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"WORLD WITH LIMITS": NEWS AND FRONTIER CONSCIOUSNESS IN
THE LATE ROMAN EMPIRE

By

Mark William Graham

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

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At the heart of Roman thinking about their imperial frontiers was a critical
paradox. On the one hand, theirs was the "*imperium sine fine,*" the imperial
power without limits or bounds. According to a dominant ideology shaping
Roman thought from at least the second century B.C. onward, the Roman
Empire was an organic entity which never "conceded" frontiers because its
destiny was to expand throughout the whole world. On the other hand,
particularly during and after the third century AD, Romans began to think
about their empire more often in terms of a defined territory, bounded by
frontiers. Beginning during the Later Roman Empire, frontiers were
imagined as marking Roman claims on but a portion of the world. Behind
this shift in thought lies what I am calling "frontier consciousness," the
beliefs and ideas Romans at center and periphery alike held about their
frontiers. This consciousness itself was negotiated through a process which
shaped and was affirmed by background knowledge. The background
knowledge itself was informed by myth, prophecy, assumptions about
geography, travel experience, worldview, and cosmology.

News from and about imperial frontiers proliferated widely in the Later
Roman Empire, reaching people and places in unprecedented ways.
Emperors began to frequent frontier regions, generating more news;
occurrences on the frontiers were now deemed more "newsworthy." The fact
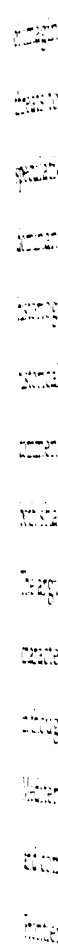
of imagined imperial frontiers coupled with increased threats or perceived threats to those frontiers made them an important site of growing speculation. Increased discussion about frontiers may be traced in the dominant media of the day. Frontiers begin to figure prominently in historiography, coinage, statuary inscriptions, architectural memorials, historical paintings and panels, panegyric, prophetic speculation and commentary, and apocalyptic pronouncements. This proliferation of news both shaped and was shaped by the shift in Roman "frontier consciousness." The argument of this thesis is that analysis of the origin, volume, and character of this frontier news gives crucial insight into an important change in thought which profoundly affected the subsequent history of the eastern Mediterranean, western Europe, and North Africa. My project specifically and comparatively analyzes the shift in Roman Anatolia with the Eastern Frontier, and Roman North Africa.

To Becky, who knows why

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ABBREVIATIONS

Amm. Marc.	Ammianus Marcellinus. *Res Gestae.* ed. and tr. J.C. Rolfe. 3 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.
ANRW	*Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt.* eds. H. Temporini et al. Berlin, 1972-
Augustine, *De civ. D.*	Augustine, *De Civitate Dei. The City of God Against the Pagans.* trans. W.M. Green, 7 volumes. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963.
Austin and Rankov	Austin, N.J.E. and N.B. Rankov. Exploratio: *Military and Political Intelligence from the Second Punic War to the Battle of Adrianople.* New York: Routledge, 1995.
BAR	*British Archaeological Reports*, International Series. Oxford.
Blockley, *Fragmentary*	Blockley, R.C. *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire.* vol. 2. Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1983.
CAH	*Cambridge Ancient History*, 1961-.
CC	*Corpus Christianorum*, series *Latina*. Brepols: Turnhout.
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum.* Berlin, 1863-
CJ	*Codex Iustinianus.*
CT	*Codex Theodosianus.* C. Pharr trans.
CSEL	*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum.* Vienna.
Dilke, *Maps*	Dilke, O.A.W. *Greek and Roman Maps.* London: Thames and Hudson, 1985.

D&L	Dodgeon, M.H. and S.N.C. Lieu, eds. *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars (AD 226-363): A Documentary History*. London: Routledge, 1991.
ep.; epp.	*Epistula*, Epistle; *Epistulae*, Epistles.
F. of C.	*The Fathers of the Church* Series. Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press.
Fowden, *Commonwealth*	Fowden, G. *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*	Fowden, E.K. *The Barbarian Plain: St. Sergius Between Rome and Iran*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
French and Lightfoot	French, D. and C.S. Lightfoot, eds. *The Eastern Frontier of the Roman Empire*. BAR S 553. Oxford, 1989.
Harley and Woodward	Harley, J.B. and J. Woodward, eds. *The History of Cartography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
Harris, *Literacy*	Harris, W.V. *Ancient Literacy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
ILS	*Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae* ed. H. Dessau, 1892-1916.
Isaac, *Limits*	Isaac, B. *Limits of Empire: The Roman Army in the East*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.
Jones, *LRE*	Jones, A.H.M. *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964.
JRA	*Journal of Roman Archaeology*. Ann Arbor, 1987-.
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*. London, 1911-.

Kearney, *World View*	Kearney, M. *World View*. Novata, CA: Chandler and Sharp, 1984.
Kennedy, *Army*	Kennedy, D. ed. *The Roman Army in the East*. JRA Supplementary Series 18. Ann Arbor, 1996.
LA	Bowersock, G.W., P. Brown, and O. Grabar, eds. *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*. Harvard: Belknap Press, 1999.
Lee, *Information*	Lee, A.D. *Information and Frontiers: Roman Foreign Relations in Late Antiquity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
Lewis, *News and Society*	Lewis, S. *News and Society in the Greek Polis*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
Liddell & Scott	Liddell H.G. and R. Scott, comp. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th ed. Oxford University Press, 1968.
MacCormack, *Ceremony*	MacCormack, S. *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976.
Maguire, *Earth*	Maguire, H. *Earth and Ocean: The Terrestrial World in Early Byzantine Art*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987.
Matthews, *Ammianus*	Matthews, J. *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*. London: Duckworth, 1989.
McCormick, *Victory*	McCormick, M. *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.
McQuail, *Media*	McQuail, D. *Media Performance: Mass Communication and the Public Interest*. London: Sage, 1992.

MGH (AA)	*Monumentae Germaniae Historica (Auctores Antiquissimi)*. Berlin, 1877-1919.
Mitchell I	Mitchell, S. *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor, Volume I:The Celts in Anatolia and the Impact of Roman Rule*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
Mitchell II	_____. *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor, Volume II: The Rise of the Church*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
Niccoli, *Prophecy*	Niccoli, O. *Prophecy and People in Renaissance Italy*. trans. L.G. Cochrane. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
Nicolet, *Space*	Nicolet, C. *Space, Geography, and Politics in the Early Roman Empire*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990.
OCD	Hornblower, S. and A. Spawforth eds. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.
OLD	Glare, P.G.W. ed. *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.
or.	*Oration*, Oration.
Panegyrici, N&R	*In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The* Panegyrici Latini. *Introduction, Translation, and Historical Commentary with the Latin Text of R.A.B. Mynors*. C.E.V. Nixon and B.S. Rodgers, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
PG	Migne, J.P. ed. *Patrologia Graeca*. Paris, 1857-66.
PL	Migne, J.P. ed. *Patrologia Latina*. Paris, 1844-64.
PLRE	*Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*. Cambridge, 1971-.
Potter, *Prophecy*	Potter, D. *Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire: A Historical Commentary*

	on the *Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.

Potter, *Prophets*   _____. *Prophets and Emperors: Human and Divine Authority from Augustus to Theodosius*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.

RE   Pauly, A., G. Wissowa, and W. Kroll, eds. *Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*, 1893-.

Rousselle, *Frontières*   Rousselle, A., ed. *Frontières terrestres, frontières célestes dans l'antiquité*. Paris, 1995.

RRMAM   D. French, ed., *Roman Roads and Milestones of Asia Minor. BAR*. Multiple volumes.

Shaw, *Environment*   Shaw, B. *Environment and Society in Roman North Africa: Studies in History and Archaeology*. London, 1995.

TLG   *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*. L. Berkowitz and K.A. Squitier, eds. Oxford, 1986.

Whittaker, *Frontiers*   Whittaker, C.R. *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

Zosimus   Zosimus. *New History: A Translation with Commentary by R.T. Ridley*. Canberra: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies (*Byzantina Australiensia* 2), 1982.

ZPE   *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigrafik*.

INTRODUCTION

τοιαῦτα πολλάκις ἐγίνετο καὶ γίνεται, καὶ πῶς ταῦτα συντελείας σημεῖα;
Julian, *Fragmenta* 1

A little over fifty years after the emperor Jovian ceded the frontier city of
Nisibis to the Persian Empire in AD 363, St. Augustine sat musing far away in
North Africa. "Almost in living memory," Terminus, the god of boundaries,
had given ground.[1] Jovian's surrender of Nisibis and more than a dozen
other frontier cities followed on the campaign and death of the emperor
Julian, who had masterminded the disastrous Persian campaign. What was
so momentous, Augustine tells his audience, was the loss of territory and the
fixing of a new eastern boundary to the Roman Empire. To him, this was
much more than the surrender of a city. It signalled the transformation of
the crucial eastern frontier. Jovian's concessions established the boundaries,
says Augustine, "where they still are today." Although nearly two and a half
centuries before Jovian, the emperor Hadrian likewise had shrunk the
boundaries of the Roman Empire, those regions he had lost ("Armenia,
Mesopotamia, and Assyria") were, to some extent, regained, according to
Augustine. Jovian's loss thus was more crippling and more permanent, and
certainly more impressed upon the Roman collective memory.[2] The point of

[1] *De civ. D.* 4.23,29; See also 5.21.

[2] Hadrian's concessions, for example, were "forgotten" by Ammianus
Marcellinus, the foremost historian of the later Roman Empire and a
contemporary of St. Augustine. Referring to the surrender of Nisibis,
Ammianus writes: "never (I think) since the founding of our city, can it be
found by a reader of history that any part of our territory has been yielded to
an enemy by an emperor or consul," 25.9.9. Such a statement is false, but it
does show how Hadrian's concessions had dropped, to a large extent, out of
the historiography.

this *exemplum*, mentioned three times in the *City of God*, is to underscore the weakness of Terminus, who was supposed to guarantee that "no one would be able to disturb the Roman frontiers."[3] Augustine proposes that Terminus was not supposed to yield even to Jove, but had in fact yielded, not to Germans or Persians, but to the "will of Hadrian," "the rashness of Julian," and now, apparently permanently, "the necessity of Jovian." These passages reveal much about Roman frontier consciousness. The amount of interest shown in this shift in the Roman frontier demonstrates the level of interest in the affairs of the frontiers, even by those far from them. It likewise shows a crucial difference from the earlier empire, when even larger concessions could be all but forgotten. It is precisely this interest in frontiers, an interest heightened during the later Roman Empire, that this dissertation explores.

The loss of Nisibis was etched deeply into the Roman memory. From the late fourth century until long after the "fall" of the western Empire, writers continued to muse on its implications.[4] Their accounts show how indelibly

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[3] *De civ. D.* 4.29.

[4] Very few events in imperial Roman history provoked such immediate as well as long-term responses. Only the Battle of Adrianople in 378 perhaps provoked more. The Nisibis incident is recorded in Amm. Marc. 25.9; Orosius, *Historiarum adversus paganos libri VII.* 7.31; Eutropius 10.7; Festus 29; Socrates Scholasticus 3.22; Gregory Nazianzenus, *Oration* 5.8-13; Libanius, *Oration* 19.49; 23.278; 24.9; Malalas 13; *Artemii passio* 69-70; *Cedrenus* i, pp. 538, 16-23 and 539, 16-21; *Chronicon ad AD 724* (*Liber Calipharum*), *CSCO* 6, pp. 133; *Chronicon Ps.-Dionysianum*, *CSCO* 91, p. 179, 23-180, 8; *Ephrem Syrus, Hymni contra Julianum* II, 15-22 and 27 and III, *CSCO* 174, pp. 78, 23-82, 14 and 83, 11-85, 8; *Epitome de Caesaribus* 43; Jerome, *Chronicon s. aa.* 363-4; John Chrysostom, *de S. Babyla contra Julianum et Gentiles* XXII, *PG* 569-70; Ps. Joshua the Stylite, *Chronicle* 7; Zonaras, 13, 1-14, 6. See D&L for translations of these and other passages. For a brief study of the accounts of the loss of Nisibis, see Robert Turcan, "L'abandon de Nisibe et l'opinion publique (363 ap. J.-C.)" in *Mélanges d'archaeologie et d'histoire offerts á Andre Piganiol*. R. Chevallier ed. vol. 2 (Paris, 1966), 875-890.

the later Roman frontier consciousness was written into the history. Zosimus, writing in the early sixth century, records that after the emperor Augustus had established the Tigris and the Euphrates as the limits of the Roman Empire "never was this territory abandoned," until Julian's death, which occasioned Jovian's retreat.[5] Again, any earlier concessions, such as Hadrian's, have been completely forgotten. And Agathias, writing in the later sixth century, characterizes Jovian's "shameful and disgraceful" truce as "so bad that it is even now harmful to the Roman state, by which he made the empire contract into new boundaries and cut off the outer parts of his own territory."[6] Such descriptions exist only in the historiography of the later Roman Empire and after. This study is an attempt to enter the worldview of Romans, a world-view informed by and informing a specific frontier consciousness which arose in the Later Roman Empire.

Historical Research Problem

At the heart of Roman thinking about their imperial frontiers was a critical paradox. On the one hand, theirs was the *imperium sine fine* -- the imperial power without limits, without bounds. According to a dominant ideology shaping Roman writers from at least the second century B.C. up to the later Empire, the Roman Empire was an organic entity which never had to define frontiers as it fulfilled its destiny to expand throughout the whole world, the *orbis terrarum*. Frontiers were recognized during the early Empire as

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[5]Zosimus 3.32. Zosimus, like most Roman historians of the later Roman Empire, ignored, or at least was ignorant of third-century concessions as well. The surrender of the whole province of trans-Danubian Dacia by Aurelian in 282 hardly registers at all in any sources.

[6]Agathias, *Historiarum* 4.25.6-7.

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demarcations between people groups rather than as physical boundaries defining the spatial limits of Roman power. On the other hand, particularly during and after the third century A.D., Romans began to express their empire more often in terms of a defined territory. Behind such reconstructions as the one from Augustine above -- one voice among many, Christian as well as pagan -- lies what I am calling a "frontier consciousness." Frontier consciousness encompasses the beliefs and ideas that Romans held about their frontiers, and how they perceived them. These beliefs, mediated against background knowledge[7], were specifically challenged and confirmed by news and information coming from those frontiers, especially during the later Empire. From the third century onward, the flow of news from the frontiers intensified, reaching people and places on a regular basis in unprecedented ways. This news gradually shaped an image of frontiers which was different from that held by Romans Romans of the early Empire. Increased threats or perceived threats at the frontiers can, no doubt, explain this in part. Also, at this time Emperors began to frequent the frontier regions, generating more news as the central figurehead of Roman power tended toward the peripheries, largely in response to internal insurrections and/or external threats in the East. A primary purpose of this study, then, is to analyze, as thoroughly as possible how Romans of the later Empire received news from and about those frontiers. I explore the origin, volume, and character of information and news from the frontiers against the

[7]The concept of "background knowledge" I borrow from Lee's work on foreign relations, *Information*, 2. He defines it as "long-term stocks of information (and assumptions) about the geography, environment, and socio-political character of neighboring states and peoples." In many ways Lee's excellent work provided the initial inspiration for my own study of the role of information in frontier studies.

backdrop of background knowledge. In short, what I am attempting is a viable reconstruction of intellectual and cultural contexts for frontier studies in the Later Roman Empire, focusing specifically on two regions, North Africa and "Anatolia" and the East.[8]

What did Romans of the later empire think about their imperial frontiers? Did that thinking change in relation to new information? Did it change over time or perhaps in relation to intensification of information? Did the average Roman without administrative or military connections care about frontiers or even think at all in terms of them? How did news of frontiers or from them reach interior areas? Did that thinking or those perceptions change in response to a changing belief system brought about by the Christianization of the Roman Empire? These are the questions that undergird this study.

My basic argument is that there was a discrete "frontier consciousness" for the Later Roman Empire. This consciousness developed through time, and, while being based in, did not merely replicate that of the early Roman empire. It varied within a certain range in different regions of the empire, and was negotiated through a process which took into account background knowledge (along with inherent world-views) and news from and about frontiers. Particularly from the third century until the fifth, Romans came to understand frontiers more and more as physical and/or territorial rather than just divisions between people or ethnic groups. The transition was in part a function of the expanded proliferation of news from and about the frontiers. The now-dominant school of frontier studies claims that "frontiers cannot be

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[8] I use the term "Anatolia" based on fourth-century descriptions of Western and Central Asia Minor as "Anatole." See *Itineraria Egeriae* and P. Alexander, *The Oracle of Baalbek: The Tiburtine Sibyl in Greek Dress.* (Washington D.C., 1967).

shown to have performed any historically recoverable function other than to have accommodated the contact of Roman and indigenous society."[9] This dissertation argues that static frontiers played an important role in the world-view of Romans of the Later Empire.

Regional Considerations

It has long been acknowledged that the "frontier" took on different forms in different regions of the Roman Empire. There never was one paradigm against which all frontiers were measured.[10] Frontier regions were also imagined differently by inhabitants at the peripheries than those at centers. This study focuses primarily on two regions -- Anatolia to the eastern frontier and North Africa. Although general questions about the Later Roman Empire cannot be avoided, I test my central thesis primarily in these two regions. A modified case study approach allows for the types of questions which can both challenge and complement generalizations about the Late Roman Empire. Larger debates concerning "Romanization" and cultural unity within the Empire have set the outermost contours for much of the research presented here. As much effort as is possible is made to acknowledge the tensions between generalizable "Roman" attributes and the local character of regions of the empire. The extent to which the Later Roman Empire represents a cultural unity becomes an issue when looking at news as well as

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[9]D. Cherry, *Frontier and Society in Roman North Africa*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 28. The idea is reflected from Isaac, *Limits*.

[10]See E. Frezouls, ed., "Les fluctuations de la frontière orientale de la empire romain," *La géographie administrative et politique d'Alexandre à Mahomet. Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg 14-16 juin 1979* (Université des Sciences Humaines de Strasbourg) *Travaux du Centre de Recherche sur le proche-orient et la grèce antiques* 6 (Leiden 1981), 177-225.

the official and unofficial infrastructures which served as the essential vehicles for that flow.

Taking the focus away from Western Europe, as such, allows for some new conclusions throughout as well. It frees us from focusing so strongly on the Germanic settlers who would transgress Roman frontiers into oblivion, and who would carve out kingdoms. One can read texts without reading into them their own expectation that "the barbarians are coming," and that they are going to stay. A regional studies approach can help clarify more globally-held Roman views, generalizations which have been shaped disproportionately, and perhaps unconsciously, by a traditional focus on the Rhine-Danube frontier.

This is not the first study to include a significant element of comparison of North Africa and the East. Earlier in the last century V. Chapot claimed inspiration from R. Cagnat, *L'Armee romaine d'Afrique* in writing his book on eastern frontiers.[11] More recently, A. Rushworth has compared the eastern frontier with the North African,[12] and B. Shaw has pointed out the potential for comparing North African frontiers and the increasingly-studied eastern frontiers.[13]

To be sure, North Africa and Anatolia and the East developed in different ways. Anatolia had throughout recorded history offered routes for conquerors, travelers, armies, traders, and the like. Here, civilizations

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[11]V. Chapot, *La frontière de l'Euphrate de Pompée à la conquête arabe*, (Paris, 1907).

