BORDERS

Geography is about space, and where there are spaces, there are borders. With good reason, one of the earliest colloquia on ancient historical geography (1990, published 1994) had *Grenzen und Grenzland* as its themes, and with equally good reason, the 2024 colloquium will revisit the topic. During the three decades that have elapsed, a mass of new scholarship has appeared,[1] while new theories and approaches have come into play within historical geography, within archaeology, and in the humanities more generally ('the spatial turn'); concurrently, some long-established concepts have been criticized and challenged, bringing new insights, new questions – and new answers to old ones.

In its simplest form, a border is a linear feature separating two spaces. As Euclid describes it in his *Elements*, 'a border (*horos*) is where something has its limit (*peras*).'[2] In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle elaborates on the concept: 'By *peras* is meant the farthest part of something, and the first point outside which no part of it can be found, and the first point within which all its parts are to be found.'[3] By introducing the categories 'inside' and 'outside', Aristotle expands the function of the border: it does not merely *divide* a space, it *delimits* and *defines* it. On another level, the border endows the space within, or its inhabitants, with a common – be it real or imagined – identity; 'us' versus 'them'.

In contemporary everyday language, 'border' is often short for 'national border', but states and nations are only two categories among the many spaces that have borders. An Athenian stone marker of c. 500 BC proudly proclaims ΗΟΡΟΣ ΕΙΜΙ ΤΕΣ ΑΓΟΡΑΣ, 'I am the border of the *agora*'.[4] Another, somewhat later stone bears the inscription ΟΡΟΣ ΙΕΡΟΥ ΔΙΟΣ, 'the border of the sanctuary of Zeus.'[5] Urban spaces and sanctuaries have borders; so do houses, fields, cemetery plots, dialects, cities, catchment areas, bishoprics and provinces, to mention only a few examples.

Natural vs. anthropogenic borders

Borders can be classified in a variety of ways. One of the most obvious is the distinction between borderlines created by nature (the Thracian Bosporus, the Pyrenees) as against those created by human agency (the border of the Athenian *agora*, the Aurelian city wall of Rome). Many borders occupy an intermediate position: by origin they are natural, but human

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[1] The footnote references given in the following are selected examples drawn from the literature, not an attempt at a bibliographical survey.

[2] Elem. 1.13: ὅρος ἐστίν, ὅ τινός ἐστι πέρας.

[3] Metaph. 1022a: Πέρας λέγεται τό τε ἔσχατον ἑκάστου καὶ οὗ ἔξω μηδὲν ἔστι λαβεῖν πρώτου καὶ οὗ ἔσω πάντα πρώτου.

[4] IG I³ 1088; THEA POTTER, *Horos: Ancient Boundaries and the Ecology of Stone*, Cambridge 2022, 277.

[5] GERALD V. LALONDE, *Agora I 5983: Zeus Exou-... Again*, in *Hesperia* 68 (1999) 155-159.

action has endowed them with an added meaning as borders.[6] Maritime boundaries constitute a special category; since placing *horoi* in the sea was not a realistic option, maritime spaces had to be defined by terrestrial features such as promontories or estuaries.[7]

In a 1994 survey of the epigraphical source material, DENIS ROUSSET – unlike earlier researchers who had assumed border markers to be the 'normal' form of boundary in the Greek world – found a strong preference for natural features as inter-*polis* borders:[8] of the 429 inscriptions collected by ROUSSET,[9] less than one-fifth were associated with artificial features such as *horos* stones or border sanctuaries.[10]

Romans shared the Greek preference for natural borders: the Rubicon, the Ebro, the Rhine, the Danube –and for a short while, the Elbe. Tacitus relates how Agricola as governor of Britain hoped to establish Rome's northern frontier at the line connecting the Clyde and Forth estuaries or, even better, to include all of Britain as well as Ireland within the Empire.[11] Domitian was of a different opinion and recalled Agricola to Rome. Another of Domitian's generals took a fresh approach to the problem by clearing strips of land – *limites* – through the German forests to a total length of 120 Roman miles or 180 kilometres.[12] This evidently met with the approval of the emperor and his successors, since long stretches of the Empire's frontier came to be marked by similar *limites*.[13] The function of the *limes* itself evolved over time, from a patrol track to a line of observation posts and fortlets, and eventually into a physical barrier – a wooden palisade, an earthen embankment or a stone wall.

