY 4.0, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-0416-3.22, in Maddalena Betti, Francesco Borri, Stefano Gasparri (edited by), *Carolingian Frontiers: Italy and Beyond*, pp. 307-316, 2024, published by Firenze University Press, ISBN 979-12-215-0416-3, DOI 10.36253/979-12-215-0416-3

1. *A question of concepts*

Thirty years ago, when Herwig Wolfram published his book on Austria before its birth, he called it *Grenzen und Räume*[1]. It is a title that sums up very well the thread that runs through the essays in this volume. The history of border or frontier practices in the Carolingian period is in fact a history of demarcations, of the definition of political, territorial and cultural spaces. It is a history that requires conceptualisation and lexical reflection. The idea of the border is in fact a cultural creation that demarcates, polarises and at the same time creates relationships.

From this perspective, Walter Pohl, in his essay, reminded the readers of this volume of the importance that Niklas Luhman's concept of *Sinngrenze* has had for the study of early medieval frontiers, at least since the 1990s, when the pioneering project on *The transformation of the Roman world* was initiated[2]. As is well known, it is a concept that is very difficult to translate into English or any other language, because the German term *Sinn* covers a different semantic field than "sense", "meaning" or "significance". A *Sinngrenze* is in fact a "limit of sense or meaning", within which a territorial frontier can also be placed. In this perspective, the territorial borders or frontiers of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages have also been studied as a case of *Sinngrenze* within a network of relations which in some cases can constitute a system. Only on this basis, Pohl argued, can we examine the particular meaning given in certain contexts to words such as *limes*, *terminus* or *fines*, and the function of fortifications or defensive borders.

From another perspective, Pohl's observations fit very well with the reconstruction of the relationship between empires and frontiers proposed by Francesco Borri in his essay, in which he proposed a comparative analysis of the meaning of imperial frontiers in the Carolingian period, demonstrating their elusiveness, the lack of a clear demarcation line, and the role played in this context by the confrontation with the "barbarian world". From this point of view, Borri reminded us that, on the one hand, the Carolingian Empire was "always decaying"[3] and, on the other, its borders were always moving, even if they were often invisible in the landscape. In any case, borders were the markers of asymmetrical power relations, as the German political scientist Herfried Münkler pointed out in his comparative analysis of empires[4]. According to Borri, the asymmetry between an empire and its surrounding territories and the projection of its frontiers, is clearly represented by the *Reichsapfel*, the *globus cruciger*, one of the main symbols of medieval imperial power.

[1] Wolfram, *Grenzen und Räume.*
[2] Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*; *The Transformation of Frontiers*; *Grenze und Differenz im frühen Mittelalter.*
[3] De Jong, *The Empire that Was Always Decaying.*
[4] Münkler, *Imperien.*

But it was not only in the case of empires that borders could be elusive. Events taking place in the "non Carolingian" Iberian Peninsula were also characterised by the presence of what Iñaki Martin Viso defined in his essay as a "blurred border". Through some specific cases that occurred on the Duero plateau between the eighth and the middle of the ninth century, Viso has shown us how difficult it is to reconstruct what happened in the Iberian territories because of the extremely problematic documentary transmission and the retrospective narratives that were imposed from the ninth century onwards. These narratives have constructed an image of the territories of the Meseta as a "desert" that was reabsorbed and repopulated by the Kingdom of Asturias, which could thus present itself as the legitimate heir of the Visigoths. This image, which dominated Iberian historiography until a few years ago, has only recently been seriously and radically challenged, mainly thanks to new archaeological data. These findings have allowed Viso and other scholars to construct a picture that is very different from the dominant one: the Meseta and the area of the Duero can now be understood as having been a "blurred space", characterised by an extremely fragmented microregional politics. Rather than being a frontier in the strict sense with al-Andalus, it was therefore mainly a "peripheral space", outside any authority, a space of little interest to Muslims until the Kingdom of Asturias took over with its "neo-Gothic" ideology.

2. *Borders between the Alps, the Adriatic and the Tyrrhenian Sea*

Even in Carolingian Italy there was a dialectic between the frontiers of the past and the frontiers of the present. From this point of view, the model provided by the borders of the Ostrogothic period, especially those in the Alps, was very important. In particular, the *Divisio regnorum* of 806 was strongly influenced by the memory of the political division of the Alps under the Goths: it assigned to Pippin a vast territory that crossed the Alps from Alamannia to Italy, and this Alpine region is the subject of Marco Cristini's research, presented in his essay included here. On the basis of certain passages from the *Variae* of Cassiodorus, Cristini reconstructed the military, administrative and ideological dimensions of what could be called Theodoric's Alpine policy. His analysis of the military dimension focused on two *castella*, one of which is commonly identified with a *castrum* near Trento, the other with Monte Barro, which he presented as examples of a defensive border system made up of a scattering of garrisons overlooking certain strategic points. From an administrative point of view, Cristini focused on the military duties of the Gothic governors, while from an ideological point of view he highlighted the rhetoric in the *Variae*, which emphasised the clear distinction between the Roman and the 'barbarian' world. This rhetoric was based on the asymmetrical imperial model described in Francesco Borri's paper, which, however, did not prove effective in complex border areas populated by different ethnic groups, such as the Alps.