[12]"North African Deserts and Mountains: Comparisons and Insights," in Kennedy, *Army*, 1996, 297-320.

[13]See the critical addenda to his *Rulers, Nomads, and Christians in Roman North Africa*, (London, 1995), 19.

mingled. Here, at the "crossroads" of civilizations, at the meeting point between "East" and "West," there were established patterns of information flow across cultural boundaries. Change and interchange are the hallmark of the Anatolian scene.

In North Africa, the situation was different. Certainly, a variety of civilizations had occupied common ground here -- Phoenician, Carthaginian, Numidian, Berber, Roman, Vandal, Byzantine. A long history of transhumance highlights the moving, "bedouin" character of a significant portion of the population, especially, and significantly, at the frontier zone. Rarely, however, has North Africa served as a crossroads or a point of blending between civilizations. Here there were no long-term frontier markets at the limits of civilizations, and at which they mingled. The real story of North Africa has been one of continuity. The Roman architecture here, such as temples at Dougga and the famous tri-capitol at Sbeitla maintain a "Numidian" character. North Africa lacked the volume of Roman travelers passing through, had far fewer troops moving (or stationed here) and fewer pilgrims.

But in both areas, there was consciousness of a frontier which ended the holdings of the Roman Empire. The eastern frontier dominates available accounts. Ammianus, Julian, Libanius, and others refer to this frontier and tell, to a certain extent, how armies and civilians related to it. The North African frontier is much less visible in extant sources, and the threats here, although very real to the inhabitants, were not as momentous as on the eastern frontier, nor as reported on throughout the rest of the Empire. North Africa thus serves as a test not only for an East vs. West approach, but also for the idea of an "active vs. passive" frontier as well.

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These two frontier zones themselves required different immediate methods to maintain them in antiquity. In the East, the great rivers of Mesopotamia had always formed a part of the frontier, even if only ideologically. Mountains and open spaces often served as the limit, but it is clear enough in sources, and in a growing recent body of modern literature, that the rivers were imagined as barriers (irrespective of modern strategic concerns).[14] In North Africa, there was some recognition of mountains, but the frontier was seen more as located near an artificial boundary. The extensive *fossatum* and *clausura*, ditch and wall, networks there continue to provoke much fruitful discussion, but their function(s) remain(s) far from clear.[15] Nevertheless, their presence does point to an idea in the minds of North Africans, of a physical limit to the Roman holdings.

Likewise, knowledge of what was on the other side of the frontier differed in both regions. To North Africans, the other side of their frontier was full of raiding nomads and mythical peoples like the "outermost Garamantes," caricatured in Roman literature from Vergil onward. With so few campaigns beyond North African frontiers, Romans had very little idea of what actually existed there. On the other side of the Eastern frontier was a long-established people, the Persians, recognized by Romans as "civilized," with whom it was possible to negotiate treaties over where the frontier would run. Romans travelled to many parts of the Persian Empire, particularly in military campaign or embassies. There survive many accounts of the geography, topography, and people of the Persian Empire written by Romans who travelled there.

[14]Chapter Three explores this issue at length.

[15]See Chapter Three.

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On the other hand, it is important to note the commonalities which held together diverse regions of the Roman Empire. In her influential study of Late Antique ceremony, S. MacCormack concludes that the "Roman Empire did, as the Romans themselves thought, form a certain unity." Part of that unity, she claims, was expressed and cemented in acts of consensus articulated in ceremonies.[16] M. McCormick in his study of the "Myth of the Roman Empire's Eternal Victory" explores how a "deep belief in the most potent of Roman myths" unified Romans and, later, the barbarian kingdoms.[17] Even with changing ritual, he concludes, one can trace the same imperial ideology and the significance it acquired into Late Antiquity and beyond. Although much recent work has challenged the notion of cultural unity of the Roman Empire, it seems clear that at some ideological level, being a Roman involved sharing a certain set of beliefs or participating in certain aspects of the ceremonial life of the Empire. As will be seen in Chapter Four, such ceremonial could communicate news from and about frontiers.

Over against this generalized Roman culture is the persistence of local cultures and identities within the Empire itself. This approach can be summed up in observations like those of D. Potter: "symbols of power did not have the same specific meaning in Syria as in Rome."[18] Thus in the study of the Roman Empire, and perhaps even more so for the later Empire and Late Antiquity, there is always a tension between unity and diversity. I try to negotiate the two extremes by maintaining that it is not always desirable to

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[16]*Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity.* (Berkeley, 1976), 272.

[17]*Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3.

[18]*Prophets and Emperors: Human and Divine Authority from Augustus to Theodosius.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

choose one or the other. Rather, I explore how the two existed together. My study of information and frontiers attempts to reflect this tension. To that end, I ask whether news about frontiers was received differently, in terms of background knowledge and the mechanics of distribution, in North Africa and the East.

Chronological Focus

Finally, a few words on the specific time period here. In his seminal work, *The World of Late Antiquity*, P. Brown characterizes the period as a time of "shifting and redefinition of the boundaries of the classical world after AD 200."[19] This observation, written at the dawn, so to speak, of Late Antique studies, continues to animate research into this fascinating period. Brown himself extends the period from this starting point to the mid eighth century. The periodization of this study is a bit shorter, bounded on one extreme by the "third-century crisis" and on the other by the major barbarian invasions of the early fifth century. I have retained the term "Late Antiquity" throughout even though I realize the difficulties of applying this term to the limited time period I propose.[20] In the title I have used "Late Roman Empire," which I deem more appropriate since this study deals with the third through the early fifth century and since I focus almost exclusively on Romans, and not on barbarians, Persians, or Arabs. Even so, I realize that this designation is not free from problems either, since, of course, the Roman

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[19](London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 13.

[20]Historians of Late Antiquity are far from agreement on its chronological limits. Some begin it as early as the second century, some extend it into eighth century, some consider it only the fifth and sixth centuries. See the Introduction to F.M. Clover and R. S. Humphreys, eds., *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

Empire was nowhere near its end in the East at this time, and my designation itself would seem to privilege the view of the west.

Beginning with the later part of the third century seems natural enough as a starting point for analyzing the Later Roman Empire -- there is much precedent for beginning here. Importantly, the phenomenon which I analyze, frontier consciousness, experienced a shift beginning about this time. Taking the early fifth century as the ending point is, in light of some excellent recent work on frontiers that have gone well beyond such traditional finishing places, not so "obvious." In some ways this might appear to be turning back the historiographical clock forty to fifty years to a time when everything wonderful and praiseworthy about Rome was seen as crashing down with the onslaught of the savage barbarians. Furthermore, my emphasis throughout on Roman experience and ideology might even make this study appear to be good old "Imperialist" history. But my focus, as well as my conclusions, I trust, lead far away from these out-moded pictures.

Much has been written and continues to be written about the "barbarian incursions" which began in the early fifth century and continued onward until the collapse of western Empire. This thesis tries to keep its focus off of the barbarians and on the ways that Romans conceived of their frontiers. Of course, the violation of those frontiers by barbarians is a major issue, but anyone who has looked at the material on barbarians knows how difficult it is to keep the focus on Roman perceptions of frontiers after their ostensible "invasions." Also, I have tried to reach a conclusion about frontiers which balances active vs. inactive frontiers. A tale only of transgressed frontier zones to the exclusion of inactive or less active frontiers would not give a balanced picture and would distract from efforts to reconstruct a general Late Roman worldview.

Admittedly, violated and invaded frontiers are well presented in sources, biased as they are to military engagements and other disasters on the frontiers. Getting past such bias might be impossible, but recognizing how it shapes the sources is a crucial step toward understanding the Roman frontier consciousness. I have tried not to look beyond those frontiers or even at the "barbarians within the gates," (to quote the title of one of many excellent recent works on the topic), so much as to look at frontiers through Roman eyes.[21] But there is another reason I have chosen this specific periodization. A major contention here is that the third to the fifth centuries as a discrete period saw the solidification of frontiers as territorial boundaries in Roman minds. During this period people came to imagine their *imperium* as an Empire -- with literal spatial and territorial reference over against the ethnic focus of earlier times. The barbarian invasions and incursions challenged this spatial conceptualization and returned Roman "frontier consciousness" to a focus on frontiers of peoples rather than on territories. Looking at this period provides a window onto the changing perceptions of frontiers and on the emergence of a specifically Late Roman frontier consciousness.

Review of the Literature

Roman frontier studies go back centuries. Their sheer volume suggests a topic of importance and enduring interest.[22] In a basic sense, a study of imperial frontiers helps one to define the term "Roman." Scholars have found in frontier studies valuable information about Roman economy, society, strategy, defense, foreign policy, and even embryonic notions of "state" and "nation." Contemporary and ongoing interest in Roman frontiers

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[21]T. Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome. A Study of Roman Military Policy and the Barbarians, ca 375-425 A.D.*, (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1994).

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CHAPTER ONE -- FRONTIERS, NEWS, AND WORLD-VIEWS

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

--T.S. Eliot, *The Rock*

This chapter locates the scope of this study, both inside and outside of the contours of existing frontier studies and within methodological paradigms which have informed my reading of the ancient sources. It provides definitions as well for some of the terms and concepts central to this study, some of which already have been presented in the introduction. Frontier studies are fraught with the normal dangers inherent in a subject with a high level of interest and debate but only few and fragmentary sources, which themselves often beg multiple or even contradictory readings. This study began with the basic question, "How did information shape late Roman views of frontiers, at center and periphery?" Answers are proposed in this and subsequent chapters.

Review of the Literature

Roman frontier studies go back centuries. Their sheer volume suggests a topic of importance and enduring interest.[22] In a basic sense, a study of imperial frontiers helps one to define the term "Roman." Scholars have found in frontier studies valuable information about Roman economy, society, strategy, defense, foreign policy, and even embryonic notions of "state" and "nation." Contemporary and ongoing interest in Roman frontiers

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[22]C. Wells succinctly traces modern interest in Roman frontiers back to the 16th century. See his *"Profuit invitis te dominante capi*: social and economic considerations on the Roman Frontiers," *JRA* 9 (1996): 436-446 at 436.

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can be seen in the well-established series of *Limeskongresses* begun in 1949 and still going strong (16 volumes to date). The more recent biennial "Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity Conference" has resulted in two published volumes and two more on the way.[23] Owing in part to the interdisciplinary efforts of frontier studies in general, research on Roman frontiers has added to traditional historical studies methodologies borrowed from archaeology, anthropology, sociology, and literary studies. Most new contributions in the field, in fact, come specifically from archaeological studies along frontier zones.

Such an ever-expanding number of studies of Roman frontiers is formidable to the newcomer -- the reading is endless; complex and diverse theoretical approaches are abundant; and the historiography is exceptionally divisive and polemical. The example of new scholars try to make contributions against an established tradition or hierarchy, only to be summarily dismissed outright by one of the "establishment" in no uncertain terms demonstrates that the road to the frontier, as in antiquity, is well traveled, crowded and, needless to say, treacherous.[24] Why, then, another study of frontiers -- and for a doctoral dissertation at that?

[23] For a complete listing of *Limeskongress* Publications, published at various places, see Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 320-321. "Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity" volumes to date are Mathisen and Sivan, 1996, and T.S. Burns and J.W. Eadie, *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts in Late Antiquity*, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2001); These conferences have pulled together a wide variety of scholars of Late Antiquity and continue to reconsider the very notion of "frontier" in fascinating ways. The third conference, for example, held at Emory University, handled urban/rural frontiers -- a topic a *Limeskongress*, focused on imperial frontiers, never would have considered. There have been strong tendencies in the "Shifting Frontiers" conferences away from Imperial frontiers, strictly defined.

[24] See, for example, Wells' review of recent work, "*Profuit invitis te dominante capi*: social and economic considerations on the Roman Frontiers,

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The study of Roman imperial frontiers in Late Antiquity remains, despite a few protests from the peripheries of frontier scholarship, entrenched in a military / political framework. Much less has been done from cultural and intellectual perspectives.[25] Outside of a foreign relations context, for example, the topics of frontier consciousness, background information, and news never have been explored at any length as they relate to cultural and intellectual issues. This is not to say that a political framework is wrongheaded or in itself misleading; rather it is to say that there are other viable perspectives which must be taken up if we are more fully to come to terms with a Roman, and more specifically in this case, with a Late Roman or Late Antique, experience of frontiers. There are, of course, serious political and military considerations which must guide, at some level, any study of frontiers. Ancient writings often speak of imperial frontiers exclusively in military contexts. This fact must be balanced against the fact that much of the

diverges from these previous interpretations, often in basic ways.

First, several recent scholars have debated how background knowledge

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JRA 9 (1996): 436-446. At 443, in a critique of a book on the western frontiers which claims to make specialist work accessible to non-specialists, Wells claims "this book is profoundly ignorant, and whatever gave them the idea that they were competent to write it cannot be imagined." He continues with denunciations like "the authors of this work suffer from the disadvantage of just not knowing what they are writing about," 444. Categorizing his own mind as "concrete and fastidious," Wells admits at one point that he has a "preference for the more conventionally military papers," because of "an innate disposition toward hard fact. "

[25]The "Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity" Conferences have sought to approach frontiers from cultural, intellectual, social, and spiritual perspectives. However, most of the papers from the first volume presented on "metaphysical frontiers" (which the editors place against a tradition of "linear-cum-geographical-cum-military frontiers") for example, are not about imperial frontiers at all but about "frontiers" such as that between wealthy and poor, heaven and earth. Another work which has addressed similar issues with much the same result is the collection of articles in Rousselle, Frontières.

historical works written during the fourth and fifth century did tend to be of military inspiration.

Recent literature addresses some of the basic issues which guide this dissertation, albeit in different ways. I have isolated works for review here which address four basic considerations -- 1) "background knowledge," defined as geographical knowledge or how Romans thought about their world in terms of geography and even limits. Here recent studies of Roman theoretical and historical geography are to the fore; 2) topography and the question of "natural frontiers," or debates over the role of rivers and mountains as literal frontiers ; 3) news and information, particularly the dynamics, contexts, and structures of news and information flow in the later Roman Empire ; 4) the intangibles of mentalities, worldviews, and ideology, and how these related to the ways that Romans viewed their place in the world and any limits to their claims upon a portion of it. My own perspective diverges from these previous interpretations, often in basic ways.

First, several recent scholars have debated how background knowledge might have influenced Roman perceptions of frontiers. Their questions, and recent discussions about them are crucial to my project. I argue that it is against, and in terms of, such background knowledge that news is reported, understood, and communicated. Discussion of news and information flow only makes sense against the backdrop of the Roman's knowledge of geographical space and topographical context. Whether their knowledge was "right" or "wrong" in relation to findings of modern satellite mapping projects, it is important to explore the knowledge the ancients held and the assumptions they shared. To some extent this is a question which anthropologists might see as loaded with *a priori* "behaviorist" assumptions because it holds that the way the Romans acted and thought depended on the

way they perceived their world. This assumption may be contrasted with the "structural determinist" one, on which more below.[26]

Some have concluded that geographic background knowledge in particular played a crucial part in Roman perceptions of frontiers. The questions they raise shape Chapter Two. A.D. Lee, in an excellent study of strategic intelligence and foreign relations in Late Antiquity, argues that it is crucial to look at background knowledge when analyzing the diffusion and acquisition of information.[27] His research, much of which is aimed at the conclusion that frontiers were information permeable, explores how knowledge of geography and environment helped Romans "imagine" regions they had never seen, often by a consistent pattern of news flow. One of many original contributions he makes is to show how the human context of frontier zones, urbanization and road patterns, for example, affected their "imageability" in the Roman mind, and to explain what role new information played in that process. F. Millar, the first historian systematically to treat information as a viable historical research problem within Roman frontier studies, explores the role of background geographic and ethnographic knowledge which would have guided emperors and advisors as they worked within a certain "conceptual framework" of the empire.[28] Although his focus throughout, like Lee's, is on policy decisions, he was an innovator in getting historians to think about the dynamics of information flowing from frontiers.

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[26]See R.D. Sacks, *Conceptions of Space in Social Thought,* (London, 1986), 95 and D. Gregory and D. Urry, *Social Relations and Spatial Structures,* (London, 1985), 3. Whittaker, *Frontiers* also presents this dichotomy between "behaviorists" and "structural determinists."

[27]Lee, *Information.*

[28]"Emperors, Frontiers, and Foreign Relations, 31 B.C. to AD 378," *Britannia* 13 (1982): 1-25.

Millar concluded that frontiers were information barriers -- a contention which Lee specifically challenges. C. Nicolet, in an unique work which has introduced many Roman historians to theoretical historical geography, concludes that Romans, particularly of the early Empire, needed a certain perception of geographic space in order to set boundaries to their empire.[29] He analyzes how Romans perceived geographic space and how those perceptions, in part, shaped their understanding of boundaries. As he writes:

> what interested me is not so much the spatial and territorial reality of the Roman Empire at its foundation, but the awareness of it possessed by the main players: the Romans and their adversaries, the ruling classes and the subjects. In a study such as this, geography should not be understood as a reality but as a representation of that reality.

"Geography," he continues, is the "knowledge and representation of the earth."[30] His work, although focused on the early empire, has influenced my own thinking about the nature of background knowledge. D. Braund, in his various analyses of the Roman frontier in the Caucasus region, concludes that geographical knowledge as well as geographical myth played an important role in how Romans imagined their frontiers.[31] He opens up new avenues for research by asking what Romans thought about their geography and how that affected the way they acted and reacted in response to those assumptions. Particularly, his approach expands the range of sources and approaches one may use in exploring background knowledge. Finally, C.R. Whittaker, following Nicolet to some extent, argues that perceptions of

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[29]Nicolet, *Space*, 2, *passim*.

[30]*Ibid.* 3.

[31]See "Coping with the Caucasus: Roman Responses to Local Conditions in Colchis," in French and Lightfoot, 1989, 31-43; and "The Caucasian Frontier: Myth, Exploration, and the Dynamics of Imperialism," in Freeman and Kennedy, 1986, 31-49.

geographic space, of which frontiers played a part, are crucial to national solidarity.[32] The first section of his recent survey of frontiers explores how Romans, again mostly of the early empire, imagined the world and the space of their Empire within it. He argues effectively that one must take into account the knowledge Romans shared about their geography and their cosmology.

