

Frontier practices in the early Carolingian Period

by Walter Pohl

Focusing on early Carolingian frontier's practices, the paper opens discussing the topic's significant scholarship, debating influential work of the past up to the developments of the last years. Afterwards, the frontier's role between Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages is discussed in detail, focusing on fortifications, violence, and terminology. Finally, the Alpine *clusae* at the end of the Lombard rule, as well as the Carolingian expansion to the east are taken in exam. Due to a fortunate conjuncture of different sources, the two case-studies enable to enlighten important aspects of early medieval frontiers.

Middle Ages; 7th-9th centuries; Frontiers studies; Alpine frontiers; Avar frontiers; Carolingian conquest.

Abbreviations

Capit. it. = *I capitolari italici. Storia e diritto della dominazione carolingia in Italia*, ed. C. Azzara – P. Moro, Roma 1998.

LP = *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. L. Duchesne, *Le Liber Pontificalis. Texte, introduction et commentaire*, 2 vols, Paris 1886-1892; transl. R. Davis, *The Book of Pontiffs. The Ancient Biographies of the First Ninety Roman Bishops to AD 715*, Liverpool 1989 (Translated Texts for Historians, 6).

MGH, AQDE = *Annales regni Francorum inde ab a. 741 usque ad a. 829, qui dicuntur Annales Laurissenses maiores et Einhardi*, ed. F. Kurze, Hannover 1895 (MGH, SS rer. Germ., 6).

MGH, ARF = *Annales regni Francorum inde ab a. 741 usque ad a. 829, qui dicuntur Annales Laurissenses maiores et Einhardi*, ed. F. Kurze, Hannover 1895 (MGH, SS rer. Germ., 6).

MGH, Capit. I = *Capitularia regum Francorum*, vol. 1, ed. A. Boretius, Hannover 1883 (MGH, LL).

MGH, LL = *Leges Langobardorum*, ed. F. Bluhme, Hannover 1868 (MGH, LL, 4).

MGH, Willibald, *Vita Bonifatii = Vita Bonifatii auctore Willibaldo*, ed. W. Levison, Hannover-Leipzig 1905, pp. 1-58 (MGH, SS rer. Germ., 57).

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In June 1985, the Schengen treaty fixed the abolition of regular border controls at the frontiers between the participating member states of the European Union. In 1989, the Iron Curtain collapsed, which so far had run across much of Central Europe, one of the most elaborate and divisive frontier lines ever constructed. It may be no coincidence that around the same time, the concept of frontier came under discussion in Ancient¹ and Medieval Studies². The notion of “the frontier” in these periods was questioned, debated and in many cases deconstructed. Were the polities and communities of the past bounded entities at all, or were their peripheries first of all zones of exchange and interaction? These were important and productive questions, and they helped to historicise the notion of “frontier”, which obviously meant different things to different people at different times. In some cases, deconstruction was perhaps pushed too far, culminating in a kind of retrospective utopia in which boundaries, identities and differences between humans did not matter. In many cases such a noble vision does not correspond to the evidence of the sources. Recent experiences in our own time have also somehow dimmed the optimistic view that “hard” boundaries between polities had only been established by the modern nations and could gradually be softened with the demise of nationalism. Even within the European Union, the wave of asylum seekers in 2015 and the pandemic in 2020/21 have demonstrated that the re-introduction of border controls is still seen as the best solution for problems perceived as originating outside one’s own country. New nationalism is gaining ground in many places in Europe and elsewhere. Perhaps the recent interest in frontiers among medievalists and ancient historians has been prompted, to some extent, by the observation of how new frontiers are being drawn across and around present societies.

The questions we are asking now are still essentially the same as in the debates of the 1990s. Was there a concept of the frontier in Antiquity and the Middle Ages that resembled our own, as historical maps seem to suggest? Or do we only project modern notions of bounded territories into the past? Did pre-modern people in Europe conceive of the boundaries between polities as linear frontiers, or were they rather used to border zones where control from both sides was situational or faded out altogether? Can the concept of frontier help us to understand the constitution of bounded social groups, polities and empires? What has changed is perhaps that the interest is in many cases more global and comparative. A glance at some 2022 conference topics also shows some concern with confronting ancient and modern/contemporary frontiers. In Houston, “Naming the Natives” juxtaposed Roman perceptions of the barbarians with attitudes towards indigenous peoples in eighteenth/

¹ *Shifting Frontiers*; this first conference in Kansas 1995 started a series, reaching “Shifting Frontiers XIV” in 2021. Increasingly, “frontiers” was also understood metaphorically, and the focus shifted to crossing frontiers in scholarship.

² See, for instance, *Medieval Frontier Societies*; *Medieval Frontiers*; *Frontiers in the Middle Ages*; *Borders*.

nineteenth-century North America. A conference in Bregenz (Austria) had the wide-ranging topic “Contextualizing Imperial Borderlands (9thc. BC–9thc. AD and Beyond)”. In Jerusalem, certainly a place where disputed frontiers constitute a particularly intricate problem, “Walls, Borders, and Frontier Zones in the Ancient and the Contemporary World” were discussed.

For the transition period between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, the notion of a “transformation of frontiers” was in many respects a fruitful approach³. I would like to mention a few fundamental contributions in which authors of this volume were involved. Stefano Gasparri addressed the topic of early medieval frontiers from a critical perspective in an article published in 1995, *La frontiera in Italia (sec. VI–VIII)*⁴. It was directed against the habit current among archaeologists and regional historians to attribute fortifications and settlements throughout Italy to some kind of hypothetical frontier defence system. In Vienna, we published a collaborative volume entitled *Grenze und Differenz im frühen Mittelalter* in 2000, containing a long article by Helmut Reimitz, *Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen im karolingischen Mitteleuropa*⁵. The book about “The Transformation of Frontiers”, published in 2001, was a result of the ESF programme on the Transformation of the Roman World⁶. At the Settimana di Studio in Spoleto on “Le relazioni internazionali nel Medioevo” in 2010, I tried to sum up the state of the art on early medieval frontiers, at a point when the wave of interest in the topic had more or less subsided⁷.

1. *Shifting frontiers, shifting concepts*

The study of Carolingian frontiers had long been overshadowed by ideological concerns. One issue was the division of the empire between a Germanic east and a Romance west, which played a role in the struggles over the shifting frontier between France and Germany in the Modern Period⁸. In this context, research on the *Sprachgrenze*, the language boundary, between the two countries also played a role⁹. At least as controversial was the question of «die Ostgrenze des karolingischen Reiches», the subject of a fundamental article by Ernst Klebel in 1928¹⁰. The debate focused, not least, on the etymology of place names, thus positing “Germanic” settlement continuity especial-

³ *The Transformation of Frontiers; Shifting Frontiers*.

⁴ Gasparri, *La frontiera in Italia (sec. VI–VIII)*.

⁵ *Grenze und Differenz*; Reimitz, *Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen*.

⁶ *The Transformation of Frontiers*.

