The Mediterranean as a Borderland

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A useful paradigm for studying Mediterranean and world history is the concept behind a course I teach, "The Mediterranean as a Borderland." The paradigm of the borderland was generated by policymakers and social scientists studying the American Southwest and developed for the field of history by Oscar Martinez at the University of Arizona.[1] Arizona is in the borderland, the region close to the border between the United States and Mexico where the influence of Mexico can be directly felt. There is of course an equivalent region on the other side in Mexico that is directly influenced by its proximity to the United States. These two regions together comprise the borderland, and they are in many ways more similar to each other than either is to the rest of the nation it belongs to. Unlike the border itself, which divides one country from another, the borderland is the area where the two societies meet and overlap. The Mediterranean Sea is often seen as a border between Christian and Muslim civilizations to the north and south. It can therefore be studied as a borderland, the region where the two overlap. Such a study highlights similarities, influences, and exchanges rather than differences and oppositions; it forms a necessary corrective to today's emphasis on the "clash of civilizations." This paper gives a historiography of the borderland paradigm and its application in the Mediterranean, and compares it with the closely related concept of the frontier.

The concept of the borderland stands in direct contrast to that of the frontier, traditionally understood as the outer edge of a society. In the case of the United States, the frontier was also the edge of civilization, the

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place where civilized society confronted the wilderness, the savage, the unknown. What lay on the other side of the frontier was conceptualized in negative terms, as the *absence* of the things that made civilized life good or even possible: government, agriculture, cities, literacy, the rule of law. Native American societies were seen as part of that savage domain; like the wilderness they were there to be conquered, civilized, converted.[2] In this paper, the frontier divides one society from another, while the borderland is where they overlap and blend. Using terms like "paradigm," "concept," and "focus" emphasizes that this discussion is less about categorizing historical borders than about different ways of looking at a border situation, different sets of questions that can be asked about any border. Rather than focusing on the border's divisive functions, the borderland paradigm encourages questions about the border's integrative role. The Mediterranean is often seen as the frontier between Christian and Muslim societies, the historic dividing line separating two groups conceived of as opposites. This is the idea behind Huntington's "clash of civilizations," the perpetual war between Christendom and Islam.[3] The borderland paradigm provides a way to go beyond Huntington's reductionism.

The frontier paradigm was expounded for the United States by Frederick Jackson Turner in his 1894 address, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History."[4] The concept expanded beyond the American context to the Old World, where the frontier was not the edge of civilization but "a fortified boundary line running through dense populations" (these are "settlement frontiers" and "political frontiers," respectively).[5] The frontier is a line (not necessarily straight or narrow) whose purpose is to delineate one population and set of conditions from another. The focus is on the differences between the two, their opposition or enmity. The frontier is an inimical place, defended by forts and armies. It acts as a "consolidating agent" on the society behind it, reducing its diversity and creating what Turner called a "nationalizing tendency."[6]

The borderland paradigm, developed in the context of U.S.-Mexico border policy, became the foundation of the field of Border Studies. Its historical and comparative implications were unpacked by Oscar Martinez in the introduction to his 1994 book *Border People*. Martinez described the borderland as "a unique human environment shaped by physical distance from central areas and constant exposure to transnational processes."[7] Residents of contiguous borderlands become interconnected as "active participants in transnational economic and social systems." Their open environment "exposes borderlanders to foreign values, ideas, customs, traditions, institutions, tastes, and behavior." Because of that, "people

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of border regions are more likely to live in heterogeneous environments because of greater ethnic mixing and more extensive migration." They may also experience intergroup tensions and ethnic strife, especially when their respective states try to eliminate diversity by force. Many borderlanders live and function in several different worlds, and "versatility is required along with the ability to be multilingual and multicultural." Tolerance of diversity is typically high in the borderland, although feelings of difference exacerbate borderlanders' already ambiguous identities. This paradigm highlights the border's connective functions, the similarities between people on either side who live close to the border, the interactions among them, and the social diversity those interactions generate.