Other historians have downplayed the role of background geographic knowledge in Roman perceptions of their frontiers. Many of these historians, implicitly at least, point to the "primitive state" of Roman knowledge of geography and topography compared to a "true" (i.e. modern) geographic rendering necessary for legitimate background knowledge. In this sense, most of these writers may be characterized by anthropologists as "structural determinists," in that they assume that people act on the basis of "the way the world is," their perceptions of that world notwithstanding. Cherry, in a recent work on frontier society in North Africa, concludes that Romans knew, or rather, cared little about geography.[33] Such assumptions, it seems, use a modern yardstick of geographical knowledge, and refuse to elevate Roman thinking about geography to the level of real "geography." Cherry's assumptions about the relationship between geography and frontier studies may be seen in his claim that frontiers performed no "historically recoverable function other than to have accommodated contact." In short, to him, Romans simply did not think about frontiers in terms of or against a set of

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[32]*Frontiers, passim.*

[33]*Frontier and Society in Roman North Africa,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 32. Cherry, surprisingly, gives no consideration at all to Lee's revision of Millar's conclusions that the frontiers were information barriers. The book does not appear in his bibliography although his methodology section handles the very question.

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background assumptions which may be termed "geography" or geographic background knowledge. Romans did have a set of assumptions which could be considered geographical knowledge and that they did think and act in terms of those assumptions rather than in terms of modern notions of their world. They were not craving modern standards of geographical accuracy, in other words.

B. Isaac, in probably the most important book on Roman frontiers written in the last twenty years, is less adamant than Cherry on this point but nonetheless presents the same assumptions in his work.[34] Through detailed studies of Roman geographic knowledge of the early Empire, Isaac concludes that the focus of Roman imperialism in the frontier zones was ethnic, and had little to do with geographic or background knowledge. In fact, he disparages Roman "knowledge" of geography, a crucial impediment, as he puts it, to any global strategizing about frontiers. The assumption here, it seems, is that because Romans did not grasp a modern and scientific understanding of geography, they were therefore unable to strategize effectively with their frontiers, and thus they did not really think in terms of literal territorial frontiers. Such conclusions, I will argue, do not seem to follow necessarily. There is no absolute connection between sharpened perceptions of frontiers and the type of "Grand Strategy" thinking which Isaac is challenging.[35] J.C. Mann likewise concludes that Romans could never have had anything close to a "Grand Strategy" with their frontiers, in part

[34] *Limits, passim*. See also "Eusebius and the Geography of Roman Provinces," in Kennedy, *Army*. 153-67.

[35] See *infra* 27 for discussion of Luttwak, who popularized the Grand Strategy idea.

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because they had a poor knowledge of geography and cartography.[36] Again, the standard is modern understanding of "the way the world is."

Second, many recent historians likewise have explored what role natural topographical or geographic features such as deserts, mountains and rivers played as frontiers. This question, handled in Chapter Three, is part of a much larger historiographical debate in many eras and contexts over the role of "natural frontiers."[37] The question here differs from the one above in that it tries to determine if or how topographical or geographical features literally served as frontiers rather than if or how people imagined them. The overlap between this category and the one above is well laid out, in the specific context of North Africa, by R.B. Hitchner as a question of ideal versus reality.[38] The major issue here is whether so-called "natural frontiers" such as the Euphrates, Tigris, Danube, and Rhine rivers, or mountains, served as military barriers and/or frontiers. The classic exposition of the problem, and one which remained dominant for some time, is A. Alföldi's presentation of the Rhine/Danube frontier as a "moral barrier," solidifying a common sense of belonging to an indivisible empire and fostering a sense of national

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[36]In his critique of E. Luttwak's "Grand Strategy" entitled "Power, Force, and the Frontiers of the Roman Empire," *JRS* 69 (1979): 175-83.

[37]The problem itself initially was highlighted by L. Febvre, of *Annales* fame. In his work *La terre et l'evolution humaine* (Paris, 1922 -- translated as *Earth and Human Evolution*) he proposed that rather than serving as "natural frontiers," rivers in fact link groups together for common activities such as trade and communication. Although many ancient historians have accepted this idea (largely *via* C. Wells' *German Policy of Augustus*) few acknowledge the *Annales* assumptions behind the notion, and even fewer give Febvre credit at all.

[38]"Image and Reality: The Changing Face of Pastoralism in the Tunisian High Steppe," in Jesper Carlsen et al. eds., *Landuse in the Roman Empire*. (Rome 1994): 27-43.

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solidarity.[39] The question may be contrasted with the one above in its "structural determinist" presuppositions, for it assumes that people act "according to the way the world is."[40] The idea, again, is that positivistic topography tells us how their world was. Developments in military studies are famous in this regard -- ancient battles are analyzed in light of satellite or other high-altitude photographs to see why they turned out the way they did.[41] The debates here, like the Roman border skirmishes they often focus on, are intense. They are instructive to my project in presenting how "natural frontiers" were imagined as such by the Romans and how Romans received information from and about them.

Some, on the one hand, dismiss the idea of natural boundaries entirely. Much of this research has followed from C. Well's pronouncement in the

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[39]"The Moral Barrier on the Rhine and Danube,"in E. Birley, ed., *Congress of Roman Frontier Studies, 1949* (Durham, 1952).

[40]Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 11.

[41]One fascinating new research tools of frontier studies has been spy photos and airplane surveys from the air. A few recent works, including D. Kennedy and D. Riley, *Rome's Desert Frontier from the Air*, (Batsford, 1990), and D. Riley "Archaeological Air Photography and the Eastern *limes*," in Freeman and Kennedy, 1986, 661-76, have proven very useful. My point here is not to denigrate modern technology in the study of ancient history but to highlight the idea that as soon as we entirely depart from the way that the Romans viewed their geography and topography we risk removing facts from context. There is much legitimacy to analyzing how topography "is" but it must be remembered that Romans never saw their frontiers from 5,000 feet above ground, and any conclusions based on that view will not be a Roman perspective. I maintain that we cannot afford to forget that the ancients were not wishing they could have the sophisticated views made possible by the modern sciences, nor did they ultimately fail or succeed in their endeavors based on how closely they approximated what we see as the way it "really is." And that seems to me the basic division between the behaviorists and structural determinists, if and when one actually falls firmly into one category or another.

early 1970s that rivers never served as barriers in the Roman Empire.[42] B. Isaac is probably the most adamant in claiming that natural boundaries such as rivers do not ever serve as frontiers.[43] In fact, he claims that there is no evidence that geography ever determined boundaries. He proposes that it did not matter much to the Romans where the frontiers ran because Roman imperialism as such focused on peoples, not territories. There is no evidence, he claims, that topography or geography determined boundaries. Whittaker likewise claims that natural features never serve as real boundaries, but he does see a function for them in that they often are promoted to that status for propagandistic purposes.[44] Both Isaac and Whittaker would agree that natural boundaries do not serve as real frontiers, but Whittaker holds that Romans did care, at some level, how or where those frontiers were imagined. Furthermore, Whittaker claims, the conflict between military, political, and administrative considerations "preclude natural frontiers." Debates about such assumptions are crucial to this project in that I am interested both in background knowledge as well as actual sites about which news could circulate. Part of this thesis depends on my own assumption that natural frontiers literally functioned as frontiers in the minds and in the worldview of Romans, and that news about or from these natural frontiers should be considered a reflection of Roman frontiers consciousness.

Some, on the other hand, have seen "natural boundaries" as literal frontiers or boundaries between peoples. The arguments here tend to support some of my central contentions, especially those focused on rivers. At one

[42]*The German Policy of Augustus: An Examination of the Archaeological Evidence*, (Oxford, 1972).

[43]*Limits*, 410-413.

[44]*Frontiers*, 27, 61.

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time this view more or less was taken for granted, but few have defended it since C. Wells, C.R. Whittaker, B. Isaac, and others have come out strongly against it.[45] Nicasie is unusual among recent historians in arguing that "natural frontiers do, as a rule, make sense in military terms. They constitute barriers." These natural boundaries, he claims, did form part of the Romans' feeling an "acute sense of belonging to one indivisible Empire."[46] In some ways, Nicasie resuscitates A. Alföldi's "moral barrier." D. Braund explores river frontiers, arguing that to look at the purely military aspects of rivers misses the point.[47] In the world-view of Romans, he claims, rivers did serve as boundaries both by nature of their "religiosity" and their "natural power to divide and to bound." Braund takes modern strategists to task for missing what he calls the "point embedded in the environmental psychology of the Roman world." It is partly from Braund that I borrow the emphasis on worldview throughout this project. I am convinced by his short article that such a worldview shaped Roman "background knowledge" about their frontiers, although there are crucial differences between the earlier and later Empire. Also, it is important to note that this worldview shaped the context and format of news coming from natural frontiers, however imagined.

In a unique approach to the geo-political world of Late Antiquity, G. Fowden analyzes the crucial role that geography played in shaping the diverse cultures of Late Antiquity. One line of his argument suggests that the

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[45]Chapter Three explores the debate in more detail, concluding that rivers were, in fact, imagined as Roman frontiers and probably functioned as frontiers as well.

[46]*Twilight of Empire: The Roman Army from the Reign of Diocletian until the Battle of Adrianople*, (Amsterdam, 1998), 121-125.

[47]"River Frontiers in the Environmental Psychology of the Roman World," in Kennedy, *Army*, 43-47.

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ideology of a Universal Christian Empire forced frontiers to diminish in importance in the later Empire. As he implies, geography, not artificially-constructed or imagined frontiers, posed the real limits on culture. Christianity in the Empire, for example, pushed far beyond national boundaries through its expansion efforts, its only limit being geography, not artificially-constructed frontiers. Thus, geography, he affirms, was the real mover of the history of the region he studies and the notion of frontiers was actually less relevant in terms of culture. His account, to be addressed in Chapter Five, presents another option to the polarized natural frontiers debate. For if geography provides the real limits, then the Roman imperial frontiers are not the issue at stake. His arguments pose challenges to all sides of the debate and will be addressed throughout.

Third, some recent works have explored directly the role of information and news in the Roman Empire. Very few studies have analyzed how information moved from peripheries to center. Some of these have debated whether the frontiers were barriers to information from beyond the frontiers. Fewer have studied how information from the frontiers moved and functioned within the Roman Empire.[48] Furthermore, the focus of these studies almost exclusively has been on foreign policy and military decisions.[49] These works contribute to my project most obviously in setting up theoretical frameworks for studying news and information flow.

[48]See the contrasting conclusions, for example, in F. Millar, "Emperors, Frontiers, and Foreign Relations" and Lee, *Information*; Cherry aligns with Millar in his *Frontier and Society in Roman North Africa*, with no consideration of Lee at all.

[49]The only exception being a work which explores news in the Republic and early Empire, noting both official and unofficial channels of communication. See G. Achard, *La Communication à Rome*, (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1991).

The study of Roman communication and information sharing in Roman frontier studies largely has sprung up in response to E. Luttwak's (in)famous *Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, published in 1976.[50] Luttwak argued that the Roman Empire saw a gradual shift in defensive posture, informed by a Grand Strategy which itself developed over time. Few if any significant studies of Roman frontiers in the past twenty-five years have failed to react to this work. In spite of some initial positive reviews by foremost Roman historians, the subsequent tide of opinion has shifted to criticism and even hostility toward Luttwak's work.[51] Criticisms aside, however, it does seem that the work deserves solitary credit for prompting research in a neglected area of Frontier Studies. In an oft-cited review of Luttwak, J.C. Mann concluded that there was "no capacity" for Grand Strategy in the Roman Empire because of the limited means of communication, and resulting lack of information available to the central government, and because of the Romans' poor knowledge of geography and cartography.[52] Mann critiques Luttwak for assuming widespread proliferation of news, information, and, with it, geographical knowledge. But Luttwak, a policy-maker and not a trained ancient historian *per se*, did not have subsequent studies of Roman news, information, and background knowledge at his disposal. Mann's critique, then, is tantamount to an indictment of Roman military and frontier studies

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[50](Baltimore: Johns Hopkins).

[51]Initial positive reviews include P.A. Brunt, Review of Luttwak, *Times Literary Supplement* 154, 1978a; G.D.P. Jones, "Concept and Development in Roman Frontiers," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 61 (1978): 115-44; and F. Millar, "Emperors, Frontiers, and Foreign Relations, 31 B.C. to A.D. 378," *Britannia* 13 (1982): 1-23.

[52]"Power, Force, and the Frontiers of the Roman Empire," *JRS* 69 (1979): 175-83.

in general up until the time that Luttwak wrote. This is a point that a continued historiographical tradition of Luttwak-bashing fails to consider.

In a study explicitly prompted by Luttwak, F. Millar analyzed the formulations of Roman frontier "policies" and the conceptual framework within which they worked.[53] Millar, who describes Luttwak's work as "excellent," sought to analyze further some of the issues which Luttwak had left unexplored. He argues that there were frontier policies and that they did have "fundamental effects on the political, social, and cultural contexts within which millions of people lived."[54] Furthermore, Millar argued, it is important to note the "extent of geographical and ethnographical knowledge available to emperors and the nature of the conceptual framework which they could apply to this knowledge."[55] Millar focuses specifically on the means by which information was gained, the forms in which it was presented, and the "conceptual frameworks within which it could be used to produce decisions about frontier policy." The way the empire worked as a system, he claims, was very much a function of the way that information was appropriated by the government. Millar's article remains standard for its basic and seminal treatment of how information proliferated *within* the Empire at the political level. He concludes, with analogy to A. Alföldi's "moral barrier on the Rhine and Danube," that frontiers were, in essence, information barriers. For him, the study of information was crucial to a study of Roman frontiers. Millar closes his study with some provocative statements, apparently designed to prompt further work. He claims that when culture

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changed (as with the victory of Christianity) so did the values that informed foreign relations. Chapter Five of this project applies questions related to this idea to background knowledge, news, and information, with somewhat different results.

Millar's work in turn prompted other significant studies of foreign relations which specifically question to what extent frontiers were information barriers. The question behind such studies is whether or not Roman policies were based at all on the retrieval of information from frontiers or beyond them. A.D. Lee concludes, in his study of third- to seventh- century Roman foreign relations, that frontiers were "information permeable," and that Romans developed regular networks for gleaning information on their neighbors. Lee's work has been influential in highlighting the personnel, frequency, context, etc. of information ebb and flow across frontiers in Late Antiquity. As such, it has been useful for this project in setting out parameters of the study of information in Late Antiquity. N.J.E. Austin and N.B. Rankov have recently produced a detailed survey of political and military intelligence in the Roman world, particularly explaining the roles of the various officials involved.[56] Their work, the first of its kind, makes valuable contributions to the study of information in the Roman world by its complete explanation of intelligence functionaries.

Finally, fighting against a predominant tendency to view frontiers as objects only of military and/or political study and importance, a few very recent works have shown how religious and mythical worldviews and cultural mentalities have shaped the placement, defense, and perceptions of imperial frontiers. These works have influenced strongly my own research

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[56] Austin and Rankov.

presented here. Throughout my research, however, I have been struck by a cleavage between predominant views of Late Antiquity as a "supremely religious or spiritual age"[57] and frontier studies of the period which treat the age as if it were striving to be rationalistic and modern in its attempts to construct and defend borders. Works exploring only the purely military or political nature of frontiers are too numerous to mention here.[58] Such ignoring of religious considerations strike me as a direct reflection of the world-view of the twentieth-century historian, rather than of any ancient reality.

The "Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity" Conferences have made efforts to bring the two extremes together, but in some senses they have preserved the spiritual vs. rational political divide in their treatment of "metaphysical" frontiers over against political and imperial ones. The editors of the first volume of papers explicitly react against an image of *limes* studies which calls to mind a "vast linear array, manned by soldiers and strengthened by fortifications, with the Romans on one side and the rest of the world on the other."[59] By expanding the parameters of "frontier studies" to include "metaphorical" and "metaphysical" frontiers they have highlighted a variety of social, ethnic, intellectual, and spiritual boundaries within Late Antique

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[57]Summarized by A. Cameron, *The Later Roman Empire, AD 284-430,* (Harvard 1993), 128. Cameron acknowledges, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, the danger of Late Antiquity being seen as the abode only of "wild monks and excitable virgins." The other extreme strikes me as both equally prevalent and misleading.

[58]Isaac, *Limits,* may be cited as a culmination of such approaches, and a ready repository of citations.

[59]Mathisen and Sivan, 2. They refer in this instance to a similar critique made by B. Isaac in "The Meaning of *limes* and *limitanei*," *JRS* 78 (1988): 125-47.

societies. These have been set against traditional studies of "geographical" frontiers, defined as political frontiers. A collection of articles edited by A. Rousselle attempts much the same thing as the "Shifting Frontiers" papers and publications, and produces similar results.[60] Its insightful papers on celestial and terrestrial frontiers certainly propose new directions in frontier studies and serve as a model for expanding beyond traditional historiographical paradigms. Whittaker presents a unique perspective in a major work on frontiers by arguing that we must take into account the "symbolic, sacred character of Roman *limites.*"[61] He argues that territoriality, suggested by notions of cosmology, is crucial to understanding a Roman mentality of frontiers. D. Braund innovatively argues for considering the psychology and worldview of Romans and how these affected their perceptions of frontiers.[62] For him, geographical myth and old stories are as important for understanding how Romans perceived frontiers as are any attempts at seeing how Roman policy took account of frontiers. Both Whittaker and Braund suggest that, in the Roman mind, territorial space had a direct relationship to the cosmos. Their analysis of this point focuses, however, on the early Empire and not the late. They both argue that frontiers, in a Roman way of thinking, were somehow connected to a notion of sacral space.

Working on a later period, E. Fowden gives a powerful argument for breaking down the barrier separating "frontier studies" from "religious

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[60]Rousselle, *Frontières.*

[61]*Frontiers,* 8.

[62]"River Frontiers in the Environmental Psychology of the Roman World," in Kennedy, *Army,* 43-47.

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studies" in Late Antiquity.[63] Her conclusions parallel Braund's, although she analyzes a Christian social context while he is dealing largely with a pre-Christian social context. E.K. Fowden's study of the region known as the "barbarian plain" (on the Syrian Steppe) makes a convincing case, in effect, for considering frontiers within Late Roman world-views. "We cannot afford," she writes, "to project onto our evidence a separation of religious belief and political or military action."[64] The history of the frontier zone in Late Antiquity is incomplete, she affirms, if we neglect the imagined power of saints in defending and defining late Roman frontiers.

My approach to frontier studies, although informed by the above discussions throughout, is unique in a variety of ways. First, by handling the idea of frontier consciousness, which includes background information as well as news, I study is not limited to "policy decisions" or strategic intelligence. All studies which explore information and frontiers to date have been focused exclusively on these. Second, I address the question of "worldview" in a changing context in a unique way, bridging the gap between "pagan" and "Christian," analyzing changes and continuities. I concludes, on the basis of worldview analysis, that frontiers did matter and that they did play a role in Roman perceptions of space, specifically for the Later Empire. Third, I present Roman frontier consciousness as developing through time; it did not, as some have implied, merely replicate or freeze in time the ideology of the early empire.[65] I maintain that new forces acted on Roman frontier consciousness, diffused in part through structures encouraging heightened

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[63]Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*.

[64]*Ibid.*

[65]Such is the argument of Whittaker, *Frontiers*.