⁷ Pohl, *Trasformazione delle frontiere*.

⁸ Haubrichs, *Franken*; Schulze, *Deutschlands „natürliche“ Grenzen*.

⁹ Haubrichs, *Über die allmähliche Verfertigung von Sprachgrenzen*.

¹⁰ Klebel, *Die Ostgrenze des Karolingischen Reiches*. For a more ideological treatment, see e.g. Aubin, *Die Ostgrenze*; Mühle, *Für Volk und deutschen Osten*. For a brief history of research on the eastern frontier of the Carolingian Empire, see Hardt, *Linien und Säume*, pp. 39–40.

ly in Eastern Austria. The question whether Germanic, Slavic or Hungarian settlers had been first in a region was seen as relevant for an ancient right of the Eastern Central European nations to these territories. German scholars also styled Carolingian expansion as a civilising process and conceptualised German *Ostsiedlung*, settlement in the East, as a historical mission of their nation. For some German historians, the engagement of Charlemagne, Otto I and many of their successors in Italy had been a wrong choice, detracting energies from the “natural” expansion zone in thinly-settled Eastern Europe¹¹.

This notion of a frontier between barbarism and civilisation and of the “historical mission” of the higher civilisation to push forward its boundaries into the wilderness in order to spread culture among its “primitive” inhabitants was not limited to nationalists in Europe. It also served as an ideological prop to European colonial expansion¹². Perhaps the most explicit interpretation of the significance of the frontier in this paradigm was developed in the USA at the turn of the twentieth century. That was the so-called “Turner Thesis” or “Frontier Thesis”, which cast a long shadow on later research on frontiers in America¹³. Turner’s idea was that the development of freedom, democracy and a pioneer spirit in the USA had been prompted by the many independent men who had pushed forward the frontier into the wilderness. It had helped the United States to free themselves from the more hierarchical society in Europe, and created an American national spirit. The ongoing tension between civilisation and wilderness, with all its challenges, in a “frontier society” could serve to bring out the best in a superior civilisation. In the meantime, it has become obsolete to regard the genocide of the indigenous population in America as a positive model of a “frontier society”¹⁴. Whether the Turner Thesis can help to understand the pioneer spirit of Franks and Bavarians in the wilderness of what is now Eastern Austria after the fall of the Avar Khaganate is doubtful, although the general resentment against a “pagan” and “barbaric” indigenous population may be comparable to some extent.

An important point of reference for the debate about the Turner Thesis was ancient Rome, which had already served as a historical model in earlier discussions about the westward expansion of the USA. Therefore, Turner’s views also provided a starting point for a critical debate about the Roman *limes* among anglophone ancient historians in the 1990. Was it really the for-

¹¹ This was the issue in the “Sybel-Ficker controversy” in the 1860s, which evolved in the context of the rivalry between Prussia (where Heinrich von Sybel taught) and Austria (Julius von Ficker’s vantage point). Von Sybel, *Die deutsche Nation und das Kaiserreich*; Wippermann, *Der „Deutsche Drang nach Osten“*.

¹² Bitterli, *Die „Wilden“ und die „Zivilisierten“*.

¹³ Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier*; see also Turner, *The Frontier in American History*; Billington, *America’s Frontier Heritage*; Turner and the *Sociology of the Frontier*. For Turner’s influence on current debates, see Elton, *Frontiers*, p. 1 («one of the most famous frontier theories»); Whittaker, *Frontiers*, pp. 4-9.

¹⁴ See *Naming the Natives*.

midable, fortified line of defence that generations of scholars had believed it to be¹⁵? *Limes* studies had so far concentrated on military architecture at the Roman frontier and its function within the defence system of the empire. Against this bias, Benjamin Isaac in 1990, C.R. Whittaker in 1994 and Hugh Elton in 1996 argued that the *limes* was not equipped to stop any large-scale barbarian invasions, or even the crossing-over of smaller groups of raiders or immigrants¹⁶. In reality, they maintained, it rather protected the routes of communication that ran along Rhine, Danube and other parts of the frontier, and helped to maintain control over the population in the frontier provinces of the empire. It also served as a symbolical frontier and demarcated the boundary between civilisation and the barbarians¹⁷. Indeed, in the many armed conflicts between the Roman Empire and the barbarians we have relatively little evidence that barbarians were stopped by the *limes*, or had to force their way into imperial territory by breaking through it, or by besieging or conquering *limes* fortresses.

It may be that Hadrian's wall in Britain with its 320 towers, 96 fortresses and a height of up to 4,5 meters constituted a more solid line of defence. It surely sufficed to curb raids by smaller groups of *Brittunculi*, as they are called on the "Vindolanda tablets", a precious set of texts about daily life on this remote part of the Roman frontier¹⁸. But even this wall, almost 120 km long, could hardly withstand a concentrated attack. A late example that the Danube *limes* served as a lateral route of communication rather than as a defence line protecting its hinterland is provided by the repeated Avar incursions into the Balkan provinces from the 580s onwards¹⁹. At the time, many *limes* fortresses along the Danube east of Singidunum/Belgrade were still in use. They did not stop the Avar armies from crossing the Save or the Danube near Singidunum, nor from marching downstream on the comfortable *limes* road as far as the Scythia minor, whether or not they attacked the forts or passed them by. On the other hand, Roman armies marching against the Avars repeatedly used the chain of fortifications on the Danube for logistic support.

The discussions of the 1990s and 2000s about the concept of the frontier were closely linked to the perceptions of space also debated at the time. The "spatial turn" in the Humanities and the Social Sciences around 1990 also affected medieval studies²⁰. A number of pioneering studies addressed the spatial concepts and geographical knowledge in the Roman Empire and the

¹⁵ Many aspects of the *limes*, but most of all its military architecture, have been discussed at the International Limes Congresses, first organised in 1949: *The Congress of Roman Frontier Studies 1949*.

¹⁶ Isaac, *The Limits of Empire*; Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*; Elton, *Frontiers*.

¹⁷ As already argued by Alföldi, *The Moral Barrier on Rhine and Danube*.

¹⁸ Bowman, *Life and Letters on the Roman Frontier*.

¹⁹ Pohl, *The Avars*, pp. 89-100.

²⁰ *Spatial Turn*.

Early Middle Ages²¹. As the *Tabula Peutingeriana* shows, ancient cartographers and the educated elite mainly perceived of the space of the empire as a network of routes connecting cities and fortresses. That was not a neutral geographical space, but a frame for human movements and nodes of settlement. The frontier of the empire is not indicated on the *Tabula*, it just becomes obvious where spaces beyond the borders are only filled by names of rivers and peoples²².