The Frontier Paradigm

Since the frontier paradigm is much older than the borderland paradigm, it was the first to be applied on a wider scale. Scholars invoked it explicitly to study Latin America, Africa, China, Australia, and Europe, especially in the medieval period of expanding states.[9] By the 1950s the historical subfield of "Frontier Studies" was global in scope, encompassing studies on the Roman Empire, the Mediterranean, the Far East, and Latin America as well as the United States and Canada. A lecture by Robert Reynolds on "The Mediterranean Frontiers, 1000-1400" conceptualized the Mediterranean as Europe's medieval frontier, which drew young adventurers to find "fame and fortune out at the edge of their world."[10] Reynolds saw the Normans as pioneers, the Crusaders as the Gold Rush, and the Venetians and Genoese as settlers establishing trading posts and plantations in their colonies. Archibald Lewis in 1958 discussed the "closing of the medieval frontier," which he defined as occurring between 1250 and 1350.[11] A more sophisticated application of the paradigm, William McNeill's 1964 *Europe's Steppe Frontier*, analyzed the process by which the Eastern European empires conquered and divided the relatively undifferentiated steppe region of Eastern Europe in the early modern period. The "closure of the frontier" was the point at which the boundaries of the Russian and Austrian empires touched, eliminating the open land and minor lordships that had formerly stood between them.[12]

The 1983 volume, *Essays on Frontiers in World History*, tested and modified Turner's paradigm in different world contexts.[13] In contrast, contributors to a 1987 volume on *Medieval Frontier Societies* took the frontier paradigm for granted, examining the settlement, institutions, and culture of frontiers across Europe as militarized zones of conflict. An exception was Burns, whose article in that volume addressed criticisms and changes to Turner's ideas as well as prior uses of the frontier paradigm by medieval historians. He noted

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that both medieval and American historians saw Americans' westward push as a medieval legacy, "the last stage in a mighty movement of peoples that began in the twelfth century when feudal Europe began pushing back the barbarian border."[14] He found analogies between the American frontier and the Spain of the Reconquista, and noted that some American frontier phenomena were actually rooted in the European frontier experience.[15] In 1993 Robert Bartlett solidified the role of the frontier paradigm as a framework for studying the making of Europe, while the contributors to the 2002 volume *Medieval Frontiers* took up the task of understanding how medieval people themselves conceptualized those boundaries.[16] For the modern period, a 1998 colloquium of European scholars discussed how the economic changes of the 1970s and the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989 resulted in the drawing of eight thousand miles of new international boundaries in Europe and generated a new interest in frontiers as a topic for contemporary European history.[17]

The Frontier Paradigm in Middle East Studies

In Middle East studies, Paul Wittek employed the frontier model in his 1937 lecture series, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire*, seeing the key to the Ottoman rise as the military organization on both sides of the Byzantine frontier, with its dominant element, the Türkmen gazis.[18] Rifaat Abou-El-Haj in 1969 examined the closure of the Ottoman frontier in Europe as a result of the treaty of Carlowitz, using McNeill's concept of the vanishing of unclaimed lands.[19] Andrew Hess's 1978 book *The Forgotten Frontier* studied the Ottoman Empire's North African frontier with Habsburg Spain.[20] Other Ottoman historians have also used the frontier paradigm in studies of phenomena such as expansion into alien territory, as in the early Ottoman conquests;[21] a line of settlement facing a wilderness of low population density, as on Syria's desert frontier;[22] or a fortified dividing line, as in Croatia or Hungary.[23]

Some authors use the term "borderlands" for the concept designated here as the frontier. Wittek's student Hâlil İnalcık referred to the Ottoman borderlands in his 1954 article "Ottoman Methods of Conquest," but specifically discussed the wilder edges of Ottoman territory, its frontiers.[24] Haldon and Kennedy also used the term "borderlands" for the Arab-Byzantine frontier while employing only the frontier paradigm.[25] The same was true of Kemal Karpat's 2003 edited volume, *Ottoman Borderlands: Issues, Personalities and Political Changes*, in which the province formed the unit of analysis: its position far from the center, its leadership, its place in Ottoman administrative and cultural systems, its reaction to centralization and reform.[26] These works used the terms frontier and

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borderland interchangeably, but the model was always that of the frontier. The importance of the border provinces lay in their position on the edge of the Ottoman Empire, and there was no attempt at a borderland analysis in the terms proposed by Martinez, in which the unit of analysis is the region on both sides of the border itself.