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news flow. Thus, traditional Roman imperial ideology alone cannot account for the change in worldview in the later empire. Fourth, by focusing on the third to fifth centuries, it presents a time in which, I argue, Romans came to see frontier as territorial, and not just as divisions between peoples. This aspect cannot be found as readily for the early Empire, and it appears to weaken with the fifth century invasions. With the advent of the invasions, the frontiers themselves might have functioned less and less as intended, but the ideology remained firmly intact. By leaving off where most studies of Late Antique frontiers begin, I believe that I have isolated a period of decided and highly influential development and change.

Information / Communication / News

M. Stephens defines news as "new information about a subject of some public interest that is shared with some portion of the public."[66] This study explores the role of news in shaping and/or confirming the Roman imagination and consciousness of frontiers. Growing alongside recent emphasis on media has been scholarship across the disciplines in the field of information theory. Much of this literature has been prompted by descriptions of our own era as an "Information Age." Many such analyses have attempted to rationalize pre-Modern and non-modern societies as compared to modern. Such efforts, from media studies to sociology, have provided models for analyzing the flow of information.

Historians of all periods have benefitted from methodologies gleaned from other disciplines in the study of information and news.[67] A.D. Lee, for

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[66]*A History of News from the Drum to the Satellite*, (New York, 1988), 9.

[67]See, for example, the use of such models in a fascinating study of news in the Greek world, S. Lewis, *News*. I thank H. Elton for directing me to this

example, borrows freely from recent sociological studies of "news" in his account of information and frontiers in Late Antiquity. One of the upshots of this sociological emphasis has been heightened awareness of terminology in the study of information. Should the appropriate term of study be "news," "media," "information," "communication," or what? The importance of terminology comes across in one recent study of news in ancient Greece which deliberately avoided the word "communication" throughout.[68] Its author also provides a critical warning to studies of news in antiquity. Modern sources tend to highlight news and the dynamics of information flow. Ancient sources rarely if ever mention the context and dynamic of information flow. As Lewis contends, news is one of the most taken-for-granted aspects of life in the pre-Modern world. To us, in a modern world, news holds "a privileged and prestigious position in our culture's hierarchy of values."[69] But to the ancients, the "very ordinariness of news means that its transmission is often present in our sources in inexplicit form, because it required no explanation."[70] Reconstructing how news functioned in any ancient society requires detailed reading of a variety of ancient sources. Further muddying the waters is the fact that ancient sources and modern studies tend to emphasize the military and other visible institutions of communication. Lewis claims to have written his book against the idea that

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work. Lewis, incidentally, criticizes modern writing on ancient news, which tends to be preoccupied "with the military, and the consequent overvaluing of certain visible institutions," 6.

[68]S. Lewis thanks his thesis advisor for warning him against "using the term 'communication' in any description of this project, because, as he said, 'communication is about everything.'" See Lewis, *News*, preface.

[69]Lewis, *News*, 2

[70]*Ibid.*, 5

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the entirety of news flow among the ancient Greek *poleis* could be understood merely with reference to the herald or signal fire.

As Lee has noted in his *Information and Frontiers* (and others have noted in their reviews of Lee) the role of information has received little systematic attention in studies of the late Roman Empire.[71] Lee gives a valuable synthesis of the ways that information shaped foreign relations in Late Antiquity. Although my focus is very different, Lee's work has proven valuable in providing models for dealing with conceptual issues. He provides a helpful methodological model by applying sociological models of information flow to a late Roman context. Following Lee, I break information down into two basic components, although my second differs from his. The first is what Lee calls "background knowledge," which I incorporate into analysis of "worldview." This aspect involves knowledge and assumptions about cosmology, geography, topography, chorography, and environment.[72] This aspect can be traced in myths as well as philosophical references to how the world hangs together and is structured. In some ways, the *Annales* term "mentalité" captures the essence of this first aspect. It shows the basic structures which minds of Late Antiquity used to make sense of (or structure) their world. My chapters on the physical and human context of the later Roman Empire explore specifically how mountains, rivers, and road systems, for example, served as sites of demarcation or frontier in the minds of Romans.

The second category is what I will call "news." Whether coming from persons such as soldiers, pilgrims, merchants, spies, hostages, etc. and

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[71]Lee, *Information*.

[72]See Chapter Two on these concepts.

channelled through various media, there was new information about Roman frontiers working its way to people throughout the Roman Empire. To be news it did not have to be as recent as what we define as news. C. Ando gives a helpful definition of "contemporary" in the ancient world as "within living memory."[73] News was often prompted by disastrous events such as the surrender of Nisibis in 363 and the Battle of Adrianople in 378, but it also arose from less momentous observations of frontier zones by persons talking or writing about their experiences at or near them. News should be interpreted and appropriated *vis á vis* "worldview" or "background knowledge." Images of space are, in fact, influenced by settlement pattern, mobility, and means of communication.[74] Through a variety of media news reached the Roman people and challenged or confirmed their worldview(s). Both of these aspects of information, worldview and news, functioning together, are crucial to this study of "frontier consciousness."

The context of news flow changed in critical ways in the later Roman Empire. Most notably, there was what J. Matthews has analyzed as the popularization of modes of communication.[75] Late Roman discussion moved from philosophical modes to popularized modes which reached and were comprehended by a much broader audience. Another basic change was in the movement in context from primarily civic-centered to church or

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[73]*Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 122. Compare this definition with Augustine's description of the surrender of Nisibis as "almost in living memory."

[74]"Worldview" by M. Kearney in D. Levinson and M. Ember eds., *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology* vol. 4. (New York: Henry Holt, 1996), 1380-1384.

[75]Matthews, *Ammianus,* 249.

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monastery-centered. This transition also had some effect on the content and structures of news flow. The ramifications of both of these changes will be explored in Chapters Four and Five.

Communication theory also has shaped parts of this project. Modern media studies have provided some helpful methodological approaches to understanding news and communication in antiquity. So long as historical context is not forgotten, such studies are helpful for defining news and to begin to assess how and why it proliferates within a society. The works of D. McQuail have been particularly helpful here, especially in his analysis of how news functions within the public interest.[76] Chapter Four in particular has been shaped by his approach to mass communications.

Chapter Four also has benefitted from the works of P. Bourdieu.[77] Bourdieu provides a model for understanding thought and action (i.e. practice) in a *habitus*, a concept with much in common with my use of world-view. But central to Bourdieu's approach are questions of how a society is held together, how it comes to be a unit, so to speak. One of the means is communication, which allows "actors" to participate in a "commonsense world endowed with objectivity secured by a consensus of meaning."[78] Communication can only be communication if there is some type of mechanism whereby the members of a society can share in its meaning. He

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[76]See his *Media Performance: Mass Communication and the Public Interest*, (London: Sage, 1992), and *Mass Communication Theory*, 3rd ed. (London: Sage, 1994). The first of these works is used by D. Mendels, *The Media Revolution of Early Christianity: An Essay on Eusebius's* Ecclesiastical History, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

[77]In particular, his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. R. Nice, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995 [1977].

[78]*Ibid.* 80.

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posits a dialectical relationship between objective structures, some of which I will explore for the later Roman Empire, and cognitive or motivating structures which they produce and of which they are products.[79] Communication structures play a part in this process. His explorations of how historical events, especially "newsworthy" ones, related to human practice have shaped my understanding of societies and communication in this project, and will be explored in more detail later.

World-view Analysis And Ideology

The analytical category of "world-view" requires some explanation. I present it here as a coherent theoretical framework upon which may be located the many stray pieces of evidence which come together in various sections of this thesis. The concept itself is not unproblematic, but there is some precedent for using it to make sense of the Late Antique world. Earlier in the last century, W. Enßlin employed it as a way of explaining the historical outlook of Ammianus Marcellinus,[80] R.T. Ridley uses it as a way of analyzing the thought world of the historian Zosimus[81], D. Braund has argued that in frontier studies it is "best to look at psychology and worldview,"[82] and E. Jeffreys proposes it as a way to study the world chronicle of John Malalas.[83]

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[79]*Ibid.* 83.

[80]W. Enßlin, *Zur Geschichtschreibung und Weltanschauung des Ammianus Marcellinus*, (Leipzig, 1923), 83-96.

[81]See Zosimus.

[82]"River Frontiers in the Environmental Psychology of the Roman World," in Kennedy, *Army*, 43-47.

[83]*Studies in John Malalas*, (Melbourne, 1990), preface.

Analyzed first in German scientific historical study, worldview (*Weltanschauung*) suggests an intellectual environment. The historian and historical theorist W. Dilthey was the first to employ the term, in the nineteenth century.[84] Dilthey's emphasis on studying the totality of "human life itself" led him to demarcate a category of thought which guided human action but was rarely explicitly laid forth by humans. Worldview analysis emerges as a response within and against objective and scientific approaches to history, as the patterns which come forth as humans piece together a "pattern of *meaning* for life." Even so scientific and "objective" an historian as Dilthey recognized the need to account for a fuzzy region in which "humans minds come to terms with the riddle of life" -- the *Rätselhaftigkeit*.[85] A worldview is a "general sense or feeling about how life as a whole hangs together."[86]

To the extent that this "region," to use Dilthey's own term, can be studied historically, it is useful for considerations of Late Antiquity. Crucial questions I ask here are what role frontiers and information about them and from them served to modify and confirm Late Antique worldviews; and to what extent did that process vary in different regions of the Empire, and between center and periphery. As an analytical category worldview is helpful, and I would argue even necessary, in frontier studies because it highlights how inhabitants of the Later Roman Empire viewed their world as they struggled

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[84]See Dilthey's *Introduction to the Human Sciences: An Attempt to Lay a Foundation for the Study of Society and History*, trans. Ramon J. Betanzos. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988. Betanzos' introduction is a must-read.

[85]*Ibid*, 28-29.

[86]*Ibid*. 29.

between the twin forces of structure and innovation. Looking at worldview can get us past the intellectual impasse of strategic concerns as the only useful approach to frontier studies. Such a view tends to ignore the intellectual and cultural context. It is one of my central contentions that turning Roman frontiers into a modern scientific object of study was a major move toward ignoring the late Roman world-view. This is not to say that political and military studies are not important; they have laid the groundwork for this study and continue to produce extremely helpful ways of viewing the Roman Empire in global context. Inhabitants of the Late Roman world at all levels were confronted with challenges to the traditional Roman worldview summarized by Vergil's famous dictum of *"imperium sine fine."* How they dealt with these challenges was both a reflection of and an influence on their worldview.

But how does one analyze something so fuzzy and implicit as a "worldview"? The study here is an experiment in how information shapes and is shaped by worldview. Subtly, through choice of what to record and how, historians, poets, churchwomen and churchmen, orators, architects, artisans, etc. betray to readers their worldview. Historical and polemical accounts, monuments and visual arts all give information filtered through a worldview. My task, then, is to set out the theoretical limits of a worldview and show how it made sense of frontiers between the third and fifth centuries. Analyzing a worldview involves reading "above the lines" as well as below and "between" them, and is a literary as well as historical enterprise. But to the extent that it can get us past strategic and policy considerations of the Later Roman Empire it opens up new avenues for exploring the fascinating Late Antique world.

Anthropological study provides some interesting approaches to worldview analysis. In his work "Ethos, World View, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbol," C. Geertz argues for the importance of considering worldview. Although he also sees it as "vague and imprecise" and "prototheory," he nonetheless presents it as a category in need of explanation when studying the thoughts and actions of human groups. A people's "worldview" is their "picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society," as Geertz understands the term. " It contains their most comprehensive ideas of order." A world view is made emotionally acceptable by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs of which such a way of life is an authentic expression.[87] M. Kearney also provides some helpful approaches to world-view, drawing analogies to cosmology and insisting that ideas in worldviews are rarely expressed directly, "and thus consist of tacit knowledge." Particularly helpful has been Kearney's analysis of images of space as a function of world-view. He shows how means of communication and mobility, both topics of this study, have an influence on images of space and thus world-view.[88]

At the frontiers or limits to one's claims on the world, the ideological limits of one's worldview may be analyzed. As C.R. Whittaker notes, borrowing from anthropological study, "ideology tends to be at its purest on the frontier, where it is most under pressure."[89] An analysis of a change in

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[87]Reprinted in C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 126-41.

[88]See his *World View*, (Novato: Chandler and Sharp, 1984) and his helpful overview at "Worldview," *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 4, ed. D. Levinson and M. Ember, (New York: Holt, 1996), 1380-1384.

[89]*Frontiers*, 195, referencing I. Kopytoff, *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Society*, (Indianapolis, 1987), 13.

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limits, for example, can reveal how one views his or her world, a "worldview." Here the stress and strain of change is reflected by and upon the way that one views the world.

To illustrate the importance of worldview a personal anecdote might help. I have stood at the Roman frontier zones of North Africa and the eastern Roman Empire and asked the proverbial "why?" To my view, both regions appeared desolate, arid, semi-desert, and rocky. Why would anyone want to hold onto these regions or struggle for recognized mastery over them? By my worldview it seems absurd to fight over these regions, but to a Roman, the answer was self-evident; so much so, in fact, that no Roman ever gives us a detailed answer to my basic question.

In spite of influential recent work on frontiers to the contrary, I will show that frontiers did matter to Romans; they did care where they were even if they did not necessarily summarize matters coherently from our perspective. St. Augustine and many Roman historians earlier and later, for example, are fully aware of the profundity of the loss of Nisibis and the territory around it. In his *City of God* he presents the importance to the Roman people (and by implication, their worldview) of the shrinking of frontiers. It would be difficult to think that Augustine was alone in his thinking or in his worldview. Interestingly, he does not seem to be measuring the loss against the expectation of *imperium sine fine*. The loss to him was a shift in a static frontier, a frontier which could be marked with a city.

It is in the step the researcher must take from the individual text(s) or piece of material culture to generalizeable conclusion(s), however, that problems arise. Reading texts in terms of audience expectation presents a host of thorny issues and very difficult questions, especially considering the regional nature of this project. Can one really speak in general terms of a late Roman or "Late

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Antique" worldview, or must one speak of a North African worldview or even a Cappadocian worldview? In the most extreme reduction, is the question really one of analyzing St. Augustine's or St. Gregory of Nyssa's worldview? My perspective is that texts are not individual and personal "symbol systems," but that they must be read in terms of audience expectation, as part of a collective enterprise.[90] Granted, texts can also present idiosyncrasies, but images in a variety of texts and shared by a wide variety of writers can get us toward a world-view.

What are the elements of a worldview, and how can one feasibly analyze it? Two types of evidence can be used in reconstructing a Late Antique worldview; both include elements of traditional reading of texts supplemented by archaeological study. To begin with, the topographical and archaeological context gives insight into the physical world the ancients actually interacted with. Scholars have long recognized the importance of landscape in analyzing a group's outlook. Rivers, mountains, valleys, deserts, the seas -- all of these played a part in what D. Braund has termed "environmental psychology."[91] Along with these natural elements with which inhabitants of the Roman world had long-term correspondence -- to echo the familiar *Annales* approach -- are the contrived or man-made

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[90]J. Ober analyzes the emergence of a "democratic political culture" in Greece by using a fascinating approach which combines the *Annales* vision of mentality of ordinary people, and modern literary theory which views texts as "symbol systems that must be understood in relationship to their receptors" (*Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People*. Princeton, 1989, p.xiv). His approach, which presents "community" as assuming a "minimal level of shared values," is not perfectly applicable to the Roman Empire, but it is instructive here in that it suggests a reading of shared meaning even in highly rhetorical texts.

[91]"River Frontiers in the Environmental Psychology of the Roman World," Kennedy, *Army*, 43-47.

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elements of the landscape such as roads, trade routes, actual settlements and corresponding architectural arrangements. B. Shaw consistently has argued that such factors must be taken into account in any study of the ancient world. Study of ancient landscapes -- the human context -- he maintains, must go beyond the mere recounting of features and connect them to the humans who lived there.[92] Columns, triumphal arches, public art work -- all of these played a part in setting and reflecting the context within which human minds could imagine their world. Frontiers existed in this context -- even if only in the imagination of frontier populations or travelers such as pilgrims, merchants, or soldiers on campaign. As an influential work on worldviews and space from the social sciences has recently pointed out, "images of space are influenced by settlement pattern, mobility, and means of communication."[93] The very way the Romans viewed their world was influenced by the human context of settlement, mobility, and ease of communication. These are crucial to understanding worldview, and can come to light through site surveys, archaeological excavations, and references in literature and on inscriptions. Chapter Four analyzes these.

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[92]See, for example, his critique of E. Fentress' *Numidia and the Roman Army* entitled "Soldiers and Society: The Army in Numidia" in his *Rulers, Nomads, and Christians in Roman North Africa*, (Variorum, 1995), IX 133-159. Shaw criticizes her specifically for parading out a series of undifferentiated "facts" about the geography of North Africa in an attempt to put history in topographical and archaeological context. The problem, he notes, is that "a positivistic collection of data in the sense of a vulgar grab-bag of givens will not suffice." His point is that the historian must make explicit the connection between the human and the environment, and not just list out geographical details.

[93]Quoted here from the *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*. Vol. 4, 1996, p.1381. See also H. Lefevre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. (Blackwell, 1991).

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Along with these physical elements come the intellectual and cultural context which likewise shaped worldview. Myth, religion, history, memory, sacred texts, oracles, and satire all shaped and expressed the worldviews of Romans. Comparatively few Romans ever visited their frontier zones. But most or all had some consciousness of what those frontiers were like, what they meant, and what they signified. Whether submerged in ideologies of *imperium sine fine* or in Augustine's musings on the problem of shrunken borders, Romans had some consciousness of frontiers. Fluctuating frontiers or ever-advancing frontiers were both ideas arising out of the intellectual and cultural context.

The role of religion in the worldview of Late Antiquity, crucial for understanding this period of transition, has long been acknowledged but very rarely applied to "frontier studies." Historians have argued that Late Antiquity was a world "rustling with deities," and have imagined the powerful role of "holy men and women" in shaping the age.[94] On the cynical side, the age has been characterized as superstitious and irrational.[95] The notion that this same sense of religiosity should be applied to frontier studies has been lacking almost entirely from frontier studies until very recently. Persons of Late Antiquity begin to resemble hard-core "modern" strategists who, as logical calculating individuals, certainly knew better than to let religious ideas and beliefs interfere with their practical considerations. Emperors, governors, or whoever, could, in fine empirical fashion, sort out not only what was "really" out there but also what "really mattered." E.

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[94]The influential works of P. Brown have carved out much of contours of the field of Late Antiquity.

[95]See A. Cameron's critique of this perspective in *The Later Roman Empire, AD 284-430,* (Harvard, 1993), 128.

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Fowden's work, mentioned above, has been one of a few which recently have challenged this dichotomy between secular and sacred in the Late Antique world.[96] In tracing the cult of St. Sergius at the Eastern frontier with Persia, she shows the importance of looking to religious forces, such as the power of saints and relics to influence political and military history of the frontier zone. Her approach highlights the role of "divine defense" surrounding holy sites, and she is helpful in suggesting the problems we have when we look only to literal "arms and walls."[97] G. Fowden likewise insists that the changes brought about by Constantine are only comprehensible when we refuse to distinguish religion and politics / military.