One of the theoretical tools employed to understand the limits between inside and outside, mainly in German scholarship, was Niklas Luhmann's systems theory. In his *Soziale Systeme*, published in 1994, Luhmann had argued that a system is defined by its difference to its environment. Its boundaries are in the first place «Sinnngrenzen» – a term not easily translatable into English because *Sinn* carries stronger philosophical overtones and covers a different semantic field from “sense”, “meaning” or “significance”²³. According to Luhmann, territorial frontiers are only one form of *Sinnngrenzen*, and boundaries between social systems may be linear, or overlap in hybrid zones, and they have to be demarcated by fixed or mobile symbolical objects. They contribute to one of the structural goals of complex systems, that is to reduce contingency and to raise the probability of expectations.

The underlying challenge for contemporary scholarship on frontiers has received too little attention so far: can Western scholars, whose education is still deeply-rooted in the classical and Judaeo-Christian tradition, escape the dichotomy between (our) “civilisation” and “wilderness/barbarism” that still shapes the prevailing narrative about the frontiers of the late antique and the early medieval Roman Empires? We should be aware that Late Rome, Byzantium and the Carolingian realm owed their power to, sometimes excessive, violence. The last Eastern Roman army ever to march deep into the Middle Danube region in 599 massacred peaceful Gepid villagers who were asleep after a feast; and Charlemagne's armies also committed atrocities against Saxons who had relapsed into paganism. Behind that, there was a deep-seated animosity against “barbarians” and “pagans” that may to some degree be described as “racial thinking”²⁴. On the other hand, we need not gloss over the destruction of Roman towns or Carolingian monasteries by Vandals, Huns, Avars, Normans or Magyars either. Overall, we should not try to minimise the role of violence, conflict and divisive social boundaries to provide ourselves with a more comfortable history consonant with our hopes and values. It is important to emphasise that early medieval frontiers were not only about

²¹ Brodersen, *Terra Cognita*; Nicolet, *L'inventaire du monde; Space in the Roman World*; Lozovsky, *The Earth is our Book; Uomo e spazio nell'alto Medioevo*.

²² Liccardo, *Geography of Otherness*.

²³ Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme*, p. 266.

²⁴ Subsuming Roman attitudes towards barbarians under racial thinking; Lopez-Jantzen, *Between Empires*. On the appropriation of barbarian stereotypes by ruling “barbarians”: Pohl, *Appropriating the discourse*.

defence and military conflict; but they were not exclusively about cultural exchanges and peaceful encounters either.

As with other concepts applied to the study of the distant past, “frontiers” should be historicised and balanced with the respective notions of the period under study. The early medieval terminology of the frontier and its uses are essential for tracing the concepts of frontier current in the period. We should not forget that even modern terminology is not very precise, differs considerably between languages, and allows for wide-ranging metaphorical uses. In English, we have the words frontier, border and boundary, which overlap to a considerable degree; limit can also be used in certain contexts. This is similar in Italian, with *frontiera*, *confine*, and in some cases *limite*. Germans mainly use *Grenze*. In Latin, there are *finēs*, *limes*, *confinia*, *terminus*, *litus* and some other terms. What makes the interpretation of many passages difficult is that in early medieval Latin, for instance, *finēs regni* can mean the frontiers or frontiers zones of the kingdom, but also its entire bounded territory. And as Benjamin Isaac has argued, *limes* rarely refers to the built-up frontier as we understand it: «In no single case is a *limes* described as something made or constructed»²⁵. The different terms can also be combined in sometimes opaque ways in the sources. For instance, Willibald’s *Vita Bonifatii* states that Boniface was sent by the pope to the «incognitos Baguariorum et confines Germaniae terminos»²⁶. When Boniface travelled to Rome through Burgundy, he crossed the Alps and then the borders: «collibus Alpium transcensis limitum finēs militumque terminos transmigravit»²⁷. If this phrase makes sense at all, it distinguishes between a border zone (*limitum finēs*) and the fortified control posts guarded by soldiers (*militum termini*), the *clusae*, which will be discussed below. We may ask ourselves why Willibald used such an exaggerated rhetoric of frontiers – was it to stress Boniface’s many hardships and unflinching commitment?

In Old High German, the frontier was called *marca*, and that carries the notion of a boundary that is demarcated in some way²⁸. However, in most cases it was used for a frontier zone, and thus developed, in the course of the ninth and tenth centuries, into the designation of a march, a relatively definite frontier area administered and defended by a *marchio*, a margrave²⁹. In consequence, the German language adopted a Slavic loanword for the border line, Polish *granica* (Czech *hranice*), *Grenze*³⁰. The early medieval frontier was a shifting concept in which the boundary and the bounded space were

²⁵ Isaac, *The Meaning*, p. 146; Isaac, *The Limits of Empire*, p. 409; Arce, *Frontiers of the Late Roman Empire*, p. 9.

²⁶ MGH, Willibald, *Vita Bonifatii*, 5, p. 22. Reimitz, *Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen*, pp. 134-140.

²⁷ MGH, Willibald, *Vita Bonifatii*, 6, p. 37.

²⁸ Tiefenbach, *Studien*, pp. 74-78 and p. 113.

²⁹ Wolfram, *The Creation*. Arguing for a more consolidated Carolingian system of marches: Stieldorf, *Marken und Markgrafen*.

³⁰ Böckler, *Grenze*.

hardly separable, and which had to be used both for definite borderlines, for indefinite border zones over which no clear control had been established, and for bounded territories. To recover this ambiguity, it surely was important to deconstruct traditional notions of the frontier in Early Medieval Studies. However, we should not end up concluding that frontiers did not matter, that they were totally permeable or only imagined and culturally constructed. Roads crossing the frontier were points at which the efforts of the early medieval kingdoms to establish some control on the movements of their subjects could be put into practice, building on Roman precedent, as the first example shows.

2. *The clusae at the Alpine pass roads, Lombards and Franks*

To make these points clearer, I would like to discuss two examples from the early Carolingian period, in which a number of practices are prescribed or described. The first one concerns the so-called “pass law” issued by the Lombard king Ratchis (744–749), just before Pippin III became king of the Franks³¹.

Hoc autem statuere previdimus: ut marcas nostras Christo custodiente sic debeat fieri ordinatas et vigilatas, ut inimici nostri et gentes nostre non possint per eas sculcas mittere aut fugacis exientes suscipere, sed nullus homo per eas introire possit sine signo aut epistola regis. Propterea unusquisque iudex per marcas sibi commissas tale studium et vigilantiam ponere debeat et per se et per locopositos et clusarios suos, ut nullus homo sine signo aut epistola regis exire possit. Et dum ad ingrediendum venerint peregrini ad clusas nostras, qui ad Romam ambulare disponunt, diligenter debeat eos interrogare unde sint; et si cognoscat, quod simpliciter veniant, faciat iudex aut clusarius syngraphus et mittat in cera et ponat sibi sigillum suum, ut ipsi postea ostendant ipsum signum nostris, quos nos ordinauerimus. Signum post hoc missus nostri faciant eis epistola ad romam ambulandi; et con venerent da romo, accipiant signo de anolo regis.