If frontiers of civic territories tend to follow natural boundaries, borders *within* the territory – borders of districts, the *agora*, sanctuaries, building plots, fields – are almost exclusively anthropogenic. The 'Hippodamian' grid of a Classical or Hellenistic *polis* took little account of the natural landscape, nor did the *limitatio* of a Roman city and its territory. Borderlines were abstract concepts imposed by the surveyor, often oriented in relation to the cardinal points, and required marking out by means of *horoi* or *cippi*. Such borders could be recorded in chart

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[6] See, e.g., LUISA PRANDI, *The Cimmerian Bosporus as a boundary between Europe and Asia according to Aeschylus: An invented tradition?* in SIMONETTA PONCHIA / LUISA PRANDI (eds), *Shaping Boundaries: Ethnicity and Geography in the Eastern Mediterranean Area (First Millennium BC)*, Verona 2023, 251-265.

[7] E.g., the Treaty of Apameia (188 BC) setting limits to the sphere of operation of the Seleucid navy: ALTAY COŞKUN, *Die geopolitische Bedeutung der Flüsse Tanais und Kalykadnos*, in *OrbTerr* 19 (2021) 89-113.

[8] DENIS ROUSSET, *Les frontières des cités grecques: Premières réflexions à partir du recueil des documents épigraphiques*, in *Cahiers du Centre Gustave Glotz* 5 (1994) 97-126, 112.

[9] Op.cit., 116-117.

[10] On Greek borders, GIOVANNA DAVERIO ROCCHI, *Systems of Borders in Ancient Greece,* in SERENA BIANCHETTI / MICHELE CATAUDELLA / HANS-JOACHIM GEHRKE (eds), *Brill's Companion to Ancient Geography: The Inhabited World in Greek and Roman Tradition*, Leiden 2015, 58-77.

[11] Tac. Agr. 23-24.

[12] Front. strat. 1.3.10.

[13] Since Roman frontiers form the topic of another series of triennial colloquia, commencing in 1949, they will not be discussed in detail here. For a critical survey of recent research, DAVID BREEZE, *The Value of Studying Roman Frontiers*, *Theoretical Roman Archaeology Journal* 1 (2018), 1-17.

or map form, the stone cadastres from Orange[14] being some of the few surviving examples of a type of map that could once be found in hundreds of cities across the Roman Empire.[15]

'Westphalian' borders and 'hard' spaces

Students of contemporary human geography conventionally refer to borders imposed by an authority – political, military or administrative – as 'Westphalian'. To quote a recent EU publication:

> The modern concept of a continuous territory, comprising a single area circumscribed by an exact boundary, arises in fact from the Treaty of Westphalia (1648). However, the Westphalian border only gradually came to prevail on the ground ... Such a border is a geopolitical object that symbolically and physically distinguishes and separates one political community and its territory from another.[16]

Unfortunately, 'Westphalian' is a historical misnomer. The concept of 'a single area circumscribed by an exact boundary' was not unknown before 1648. Nor did the Treaty of Westphalia establish a clear-cut system of territories; ecclesiastical jurisdictions, for instance, could cut across secular political borders. The term has, however, become firmly entrenched in contemporary geographical terminology, where the territory circumscribed by a 'Westphalian' border is known as a 'hard' space.[17]

The hardest of all spaces are those of the prisoner or the exile, banished beyond the borders of one's homeland or confined to a small space within it. Exile is a common theme in Greek literature and myth, imprisonment less so (with the Minotaur as a conspicuous exception), perhaps due to a lack of suitable, inaccessible spaces. With the imposition of Roman rule over the *mare nostrum* and the suppression of piracy, *relegatio* to an island – *de iure* banishment, but *de facto* imprisonment – was increasingly applied to criminals, political opponents and occasionally members of the Imperial family.[18]

The 'territorial trap'

in a provocative and influential paper, PAUL AGNEW (1993) warned colleagues studying international relations against the 'territorial trap': the facile assumption that territories enclosed by 'Westphalian' borders form homogenous entities with a common set of values, identity

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[14] FRANÇOIS FAVORY (ed.), *Le Tricastin romain: évolution d'un paysage centurié*, Lyon 2017.