Myth has likewise been discounted, to the extent that it should be considered at all separately from religion. Inhabitants of the Late Antique world, again, were neither nineteenth-century pragmatic imperialists nor rationalists. They did not (and would not have wanted to) disregard myth like the many modern strategic and military historians who have analyzed frontiers. D. Braund has argued that myth about rivers was a very important part of the "environmental psychology" of the Roman world, especially serving as boundaries to it. He also contends that myth was "very much part of contemporary government and diplomacy." "Myth," he writes, "structures the world and makes sense of it."[98] An understanding of such myths is necessary if we are to enter the world of Late Antiquity ourselves and explore the ways in which frontier consciousness functioned in a Late Antique worldview.

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[96]*Barbarian Plain.*

[97]*Ibid.* 3.

[98]"River Frontiers in the Environmental Psychology of the Roman World," in Kennedy, *Army*, 43-47.

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Working in a way similar to myth are biblical texts which shaped the way persons of Late Antiquity imagined their geography. That these persons were influenced by biblical texts is beyond doubt. Interpretation, as always, was tricky business, but the fact that the Scriptures shaped the Later Roman and Late Antique imagination is certain. A. Cameron writes:

> The Scriptures, then, presented both an opportunity and a challenge in late antiquity. They provided vocabulary, imagery, and subject matter for poets; models for holy men and women; and ways of understanding humanity and the world. But they required exegesis, and this could be difficult and risky.[99]

Some of these difficulties will be taken up in the next section. The extent of the difference Christianity made in the Late Roman Empire is the topic of Chapter Five.[100] Behind my analysis here lie questions of both how their own view of geography affected the way persons of Late Antiquity read biblical texts and how biblical texts affected their worldview. In the allusions of Romans of the later Empire to biblical texts one may in some sense see the current state of their knowledge of the world. The Euphrates river, for example, was a powerful biblical symbol for borders; its role as such must be considered in any study of Late Antique borders.[101]

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[99]"Remaking the Past," in *LA*, 1-20, at 4.

[100]Textual examples include Cosmas Indicopleustes' Christian Topography and the pilgrim's view of Eastern geography and topography, shaped invariable by Biblical descriptions of sites. One recent work is very helpful in drawing parallels to this type of ideology through the "Christianization" of the Empire. M. McCormick, in his *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West*, explores how the Roman ideology of "eternal victory" persisted in the Christian Empire and even was taken over by the Germanic peoples of western Europe. McCormick provides a model for considering this type of ideology and its role in a changing context or worldview.

[101]References to the Euphrates as a frontier or boundary include Genesis 15:18, Deuteronomy 11:24, II Samuel 8:3, I Chronicles 5:9. See *infra* 143.

Prophecy, of which some examples survive from the Later Roman Empire, reflects worldview as well. Prophecy formed a part of the Late Antique worldview in that history made sense, to Christians anyway, as part of the plan of God -- past, present, and future were all part of a continuum which had its fulfillment in prophecy. To pagans, history was no less viewed as part of a pattern -- oracles, prodigies, etc. were part and parcel of the notion of history and could not be divorced from it.[102] Prophecy connected nature to religion in a way that expressed and shaped worldview. In this sense, commentaries or references to the prophetic works of the Hebrew Scriptures as well as pagan and Christian prodigies and oracles also play a part in shaping and / or revealing a Late Roman worldview.

Sources and Method

One of the major reasons that studies connecting frontiers, background knowledge, and news have rarely been attempted -- and outside of foreign relations and policy issues have not been attempted at all -- is the paucity of sources at our disposal which handle the historical problems these present. There are no systematic treatises by Romans on frontiers, news, or background knowledge, nor should we expect there to be. Many of the questions connected with these types of sources are specifically modern questions, posed in an "Information Age." That does not necessarily make them any less relevant to studies of Late Antiquity. Often we know only that the news of a frontier skirmish made it to Constantinople, for example; our sources rarely bother with the details of how the news got there, or the media

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[102]Popular belief, such as in portents and divination often associated with prophecy was on the rise across the board in the Later Roman Empire. Chapter Five explores this phenomenon at length, and the connection it had to frontiers.

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which carried it.[103] Background knowledge and worldview present similar problems. Rarely if ever for the ancient world do we find writers reflecting on the unspoken aspects that make up their worldview, their intellectual environment, their assumptions about the way the world hangs together. A philosopher, such as a Libanius or a Julian, might give us clues as to their cosmology, but such musings may be read as exceptional, and these particular examples often have an extra layer of polemic to sort through. How is one to generalize from them? Our sources, however, do yield subtle clues, sometimes intentionally, sometimes unintentionally.

My major sources are the "usual suspects," the Roman histories written during and/or about the third to the fifth centuries, particularly during the fourth. Ammianus Marcellinus in particular gives the most complete narrative of a series of events albeit, for only a rather brief period of time in the parts of his massive work which have survived (354-378). Here and there throughout his work one can see a late Roman frontier consciousness, even if, in the opinion of most, his conservatism merely puts forth traditional and reactive views of the Roman Empire.[104] Ammianus gives the perspective of a military figure and his account is invaluable in its presentation of strategy considerations and military campaigns. In this regard, the work has been very well explored and it stands as the most important extant literary work on

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[103]D. Potter gives an original and detailed introduction to the concept of media in the Roman Empire, including explanations of statues, paintings, coins, historical inscriptions, architectural memorials, triumphal arches, imperial cult, Games, local festivals, etc. as "media." See his *Prophets*, 110-130.

[104]The idea that Ammianus presents classical Roman ideology conservatively frozen in time is presented by a recent work on Ammianus as an historian. See T.D. Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus and the Representation of Historical Reality*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

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the Later Roman Empire from almost any perspective.[105] Other historians include Festus, the "Fragmentary Classicizing Historians" -- Olympiodoros, Priscus, Eunapius, Malchus, Menander the Guardsman, Zonoras, Zosimus, and Herodian. All of them give some indication of Roman frontier consciousness and the proliferation of news. Christian World Chronicles and Ecclesiastical Histories also appear here, some written after the period under discussion -- Malalas, Orosius, Zachariah of Mitylene, Hydatius, Socrates, Eusebius, and others. Each of these will be introduced more thoroughly in the section in which they appear the most.

Dogmatic and theological works, not often central to frontier studies, also help in reconstructing both a Late Roman worldview and the way in which frontiers were imagined within it. The works of Augustine, St. Basil the Great, Cyprian, Gregory Nazianzus, Hippolytus, Orosius, Socrates Scholasticus and others give clues, as my reading of the introductory story suggests, to Roman thinking about frontiers. At times, the references to frontiers are incidental or anecdotal, but still provide answers to the questions which this study raises. Particularly helpful are uses of current frontier happenings as examples in sermons and polemics. The proliferation and use of news, even

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[105]Recent works I have consulted on Ammianus include *Ibid.*; N.J.E. Austin, *Ammianus on Warfare: An Investigation into Ammianus' Military Knowledge.* Collection Latomus 165. (Brussels, 1979); T.D. Barnes, "Ammianus Marcellinus and his World," *Classical Philology* 88 (1993): 55-70; R.C. Blockley, *Ammianus Marcellinus. A Study of His Historiography and Political Thought.* Collection Latomus 141. (Brussels, 1975); B. Croke and A.M. Emmett eds. *History and Historians in Late Antiquity.* (Sydney, 1983); J.F. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus.* London, 1989; R.L. Rike, Apex Omnium: *Religion in the "Res Gestae" of Ammianus.* The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 15. (Berkeley, 1987); and J.W. Drijvers and D. Hunt, *The Late Roman Empire and its Historian: Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus,* London: Routledge, 1999).

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if that news is initially of a political or military nature, can thereby be assessed in an ecclesiastical context.

Some of the many gaps in the narrative have been filled in with references in letters, personal, imperial and ecclesiastical. The most helpful have been the letters of Libanius, a fourth-century rhetorican at Antioch, of which some 1600 survive. Libanius was specifically interested in the progress of Julian on his campaign beyond the frontiers of the Empire, and kept up a correspondance with him up to those frontiers. References by both reveal clues as to how Romans envisioned their frontiers. My use of imperial letters rests on the notion that "it should not be assumed that emperors thought any differently from the people."[106] Letters also give clues to imperial news networks throughout the Empire. Ecclesiastical letters have proved helpful, not only for the intentional information they provide but also for the unintentional picture they give of the growth of an ecclesiastical news network which at times diverged from, and at times replaced, the imperial channels. Naturally, I have looked most closely at those written by North Africans and Anatolians.

Law Codes are helpful in many of the same ways as letters. Brief introductory sections often tell of the exact location, sometimes along a frontier, of the emperor issuing the law. Both the *Codex Justinianus* and the *Codex Theodosianus* preserve these interesting pieces of information. These are helpful for reconstructing the time and distance of news traveling under very specific circumstances.

I have also made much use, particularly in Chapter Five, of a variety of prophetic and apocalyptic works as well as commentaries, ranging from the

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later Sibylline Oracles to such works as Hippolytus' *Commentary on Daniel*.[107] The Sibylline Oracles, for example, seem to have functioned at one level as media of news. Prophetic texts also give insight into a Late Roman worldview by revealing the hopes, expectations, disappointments and despairs which Romans of the period faced. Such feelings could be encouraged into writing by the strain of ideology at the frontiers. It is against this background that one can analyze the news, much of it coming from the frontiers, which was used both to make sense of and interpret established prophecies, and as the substance for new prophecies. The *Oracle of Baalbek, Seventh Vision of Daniel, Commentary on Ezekiel,* Tzetzes' *Chiliad* as well as the later *Sibylline Oracles* all give subtle clues to the way that the world was viewed. Oracles and apocalypses, pagan and Christian, give occasional insight into how people of Late Antiquity made sense of changes on or challenges to frontier zones.

In my study of prophetic texts I have gleaned much methodologically from two very different studies from other historical contexts. In her study of prophecy and people in Renaissance Italy, O. Niccoli criticizes traditional approachesto prophecy in social context which view it as "pure propagandistic."[108] Most recent studies of prophecy in the Roman Empire have approached prophecy from the perspective Niccoli criticizes.[109] Such purely political approaches, she argues, are deceiving and reductive. Taking a

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[107]In a unique study of prophecy in the Roman world Potter, *Prophets* questions whether the genres apocalyptic and prophetic should be in any way separated, as I have done here. There will be more on this discussion in Chapter Five.

[108]*Prophecy.*

[109]Potter, *Prophets,* for example.

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cultural and intellectual approach to the study of prophecy, she concludes that prophecy constituted a "unifying sign" connecting nature to religion and religion to politics. One interesting thing she notes about prophecy is the way its substance moves between different cultural and social strata, "popular" to "higher culture" and vice versa. In prophecy, she claims, one can see not only political manipulations of "popular" beliefs but also popularizations of official political ideologies. A key point I pick up from her is that prophecy can be linked to political stability in very specific times of perceived crisis. And it also links nature, however construed, to the events of the day. Such issues are central to some of my chapters. Interestingly, the late Roman Empire witnessed just such a popularization of beliefs. The result was that more and more people, at all levels of society, came to rely heavily on popular prophecies and related types of divination such as portents and prodigies. This change, approximately concurrent with a shift in frontier consciousness, has proven helpful in tracing it. Chapter Five explores these changes in detail.

In a very different type of study, R. Lerner presents medieval prophecy as revealing "deeply imprinted mental patterns," or mentalities.[110] Unlike Niccoli, who studies the moment of a unique prophecy's utterance as a reflection of contemporary concerns, Lerner looks at persistencies over time as expressed in the permutations of one prophecy, the Cedars of Lebanon prophecy. To Lerner, the medieval reader saw history and prophecy as guides

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[110]*The Powers of Prophecy: The Cedars of Lebanon Vision from the Mongol Onslaught to the Dawn of Enlightenment.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). I also have gleaned much from P.J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition,* (Berkeley, 1985), and a much-neglected older work, A.R. Anderson, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog and the Inclosed Nations.* (Medieval Academy of America, 1932).

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to reading current events -- a plan was in effect which linked the past with the future. Lerner's approach is instrumental to my project in that it shows how readers could view older prophecies through the lens of contemporary concerns, but did so in terms of longer-term expectations "concerning what they already knew and what they were looking for."[111] The occurrences of the day were linked inextricably with the end, a foreordained divine plan.[112] For this project I do not have the benefit of a prophecy transfigured in time, so I cannot adopt that aspect of Lerner. But I do borrow the idea that prophecies are a rich source of information in that they do reveal mentalities.[113]

A few geographical and topographical works give clues to Roman systems of thought about geography. Written texts, such as Eusebius' *Onomasticon*, *Expositio totius mundi et gentium*, Orosius' *Historiae ad paganos*, a section of which is a synopsis of world geography, Cosmas Indicopleustes' *Christian Topography*, *Geographi Latini minores*, as well as others, present Roman worldviews in one form or another. Such works rarely if ever mention frontiers or boundaries as such, but they are invaluable in presenting the ways that Romans envisioned geography and topography. As I argue throughout this thesis, such Roman conceptions are fundamental to a Late Roman worldview. Such works help one see past the modern strategic

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[111]*op.cit.*, 112.

[112]*op. cit.*, 193. Lerner characterizes the medieval prophetic method as consisting of pseudonymity, *ex eventu* predictions, and obscure allusiveness. A crucial weakness in his account is that he does not note that the same is true of Sibylline oracles, the Oracle of Baalbek, and Jewish apocalyptic writings of the Hellenistic period. At one level, what he traces as a medieval mentality could, at least in method of presentation, be compared explicitly to much more ancient patterns.

[113]*op.cit.* 8

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studies which often overlook the fact that the ancients saw the world very differently from us and were not in some sense reaching or longing for a specifically modern notion of geographical exactness. *Itineraria*, or descriptions of travel along roads, are also valuable for understanding the road systems of the Empire as well as the context of traveling along it.

Visual images of the world and parts of it also can give some sense of a late Roman worldview. The very few surviving maps, copies of maps, and map descriptions from Late Antiquity have been well studied, although controversies concerning them are ongoing.[114] The most famous map is the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, a twelfth-century copy of probably a fourth-century Roman original. Additionally, there is abundant visual material on triumphal arches, columns, and the like. Images of emperors crossing rivers, for example, apparently symbolizing the departure from Roman territory, are readily available. Visual depictions of the natural order are plentiful, picturing peoples, rivers, mountains, gods, and more.[115] Such iconography gives crucial clues to some of the unspoken elements of a Roman worldview. C. Nicolet, who has been very influential in exploring Roman perceptions of space, presents a model in which one must not only reread and scrutinize texts but also "iconographical and architectural works -- in short, archaeology" in order to understand how the ancients viewed space and geography.[116]

Panegyrics, the best surviving example of epideictic (or display) oratory, give insight into the Roman mind at many levels by presenting a reconstruction or construction of the recent past according to established

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[114]See in particular Dilke, *Maps*.

[115]See, for example, Maguire, *Earth*.

[116]*Space*, 9.

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literary conventions. A panegyric was literally a public speech by a skilled rhetorician given in honor of the emperor or other outstanding figure. Every New Year's Day, imperial birthday, and anniversary was commemorated, and every deed remotely deserving of honor was used to praise the honoree.[117] Panegyric was a widely-circulating medium, touching not only an immediate listening audience but potentially the whole of the literate public and beyond as well. Many panegyrics became rhetorical models in schools, and were studied and quoted from. Panegyrics present the hopes and joys of Romans, particularly at the moment the speech was uttered. In the words of C.E.V. Nixon, editor of the most recent collection of Late Roman panegyrics, the panegyric is "a priceless historical document reflecting the outlook of the day."[118] They aimed to give stability and hope to a people otherwise uncertain of the future. Frontiers figure in panegyrics from the later Empire, and show the development of Roman frontier consciousness. The panegyrics at times specifically present Emperors solidifying, restoring, pushing forward frontiers, and even rendering frontiers unnecessary. Panegyric thus indicates the varieties of ways by which Romans expressed their frontier consciousness. Orations by Libanius are also a crucial source of information on how frontiers were perceived in the later Roman Empire.

Especially for the late fourth and early fifth centuries, some Saints' Lives also have been useful. These have proven to be essential sources for many presentations of Late Antiquity. They are, fortunately, one of few of the sources from Late Antiquity which survive in relative abundance. For this project, I have used "lives" about and by a western nun/pilgrim to the

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[117]See *Panegyrici* N&R

[118]*Ibid.,* 34.

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Jerusalem and the Eastern frontier, as well as lives of various Cappadocian saints. They give brief insight into worldviews of ancients, often in off-handed musings. And occasionally they preserve information about frontiers, usually those "violated" by "barbarians."

Archaeological studies and methods have been crucial to this thesis as well. Debates over the interaction between literary and material sources are of perennial interest and importance to ancient historians.[119] In a study like this, which traces frontier consciousness and dwells on Roman ideology about frontiers, archaeological surveys might seem to be of minimal assistance. B. Isaac's recent and influential study of the Eastern frontiers maintains a certain level of explicit skepticism toward archeological data -- "the use of archaeology is particularly difficult because so much induction is involved in the interpretations of physical remains."[120] I nevertheless have relied, in some places, on the works of archaeologists in my discussions of such factors as demographics, urbanization, population density, communication infrastructure, monastery sites, and the like. Archaeological studies and site surveys allow for more complete treatments of what I am calling, after Shaw, the human context -- road patterns and networks, settlement patterns and levels of urbanization, physical remains of walls and ditches.

Archaeological studies of the specific areas of the frontier zones are on-going. The Eastern part of the Roman Empire has been receiving some much-needed increased attention lately, and the study and survey of North

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[119]Anecdotal material from a recent "Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity" conference in which some participants claimed to be interested in "people not pots" highlight the differences in approach of historians of Late Antiquity.

[120]*Limits*, 6-7.

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Africa gets richer all the time.[121] Neither area, of course, has received the sustained archaeological attention that Western Europe has, but work continues to progress, and new insights emerge regularly to challenge and/or confirm viewpoints long taken for granted. Moreover, archaeological methodologies highlight the *longue dureé* in a way that literary sources do not necessarily do. As Shaw points out more than once in his studies of North Africa, archaeology tells us of gradual change and continuity in the human context. Such "trends and long-term developments" can be seen only through archaeological study, he contends.[122] His work provides first-rate methodologies for analyzing the interaction between humans and landscape, especially for North Africa. Archaeology and site survey must be taken into account if one is to appreciate the context of the Late Antique person.

On the other hand, Shaw recognizes that there are questions which archaeology does not answer. The "specific short-term causes and events that are an integral part of history, and the ideological and material interactions within human communities that produced commensurable artefacts remain beyond the reach of archaeology."[123] Thus, the type of interpersonal

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[121]See D.J. Mattingly and B. Hitchner, "Roman Africa: An Archaeological Review," *JRS* 85 (1995): 165-213 for a complete survey of recent North African archaeology.

[122]*Environment* I, 40-. Not all, of course, agree with such assertions. Many, including this author, think that literature, if studied carefully, can betray long-term thought processes in a way that archaeology cannot. The *Annales*-influenced historians of Late Antiquity (P. Brown, G. Fowden, etc.) have long held that both material culture and written texts can reveal long-term developments and mentalities.