However, the dynamics in the Alpine regions from Late Antiquity onwards were quite different: Katharina von Winckler's essay pointed out that, ever since Antiquity, the borders that crossed the Alps were often well defined (partly, of course, due to the latter's orography), although they never followed the actual mountain ranges. In fact, both in Late Antiquity and in the Early Middle Ages, Alpine borders always ran along the lower slopes of the mountains, ensuring control of both sides of passes or their access routes whenever possible. This "transalpine" projection was also evident in the extension of the great monastic estates, which often seemed to have no relation to political boundaries, as in the famous case attested by the testament of Abbo for the monastery of Novalesa. This case is also a vivid example of the fact that the monasteries in the Alps often played a role in military defence, even during the long period after the conquest of *Raetia Curiensis* and Bavaria, when the Alps no longer formed a boundary between two or more kingdoms, but were crisscrossed by internal (and also rather "mobile") borders, as shown by the succession of different *divisiones* of the Carolingian Empire between 806 and 880.

The borders of Carolingian Italy crossed the sea as well as the Alps. The picture of the eastern and Adriatic borders, as Annamaria Pazienza has pointed out, is less clear. She focused particularly on Istria, an important contact and competition area between Venice and the Carolingian world, and on two of the principal actors in that area at the beginning of the ninth century: the Patriarch Fortunatus II and the duke of Istria John, the protagonist of the famous Plea of Rižana. Starting from the events in which Fortunatus and John were the main "actors", Pazienza argued that the Upper Adriatic was perceived in the Carolingian age as an area characterised by often violent border disputes and competition for resources, on which the consequences of the iconoclastic crisis had a profound impact. According to Pazienza, this was also the context of the controversy that led to the Plea of Rižana against Duke John. In this context, she suggested that the latter was not a Frankish immigrant, but was of local origin and could be identified with Duke John Galbaio, who ruled Venice in the same years.

Shifting our focus from the Adriatic to the Tyrrhenian, Maddalena Betti instead examined the question of the southern border of Carolingian Italy from the perspective of Rome and the Papacy, starting from the issue of reclaiming the Roman *fines*. In an analysis based on the *Vitae* of Popes Paschal I, Sergius II and Leo IV in the *Liber Pontificalis*, Betti has shown that the papal interest in territorial issues was revived during the reign of Lothar, after having waned in 774 with the end of the *regnum Langobardorum*, and has pointed out that this interest led to a new territorial projection of the papacy in the Sabina and along the coast of Latium. Furthermore, Betti has reconstructed this change of course by bringing together various episodes related to events such as the Saracen incursions, the construction of new walls in Rome and the ceremonies of the imperial *adventus*, which suggest a spatial definition of the papacy's activities in the surrounding cities and territories.

3. *Frontiers, fortifications and the "others"*

When we think of borders, we often associate them with walls, barriers and fortifications. Was this also the case in Carolingian times? Two essays in this volume attempt to answer this question. Simon MacLean, for example, in his essay on frontiers and fortifications in the ninth and tenth centuries, analysed the role of frontiers in the Carolingian political imaginary as transmitted through some important works of historical narrative, such as the *Annales regni Francorum*, the *Annales Fuldenses*, the Astronomer's *Vita Hludowici Imperatoris*, the *Gesta Karoli* of Notker of St. Gall or the works of Ermold. He pointed out that these texts tend to polarise between the *palatium*, understood as both the *locus* of political authority and the symbol of the Carolingian political order, and the *castrum*, understood as a structure that stood in relation to an external danger, to the "anti-imperial world", in a context in which the construction of fortresses and fortifications was often associated with the Carolingians' enemies, particularly the Vikings. He thus presented us with a polarised image, in which fortified residences in the Carolingian imperial imagination were portrayed in a negative light because of their "enclosure", while royal palaces were portrayed in a positive light because of their "openness", whether supposed or real.

In the Carolingian period, we find this asymmetry in the border areas outside Italy, and some of our contributors have written about these areas from a comparative perspective.

Marco Franzoni, for example, described the enormous logistical challenges and costs involved in Charlemagne's campaigns against the Saxons and the Danes. He highlighted the role of the new buildings and *palatia* – such as the important outposts of Herstelle and Paderborn – which the Frankish king used, in conjunction with his military campaigns, to project his authority over new lands, and which required enormous investment from the centre. As Simon MacLean also noted, all this activity was mirrored on the other side of the border, with the Carolingians' enemies, in particular the Danes, building their own fortifications.