The Borderland Paradigm

The borderland paradigm has seen less explicit employment, due to its more recent inception. The idea of the borderland is older than its naming and theoretical formulation, but prior to that articulation the idea was not used methodically. Lord Curzon, as early as 1907, spoke of "frontiers of separation" and "frontiers of contact," which the geographer Marvin Mikesell referred to as "frontiers of exclusion" and "frontiers of inclusion."[27] Owen Lattimore, in his 1955 paper "The Frontier in History," made several points later incorporated into the borderland paradigm. His studies of Inner Asia showed that "the linear frontier as it is conventionally indicated on a map always proves, when studied on the ground, to be a zone rather than a line." He realized that "the maximum of difference is to be sought near the center of gravity of each country and not at the frontier where they meet." Cross-border activities and interests "set up their own nexus of social contact and joint interest," creating of the border people "a 'we' group to whom others of their own nationality, and especially the authorities, are 'they'." Therefore, "it is not surprising that the ambivalent loyalties [and today we would add, identities] of frontier peoples are often conspicuous and historically important."[28]

Martinez took as his unit of analysis the borderlands on both sides of the border, rather than the boundary itself or the frontier as the edge of a state. Since he conceptualized the borderland paradigm in 1994, the intellectual ferment generated by multiple conferences and attempts to apply it more widely in this age of globalization have led to further refinements. Martinez divided borderlands into four types according to their cross-border relations: *alienated borderlands*, where tension prevails and cross-border activity is marked by antagonism and estrangement; *coexistent borderlands*, where stability comes and goes and interaction is limited or intermittent; *interdependent borderlands*, symbiotically linked, where sometimes asymmetric economic relations spawn extensive social interactions; and *integrated borderlands*, which are merged economically and socially, though not politically.[29] In 1997 Baud and van Schendel brought the state back in, with its interest in maintaining a firm border between itself and its neighbors, but focused attention on the ways that borderlanders,

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whose networks extend across the border, seek to subvert or evade the boundary-marking efforts of states, while border elites occupy an ambiguous position as both state-connected and independent agents. They posited that the borderland effect varied over space (distance from the border), time (age of the border), and social class (elites having more attachment to the state than non-elites). The interaction of these factors produced another classification of borderlands, this one according to their political status: *quiet borderlands*, where state, elites, and population form a stable power structure, either voluntary or enforced; *unruly borderlands*, where the local population resists the boundary and its rules of sovereignty; and *rebellious borderlands*, where elites side with an unruly population against the state.[30]

The Borderland Paradigm in Mediterranean Studies

My article, "Mediterranean Borderlands: Early English Merchants in the Levant," applied the borderland paradigm directly to the Mediterranean context.[31] Although it was not a methodical explication of the Mediterranean as a borderland between Christendom and Islamdom, or the Ottomans and the West, it did outline the frontier and borderland paradigms, referencing Turner and Martinez. The Mediterranean border functioned "to channel—not to prevent—the movement of people, goods, and ideas." In this context, "merchants, migrants, mercenaries, missionaries, conquerors, refugees, and slaves moved permanently or crossed repeatedly to the other side, while goods and ideas were briskly exchanged."[32] Anomalous in a frontier paradigm, these movements tend to disappear from narratives of conflict and alienation, while in the borderland paradigm they are central to the life of the borderland. The article examined one such movement, the entry of English merchants and seamen into the Mediterranean region from the hinterland of Europe when the Mediterranean first opened to their trade in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, discussing the differences between hinterland and borderland attitudes revealed in their travel narratives and letters home.

Also based on the borderland paradigm was the multidisciplinary 2010 volume, *Understanding Life in the Borderlands*, edited by I. William Zartman. The chapters addressed the question of "how borders affect the groups living near them," although none conceptualized the Mediterranean itself as such a border. Zartman's book was based on research on the U.S.-Mexico border; it examined "subnational areas whose economic and social life is directly and significantly affected by proximity to an international boundary."[33] It emphasized the fact that the borderlands are not just places or events, but "social processes," and as such are "continually in movement." Zartman