[123]"Archaeology and Knowledge: the History of the African Provinces of the Roman Empire," in Shaw, *Environment* I, 47.

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communication which this study seeks to elucidate is often outside of the realm of archaeology.

Archaeological studies highlight one of the most heated topics of debate in frontier studies -- the role of the various structures discovered along frontier zones. Walls such as those of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius in Britain have perhaps received the most attention, but North African *fossata* and *clausurae* and Eastern *limes*-roads have been receiving more and more study recently. Central to such debates are questions over what these structures were "actually used for." Were they there to repel invaders, channel transhumance, promote communication, deter would-be settlers? Studies of these structures do appear in this dissertation but only after the basic question has been asked: Did Romans interior to them know of their existence? If so, what might they have thought about these structures? Did they imagine them as literally drawing an ultimate line for Roman holdings?" My concern here is not so much what these structures were "really" used for so much as how they were imagined, and what role their presence or perceived function might have played in, or what it might reveal about, a Late Roman view of the *limites*.

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CHAPTER TWO -- TOWARD A LATER ROMAN COSMOLOGY OF SPACE AND FRONTIERS

> I think Heaven smiled on you [Constantius] and willed that you should govern the whole world, and so from the first trained you in virtue, and was your guide when you journeyed to all points, and showed you the bounds and limits of the whole empire (τῆς ἀρχῆς ἀπάσης ὅρους καὶ πέρατα), the character of each region, the vastness of your territory, the power of every race, the number of the cities, the characteristics of the masses.
>
> --Julian, *Oration* I. 13-14

The connection here between the celestial / divine and the mundane in describing Roman territory and boundaries is hardly incidental. Heaven itself, or God himself, revealed to Constantius the boundaries of his empire, and all the space in between. In the Roman world of all periods, images of territorial space were intertwined with cosmology, and thus with world-view.[124] In the words of Nicolet, "territory was not neutral: it was viewed as having a relationship with the cosmos, religiously oriented and pervaded with sanctity."[125] Although Nicolet's description is specific to the early

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[124]Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 12-18 provides a helpful introduction to cosmology and frontiers for the Republic and early Empire. I borrow a definition of "cosmology" from L.H. Martin, *Hellenistic Religions: An Introduction,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 13. "'Cosmology' is used not in the modern philosophical sense to designate a branch of metaphysics but is used in a descriptive sense to designate a model or physical image of the universe." For a more strictly philosophical look at the connection between heaven and earth in Later Roman cosmology, see S. Sambursky, *The Physical World of Late Antiquity,* (London: Routledge, 1962), Chapter 6, "The Unity of Heaven and Earth." This book is not often cited in Late Antique studies, but it does give an interesting look at changing philosophical currents, with some focus on Neo-Platonism in the Later Roman world.

[125]Nicolet, *Space,* 189. See also L. Kong, "Geography and Religion: Trends and Prospects," *Progress in Human Geography* 14.3 (1990): 355-71. Kong analyzes the overlap between geography and religion, addressing briefly ancient cosmology and assessing trends in geographical study which have tended to

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Roman Empire, there is no indication in the sources that such a mentality entirely disappeared in the later Empire.[126] Its focus and format might have shifted, but, as will be seen, the substance essentially remained the same. The very notion of bounded space, assumed by the presence of frontiers, was central to Roman cosmology, and thus frontiers were crucial to a Roman world-view. Anthropologist M. Kearney writes in his work on world-view that "cosmologies are by nature pre-eminently statements about space."[127] It seems natural that Roman views of territory and boundaries cannot be disconnected from cosmology. So much is suggested by the sacrosanctity of borders in a Roman world-view. Behind the Roman imagination of limits to their holdings stood Terminus, the Roman god of boundaries at center and periphery alike, stood [128] Some preliminary remarks on Roman cosmology will set the stage for the descriptions of news and frontiers in the chapters to follow.

During the early Roman empire, the definition of cosmos seemed "to broaden in meaning and more often denotes not just the world as the natural, physical structure of the universe, but especially the inhabited world."[129] Cosmology came to encompass the whole, undifferentiated, realm

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ignore or highlight "religious geography" or "the geography of religion." She writes that "among other questions that merit attention, there is certainly a need to try and understand the processes through which specific environmental objects, landscapes and buildings are invested with meaning of a religious kind," 367.

[126]On the sacralization and desacralization of space in Late Antiquity, comparing pagan and Christian processes, see B. Caseau, "Sacred Landscapes," in *LA* 21-59.

[127]Kearney, *World View*, 92.

[128]See *infra* 244 for more detail on the role of Terminus.

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of the gods, nature, and the human. Sources from this period begin to show the cosmos as the sphere of man's activity, and not just that of the gods or celestial bodies. Pliny as well as the *Gospel of St. John*, for example, refer to the cosmos as the abode of "mankind," "the inhabitants of the world," "the sphere of man's activity," and "the scene of life." Pliny presents cities as well as rivers and islands as basic elements of the cosmos.[130] Although less explicit in the early empire, frontiers, of both divine and human construction, came to be expressed more and more as elements of the cosmos as well. Writing in the early Empire, Pliny would nowhere refer to the boundaries or frontiers of empire, but always to divisions of people groups. When he does refer to the limits of Roman rule, he often connects "the rule of Rome and the rule of *Natura*," thus implying the connection to the cosmos.[131] Other writers of his era likewise refer to frontiers as dividing human groups, rather than space or territories. In general, the later Empire saw a shift away from an exclusively ethnic emphasis of frontiers and more toward literal divisions of territory and space demarcated by those frontiers. The ethnic focus does not go away completely, but it becomes only one mode of expression among many.

If Nicolet is correct (and I think he is) in arguing that the Romans saw no distinction between the celestial and terrestrial worlds, then it follows that a dominant celestial cosmology could never be separate from terrestrial geography. Of the three major cosmologies known in the history of Western

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[129]M. Beagon, *Roman Nature: The Thought of Pliny the Elder*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 53.

[130]Pliny, *Natural History* 7.1; *John* 1:10; 3:17; 7:7; 12:13; 14:17, 22; 15:18, 19; 17:4, 21. See M. Beagon, *Roman Nature*, 53, for these references as well as a list of references to the Church Fathers.

[131]Beagon, *op. cit.* 189, in reference to Pliny, *Natural History* 27.2-5.

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Civilization, the Romans primarily occupied the second, the so-called "Hellenistic" or Ptolemaic cosmology.[132] The Ptolemaic cosmos was part of a key shift in thought of the Hellenistic period and beyond, and one which shaped understanding of the universe for centuries to follow, by most estimations until it was replaced by the Copernican cosmology during and after the sixteenth century.[133] Examples of its influence on the New Testament, for example, suggest that the Ptolemaic cosmology reached beyond a small circle of scholars.[134] According to this cosmology, earth was the center of a systematic cosmos, surrounded by rotating planets and sun. The ordered universe opposed the chaos outside of it. This cosmology extended to the way that the earth, or *terra*, functioned. Romans were sure that their Empire was located at the center of the cosmos. Pliny the Elder as well as Christian writers up to and well beyond Isidore of Seville think within this cosmology.

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[132]Although Ptolemy was a Roman of the second century, his is the formal expression of changes in thought long preceeding him. See Martin, *Hellenistic Religions*. Ptolemaic cosmology replaced a Near Eastern and Classical cosmology in which the ordered cosmos is a flat disc surrounded by or, even floating on the chaos of water. The third cosmology is the Copernican, in which the sun is envisioned as the center of an orderly system.

[133]On the centrality of the Ptolemaic cosmology to the Hellenistic world, see M.P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der Griechischen Religion*, vol. 2, 2nd ed. (München: C.H. Beck, 1961-1967), 702-711. See also E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, (New York: Norton, 1970), chapter 1. L. Martin, *Hellenistic Religion: An Introduction*, provides helpful descriptions in his introduction.

[134]Among commonly-cited examples is *Colossians* 1:17, where Christ is presented in terminology powerfully reminiscent of the Ptolemaic cosmic system -- (καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν). Christian thought was neither cosmologically innovative nor highbrow, so such references do point to a wide and popular diffusion of the Ptolemaic cosmology.

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The assumptions of this cosmology would have permeated all Roman thinking about their world. Their world was part of an ordered cosmos and not merely a large flat space on which empires fought for control of peoples or territory. Isidore of Seville, borrowing from classical images, continued to see the earth (*terra*) in the middle of *mundus*. "Everywhere the ocean flowing around encompasses its borders in a circle." The eastern region of the world was its head, *quasi facies*, and the north the hind part.[135] Although it is difficult to imagine a notion of the world where such cosmological assumptions work together comfortably with images of topography and space, it must be remembered that both fit together naturally in the Roman mind.

Such a view is also clear in the imagery of the sphere, an important component of imperial ideology, and one which could only function within a Ptolemaic cosmology. The large number of associations of the sphere or globe with successful Roman military and/or political leaders is a testimony to the prevalence of the Ptolemaic cosmology.[136] The globe generally symbolizes

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[135]*Etymologies* 3.30.1. Isidore, *Etymologies* 13.5.2, also imagined the *sphaero caelo* as a globe surrounding the seven planets, with earth at its center. For further analysis of the cosmological thought of Isidore, see W.J. Brandt, *The Shape of Medieval History: Studies in Modes of Perception*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 2-11. On the classical background to the idea of Ocean surrounding Earth, see J. S. Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought: Geography, Exploration, and Fiction*, (Princeton, 1992).

[136]For depictions of the sphere on coins and statuary, see Nicolet, *Space*, figs, 5-10, 12. For the early empire, the globe appears on coins associated with Pompey, Augustus, Trajan, and Hadrian, and in a statue of Pompey. For the later Empire, visual and verbal sources associate emperors with the sphere. Numerous coins depict emperors (Valentianian, Valens, Gratian, Maximian) holding onto or associated with a globe. See S. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) 128-29, 166, 174, 177. H. Maguire, *Earth*, also notes the connection of the globe with imperial power and universal dominion on coinage and elsewhere. See also A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantine*, (Paris, 1936), 204 for a discussion of the globe-shaped throne of Christ and its relation to imperial

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imperial power in Late Antique, Byzantine, and Medieval iconography.

Ammianus gives the following example involving such a sphere:

> In this welter of adverse events Constantius' fortune, already
> wavering and at a standstill, showed clearly by signs almost as plain as
> words, that a crisis in his life was at hand. For at night he was alarmed
> by apparitions, and when he was not yet wholly sunk in sleep, the
> ghost of his father seemed to hold out to him a fair child; and when he
> took it and set it in his lap, it shook from him the sphere which he
> held in his right hand and threw it to a great distance. And this
> foretold a change in the state, although the seers gave reassuring
> answers.[137]

The sphere clearly was a powerful sign, connected with the solvency of the

state and with it the cosmos. The communication, "almost as plain as

words," showed the connection of crisis to the sphere in his right hand. The

sphere, or at least strong association with it, showed the possession or loss of

power.

From a slightly later context, Procopius describes Justinian's equestrian

statue thus:

> He directs his glance toward the rising sun, taking, I think his course
> against the Persians. In his left hand he holds a globe, by which the
> sculptor indicates that all land and sea serve him, but he has neither
> sword nor spear or any other weapon, but on his globe there is a cross,
> by which alone he has acquired the empire and victory in war. And
> extending his right hand to the rising sun and spreading out his fingers
> he orders the barbarians in that direction to remain at home and to
> advance no further.[138]

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imagery in the apse mosaic at San Vitale. For analysis of the connection
between the temporal and celestial realms as pictured by spheres, see B.
Bakhouche, "Limites et Quadrillages du Ciel 'De la Sphère au Globe' (à
l'époque impériale)," in Rousselle, *Frontères,* 309-329. See also *infra* Ch. Five,
I b. for analysis of an example of the sphere in late imperial iconography.

[137]21.14.1.

[138]Procopius, *de aedificiis* 1.10.16-19. Quoted in S. MacCormack, *Ceremony.*
Other emperors are described as holding the globe in the right hand. See *infra*
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Again, we see a connection between the solvency of the empire and the fact of frontiers beyond which "barbarians" are not allowed. Emperors who maintain the frontiers are worthy to claim that "the land and sea serve" them. The symbols of majesty, both through his outstretched right hand and the possession of the globe in the left, communicate a strong empire, one whose frontiers would not admit barbarians.

Other examples of the globe appear on coins and in the visual arts, and further connect the globe to the *oikoumene* and the cosmos itself. The iconography of the globe here often shows the dominion of the emperor or figure pictured receiving or holding it. On one coin, Valentinian and Valens sit enthroned, holding a scepter and a globe. Gratian stands between them holding the image of the globe.[139] On another coin Maximian is shown receiving a globe from Diocletian; on other coins he is shown receiving a globe from Jupiter.[140] The globe seems to be specifically linked with him in a powerful and specific way.

The image of a ruler seated on a globe was prevalent and was absorbed readily into Christian symbolism and iconography. Jesus is shown on a globe, signifying his connection with the *oikoumene* and the *cosmos*.[141] The association of Christ and the globe also appears on mosaics. The apse mosaic at San Vitale features Christ seated on a globe. A. Grabar has pointed out that the globe-shaped throne was a symbol of universal dominion for emperors

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[139]MacCormack, *Ceremony*, 166. For further discussion of the connection of the globe to imperial power on coinage, see H. Maguire, *Earth*, 64.

[140]MacCormack, *Ceremony*, 174.

[141]MacCormack, *Ceremony*, 128-29.

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which was taken over in Christian iconography to show the universal rule of Christ.[142]

Both literary and visual evidence, then, show the connection between the cosmos, divinity, and the frontiers. The existence and maintenance of the frontiers is very real in the worldview of Romans. The argument that the "frontier did not matter much" misses entirely a crucial part of the worldview of the Romans of the later Empire and Late Antiquity. Again, there is little justification for viewing the strategic and rational (by our standards) concerns of frontier defense as separate from the realm of the divine which formed a single unit with the readily-visible world. The seen and the unseen worlds were in cosmic union. During the later empire a sphere firmly held in the hand of an emperor is a visual indication of the solvency of the empire, especially due to defended frontiers.[143] Thus, a late Roman cosmology is strongly informed by information from and about frontiers.

That the cosmos can in some way be envisioned as separate from religion and/or mythology is a thoroughly modern notion. To the ancients of any period, cosmology was partially a function of religious beliefs, however the exact expression of those beliefs might have differed from period to period and region to region. The world of the Romans, no less than the world of any ancient peoples, was one in which the "constant intervention of divine powers was taken as a fact of life."[144] Assumptions about the cosmos necessarily are thus shot through with religious meaning. Although he

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[142]For a description of the mosaic, see A. Grabar, *l'empereur dans l'art byzantine*, (Paris, 1936), 204; see also Maguire, *Earth*, 78.

[143]See *infra* Ch. 5 I b.

[144]Potter, *Prophets*, 97.

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dismissed the classical "heresy of affirming that the Heavens were spherical" (he proposed a large, "orthodox" cuboid instead), the sixth-century Byzantine writer Cosmas Indicopleustes wrote nearly half of his *Christian Topography* on topics celestial, even extending it to demons and to angels, who brought about the movements of the heavenly bodies. His description of geography juxtaposes indiscriminately what we might consider divine and mundane elements.[145]

Pagan or Christian, Romans envisioned divine powers holding together the system of the cosmos. Julian, the famous pagan emperor, expressed his views in this way, in his "Hymn to King Helios": "this divine and wholly beautiful cosmos, from the highest vault of the heaven to the lowest limit of the earth (γῆς ἐσχάτης) is held together by the continued providence of the gods."[146] Julian wrote this while on a military campaign to Persia to claim for Rome a new portion of that earth and/or extend his own frontiers. He, no less than his Christian contemporaries, believed that ultimately the will of God or the gods held together the world, even down to its seemingly temporal or mundane boundaries. Most evidence from the period suggests that Julian shared basic world-views with his contemporaries, pagan and Christian. Ammianus, at one point, associates together a shift of the eastern frontier and a disturbance of the cosmos. A portent indicated divine wrath as a certain statue lost the celestial sphere from its hand at the moment the eastern frontier is redefined.[147]

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[145]For an argument that Cosmas presented a widely popular sixth-century picture of the cosmos, see *infra* 144.

[146]Julian, *Oration* 4.132C — ὁ θεῖος οὗτος καὶ πάγκαλος κόσμος ἀπ᾽ ἄκρας ἀψῖδος οὐρανοῦ μέχρι γῆς ἐσχάτης ὑπὸ τῆς ἀλύτου συνεχόμενος τοῦ θεοῦ προνοίας.

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At the heart of this discussion are Roman perceptions of space. What I have called "frontier consciousness" can only be formulated against a backdrop of notions of space. These visualizations were part of a process by which Romans analyzed their world and changes within it. Recent work on Roman space perception, primarily for the early Empire, has shown how impossible it is to ignore Roman assumptions about space when one is exploring Roman frontiers or any other aspect of imperial ideology. In the words, again, of Nicolet: "in order to set boundaries to their Empire and to claim to have reached those that were marked out, the Romans needed a certain perception of geographical space, of its dimensions and of the area they occupied."[148] Within this space Romans could make sense of their administrative framework. And within this space, Romans imagined their Empire and the limits of it. There exists to date no study of space and cosmology for the later Empire.

Anthropological and sociological research on space perception, which has informed all studies of it for Roman or other contexts, shows that it cannot be divorced from a "value system," which some anthropologists prefer to associate with worldview. Some consideration of research on human space perception is helpful in explaining the relationship among some key elements of this dissertation, including information and cosmology. In the words of R.M. Downs, an anthropologist analyzing space-perception:

> The *real world* is taken as the starting point, and it is represented as a source of *information*. The information content enters the individual through a system of *perceptual receptors*, and the precise meaning of

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[147]Amm. Marc. 25.9-10 — See *infra* Ch. 5, I b. for a much more detailed analysis of this episode as it relates to Roman cosmology and divination.

[148]Nicolet, *Space,* 2. This view has been challenged by B. Isaac, *op. cit.* and D. Cherry, *op. cit.* both of whom claim that frontiers were essentially irrelevant as concepts.

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the information is determined by an interaction between the individual's *value system* and their *image of the real world*. The meaning of the information is then incorporated into the image.[149]

Downs imagines here something of a recurrent yet organic system in which new information, filtered through a value system, changes one's perception of the "real world." As new information is processed through perception and that value system, the perceived world itself actually changes, and then fresh information can renew the cycle, so to speak.

The "real world" is thus perceived through a world-view, to impose terminology foreign to Downs' system but widely used by anthropologists such as M. Kearney to describe the same general phenomenon. Downs' model is helpful in suggesting how news (information) can relate to cosmology and worldview. During the later Roman Empire, new information and new types of information, specifically from frontiers, challenged traditional notions of space perception. Thus, an altered world-view emerged, based in both traditional and changing value systems and new information and new types of information.