The clause has been interpreted in the general context of an alliance of the pope with the Franks directed against the Lombards, which had begun under

³¹ MGH, LL, Ratchis 13, p. 192: «It is our command that, with the help of Christ, boundaries will be maintained and guarded in order that neither our enemies nor our people can send *scouts* through them or *receive outgoing* fugitives, *but* that no man can enter *through* them without a *sign or a letter* by the king. Every *iudex* (judge) should use such care and vigilance with regard to the frontier committed to him both in his own actions as well as in those of his local officials (*locopositi*) and gate wardens (*clusarii*) that no man can go out without a *sign or a letter* by the king. When *pilgrims* who plan to go to Rome come to our border *posts* (*clusae*), the judge shall inquire diligently whence they come. If he recognizes that they come without evil intent, the judge or the gate warden shall issue a passport (*syngraphus*) placing it on a wax tablet and setting his seal to it, in order that afterward the travellers may show this notice to our appointed agents. After this *sealed document* (*signum*), our *envoys* shall give the travellers a letter to enable them to go to Rome; and when they return from Rome, *they will receive a seal from the king's ring*». English translation: Fischer Drew, *The Lombard Laws*, pp. 223-224 (I have marked in italics where I depart from her translation).

Ratchis's predecessor Liutprand and had gathered momentum under his successors Aistulf and Desiderius³². Ratchis had started his reign on a different note, concluding a 20-year peace agreement with Pope Zachary soon after his accession³³. Only in 749, probably under pressure from a more ambitious faction at his court to which his brother Aistulf seems to have belonged, did he resume the offensive against the exarchate and besiege Perugia, but lifted the siege upon papal intervention and stepped down, later becoming a monk at Montecassino³⁴. His laws are dated to 746, but clause 13 and 14 were only copied into the lawbook by mistake by a scribe who also faithfully copied the provision in his template that only the laws written above (that is, 1 to 12) were to be included into the edict, while the two following chapters should only be circulated in a *breve*, which here is best translated as “capitulary” (the two clauses are called *capitula* in the text). Possibly, they were part of the preparations for the attack on Perugia. More likely, Ratchis desperately tried to extend control over his own kingdom, as two previous laws show: in clausa 9, he forbade any *iudex* (“judge”, a leading official in the duchies) or other man to send envoys to Rome, Ravenna, Spoleto, Benevento, Francia, Bavaria, Alemannia, Raetia or Avaria under the threat of a death penalty. And clausa 12 is directed against spies in the palace or people who transmit confidential information to foreign provinces. Ratchis must have felt surrounded by enemies and traitors in and around his kingdom.

However that may have been, Ratchis 13 tells us a lot about eighth-century frontier practices. It seems obvious that Ratchis did not simply reconfirm standard procedures; however, his provisions must have seemed practicable, and relied on existing infrastructure on the ground. This basis was constituted by the *clusae*, which had remained from the *Tractus Italiae circa Alpes*, the ancient Roman system of fortified posts at the south end of the Alpine pass roads³⁵. This defensive system is mentioned in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, the military handbook compiled in the early fifth century³⁶. In the list, it was the only area assigned to the *comes Italiae*; unfortunately, no details are mentioned. Part of the *Tractus* were the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum* that should bar access to Italy from the east, in modern Slovenia, where a number of defensive walls are still traceable or have been excavated³⁷. Most likely, the *Claustra* already ceased to be fully functional after Alaric I's invasion of Italy at the beginning of the fifth century. We hear more about the western parts of the *Tractus* in later centuries. In the Gothic period, sixty soldiers were stationed in *Augustanis clusuris*, in the *clusurae* of Aosta, deemed to bar, «as through

³² Tangl, *Die Pafvorschift des Königs Ratchis*; Pohl, *Frontiers*.

³³ LP, I, p. 431; transl. Davis, pp. 43-44; Noble, *The Republic of St. Peter*, pp. 56-57; Pohl, *Werkstätte der Erinnerung*, pp. 183-185.

³⁴ LP, I, pp. 433-434; transl. Davis, pp. 47-48.

³⁵ Settia, *Le frontiere del regno italico*; Brogiolo – Gelichi, *Nuove ricerche*, p. 12.

³⁶ *Notitia Dignitatum*, Occ. XXIV, p. 173.

³⁷ First mentioned in Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, vol. 3, 31.11.3, p. 458. Poulter, *An Indefensible Frontier*; Kos, *Barriers*; Ciglencéki, *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*.

some gate of the province, the entry of pagan peoples», as Cassiodorus puts it in his flowery administrative rhetoric³⁸. A later letter by Cassiodorus in the name of Theodoric addressed to «all Goths and Romans and those who are at ports or *clusurae*» requires them not to let a group of slaves who had murdered their master escape³⁹. Procopius mentions several fortifications, *fro-uria*, in the Cottian Alps between Gaul and Italy, mostly manned with men from the local population⁴⁰. With Brogiolo and Gelichi, I would differentiate between several types of fortifications⁴¹: first, those barring the way in straits of Alpine valleys, the *clusae* or *cl(a)usurae*; second, the major fortified towns along Alpine roads, such as Susa or Aosta; and third, hillforts and other fortifications on or along the foothills of the Alps, such as Monte Barro or the Isola Comacina⁴². The provisions of Ratchis only concerned the first type.

In the eighth century, a number of *clusae* were obviously still in place. Paul the Deacon, who wrote in the early 790s, calls them *claustra* and mentions them when King Perctarit after Grimoald's coup in 662 escaped first to Turin and then crossed the *claustra Italiae* to Gaul; when he returned after Grimoald's death, the courtiers already expected him at the *claustra* and greeted him as king⁴³. When Ratchis issued his *breve*, the fortified control posts were guarded by *locopositi et clausarii*, for instance, at S. Michele near Susa or in the Valley of Aosta. They stood under the authority of a *iudex* who must have resided in the nearest major town, most likely in Turin and in Ivrea. The controls relied on communication in writing, and on the notion that free movement in and out of the kingdom, and even inside the kingdom, was something that required permission and control. That clerical travellers needed letters of introduction, *epistolae formatae*, from a superior of their place of departure had been established practice in the Church since Roman times⁴⁴. Similar letters for laymen are not attested from the Carolingian period, but that may well be due to the very slight chances of their transmission. Ratchis 13 does not mention such letters either, but it surely included clerics who would have had them. What exactly the *signum* was that was required to enter or leave the kingdom, alternatively to the king's letter, is unclear – a signature or a seal

³⁸ Cassiodorus, *Variae*, 2.5, p. 60: «Praecipimus sexaginta militibus in Augustanis clusuris iugiter constitutis annonas [...] praestare [...] Decet enim cogitare de militis transactione, qui pro generali quiete finalibus locis noscitur insudare et quasi a quadam porta provinciae gentiles introitus probatur excludere». S. Bjornlie, *The Variae*, p. 85, translates that the soldiers should «bar the passage of peoples from the provinces», but I assume that the *porta provinciae* should mean the «gate of the province», the kingdom of Italy.

³⁹ Cassiodorus, *Variae*, II, 19, p. 70.