[15] JASON MORRIS, *Forma Facta Est: Agrimensores and the Power of Geography*, in *Phoenix* 72 (2018), 119-142.

[16] BIRTE WASSENBERG / BERNARD REITE, *Territorial Cooperation in Europe: A Historical Perspective*, Luxembourg 2015, 70.

[17] Not to be confused with the terms 'hard border' and 'soft border', which refer to the presence or absence of modern-day border controls.

[18] FRANK STINI, *Plenum exiliis mare: Untersuchungen zum Exil in der römischen Kaiserzeit*, Stuttgart 2011.

markers and interests.[19] Ancient historians glibly speak of 'the enmity between Athens and Sparta' or 'the rivalry between Nikaia and Nikomedia' as though these were monolithic entities, although public opinion in Athens – as in many other city-states of the Classical period – was often divided between pro-Spartans and anti-Spartans.

Archaeologists, too, can fall into the territorial trap. According to A. BERNARD KNAPP, for many years a leading figure within Cypriot archaeology, 'a socially complex polity emerged on Cyprus during the 17th – 16th centuries BC' and established 'interaction between Cyprus and other contemporary state-level polities';[20] Knapp also highlights the 'prominence of luxury goods, imported or locally made, in Late Cypriot tombs *all over the island*'.[21] Against this homogenizing view JOHN LUND, in a detailed study of pottery production and trade in Hellenistic-Roman Cyprus, has demonstrated that as late as the Roman period, distinct regional centres of pottery production and trade can be identified, and proposes to divide the island into six 'ceramic regions' seen as 'embodiments of exchange systems'.[22]

Fuzzy borders and soft spaces

LUND'S 'ceramic regions' are examples of what contemporary human geographers call 'soft' spaces, as opposed to the 'hard' spaces defined by 'Westphalian' borders, and it is a characteristic of soft spaces that their borders are 'fuzzy'.[23] According to LUND, 'limits were by no means impermeable … Up to a third of the pottery that predominated in a given ceramic region was also distributed outside it'.[24]

In a recent study, GARY REGER has re-examined the Greek notion of 'border' in the light of ancient border arbitrations. He finds evidence for the co-existence in the Greek world of 'the Westphalian idea of borders' and the 'notion of a less-controlled periphery'.[25] While acknowledging the central role of the border in 'the ongoing identity of the *polis* and its citizens' and that 'boundaries were fundamental to the polis',[26] REGER points out that the inhabitants of the borderlands may have another set of values and interests, different from that prevailing at the centre of the territory:

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[19] JOHN AGNEW, *The Territorial Trap: The Geographical Assumptions of International Relations Theory*, in *Review of International Political Economy* 1 (1994), 53-80.

[20] BERNARD A. KNAPP, *Prehistoric Cyprus: A 'Crossroads' of Interaction?* in ACHIM LICHTENBERGER / CONSTANCE VON RUEDEN (eds), *Multiple Mediterranean Realities: Current Approaches to Spaces, Resources, and Connectivities*, Paderborn 2015, 17-30; quotation from p. 22.

[21] Op.cit., 23, my italics.

[22] JOHN LUND, *A Study of the Circulation of Ceramics in Cyprus from the 3rd Century BC to the 3rd Century AD*, Aarhus 2015, 157-158.

[23] TØNNES BEKKER-NIELSEN, *Hard and Soft Space in the Ancient World*, in KLAUS GEUS / MARTIN THIERING (eds), *Features of Common Sense Geography*, Berlin 2014, 131-146.

[24] LUND, op.cit., 159.

[25] GARY REGER, *On the Border in Arizona and Greece: Border Studies and the Boundaries of the Greek Polis*, in *Historical Geography* 45 (2017) 188-219, quotation from p. 194.

[26] Op.cit., 198.