A visual example of this type of change may be seen in a few depictions of the emperor in Late Roman art. On the so-called Barberini diptych, the traditional Roman ceremony of *adventus*, recognizing the arrival of the emperor, is infused with new meaning. On this piece is presented a "cosmic hierarchy where emperor and empire mediate between Christ in the clouds of heaven, and subjected barbarians."[150] The Roman image of the cosmos here had incorporated new information with the image of the *parousia* of Christ.

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[149]"Geographic Space Perception: Past Approaches and Future Prospects," in *Progress in Geography: International Reviews of Current Research* 2 (1970): 65-108, at 84-5. See 85 in particular for a visual of this process.

[150]S. MacCormack, *Ceremony*, 70-71 and note on plate 22.

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The image of the subject barbarians at the bottom of the diptych, clearly separated by a strong line, suggests Roman images of boundary and of space perception, presented in cosmic time. The base of the column of Arcadius gives a similar example of a changing value-system, of new information producing or reflecting a new image of the real world. Again, the arrival of the emperor is presented in terms of the second coming of Christ, with a clear hierarchy: "Christ in heaven, the emperor on earth, and the subject nations, by means of a division into registers."[151]

The cosmic presentation in these visuals suggests the ways in which the space-perception of the Romans cannot be distinguished from value and belief systems. The divine and mundane were a unit as before, but now a Christian reading of the cosmos mixes with the classical. Such changes, I suggest, were part of a general shift in frontier consciousness during the later Roman Empire.

The Shapes of Roman Geography

As suggested above, there is a general divide among historical geographers on how to interpret human thought and action in geographical and topographical context. On the one hand are the "structural determinists" who hold that people think and act according to the way the world *is;* and on the other hand are the "behaviorists" who stress that people think and act according to the way they *perceive* the world to be.[152] My own position

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[151]*Ibid.,* 71, and plates 20-21.

[152]See R.D. Sacks, *Conceptions of Space in Social Thought* (London, 1986), 95, and D. Gregory and D. Urry, *Social Relations and Spatial Structures,* (London,

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should be fairly clear. I am more interested in how Roman perceptions of such features shaped thought and action than in a scientific, objective analysis of the way their world actually was/is. I wish to take nothing away from studies which use archaelogical survey and aerial photography to determine where Roman frontiers "actually were."[153] But it is my contention here that perceptions and ideologies are seen best, if not exclusively, in texts and visual images.

On the ground, so to speak, the Roman understanding of space was directly related to their understanding of geography. Debates over Roman knowledge of geography and their application of it are intense and far from consensus. But in general, Roman thought has been seen as shaped by two different traditions in geography.[154] The extent to which these two dominant traditions informed Roman thinking is largely a matter of hypothesis, given the paucity of the evidence.

The first of these was the Ptolemaic geographical tradition, which aimed to produce a "graphic representation of the whole known part of the world."[155]

1985), 3. C.R. Whittaker introduces these same divisions in Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 11ff.

[153]See *supra* 23.

[154]Roman traditions of geography have been well explored, especially for the early Empire. Nicolet, *Space*, is now the starting point. Other works include P. Janni, *La mappa e il periplo. Cartografia antica e spazio odologico*, (Rome, 1984); N. Purcell, "The Creation of Provincial Landscape," in T. Blagg and M. Millett, eds. *The Early Roman Empire in the West*, (Oxford: 1990), 6-29; E. Rawson, *Intellectual Life in the Late Roman Republic*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 250-66; F. Cordano, *La geografia degli antichi*, (Rome: Laterza 1993); M. Sordi, *Geografia e geografi nel mondo classico*, (1988); J.B. Harley and D. Woodward, eds. *The History of Cartography*, vol. 1. *Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean*, (Chicago, 1987); Dilke, *Maps*; Lee, *Information*, 81-90; and Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 10-30.

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This tradition, probably the minority, could plot spatial points in relation to others using a demi-Cartesian grid system, and aimed to produce something of a two or even three-dimensional depiction of the globe.[156] In a Ptolemaic system, any given point could be related to any other point on a grid.[157] Ptolemy and Marinus of Tyre worked out a system of projection drawn from 8,000 points, with latitude and longitude coordinates.[158] This tradition, although it would be more influential in the modern period, is less noticeable in Late Antiquity.[159] According to P. Janni, this mode of though aimed to comprehend what he calls *spazio cartografico*, closer to our own understanding of space. Janni points out that this type of study was highly theoretical and was pursued only by a few academics.[160]

The second tradition was more utilitarian and "purely descriptive," more often working with written topographical texts than with graphic representations.[161] This tradition often is seen as the mainstay of military strategists and campaign planners, although Whittaker has recently

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[155]Ptolemy, *Geography* 1.1.1. See also B. Isaac, "Eusebius and the Geography of Roman Provinces," in Kennedy, *Army*, 153-167, at 153-154.

[156]See O.A.W. Dilke, "The Culmination of Greek Cartography in Ptolemy," in Harley and Woodward.

[157]B. Isaac, "Eusebius and the Geography of Roman Provinces," in Kennedy, *Army*, 153-67, at 157.

[158]Nicolet, *Space*, 71.

[159]Although see the related analysis of Late Antique philosophy in S. Sambursky, *The Physical World of Late Antiquity*, (London: Routledge, 1962).

[160]*op. cit.*, 58-65, 79-90, 147-58. Cited in Lee, *Information*, 86.

[161]See, in particular, R.K. Sherk, "Roman Geographical Exploration and Military Maps," *ANRW* II.2:534-62; See also B. Isaac, "Eusebius and the Geography of Roman Provinces," in Kennedy, *Army*, 153-67, at 154; Lee, *Information*, 83-84; Whittaker, *Frontiers*, chapter 1.

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challenged its prevalence even among them, at least for the early empire.[162] More geographical information, it must be noted, was available to emperors of the later empire, especially since the Later Empire witnessed the increased presence of the emperor on the frontier. And an increase in the number of eastern campaigns, as well as in the presence of literate soldiers, increased the available knowledge of the geography at and even beyond frontiers.[163]

This second tradition was probably the one on which Julian relied when, due to his extensive reading before his Persian campaign, he was "as informed about the geography of the region as if he had been born there, such long acquaintance with the terrain had his books given him even when he was far away."[164] It seems that Julian was able to read up on the geography of the Roman frontier region and beyond in available books and in pamphlets prepared by soldiers and other travelers in the frontier zones and beyond.[165] This geographical tradition imagined points on a line in relation to each other. According to Janni, this common system of imagining space was closely related to the Roman method of road construction; Roman *spazio*

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[162]Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 63 -- "Neither generals nor emperors can have had much of an idea about the geography of an area before beginning a campaign." Isaac also questions the extent to which Roman generals could have received geographical information other than by word of mouth from old centurions. See Isaac, "Eusebius and the Geography of Roman Provinces," 155.

[163]See *infra*, Ch. Four I a. for a description of such accounts of the topography written during campaigns.

[164]Libanius, *Oration* 18.246. Libanius records that Julian also relied on captives to supplement his knowledge. In fact, one old captive was forced to tell the truth to Julian once that man discovered the extent of Julian's knowledge which could corroborate his descriptions.

[165]See *infra*, Ch. Four I a. for more analysis of these written descriptions prepared and used by soldiers.

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odologico was defined in terms of points along a road. Thus, Janni contends, the vast majority of Romans really only conceived of space as linear, rather than two- or three-dimensional. This is the presentation of the *itinerariae*, of which many are extant, as well as the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, which seems to be a visual depiction of an *itineraria*. Both the written and the visual forms conceive of the world as being laid out along a road system or systems.[166]

As foreign as this linear geography is to our own cartographic mentality, recent historical geographers have begun to suggest that the difference might not be as extreme as it seems at first glance. Nicolet, in particular, has criticized attempts to put forward a "'natural' difference between the ancient way of thinking and our own." A linear mentality, he contends, "must not systematically be set in opposition to a cartographic mentality, which only appeared in modern times and which brought about a totally new vision of space in two dimensions, through complete charts based on astronomical measurements and on actual triangulation."[167] Although the ancient understanding was far different from ours, there does seem to be no reason to deny outright any type of global vision to ancient cartographers. In fact, as Nicolet has argued, from Augustus onward, knowledge and representation of the imperial sphere implied "the creation of a geography, chorography and a cartography that were coherent and progressively improving."[168] Nicasie provides a useful description of Roman thinking about geography. While

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[166]See O.A.W. Dilke, "Itineraries and Geographical Maps," and "Maps in the Service of the State: Roman Cartography," both in Harley and Woodward, 177-275. Roman *itinerariae* from the Christian period are collected in CC 175 along with other geographical works from the later Empire.

[167]Nicolet, *Space*, 70-71.

[168]*Ibid.*, 125.

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not taking for granted the differences in Roman and modern ways of viewing space, neither does he aim to show how little the Romans were capable of compared to modern geographical abilities.

The Roman cartographic mentality was, it must be remembered, different from ours in crucial ways. Janni warns against "taking for granted the thought-world of easy, habitual map-literacy" so standard in the modern world when one looks at the ancient world.[169] As another recent commentator has put it, "using maps must be learnt . . . the mental translation of two-dimensional graphic representations into larger surfaces, is an acquired skill."[170] Thus, to a writer like Eusebius a given point can only be located in relation to one or two other points, and those in a straight line.[171]

That Romans knew about some type of maps and used them fairly regularly is beyond doubt; the format and method of using those maps involves a bit more conjecture. Vegetius, a late fourth / early fifth century writer on military strategy, records:

> indeed, the more conscientious generals reportedly had itineraries of the provinces in which the emergency occurred not just annotated but illustrated as well, so that they could choose their route when setting out by the visual aspect as well as by mental calculation.[172]

Such a description shows a new development in thought and in campaigning. Such visual images are not attested before the later Roman

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[169]*op. cit.* 62-4; Janni's words translated and cited in Lee, *Information*, 87.

[170]Isaac, "Eusebius and the Geography of Roman Provinces," in Kennedy, *Army*, 157.

[171]*Ibid.*

[172]Vegetius, *Epitoma rei militaris* 3.6, ed. C. Lang, (Teubner, 1885). On this passage, see M.J. Nicasie, *Twilight of Empire: The Roman Army from the Reign of Diocletian until the Battle of Adrianople*, (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1998), 163-64.

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Empire. These most likely would have looked something like the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, with visual depictions of the natural and civic features of the Empire laid out in a long horizontal panel.

The difficulty is in assessing how Roman knowledge of geography shaped their worldview, and vice versa. The field is wide open, but one note of caution seems necessary. To imply, as some recent writers seem to do, that a few Romans conjectured about theoretical geography and even cosmology in their spare time, but that all knew to overlook these crucial elements of their world-view when things like defense of the empire was called for, simply does not stand up in light of the evidence. The Romans, as will be seen, simply did not divide thought into tidy, modern categories.

Furthermore, a third "tradition" of geographical knowledge appears in the sources, one which challenges the basic idea that only academics, generals, and statesmen, if anyone cared or knew anything about geography.[173] There is some indication of interest in educating the Roman public in geography by means of large wall maps. Although references in existing literature to such wall maps are clear, none of the maps survive. The most famous one from the early empire was the world map of Agrippa, erected in a portico in Rome on the east side of the Via Lata. We know of this particular map through a reference to it by Pliny.[174] In the Late Empire, Theodosius II ordered a map of the world for display, at a school in Constantinople.[175] A surviving

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[173]Isaac and Cherry, both claim that Romans knew or cared little about geography. See *infra* 107.

[174]*Natural History* 3.16-17. See Dilke, *Maps*, 41-53, for a description of this particular map.

[175]On the location of this map, see W. Wolska-Conus, "La 'carte de Théodose II: sa destination?," *Travaux et mémoires* 5 (1973), 274-79.

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hexameter poem describing Theodosius' wall map gives us some indication

of what it would have included:

> This famous work -- including all the world,
> Seas, mountains, rivers, harbours, straits and towns,
> Uncharted areas -- so that all might know,
> Our famous, noble, pious Theodosius
> Most venerably ordered when the year
> Was opened by his fifteenth consulship.
> We servants of the emperor (as one wrote,
> The other painted), following the work
> Of ancient mappers, in not many months
> Revised and bettered theirs, within short space
> Embracing all the world. Your wisdom, sire,
> It was that taught us to achieve this task.[176]

A further map, from the very end of the third century, to be explored in more

detail in the next chapter, was designed "for educational purposes" in order to

"let the schoolchildren see it in those porticoes, ... rivers, oceans, peoples."[177]

The intent here seems to be that they may see their vast empire and keep up

on happenings throughout it, especially occurrences at the peripheries, , as

will be argued in the next chapter. Such a usage does not quite fit the image

of geography only for arcane academics and generals, and suggests a third

category of Roman understanding of geography, at a more popular level.[178]

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[176]Trans. in Dilke, *Maps*, 169-70. For the Latin, see A. Riese ed., *Geographi Latini minores* (Heilbronn, 1878, repr. Hildesheim, 1964). See *infra*, Ch. 3 for more description of these maps in relation to natural frontiers.

[177]*Panegyrici* N&R, 9.21. The next chapter begins with this episode.

[178]It might be noted that geography was not recognized as a discrete subject in Roman education, but could be a valuable subsidiary to a variety of subjects such as geometry, astronomy and literature. For education in antiquity see H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*. trans. G. Lamb (New York: Mentor, 1956). Late Roman geographical education can be surmised from geographical handbooks from Late Antiquity which were likely used as school texts -- Dionysius' *Periegesis*, Julius Honorius' *Cosmographia* and Stephanus Byzantinus, *Ethnika*. For a brief discussion of these texts, more concerned, it

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One visual depiction survives which might give some indication of what such maps looked like. On a parchment fragment discovered earlier in the last century at Dura Europos, near the Eastern frontier, there is a small painted map. According to one estimation, the map can be dated to just before A.D. 260.[179] The map gives a fairly accurate portrayal of the north shore of the Black Sea, the Danube River, and a few other points along with a few mileage indicators. The points are listed along the shore and show an attempt at a two-dimensional rendering of space. It is generally believed that this parchment was affixed to the inside of a shield, and was used on an eastern campaign. Not much more can be said with certainty about this map, but it might give some indication, on a small scale, of the type of rendition given in the wall maps of the early and later empire.[180]

Geography and Boundaries

The relationship of geographical knowledge with Roman understanding of frontiers is fairly clear in available sources. It has become somewhat fashionable in Roman frontier studies of late to hold that the Romans "knew or ... cared little about geography."[181] Such a view largely has been formulated against Luttwak's Grand Strategy notion. Fortification lines at the

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seems, with how "wrong" they are to the modern eye than with their place in Roman education, see Lee, *Information*, 82-85.

[179]Dilke, *Maps*, 120-21.

[180]For further discussion of this map, and illustrations of it, see F. Cumont, *Fouilles de Doura Europos, 1922-1923,* (Paris, 1926), 323-337 and pls. 109, 110; R. Uhden, "Bemerkungen zu dem römischen Kartenfragment von Dura Europos," *Hermes* 67 (1932): 117-25.

[181]D. Cherry, *Frontier and Society in Roman North Africa,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 32.

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peripheries of the empire seem, to the modern eye, irregular, unscientific, and even random.[182] These observations supposedly debunk the idea that Romans could ever have had a universal strategy, simply because they had no global geography. As Isaac puts it:

> There is no evidence, in fact, that geography determined the boundaries of the empire. . . what we know of ancient geography indicates that it had by no means reached the level required to provide military planners with global strategic insight of the sort required for a territorial strategy.[183]

But such conclusions seems to take us far beyond the evidence. Available sources do suggest that Romans cared a great deal about geography, especially during the later empire. Their interests and potential might pale in comparison to our modern understanding, and might not have been aimed at our notions of strategy, but it seems that the historian's job should be to try to understand the Romans rather than to critique their "deficiencies." The task is one which cannot necessarily be done using traditional historical methods. "To comprehend the importance of geography for the mentality and ideology of this period, it is important not only to reread and scrutinize maps, authors, and official texts, but also iconographical and architectural works -- in short, archaeology."[184] Such wide readings of non-traditional historical materials invariably have challenged what has become the received knowledge on Roman geographical understanding.

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[182]Ibid.

[183]Isaac, "Luttwak's 'Grand Strategy' and the Eastern Frontier of the Roman Empire," in French and Lightfoot, 233 -- Isaac also writes -- "We have no indication that the Roman empire systematically collected and interpreted information beyond the territory under Roman control." This idea has been challenged effectively by Lee, Information, passim.

[184]Nicolet, Space, 9. Archaeology, incidentally, is an approach Isaac finds unhelpful for his own study. See Limits, 6-7.

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To understand a late Roman view of geography, it is necessary to assess a variety of texts expressing views of the world. The Late Roman Empire was a time of intense transition, and scenes often present a certain level of tension. Late Roman knowledge of geography brought myth, Biblical texts, and classical cosmology to its understanding of frontiers and boundaries. Myth played a crucial role in the Roman imagination of space and frontiers. D. Braund has argued that myth was critical in defining the Roman frontier in the Caucasus region, for example.[185] To the extent that myth does structure the world and helps make sense of it, Romans relied on it when observing or imagining their frontiers with foreign peoples or with another's territory.[186] One feature of the world chroniclers of Late Antiquity is the means by which they imagine the history of the world, including remote stories and hoary myths, playing out anachronistically in terms of their own Late Antique context. One such way they do this is to imagine various myths enacted along the Roman *limes*. For the most part, these references reflect images of the frontier from the perspective of the fourth century or later.[187] For example, Malalas records that Orestes took Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, and "traveled to the East, to the Saracen *limes*, and reached Trikomia in the land of Palestine."[188] His spatial dimensions here are late Roman. And again, Tauros, the emperor of Crete, fights Agenor and his sons

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[185]D. Braund, "The Caucasian Frontier: Myth, Exploration and the Dynamics of Imperialism," in Kennedy, *Army*, 31-49, at 34.

[186]*Ibid.*, 39.

[187]For the change in meaning in *limes*, see B. Isaac, "The Meaning of *Limes* and *Limitanei*." The examples I present here use *limes* in a way unknown before the fourth century.

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in the east, on the *limes*.[189] Such references, conflating events of the remote

and mythical past with contemporary Roman situations, remind us that there

was no clear divide between the world of myth and lived experience when

Romans imagined their imperial frontiers.

Supernatural elements were also seen as defining frontiers, or at least

boundaries. The author(s) of the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* record(s) that

"many declare that there is a certain decree of fate that no emperor may

advance beyond Ctesiphon, and that the emperor Carus was struck by lighting

because he desired to pass beyond the bounds which fate has set up."[190] The

author of this passage himself was not quite convinced by the story, believing

instead that Carus had been killed by an illness; many did believe that there

was something supernatural about such boundaries.[191] Aurelius Victor

records the same incident, claiming that in spite of oracles of warning, Carus

had indeed passed "immodestly and vaingloriously" beyond Ctesiphon and

had thereby paid the price by being struck dead with a thunderbolt.[192] A

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[189]30.