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provided yet another classification for borderlands, this one in terms of their social makeup. The *black-and-white borderland* features "a sharp distinction between two different peoples along a clear borderline," such as the situation in contemporary Cyprus. The *grey borderland* is its opposite, where "different populations [are] fully intermingled, whether they feel 'different' or not," as in Alsace or southern Texas. In the *buffered borderland* "a different culture is located between the two main cultures/populations to insulate them from one another," as the Serbs functioned in Krajina to separate Croats from Muslims. The *spotty borderland* "has islands of one culture/population within the other, separated by internal boundaries," as in the ghettos of Europe or the United States. The *layered borderland* imposes "a dominant population from one culture over another of a different culture," as in colonial Algeria or apartheid South Africa. Many borderlands are mixtures of these types; a good example is Palestine's West Bank.[34]

The important thing to remember, according to Zartman, is that borderlands are always in motion. Thus, rather than simply matching borderlands to the appropriate ideal types, the real task is to see how time, space, and the nature of the activity chosen for analysis interact to move borderlands from one type toward another. "In their characteristic mobility, borderlands always prepare for the next move at the same time as they respond to the last one—not just movement, but movement in response to a particular situation, producing pressures for a future situation." Some sources of this dynamic movement include "the evolution of power centers," "attempts to impose a new boundary on an old borderland," and "shifts in and interactions among horizontal divisions of class and other stratifications that arise in the borderlands and interact across the frontier." Hovering over all is "the mythological level, the way borderlands are perceived from either side of the dividing line."[35]

In different ways, all of these models focus attention on what is happening in the borderland and how the people of the borderland manage their existence in proximity to a boundary with an "other" or "others," something that people outside the borderland are only occasionally called upon to do. Studies of the Mediterranean have often treated contacts between its peoples or even between different communities within the same people as frontier phenomena, things that divide. The concept of the borderland encourages us to see the world not as a series of discrete entities butting up against each other, but as an alternation between zones of low interaction and zones of high levels of contact. Lenses such as the borderland turn the spotlight on the high-contact zones, fostering the investigation of interactions and continuities and countering the divisive concept of the clash of civilizations.

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End Notes

[1]Niles Hansen, *The Border Economy: Regional Development in the Southwest* (Austin: University of Texas, 1981); Oscar J. Martinez, *Border People: Life and Society in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1994). This essay will not attempt to discuss all studies of borderlands or frontiers, but only those that explicitly employ those concepts.

[2]Recently, U.S. historians of the West have revised the category of the frontier to include some of the concepts of the borderland; this is called "New Western History." For purposes of clarity, I will continue to use the term in its older sense. See Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West,* Patricia Nelson Limerick and Charles E. Rankin (New York: Norton, 1987); *Trails: Toward a New Western History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991).

[3]Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs,* Summer 1993, pp. 22-49.

[4]Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1920), pp. 1-38.

[5]Daniel Power, "Introduction," in *Frontiers in Question: Eurasian Borderlands, 700-1700,* ed. Daniel Power and Naomi Standen (New York: St. Martin's, 1999), pp. 2, 4-8. Power provides a short history of frontiers and of the term frontier but does not discuss the borderland concept.

[6]Turner, pp. 2, 7, 14.

[7]Martinez, pp. xvii-xviii.

[8]Martinez, pp. 10, 14, 17, 18-19, 20.

[9]H. E. Bolton, "The Mission as a Frontier Institution in the Spanish-American Colonies," *American Historical Review* 23 (1917), pp. 42-61; Victor Andres Belaunde, *The Frontier in Hispanic America,* Rice Institute Pamphlets, 23 (October 1923), pp. 202-13; Eric A. Walker, *The Frontier Tradition in South Africa* (London: Oxford, 1930); Owen Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (New York: American Geographical Society, 1940); Frederick Alexander, *Moving Frontiers, an American Theme and Its Application to Australian History* (Victoria: Melbourne, 1947). For Europe, see below.

[10]Published in *The Frontier in Perspective,* ed. Walker D. Wyman and Clifton B. Kroeber (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1965), p. 21 [and pp. 21-34]; see Preface for the history of the lecture series.

[11]Archibald Lewis, "The Closing of the Medieval Frontier, 1250-1350," *Speculum* 33 (1958), pp. 475-83, cited in Robert I. Burns, "The Significance of the Frontier in the Middle Ages," in *Medieval Frontier Societies,* ed. Robert Bartlett and Angus MacKay (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), p. 313 and n. 10.

[12]William H. McNeill, *Europe's Steppe Frontier 1500-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1964).