⁴⁰ Procopius, *Bella*, VI, 28, IV, pp. 120-125.

⁴¹ Brogiolo – Gelichi, *Nuove ricerche*, p. 12.

⁴² *Ibidem*, pp. 12-13. They include further types of fortified hilltop settlements and urban castles not relevant here. I doubt that «type 3» hill fortresses, such as Monte Barro (*ibidem* pp. 22 – m 31), were intended to bar the way to invaders; rather the intention may have been to station small garrisons of soldiers at easily defensible sites and offer protection to the population.

⁴³ Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum*, V, 2 p. 144; V, 33, p. 155: «ac post claustra Italiae transgressus» and «cum ad claustra Italiae venisset».

⁴⁴ Fabricius, *Die Litterae Formatae*; Mastruzzo, *Un'epistola formata*.

of recognition on an *epistola formata*, or the sealed wax tablet mentioned below? In any case, quite a complicated procedure was required from pilgrims going to Rome. The *clusarius* or the judge had to question the travellers, and if they did not seem suspicious, he issued a *syngraphus* on a wax tablet closed with his seal. *Syngraphē* is a term sometimes used for private charters and other documents in the early medieval West⁴⁵; the ninth-century copyist did not understand the word anymore and wrote *socropus* instead. This document had to be handed over to a royal *missus*, an envoy (the terminology is already Carolingian), who provided a letter of approval for the journey to Rome. On their way back, the pilgrims had to obtain a royal seal on this letter which would grant them passage through the *clusae*.

The *iudices*, the secular authorities (mostly dukes and gastalds), were responsible for the controls involved, and neglect of this duty could have dramatic consequences, at least in the rather paranoid context of Ratchis's laws of 746. The clause also contains provisions for places where no fortified border posts were available, which regards the roads to Rome leading through Tuscany. Here, the judges had to control their entire district for travellers crossing it without the king's permission. It is remarkable that these provisions do not only concern foreigners entering the country, but also *gentes nostrae*, spies, and fugitives going into both directions. Mobility of the king's own subjects could be as suspicious as foreigners moving into the country. Interestingly, the Germanic word *marca* is used here for the area of responsibility of the *iudex*, which does not differentiate between the border itself and the town or district administrated by the judge. This also foreshadows Carolingian and post-Carolingian usage, like much else in Ratchis's capitulary.

Ratchis's capitulary provided for extraordinary measures, and the main intention clearly was to control traffic between the Frankish realm and Rome, the partners of the anti-Lombard alliance, but also to monitor the mobility of potentially suspicious subjects of the king. We cannot assess how efficient they were, and whether they were carried out at all. In any case, Aistulf, already in his first year, reaffirmed Ratchis 13 in a more general manner⁴⁶. Again, both incoming and outgoing movements are explicitly covered, and penalties for neglect by the responsible *clusarii* foreseen. That some of the *clusae* lay in ruins certainly helps to put Ratchis's provisions in perspective. Trade inside the country, by land or water, was also forbidden if not licensed by the king or judge⁴⁷. In particular, clause 4 banned any business with Romans in times of war. If an *arimannus* should do so, he was to lose his possessions and be shav-

⁴⁵ Thür, *Syngraphie*.

⁴⁶ MGH, LL, Aistulf 5, p. 197: «De clusas, qui disruptae sunt: restaurentur et ponant ibi custodiam, ut nec nostri homines possint transire sine voluntate regis nec extranei possint introire in provincia nostra similiter sine voluntate regis vel iussione. Et in quale clusa inventus fuerit, tali pena subiaceat clusarius, qui custodire neglexit, a iudice suo, qualis ipse iudex a rege anteposito. Nisi iudex pro utilitate regis miserit missum suum, aut recipere tantummodo pro causa regis».

⁴⁷ MGH, LL, Aistulf 6, p. 197.

en, *decalvatus*, under shouts of: «Sic patiat, qui contra voluntatem regis cum Romano homine negotium fecerit, quando lites habemus»⁴⁸. Neglect that led to the escape of thieves through the *clusae* was explicitly threatened with sanctions⁴⁹. All these laws were issued in 750/751, before Aistulf attacked and conquered Ravenna. These were, then, mostly specific measures. The entire section of Aistulf's laws of 750 was not copied into several of the ninth-century manuscripts⁵⁰.

Yet much of what was prescribed here also corresponded to normal practice. According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, there were «Francorum clusae»⁵¹ (on the road over the Great Saint Bernard Pass) and «clusae Langobardorum»⁵². In 754 (or 755), Aistulf made a surprise attack on the Frankish *clusae* on the Mont Cenis road, but was pushed back by a small garrison⁵³. In 756, Pippin III broke through the *clusae* on the Longobard side⁵⁴. When Charlemagne marched into Italy in 773, he divided his army and led his part across the Mont Cenis, while his uncle Bernhard crossed the Great Saint Bernard Pass; both armies stopped at the *clusae*, where King Desiderius blocked Charlemagne's advance until the Franks sent a unit across the mountains⁵⁵. When King Bernhard of Italy rebelled against Louis the Pious in 817, he reputedly blocked all access routes to Italy at the *clusae*⁵⁶. In the course of the Middle Ages, Italian forces repeatedly sought to block the roads to a Frankish or German army marching south, usually without much success⁵⁷. The *clusae* in the Val di Susa could also serve as a border in the *Divisio Regnorum*⁵⁸. The Val di Susa down to the chiusa di San Michele belonged to Louis the Pious's part in Southern Gaul to Italy. Interestingly, the *Divisio* also fixed three different routes between Italy and the Frankish heartlands for the three heirs of Charlemagne: Louis through the *vallis Segusiana*, Charles the Younger through the *vallis Augustana*, and Pippin of Italy through the Norican Alps and Chur⁵⁹.

⁴⁸ MGH, LL, Aistulf 4, p. 196: «Those who conduct business with a Roman contrary to the king's wish, as long as the Romans are our enemies, suffer thus» (transl. Fischer Drew, p. 229).

⁴⁹ MGH, LL, Aistulf 9, p. 197: «De furonibus qui neglexerit inquirere aut sollicitare, vel qui eos transire permittunt foris clusas, ita subiaceat, sicut edicti continet pagina, et intra presentem indictionem fiat inquisitio».

⁵⁰ Pohl, *Frontiers*.

⁵¹ LP, I, p. 447, p. 450; cf. *Chronicon Salernitanum* 4, p. 5.

⁵² LP, I, p. 452, p. 495.

⁵³ LP, I, p. 450.

⁵⁴ LP, I, p. 452.

⁵⁵ LP, I, p. 495; MGH, ARF, p. 36, *ad annum* 773.

⁵⁶ MGH, ARF, p. 147, *ad annum* 817: «omnes aditus, quibus in Italiam intratur, id est clusas, impositis firmasse praesidiis».