> There is also evidence for a 'borderlands world', a locus of culture and practice differ-
> ent from and sometimes in conflict with that of the metropole. This culture was, some-
> times, confected out of cross-border interactions between neighbors ... some borders
> display an intentional fuzziness: land left purposefully unassigned to one side or the
> other; rights of use, especially pasturage and wood-cutting, but also sometimes farm-
> ing and fruit-gathering, or even exploitation of high-value resources, accorded to resi-
> dents on either side of the border, irrespective of citizenship.[27]

The unified territory of the Roman Empire left less room for 'borderland worlds', but along
the outer frontier of the Empire, there is ample evidence for zones of 'culture and practice
different from and sometimes in conflict with that of the metropole.'[28] The word *conflict* may
be taken in its most literal sense: quite a few of the third-century revolts which toppled or
attempted to topple the reigning emperor had their origins at the frontier, in the
dissatisfaction of soldiers or provincials to whose eyes the central authority seemed unable
to protect them or indifferent to their problems.

Gendered borders

Since most borders are in the last analysis social constructs,[29] they are sensitive to social
divisions by class, by ethnicity – or by *gender*, a topic that occupies a higher place on the
research agenda today than it did in 1990. Much of the discussion of gendered space has
been centred on Athenian households. Was the dwelling gender-segregated into 'hard'
spaces with male visitors confined to the *andron* (the older view) or was the gender division
within the household permeable and flexible, a 'fuzzy' border?[30] Several of the literary
sources (all authored by men) have a normative character; they describe gender separation
as the writer would like it to be, not how it actually was.

Outside the household, some sacred spaces were closed to either men or women, and Greek
women were barred from attending athletic events, but recent research appears to
demonstrate that their exclusion from the political and judicial sphere was based less on
specific regulations than on unwritten 'fuzzy' norms of 'proper' female behaviour.[31] Such
borders could be transgressed on occasion, though at the cost of a social stigma: in the
Politics, Aristotle notes that 'one cannot prevent the wives of the poor from going out'[32] into
public spaces, and women (though not the respectable ones) could participate in the

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[27] Op.cit., 195.

[28] E.g., on the eastern border: Udo Hartmann / Frank Schleicher / Timo Stickler (eds), *Imperia sine fine? Der part-
hisch-römische Grenzraum als Konflikt- und Kontaktzone*, Stuttgart 2022.

[29] Walter Pohl, *Roms Grenzen: Ein sozialgeschichtliches Phänomen*, in Erich Claßen / Michael M. Rind / Thomas
Schürmann / Marcus Trier (eds), *Roms fliessende Grenzen*, Darmstadt 2021, 53-61.

[30] James Davidson, *Bodymaps: Sexing Space and Zoning Gender in Ancient Athens*, in *Gender & history* 23 (2011)
597-614.

[31] Konstantinos Kapparis, *Women in the Law Courts of Classical Athens*, Edinburgh 2021.

[32] Arist. Pol. 1300a: πῶς γὰρ οἶόν τε κωλύειν ἐξιέναι τὰς τῶν ἀπόρων.

symposion. Spartan girls and women enjoyed more freedom of movement than their Athenian counterparts, but here, too, there were gendered spaces: the *syssition*, where military-age citizens shared their evening meal, was an all-male venue.

In Rome there were fewer gendered borders. As Cornelius Nepos somewhat condescendingly remarks, 'many of the customs which are held in high esteem here among us would be offensive to [the Greeks]', and continues: 'What Roman would be ashamed to bring his wife along to a dinner party?'[33] Roman women could participate in judicial proceedings and attend the theatre, the amphitheatre and the circus, although from the time of Augustus onwards, audiences were segregated by gender and women were entirely excluded from viewing athletic contests.[34] Christian congregations, too, were divided by gender,[35] and some sacred spaces were out of bounds altogether for either men or women.

Summary

Ancient states, empires and cities were delimited by borders, but borders also shaped the everyday lives of their inhabitants. Borders could be symbolic and abstract, or they could be present and visible on the ground and in the cityscape. Borders could be imposed from above or grow from below; they could be sanctioned by political or religious authority or created by day-to-day interaction. Borders were associated with conflict and exclusion, but also zones of contact and exchange. The 2024 colloquium will offer many opportunities to explore the topic and in so doing expand the borders of our knowledge.

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[33] Nep. praef. 6: *Contra ea pleraque nostris moribus sunt decora, quae apud illos turpia putantur. Quem enim Romanorum pudet uxorem ducere in convivium*?
[34] Suet. Aug. 44.
[35] Const. ap. 2.7.