[13]George Wolfskill and Stanley Palmer, eds., Essays on Frontiers in World History, The Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures (College Station: Texas A&M University

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Press, 1983). Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

[14]Ray Allen Billington, *Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier*, quoted in Burns, p. 312 (see n. 11).

[15]Burns, pp. 316-18. The frontier paradigm became popular in studies of Reconquista Spain; see Angus MacKay, *Spain in the Middle Ages: From Frontier to Empire, 1000-1500* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978).

[16]Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950-1350* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 2; *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices*, ed. David Abulafia and Nora Berend (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002).

[17]Malcolm Anderson, "European Frontiers at the End of the Twentieth Century: An Introduction," in *The Frontiers of Europe*, ed. Malcolm Anderson and Eberhard Burt (London: Pinter, 1998), p. 1.

[18]Paul Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1938), p. 17.

[19]Rifaat A. Abou-El-Haj, "The Formal Closure of the Ottoman Frontier in Europe, 1699-1703," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 89 (1969), pp. 467-75.

[20]Andrew C. Hess, *The Forgotten Frontier: A History of the Sixteenth-Century Ibero-African Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), pp. 257-58.

[21]Hâlil İnalcık, *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age*, trans. Norman Itzkowitz and Colin Imber (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), pp. 3, 5-9; Colin Heywood, "The Frontier in Ottoman History: Old Ideas and New Myths," in Power and Standen, pp. 228-50.

[22]Wolf D. Hütteroth, "Ottoman Administration of the Desert Frontier in the Sixteenth Century," *Asian and African Studies* 19 (1985), pp. 145-55.

[23]Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Austrian Military Border in Croatia, 1522-1747* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1960); Pal Fodor, "Making a Living on the Frontiers: Volunteers in the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Army," in *Ottomans, Hungarians, and Habsburgs: The Military Confines in Central Europe in the Era of Ottoman Conquest*, ed. Geza David and Pal Fodor (Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 229-63; Gabor Agoston, "A Flexible Empire: Authority and Its Limits on the Ottoman Frontiers," *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 9 (2003), pp. 15-31; Mark Stein, *Guarding the Frontier: Ottoman Border Forts and Garrisons in Europe* (London: IB Tauris, 2007). See also A. C. S. Peacock, ed., *The Frontiers of the Ottoman World*, Proceedings of the British Academy, p. 156 (Oxford: Oxford, 2009).

[24]Hâlil İnalcık, "Ottoman Methods of Conquest," *Studia Islamica* 2 (1954), pp. 104-29.

[25]Jon Haldon and Hugh Kennedy, "The Arab-Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: Military Organization and Society in the Borderlands," *Recueil des travaux de l'Institut d'Études Byzantines* 19 (1980), pp. 70-116.

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[26]Kemal Karpat with Robert Zens, eds., *Ottoman Borderlands: Issues, Personalities and Political Changes* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2003), also published as *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 9 (2003).

[27]Marvin W. Mikesell, "Comparative Studies in Frontier History," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 50 (1960), p. 65. See also Herbert Eugene Bolton, *The Spanish Borderlands: A Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest* (New Haven: Yale, 1921); as a student of Turner he refrained from developing a separate borderland paradigm.

[28]Owen Lattimore, "The Frontier in History," published in *Studies in Frontier History: Collected Papers, 1928-1958* (Paris: Mouton, 1962), pp. 469-70.

[29]Martinez, pp. 6-9.

[30]Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel, "Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands," *Journal of World History* 8 (1997), pp. 211-42.

[31]Linda T. Darling, "Mediterranean Borderlands: Early English Merchants in the Levant," in *The Ottoman Empire: Myths, Realities and 'Black Holes': Contributions in Honour of Colin Imber*, ed. Eugenia Kermeli and Oktay Özel, pp. 173-88 (Istanbul: Isis, 2006).

[32]Darling, pp. 173-74.

[33]I. William Zartman, "Introduction: Identity, Movement, and Response," in *Understanding Life in the Borderlands: Boundaries in Depth and in Motion*, ed. I. William Zartman (Athens: University of Georgia, 2010), p. 1, citing Hansen, no page number.

[34]Zartman, pp. 1-2, 7-8.

[35]Zartman, pp. 10-14.

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