⁵⁷ E.g. MGH, Liudprand, *Antapodosis* I, 5, p. 7; Lampert of Hersfeld, *Annales*, p. 285, *ad annum* 1077 (in these two cases, with the explanation: «quas clusas nominat vulgus», or similar). Cf. Schneider, *Alpenpolitik*, p. 36.

⁵⁸ MGH, Capit. I, no. 45, 1, p. 127 (806): «montem Cinisium, vallem Segusianam usque ad clusas, et inde per terminos Italicorum montium usque ad mare».

⁵⁹ MGH, Capit. I, n. 45, 3, p. 127 (806).

On a more individual and everyday level, letters of conduct were also a well-known practice, although there is legislation that reminded Carolingian subjects to follow it. An Italian capitulary of 787 states: «Sicut consuetudo fuit sigillum et epistola prendere et vias vel portas custodire, ita nunc sit factum»⁶⁰. Of course, 787 was again characterised by a delicate political situation, as Charlemagne prepared for the final blow against the Bavarian duke Tassilo III. Yet Carolingian capitularies continue to express concerns with people crossing the borders without permission. Much of the former Italian frontier now lay within the Carolingian realm, but the preoccupations of law-givers remained the same. Charlemagne's capitulary probably issued for Italy in the 780s deals with those who were prepared to launch raids against the enemies and extend the march («illos qui parati sunt inimicis insidia facere et marcam nostram ampliare») – another early example for a spatial conception of *marca*⁶¹. The result could be hate, *odium*, of the people living in border areas (*confinales nostri*) against those who launched raids against the enemies⁶². Even in Charlemagne's Empire, such activities would spur retaliation bound to make the *confinales* suffer, whereas the undefined and most probably quite uncontrolled *illi*, the Frankish raiders, would long be gone⁶³.

3. Limes certus and the Carolingian expansions to the east

My second example are the frontiers between Bavarians/Franks and Avars. As the *Annales regni Francorum* remark, the border between Bavaria and the Avar realm had been fixed by a treaty at the lowest stretch of the Enns river before it flowed into the Danube, near the ancient town of Lauriacum⁶⁴. «For this river, which flows through the middle of the border area between the Bavarians and the Huns, serves as a sure frontier (*limes certus*) for the two realms»⁶⁵. One might regard this as an example for a linear frontier, but the decisive point surely was where the old Roman road crossed the Enns river. After the Bavarian duke Tassilo III had submitted to Charlemagne in 781, Avars envoys appeared at Lippspringe in July 782 «for the sake of peace». At the same time a considerable Avar army drew up on the Enns but did no damage, as the Bavarian annals note with relief⁶⁶. In 788, when the Franks removed Tassilo III and took direct control of Bavaria, there were clashes between Franks and Avars, who also raided in Friuli but were beaten there and close

⁶⁰ MGH, Capit. I, n. 95, 17, p. 201 (c. 790); Capit. it., no. 7, 17, p. 70.

⁶¹ Capit. it., no. 8, p. 70; MGH, Capit. I, n. 101 (790-810?), p. 208.

⁶² Capit. it., no. 8, p. 70; MGH, Capit. I, n. 101 (790-810?), p. 208.

⁶³ For *confin(i)ales*, see MGH, ARF, p. 36, *ad annum* 773; cf. Wolfram, *Salzburg, Bayern, Österreich*, p. 180, with note 452; p. 183 with note 465.

⁶⁴ Pohl, *The Avars*, p. 372.

⁶⁵ MGH, AQDE, p. 89, *ad annum* 791.

⁶⁶ *Annales Iuvavavenses*, p. 734, *ad annum* 782; MGH, *Annales s. Emmerami maiores*, p. 735, *ad annum* 783. Pohl, *The Avars*, p. 378.

to the Danube⁶⁷. Carolingian propaganda accused Tassilo and his Longobard wife to have sought an alliance with the Avars against the Franks. Charlemagne, who had come to the Bavarian capital Regensburg, took measures to protect the Bavarian frontiers («*fines vel marcas Baioariorum*») against the Avars⁶⁸. Avar envoys appeared in Worms in 790. The revised version of the *Royal Frankish Annals* defines the subject of the negotiations as «the borders (*confinia*) of the kingdoms and where they ought to be»⁶⁹. One thing that emerges from these passages is that the *Royal Frankish Annals* had no fixed terminology to describe the Avar frontier. The three passages cited here for the years 788, 790 and 791 cover practically the entire semantic field for “frontiers”: *limes*, *fines*, *marcas* and *confinia*.

Charlemagne now decided to cross this frontier to attack the Avar realm⁷⁰. In early September 791 he reached Lauriacum at the Enns river with his army, where they pitched camp. In order to win heavenly blessing for the campaign, three days of fasting and prayers were held accompanied by ceremonious masses. A letter from the king to his spouse Fastrada provides more detail⁷¹. The priests, the king wrote, had banned the consumption of wine and meat, excepting those whom the *infirmitas* of their age or their youth excused. It was permissible to buy oneself free of the ban on wine, the *potentiores* at the cost of one *solidus* a day, the poorer soldiers «each according to his own good will and in proportion to his means». During this time each priest had to say a mass and the clerics had to sing psalms and recite litanies: «Thus our priests considered proper». The liturgical spectacle says a great deal about the hesitation to cross the Avar frontier into regions where Frankish troops had not yet operated, and about securing God’s protection for the ambitious campaign against the pagans. Before the beginning of the actual attack, warriors and non-combatants again united and sought to prepare for this venture.

While at Lauriacum, the king received the news of a victory of the Italian army over the Avars. There the *scara*, the troop of young Pippin of Italy under the leadership of Duke Eric of Friuli and of the *dux* of Istria, had crossed the

⁶⁷ MGH, ARF, pp. 82-84, *ad annum* 788; Pohl, *The Avars*, pp. 378-379.

⁶⁸ MGH, ARF, p. 84, *ad annum* 788: «Post haec omnia domnus rex Carolus per semet ipsum ad Reganesburg pervenit et ibi fines vel marcas Baioariorum disposuit, quomodo salvas Domino protegente contra iamdictos Avaros esse potuissent». Pohl, *The Avars*, pp. 378-379.

⁶⁹ MGH, *Annales qui dicuntur Einhardi*, p. 87, *ad annum* 790: «Agebatur inter eos de confiniiis regnorum suorum, quibus in locis esse deberent». See Wolfram, *Conversio Bagoariorum*, p. 256.

⁷⁰ MGH, ARF, pp. 86-88, *ad annum* 791; *Annales Mettenses priores*, pp. 78-79, *ad annum* 791; Pohl, *The Avars*, pp. 379-382.