Although many resources were invested in the infrastructure of the northern frontiers of the Carolingian Empire, the choices made for the frontier of the Iberian Peninsula – where, according to the established historiographical tradition, Charlemagne introduced the *marca hispanica* – were markedly different. In this context, Igor Santos Salazar has analyses the diplomas and legal documents that record disputes in the Carolingian counties of the eastern Pyrenees. On the basis of these documents, he has reconstructs the dynamics of the competition for control of land in this frontier area, where "tax revenues" constituted an important political resource for the creation of networks of *fideles* around the Carolingian comites in the south-western periphery of the Carolingian Empire.

If this was the case in the south-western regions of the Carolingian Empire, what happened in the south-eastern regions? The contributions of Neven

Budak and David Kalhous provide us with an answer to this question. Neven Budak leads our gaze eastwards, to consider the influence of the Carolingians in the Balkans, particularly in modern day Croatia and what was Lower Pannonia. He showed how the Carolingians began to develop their defensive system in this south eastern political space in the 780s, linking up initially with the eastward expansion of Pippin, "king of Italy", in close collaboration with the *dux de Histria* and the duke of Friuli. It was only later, Budak reminds us, that the territories conquered in Dalmatia were organised along the same *limes* as those pursued by the Carolingians in other *regna* situated near the eastern borders of the Empire, with the appointing of two *duces*, known initially as the *dux Dalmatie et Liburnie* and the *dux Pannonie inferioris*. However, he also pointed out that the fact that we have so little information from the Carolingian side makes it difficult to reconstruct the political divisions of the Balkans with any degree of accuracy. In fact, they can best be deduced retrospectively, most usefully from the *De administrando imperio* of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, although many key questions remain unresolved, such as the question of the actual size and division of Liudevit's regnum inter *Savum* et *Dravum*. This was the volatile and fragmented political scene in which various actors operated during the ninth century in unceasing competition for territorial control. And this volatility was only partially mitigated by the treaty of Aachen and, not long afterwards, by the redefinition of the political order following the reorganisation of the march of Friuli in 828 and the emergence in the sources of a *dux Croatorum* who dated his letters according to the years of Lothar's reign in Italy, despite the fact that he seems to have operated as an independent political actor. On the other hand, the Carolingian influence, at least on the élite, seems to have persisted in the material culture associated with burial practices, as evidenced by archaeological finds such as swords, lances and other objects which, according to Neven Budak, should be understood as instances of *imitatio regni* or *aemulatio imperii* in relation to the Carolingians.

In the next essay, David Kalhous considered the role played by a great river – the Danube – as both border and contact zone. Starting with Claudio Magris' image of the Danube[5], Kalhous introduced us to the complex reality of the territories through which the river flows, which in many ways is similar to the Catalonia described by Igor Santos Salazar, both in terms of its internal dynamics and in the ideological reconstructions of its history based on present day political claims. Kalhous analysed in particular the ninth-century Bavarian Eastern March and its surroundings in the light of the material sources and the great historical narratives of the Carolingians contained in the *Annales regni Francorum*, the *Annales Fuldenses* and the *Conversio Bagoariorum et Carantanorum*. Choosing a few apposite examples, he showed us the multiple functions of the great river, more varied and complex than

[5] Magris, *Danubio*.

its representation as a frontier in Carolingian sources would have us believe. The Carolingian sources, however, clearly evidence the waterway's logistical importance, particularly in facilitating the projection of Carolingian military power towards the east and against the Avars. The regions around the Danube were territories of contraposition and of contact, although the disparity between written and material sources means that it is not easy to draw comparisons between, or reconstruct the cultural models of the élites, sometimes "manoeuvered" by outside powers, as in the case of the territories that came to be dominated by the Church of Salzburg. Kalhous also pointed out that these cultural models often acted as filters, in particular when the Carolingian sources describe conflicts on the other side of the Danube. They adopted narrative models already present in their rhetorical "arsenal", as in the case of the trial of the Moravian prince Rastiz, whose depiction in the *Annales Fuldenses* is strongly influenced by the model used to recount the deposition of the duke of Bavaria, Tassilo III.