⁷¹ *Epistolae variorum*, no. 20, pp. 528-529: «Nos autem, Domino adiuvante, tribus diebus leantia fecimus, id est nonis septembris quod fuit lunis die incipientes, et martis et mercuris; Dei misericordiam deprecantes, ut nobis pacem et sanitatem atque victoriam et prosperum iter tribuere dignetur, et ut in sua misericordia et pietate nobis adiutor et consiliator atque defensor in omnibus angustiis nostris existat. Et a vino et carne ordinaverunt sacerdotes nostri, qui propter infirm[ita]tem au]t senectudinem aut iuventudinem abstinere potebant, ut abstinuisset (...) Et sacerdos unusquisque missam specialem fecisset, nisi infirmitas inpedisset. Et clerici, qui psalmos sciebant, unusquisque quinquaginta cantasset».

border of the *partes Avariae* on August 23. After some skirmish, an Avar fortification (*uualum*) was captured, and «a great number» of Avars killed; «many say that for a long time no greater massacre had been committed among the Avars». That was probably correct, after almost 200 years of largely peaceful relations of the Avars with their western neighbours. About one hundred and fifty of them were captured «and spared», according to a general order issued by Charlemagne: this is, as the letter specifies, as things should be handled in the future. The fortress was plundered, the Frankish troops spent the night there and returned home on the next day. Obviously, there was no intention to march deeper into Avar territory. The Avar *uualum* seems to have been close to the frontier, most likely on the Hrušica Plateau, where the late Roman fortress *Ad Pirum*, a part of the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum* had once guarded a mountainous tract of the main road from Aquileia to Emona/Ljubljana and on to Pannonia⁷². It is not unlikely that the Avars actually used the remains of the ancient Roman border fortifications. In the campaign of 791, the Frankish armies also encountered fortifications along their march, rather deep in Avar territory: one on the western slopes of the Vienna Woods, and the other north of the Danube at the Kamp River (and these were hardly Roman structures). Perhaps warned by the failure to defend the *uualum* against the Italian army, the Avars had abandoned these structures. It seems surprising that the steppe riders would withdraw behind walls, but that is no exception. Like the Bulgars, the Avars had constructed long walls which somehow surrounded the core of the Avar settlement area, especially towards the east, the so-called Csörsz Dyke (or Devil's Dyke). It had long been attributed to the Sarmatians, but recent finds point to the Avar period⁷³. As many other fortifications of the early Middle Ages, they were not constructed close to the border, but more inland.

4. *Some conclusions*

What do these examples tell us about frontier practices in the Carolingian period? Both concern relatively short-term political activities focused on frontiers, one to step up control of movements across the border, and the other to negotiate, emphasise, and then cross a frontier with armed forces. These political efforts did not create new practices, but could rely on a set of established features on the ground, on current usage and on specialised personnel. There were border points and defence structures, mostly fortifications, often based on previous Roman buildings, although their military function often remains vague in the sources. We can assume that the Avar

⁷² Ciglencečki, *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum*.

⁷³ Fiedler, *Nochmals zur Datierung der Wall- und Grabenzüge*; Curta, *The Current Stage of Research*; Pohl, *Frontiers and Ethnic identities*, p. 257; on Bulgar dykes, see Squatriti, *Moving Earth*.

uualum near the Italian frontier had been equipped and manned for defence against the Franks. Its conquest in August 791 was a rare case in which fortresses along the border were actually besieged and stormed.

There was a specific type of border fortifications, which are the remains of the Roman *tractus Italiae circa Alpes*. These are the structures that were conveniently used for the border controls that the laws of Ratchis and Aistulf and then Carolingian capitularies regulate. They had been built to be used for defence against invaders, as, not least, the impressive remains of barrier walls and towers of the *Claustra Alpium Iuliarum* indicate. Still, Andrew Poulter has called this line of fortifications «an indefensible frontier», because anything less than a large army could and did not protect its wide-ranging structures blocking several access roads in different valleys in case of a major invasion⁷⁴. The *claustra* could be effective against bandits and small raiding parties, and were useful to control (and tax) normal traffic. The same more or less applies to the *clusae* in the Western Alps, although the landscape with its long, often narrow valleys and higher mountain ranges is more favourable to efficient control. No barrier walls of comparable length were necessary there, and stationing an army at the appropriate *clusa* could actually block access from one of the major pass roads. This is what Desiderius tried with some effect in 773, and managed to stop Charlemagne's army for a while with a force that could not have resisted the Franks in an open battle. Still, eventually Charlemagne sent some of his troops across the mountains, and Desiderius had to retreat to Pavia. This was the strategy that the Lombards had always employed against Frankish invasions since the sixth century: they closed themselves into their walled towns and smaller hillforts and hoped that the Franks would not engage in protracted siege warfare. Charlemagne did just that in 773/774, besieged Desiderius in Pavia, and won. In general, in Late Antiquity it did not make much sense to defend frontiers. This also concerns Late Rome and Byzantium with its standing armies: the so-called *Strategikon of Maurice*, compiled around 600 CE, maintains that one should not risk a battle against an invading army that was equal or stronger, but keep one's own army intact and seek ways to weaken the invaders by ambushes, surprise attacks and cutting off supplies⁷⁵.

Overall, the *clusae* were surely less important for large-scale defence operations than for the day-to-day control of movements. Pilgrims, merchants, messengers, fugitives, spies, itinerant folk, and sometimes small-scale plunderers crossed the borders, and could raise different problems that tighter control could be expected to keep in check. This becomes obvious in Ratchis's and Aistulf's clauses that, even under tense political circumstances, do not address any defensive measures to be taken, and just target a more elaborate control of travellers. These controls were not specific to cross-bor-

⁷⁴ Poulter, *An Indefensible Frontier*.

⁷⁵ *Das Strategikon des Maurikios*, X, 2, p. 340.

der traffic, but relied on the principle that the authorities of the kingdom had to be aware of long-distance movements, whether within the realm or across its frontiers, and had to be able to curb transgressions. This system was most of all maintained by the Church which had begun to issue travel permits for its clerics, the *epistolae formatae*, early on in its process of institutionalisation, a practice that could fairly easily have been generalised in early medieval kingdoms. A second strong interest in keeping travellers under control was the need to catch runaway slaves or dependent workers, also a late antique heritage in the early medieval period⁷⁶. Third, efforts were made to detect fugitives of all sorts, from murderers and thieves to rebels and deserters, and most of all keep them from leaving the country. Fourth, there was an interest in monitoring trade, protecting the merchants, steering them in the right direction and imposing levies on them. Fifth, pilgrims who entered Italy were mostly going to Rome, and in the last decades of the Longobard kingdom, when relations with the Franks and the papacy were often tense, such movements could trigger suspicions.