4. *Between visible and invisible borders*

However, as Niklas Luhmann has shown us, and as Walter Pohl has described in his essay, borders cross not only territories but also cultures. They can be "immaterial" and emerge from the documentary tradition, as Stefano Gasparri, Flavia De Rubeis and Gianmarco De Angelis have shown in their essays. From this point of view, Stefano Gasparri has reconstructed the history of the border pacts, an Italian peculiarity in the Early Middle Ages. In his reconstruction, based on a careful reading of the sources, Gasparri highlighted the importance of the Lombard legacy for these pacts. It is therefore no coincidence that the first pact that has come down to us from the Carolingian period concerns the duke of Benevento Arechis II, who, between 784 and 787, tried to reach an agreement with the Neapolitans on the political and economic management of an important territory – the *Liburia* – and its inhabitants. Significantly, no clear dividing line emerges in these pacts, an aspect that seems to have been secondary to the management of the land labourers, whose legal status was often very ambiguous. Compared to these pacts, that signed in 836 by the duke of Benevento Sicard was certainly much more complex and articulated. It appears as a five-year concession, made after a long conflict, in favour of the Bishop of Naples John, the *magister militum* Andrea and the inhabitants of the duchies of Naples, Sorrento and Amalfi. In this context, Gasparri highlighted the concessions made in favour of the *negotiatores*, who were guaranteed the possibility of moving freely from one territory to another. Gasparri was thus able to highlight the existence of border areas with walls, barriers and fortifications, through a careful analysis of these pacts which were subject to "mixed" political and economic control due to the needs of managing agricultural labour and trade. In other words, these were areas without insurmountable linear borders, as confirmed by the last case stud-

ied by Gasparri, the pact of 840 between Lothar I and the Venetians, which formed the basis of relations between the Venetian duchy and the mainland powers for centuries.

In addition to "textual boundaries", the ninth century was also a time of "graphic boundaries". This phenomenon is explained by Flavia De Rubeis in her essay dedicated to the concept of frontiers from the point of view of epigraphy, which contains a number of thought-provoking ideas, starting with the abandonment of the concept of a "graphic area", understood as a writing system that prevails in a territory and is characterised by morphologically stable elements. In this way, De Rubeis reworked Bakhtin's observation that «language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated — overpopulated — with the intentions of others»[6]. Consequently, she focused her analysis not on a graphic area but on a single place. In this context, she has proposed to distinguish between "horizontal boundaries", in the sense of the use of different graphic systems within the same chronology in the same society, and "vertical boundaries", in the sense of graphic forms that are morphologically differentiated within the same writing system and adapted to the needs of different patrons. From this perspective, De Rubeis analysed the specific case of epigraphic communication in Venice and Croatia. The picture that emerges is somewhat unexpected, given the initial poor quality of epigraphic production in Venice and the surrounding area. In fact, De Rubeis highlighted the progressive increase of epigraphy, an instrument of visibility that seems to have been appreciated by local élites, both lay and ecclesiastical, even in the absence of a consolidated writing system. But while the secular élites maintained the scripts that had characterised their epigraphic production from the beginning, the ecclesiastics gradually moved towards a script closer to the manuscript writing. The cases of Venice and Croatia thus testify to a full awareness on the part of the élites of the importance and efficacy of writing, with its epigraphic forms and formalisms.

On the other hand, Gianmarco De Angelis has reconstructed a very moving and articulated picture of the documentary landscapes of Carolingian Italy, which in turn allows us to see general lines behind which many differentiations are hidden. From this point of view, the panorama of "private charters" outlined by De Angelis is particularly complex, with the introduction of new deeds such as the *precariae* or the *notitiae traditoriae*, and changes in documentary structures through the inclusion of *formulae* and conceptual nuclei, as in the case of the *libellus* and the *traditio chartae*. Moreover, De Angelis has highlighted another very important and often ignored question, identifying a "documentary boundary" that allows us to distinguish two standard formularies in the sale related charters in the heart of the Po basin (Bergamo, Cremona, Milan, Parma and Piacenza), where many individuals were active

[6] Bakhtin, *Discourse in the Novel*, p. 294.

in the money trade, and south of the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines, where the cornerstone was represented by the landed assets, while the agreed sum for the exchange was mixed in the text among the numerous guarantee clauses for the buyer and for the possible future sale of the goods.

These dynamics from the beginning of the ninth century were complicated by the increasingly active role of transalpine individuals and groups (Franks, Bavarians, Alamans and Burgundians), who established in the peninsula a legal pluralism unknown in the previous period. Within this new framework, De Angelis also identified an internal documentary boundary linked to the appearance, from the 820s onwards, of elements of new formularies, sometimes characterised by surprising choices in the dating system or the appearance of phrases that appear to be archaic, such as the expression *de tempore barbarico*.

Even from the point of view of the typology of written sources therefore emerges what De Angelis has effectively defined as the “porosity of borders”, and it is perhaps precisely this image of “porous borders”, together with that of “blurred borders” proposed by Iñaki Martin Viso, that best represents and synthesises the long journey around Carolingian borders – ideological, material, cultural, often imaginary – that this book allows us to undertake.

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