Besides these and other issues that required regulating mobility by the authorities of the kingdom throughout its territory, there were a few elements that were in some ways specific for frontier zones. First, as Charlemagne's capitulary from the 780s shows, one could expect a higher degree of low-level violence, brigandage and raiding in the peripheries of the kingdom, where raiders could swiftly withdraw across the borders⁷⁷. It is remarkable that plunderers from one's own side going out seemed at least as much of a problem as those coming in, because they could provoke retaliation. Such incidents therefore triggered the hate of the *confinales*, the border folk. Second, at least in conflictual situations, the king obviously worried about defectors, conspiracies, spies and in general critical intelligence being passed on to enemies. As the wording of Ratchis's and Aistulf's precautions shows, this was not simply a question of "us vs. them", in which the borders had to be guarded against suspicious people coming into the country, but as much an issue of controlling one's own subjects and of curbing their potential cooperation with the enemy. Only the Alpine routes, and perhaps river traffic in the Po Basin, gave a chance to channel and control such exchanges. But even there, control posts could be situated far from the frontier. In all the measures introduced by Ratchis and Aistulf, the terms for "frontier" were hardly used (except for *marca* for the judge's district). It was taken for granted, and the respective measures implemented without employing a rhetoric of the frontier.

Our second example is in fact one of the cases in which frontiers as such were politicised and constructed as an issue to be resolved. Paradoxically, what was at stake between 782 and 791 was the *limes certus* at the Enns, a secure frontier first publicised as a problem and then swept away by the Car-

⁷⁶ Nehlsen, *Sklavenrecht*.

⁷⁷ MGH, Capit. I, no. 101 (790-810?), p. 208.

olingian offensives. Frankish propaganda linked the Avars, who had largely been peaceful neighbours for almost 200 years, to Attila's Huns and their devastating invasions of Gaul and Italy⁷⁸. A frontier so close to the Bavarian heartland could therefore be regarded as risky, which Charlemagne, a ruler stronger than the deposed Bavarian duke Tassilo III, would now be able to remove. This would also allow to carry the Christian mission deep into the pagan neighbouring regions. On the whole, though, most conflicts in the Carolingian period were not, like in the Modern Age, about pushing forward one's frontiers. In the early Carolingian period, the Franks aspired to the conquest of entire countries. With the victory over the Avars, they had reached the stage in which they did not have the capacity to control and integrate all newly-won territories any more. The former Avar lands now largely were an open, often thinly-inhabited land with rather indefinite boundaries, in which Slavic princes ruled in the name of a distant Frankish king or emperor. The Capitulary of Thionville, issued in 805 and banning the export of arms to Slavs and Avars, still states that merchants were not allowed to take arms for sale beyond Lauriacum, the former *limes certus*⁷⁹. Bans of the export of weapons and also slaves were a repeated concern of Charlemagne's capitularies⁸⁰. Lauriacum remained a border post: in 900, the Hungarians crossed the Enns and invaded Bavaria, which still began at the river.

In spite of some attempts at general precautions for the eastern frontier of the Carolingian Empire, no coherent strategy of managing the new boundaries and frontier regions east of the now pacified Saxony and in the former Avar realm are discernible; a consistent «Markenorganisation», organisation of the marches, was slow to emerge⁸¹. Still, there were differences between the rather open frontier of the conquered Avaria and the better-demarcated border region along the Elbe between Saxony and the unconquered Slavs. In 819, the *Annales regni Francorum* speak of «praefecti Saxonici limitis», commanders of the Saxon frontier, who led a campaign against the Abodrites⁸². This was not yet a “march” led by a margrave as in later centuries, but a frontier zone under the responsibility of several regional commanders; and it should not be seen as a *limes* in the Roman sense, although there were fortified places at the main crossing points, which are enumerated in the Thionville Capitulary⁸³. In the Elbe region, the archaeological evidence displays a wide variety of settlements and fortifications of different types and uses, without any recognis-

⁷⁸ Pohl, *The Avars*, pp. 376-377.

⁷⁹ *Capitulare missorum in Theodonis villa datum secundum, generale*, in MGH, Capit. I, n. 44, 7, p. 123.

⁸⁰ For instance, Herstal, Capit. I, n. 20, 19, p. 51 (779; sale of slaves *foris marca*).

⁸¹ Cf. Wolfram, *Salzburg, Bayern, Österreich*, pp. 175-192; Wolfram, *Gotische Studien*, pp. 263-266.

⁸² MGH, ARF, p. 149, *ad annum* 819; Wolfram, *The Creation*, pp. 238-239.

⁸³ MGH, Capit. I, n. 44, 7, p. 123. For the controversy about the existence of an organised *limes Saxoniae: Der Limes Saxoniae*. But see also Hardt, *Hesse, Elbe, Saale*.

able overall plan⁸⁴. However, Saxony had much more swiftly been integrated into the Frankish kingdom than the land between the Enns and the Vienna Woods and beyond. The defeated Saxons, after so many years of bitter struggle, had become Christians and «united with the Franks to form one people», as Einhard claims in his *Vita Karoli*⁸⁵. In 819, an army of «Saxons and eastern Franks» already defended the Saxon frontier against Abodrites⁸⁶.

The former Avar territory, conquered at about the same time as Saxony, was slow to be Christianised and was never integrated in a similar way⁸⁷. The largely Slavic population was hardly regarded as *unus populus* with the Bavarians. Even the terminology remained vague, and the conquered lands were variously called *Avaria*, *regnum Hunnorum*, *oriens*, *marca nostra*, *provincia*, *terra* or *plaga orientalis*, *partes orientales* or *Pannonia*⁸⁸. None of these terms were clearly demarcated, and did not even allow to distinguish between the region between Enns and Vienna Woods or perhaps Lake Neusiedl, in which settlers from the west and Bavarian monasteries acquired property and which was mostly administrated by Bavarian/Frankish counts, and vast regions to the east in which Slavic princes under Frankish suzerainty ruled⁸⁹. There was no clear boundary between the two parts, which the inhabitants of these regions, who continued to be perceived as *confin(i)ales*, border folk, could regard as “their” frontier. What had been treated as an open expansion zone gradually turned into an exposed area controlled by ruthless warlords and threatened by Moravian or Bulgar attacks⁹⁰. Carantania was a more consolidated region with a territorial identity of its own⁹¹. When the Hungarian mounted warriors established a new centre of power in the Carpathian Basin in c. 900, Frankish/Bavarian control over the former Avar territories evaporated fast. Investments in the region were limited in the Carolingian century, with the partial exception of the land between the Enns and the Vienna Woods. No new symbolical order and no durable frontiers, one could say: no resilient identities emerged in these regions⁹².

⁸⁴ Schmauder, *Überlegungen zur östlichen Grenze*.

⁸⁵ Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, 7, p. 10: «Christianae fidei atque religionis sacramenta susciperent et Francis adunati unus cum eis populus efficerentur».

⁸⁶ MGH, ARF, p. 149, *ad annum* 819.

⁸⁷ See also Džino – Milošević – Vedriš, *A View*, p. 2.

⁸⁸ Wolfram, *The Creation*, pp. 242-243.

⁸⁹ Wolfram, *Salzburg, Bayern, Österreich*, pp. 84-86; Wolfram, *The creation*; Reimitz, *Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen*.

⁹⁰ Johaneck, *Die Raffelstettener Zollordnung*.

⁹¹ Štih, *Integration*.

⁹² Reimitz, *Grenzen und Grenzüberschreitungen*, pp. 165-166.

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