[190]*Carus* 9.1 — *hanc ego epistulam idcirco indidi quod plerique dicunt vim fati quandam esse, ut Romanus princeps Ctesiphontem transire non possit, ideoque Carum fulmine absumptum quod eos fines transgredi cuperet qui fataliter constituti sunt.* D&L 114.

[191]The author goes on to reveal what seems to be his own view of Roman frontiers. Referring to the famous victories of the Caesar Maximian [i.e. Galerius] in 297, he declares that it was always granted to the Romans "to conquer the Persians and advance beyond them, and methinks this will surely come to pass if only our men fail not to live up to the promised favor of Heaven"; *Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Carus,* 9.1

[192]*Liber de Caesaribus* 38.3. Festus, *Brev.* 24, Eutropius 9.18.1; Jerome, *Chronicon s.a.* 284; *Epitome de Casaribus* 38.1; Orosius, *adversos paganos* 7.24.4; Sidonius Appollinaris, *Carmina* 23.91-6; Jordanes, *Historia Romana* 294; and Syncellus, p.472 all record outright that Carus was killed by lightning, although none of these mention the element of fate. Cedrenus 1, p. 464, 6-9,

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similar reference records that the emperor Julian's big mistake was that he had disobeyed a sibylline prophecy which proclaimed that "the emperor must not that year leave his frontiers (*limitibus*)."[193] Again, the connection of frontiers to divinity is unmistakable. Ammianus elsewhere records that one of the blessings bestowed by Fortuna upon Julian was that "no barbarians crossed his frontiers (*fines*)."[194]

Biblical stories could function similarly to myth in world chronicles. John Malalas, combining chronology of Greek mythology and Biblical story, records that after the time of King Minos, Solomon built a city on the *limes* which he called Palmyra ("Past Fate"), because in the past the village had been fatal for Goliath whom his father had slain there."[195] The reference point of the Roman eastern frontier is read anachronistically into the Biblical and pre-classical past. Later, Malalas records, Mary and Joseph departed to Persian territory by way of the *limes*.[196] The reader and/or hearer of biblical stories could thus fit them into a framework of a Roman conception of space.

One cannot ignore such images when trying to make sense of Roman conceptions of space and frontiers. The difficulty is in how to read such references. They only survive in Malalas' account, and thus might be attributable to his imagination. The temptation is there, however, to read them in terms of his audience. As maintained throughout this study, texts

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records that he was killed by plague. Zonaras 12.30 records the lightning story but also adds that some say Carus was killed fighting the Huns.

[193]Amm. Marc. 18.1.6.

[194]22.9.11.

[195]143.

[196]231.

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are not personal symbol-systems.[197] The western pilgrim Egeria began

studying for her eastward trek by perusing all the books of the Old and New

Testaments for their descriptions of "the holy wonders of the world, and its

regions, provinces, cities, mountains, and deserts."[198] Her notion of

geography was shaped powerfully by Biblical texts, as is clear throughout her

pilgrimage account. The same must be said of Cosmas Indiceuplestes, who

based his entire description of the universe on his interpretation of biblical

passages.

The relationship of geography and boundaries also may be seen in

descriptions of the Roman empire as extending to or almost to the bounds of

the earth itself. The boundaries of the empire become, in a certain sense, the

boundaries of the earth.[199] Such references speak at some level to Roman

cosmic notions of space. Orosius speaks of the Roman Empire as being

extended "almost to the outermost boundaries of the earth."[200] The pilgrim

Egeria, who traveled probably from Spain to the eastern frontier of the

Empire, is described by a biographer as traveling to the "other side of the

world."[201] In another section, the same biographer describes her journey "to

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[197]See *supra* 42-43.

[198]"The Letter in Praise of the Life of the Most Blessed Egeria Written to his
Brethren Monks of the Bierzo by Valerius," 1 in J. Wilkinson, *Egeria's
Travels*, (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1999), p. 200-204 at 201.

[199]See J. Romm, *Edges of the Earth,* especially Chapter One, "The Boundaries
of the Earth."

[200]*Historiae ad paganos* 6.14.

[201]"Letter of Valerius," 1, p. 200. Valerius is a 7th-century Galician monk. His
descriptions of Egeria's journeys preserve the idea that her travels throughout
what was the Roman Empire were equivalent to travelling the whole world.
His letter was written about 680, and was part of the training of the monks of
Bierzo (Vierzo). On the life of Valerius, see P. Maravel and M. Díaz y Díaz,

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the bounds of almost the whole earth" and enumerates her "labor of traveling the whole world."[202] Her travels throughout the earth are a means of seeking "the kingdom of heaven on high; . . . as she trod this earth, she was obtaining paradise in calm and exultant glory."[203] Egeria herself records that when she is greeted by the bishop of Edessa, a city near the eastern frontier, he greets her warmly because of her journey from "the other end of the earth."[204] Such descriptions suggest ways in which Romans used the language of boundaries as points of reference.

Before the third century, the dominant if not the only means of referring to frontiers is in the context of an ever-expanding hegemony of the Romans. If that expansion stopped in any place, it was only because it was convenient to do so, and because going further would lead into useless areas and empty voids or might include unwanted persons. On the one hand, Pompey's *Res Gestae* claims that he "extended the frontiers of the empire to the limits of the earth."[205] Early imperial references were bound to the ideology of *imperium sine fine*, and with few exceptions they present Roman frontiers as ever-expanding to natural or logical stopping points.[206] But on the other, Romans did see a convenient end to their expansion at the point of unwanted peoples. Appian records in the second century, for example, that

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Égérie, Journal de Voyage (Itineraire) et Lettre sur la Bienheureuse Égérie, (Paris: *Sources Chrétiennes* 296, 1996).

[202]*Ibid.*

[203]*Ibid.*

[204]19.5.

[205]Diodorus Siculus, 40.4 — καὶ τὰ ὅρια τῆς ἡγεμονίας τοῖς ὅροις τῆς γῆς προσβιβάσας.

[206]For the early empire, see, in particular, S. Dyson, *The Creation of the Roman Frontiers*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

on the whole, prudently possessing the best parts of land and sea, [the Roman emperors] choose to preserve their empire rather than extend it indefinitely over poor and profitless barbarian peoples. In Rome I have seen embassies of some of these offering themselves as subjects, but the emperor did not accept them as they would be useless to him.[207]

By the late Empire, however -- and this is crucial to understanding Late Roman frontier consciousness -- this way of viewing the world is only one of the options. A whole array of sources presents a range to Roman thinking about frontiers which suggests a definite shift. The parameter of presentations suggest the limits, so to speak, of Roman thought on the spatial dimensions of their frontiers. The ideology of *imperium sine fine* continues, but along with it are notions that the frontiers are defensive barriers, that they are placed against outsiders, and that they demarcate a clear space known as the *Imperium Romanorum*.

Key sources on imperial and frontier ideology from the late third century onward are the surviving panegyrics from Late Antiquity. Panegyric gives insight into the world-view of Romans at many levels by indicating how Romans viewed the temporal and spatial limits to their world at specific moments in time. Looking at tacit dimensions of world-view can show us something about the long periods of peace between punctuating moments of crisis and disaster.[208]

The panegyrics present frontier consciousness in a variety of paradoxical or even contradictory ways. The strengthening or perceived strengthening of frontiers provided orators with specific and concrete reference points in their

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[207]Appian, *Praef.* 7.25-28.

[208]The need for such a view has been hinted at in J.W. Eadie's review of Lee, *Information*, in *American Historical Review* (June 1995), 883-884.

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praise of the emperors. Audiences of such panegyrics would have appreciated the factual grounding of these references even amidst the epideictic or display rhetoric. S. MacCormack, in her influential study of ceremony in Late Antiquity, has pointed out that Roman audiences would have been conditioned to sort facts as "facts" from facts as symbols and tokens of imperial majesty.[209] The praise or flattery, therefore, would fall flat if not grounded in some type of perceived fact about Roman frontiers. Information about frontiers was thus helpful in describing the solvency of the Roman Empire. Panegyricists handled the frontiers in a few specific ways. The variety here shows the relation of space and frontiers in the late Roman mind.

First, and connecting to Roman structural ideologies such as *imperium sine fine*, most panegyrics imply that Romans are firmly in control of where they place their ever-expanding imperial frontiers. The image is one of growth which would eventually lead to the take-over the whole world, or at least what was worth having. A panegyric from the last decade of the third century highlights how, through his campaigns into Germany, the emperor Maximianus has expanded indefinately the frontiers of the empire:

> Indeed, could there have eventuated a greater one than that famous crossing of yours into Germany, by which you first of all, Emperor, proved that there were no bounds to the Roman Empire except those of your arms. For previously it seemed that Nature herself had mapped out the Rhine so that the Roman provinces might be protected from the savagery of the barbarian by that boundary. And before your Principate who ever failed to offer thanks that Gaul was protected by that river?[210]

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[209]MacCormack, *Ceremony*, 2, 268, etc.

[210]*Panegyrici*, N&R 10.7.2-4 — *Quod autem maius euenire potuit illa tua in Germaniam transgressione, qua tu primus omnium, imperator, probasti Romani imperii nullum esse terminum nisi qui tuorum esset armorum?*

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Maximianus is connected directly to the solvency of the Empire through his defense of the Roman frontiers. He is praised in different panegyrics for "extending the boundaries of Rome by means of *virtus*,"[211] and for traversing "the frontiers tirelessly where the Roman Empire presses upon barbarian peoples."[212] The theme of indefinite expansion continues in this and subsequent panegyrics as emperors are praised for "so many frontiers pushed forward"[213], for pushing forward "the boundaries of Roman power by means of *virtus*,"[214] and for traversing "the frontiers tirelessly where the Roman Empire presses upon barbarian peoples."[215]

Second, and in some tension with the first usage, many panegyrics imply a static frontier along which Romans live and fight, a frontier they maintain against the harshest attacks. The language now highlights the defensive nature of Roman frontiers. In one panegyric, Constantius I, the father of Constantine, is praised for "protecting the whole frontier" near the Rhine "by the terror inspired by [his] presence."[216] In other panegyrics, speakers rejoice

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Atqui Rhenum antea uidebatur ipsa sic Natura duxisse, ut eo limite Romanae prouincae ab immanitate barbariae uindicarentur. Ecquis umquam ante uos principes non gratulatus est Gallias illo amne muniri?

[211]*Panegyrici*, N&R 10.9.1 — *uirtute Romanum limitem uictoria protulit.*

[212]*Panegyrici* N&R 7.14.1 — *te, iuuenis, indefessum ire per limites qua Romanum barbaris gentibus instat imperium.*

[213]*Panegyrici* N&R 8.1.4 — *<tot> prolati limites.*

[214]*Panegyrici*, N&R 8.3.3 — *qui Romanae potentiae terminos uirtute protulerunt.*

[215]*Panegyrici*, N&R 7.14.1 — *te, iuuenis, indefessum ire per limites qua Romanum barbaris gentibus instat imperium.*

[216]*Panegyrici*, N&R 8.13.3 — *Tu enim ipse, tu domine Maximiane, imperator aeterne, nouo itineris compendio aduentum diuinitatis tuae accelerare*

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at all the "camps of cavalry units and cohorts reestablished along the Rhine, Danube, and Euphrates frontiers"[217] and "the Rhine secure with armies stationed along the whole border"[218] -- certainly reasonable cause for rejoicing after the third century. Here, we see that the medium of panegyric reveals, even if unintentionally, questions about world mastery which must have been on the minds of many Romans at all levels, even those far from the frontier zones. For panegyrics were delivered and circulated throughout the empire. The emphasis is on re-establishment in the face of hostile foes.

In the process of defining or re-defining their own imperial power, a changing Roman attitude appears. One panegyricist goes into some detail on how living on these frontiers shapes the character of Romans at the periphery. He praises an emperor for coming from an area

> whose frontier, exposed to the enemy (although a beaten one) and always arrayed in arms, has taught [him] the tireless habit of toil and patience, in provinces where all of life is military service, whose women even are braver than the men of other lands.[219]

Third, alongside these ambiguous uses of frontier images are indications of a belief that the Roman Empire was always (or at least should be) coterminous with the world and thus had no frontiers. One emperor is

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dignatus repente Rheno institisti, omnemque illum limitem non equestribus neque pedestribus copiis des presentiae tuae terrore tutatus es.

[217]*Panegyrici,* N&R 9.18.4 -- *Nam quid ego alarum et cohortium castra percenseam toto Rheni et Histri et Eufratae limite restituta.*

[218]*Panegyrici,* N&R 12.2.6 -- *Rhenum tu quidem toto limite dispositis exercitibus tutum reliqueras.*

[219]*Panegyrici,* N&R 11.3.9 -- *non enim in otiosa aliqua deliciisque corrupta parte terrarum nati institutique estis, sed in his prouinciis quas ad infatigabilem consuetudinem laboris atque patientiae fracto licet oppositus hosti, armis tamen semper instructus limes exercet, in quibus omnis uita militia est, quarum etiam feminae ceterarum gentium uiris fortiores sunt.*

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praised for having "conquered everywhere,"[220] and for conquering beyond

the limits where the sun rises and sets.[221] This image also occurs in a speech

by Libanius. Libanius presents the scale of Empire as "from the west to the

rising sun."[222] A number of passages highlight Maximianus' defense of the

frontiers. In fact, among surviving panegyrics hardly any other emperor is

more specifically associated with Roman frontiers than he, due to his

momentous redrawing of the Eastern frontier with his defeat of Narses in

298.[223] Continuing the theme, one panegyricist claims that Constantine "the

Great" has made fortifications along what were once frontier zones into

"ornaments to adorn" rather than to protect -- the restitution was so complete

that military defense was no longer necessary.[224] The variety among these

usages of frontiers in the panegyrics suggests a highly diluted *imperium sine*

fine ideology, and a shift to something else.

Beyond the Boundaries of Empire

Much has been made recently of the idea that the Romans thought in

terms of peoples, not territories. Therefore, it is claimed, Romans thought of

themselves as conquering human groups rather than space when they

moved beyond what once were frontiers. B. Isaac provides a clear example of

such an assertion, claiming that "there can be no doubt that the focus of

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[220]*Ibid.*, 4.4 -- *sciunt tamen uos ubique uicisse.*

[221]*Ibid.*, 6.6.

[222]*Oration* 17.32.

[223]See J.W. Eadie, "The Transformation of the Eastern Frontier, 260-305," in Mathisen and Sivan, eds., 72-82.

[224]*Panegyrici*, N&R 8.11.5, 13.1.

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Roman imperialism tended to be ethnic rather than territorial or geographic. The Romans conquered peoples, not land."[225] However true this may have been for the early Empire, and Isaac gives plenty of examples from early imperial writings to suggest that it might have been, it simply is not defensible universally for the later Empire, although it often is assumed as such.[226] Appian did speak of "the boundary of the peoples subject to the Romans," rather than "the boundary of the Empire." But such a differentiation cannot hold completely past the third century.[227] The problem, it seems, is that ideology and ideas of the early empire are frozen in time and then read by recent historians into the later Empire, without a great deal of warrant.

A change occurred in the Roman way of thinking about territory, part of what I am calling a shift to Late Roman frontier consciousness. Specifically from the third century onward, Romans did begin to think of their holding in terms of bounded territories and not just divisions between peoples; frontiers became part of their world-view. It was not until the third century, in fact, that Augustus was seen, albeit anachronistically, as hedging the empire

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[225]Isaac, *Limits*, 394-401, at 395.

[226]For an opposing view for the early Empire, see Nicolet, *Space*, which is based on the idea that Romans did have a definite sense of the space they occupied and of space which was not theirs.

[227]The example here is drawn from Isaac, *Limits*, 396, quoting Appian, *Praef.* I. Nicasie, *Twilight of Empire*, specifically challenges Isaac on this point as well by emphasizing that many of the enemies the Romans faced in the fourth century were sedentary or at most semi-nomadic peoples. "To differentiate between the population of a given region and the region itself thus seems to be a classic example of a scholar throwing much darkness on a subject, since the one usually came with the other; I fail to understand how it is possible to conquer a sedentary people without conquering its territory," 175.

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around with natural frontiers such as rivers, deserts, and mountains (on which more in the next chapter).

One way to assess the later Roman understanding of boundaries is to consider Roman analyses of the space beyond. An initial problem is that conservatism in terminology makes it difficult to assess in some cases whether "*Imperium Romanorum*" in the sources refers specifically to "Imperial rule of the Roman people," or, whether it reflected a transition to a strong territorial connotation. The shift in meaning from *imperium* to Empire, imperial rule to the bounded territory of empire, was gradual, and followed the pattern of other Roman designations of space.[228] The transfer in concept from the limits of one's rule or hegemony to a definite spatial area was perfectly natural to the Romans. The most famous example is the change in meaning of "*provincia*" from the power prescribed to a given magistrate to what we know as "province," a bounded territory whose borders were clearly demarcated.[229] Less known is the development in meaning of the provincial subdivision known as *conventus*. Beginning as a gathering of Romans for legal or commercial reasons, the *conventus* eventually became associated with the space of that central meeting, and then the territory from which people could gather. Some provinces then were divided up into bounded *conventus* districts for purposes of administration.[230] So, the

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[228]See Nicolet, *Space*, 15, for discussion of the semantic links between power and territory.

[229]On which see A. Lintott, *Imperium Romanum: Politics and Administration*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 59-61, and W.T. Arnold, *The Roman System of Provincial Administration to the Accession of Constantine the Great*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1914), 8-9.

[230]See E. Albertini, *Les Divisions Administratives de l'Espagne Romaine*, (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1923); J.J. von Norstrand, "The Reorganization of Spain by Augustus," *University of California Publications in History* 4:1 (1916); A.

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transition of terminology from designating hegemony and/or administration exerted over a given space, to the space itself, was not unprecedented, and shows the way in which geographical meaning can be flexible and organic.

The Romans, especially those of later Roman Empire, clearly had a concept of an end to their claims, the influence of the ideology of *"imperium sine fine"* notwithstanding. Many available sources, particularly of the later Roman Empire, refer to Romans going outside of space that was the *Imperium Romanorum* by going beyond its boundaries. Libanius, for example, in summarizing the campaign of Julian, claimed that Julian "passed beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire and still ruled over it: physically he might be in enemy territory, but he retained his own empire under his sway, and whether present or absent, he had the same ability to enforce universal peace."[231] The emphasis is on Julian's projection of power -- a perfectly Roman notion in any period -- but there is a definite spatial aspect embedded in this reference. From the perspective of one inside the bounds of Empire, Julian had gone beyond the Roman frontier and into the territory of another. It seems impossible to read the γῆς as anything other than a territorial description of the Roman Empire. *Imperium* might be read as exclusively "power" with no territorial connotations, but γῆ is a bit more difficult to deal with this way. The βασιλεία also might be open to multiple readings, but it is clear that Libanius, at least, conceived of the Empire as a territorial and space division and not just as a people. Furthermore, the substantive use of τῇ πολεμίᾳ clearly refers to enemy territory; the phrase is

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Tranoy, *La Galice Romaine: Reserches sur le nord-ouest de la peninsule iberique dans l'Antiquite* (Paris: Diffusion de Boccard, 1981).

[231]*Oration* 18.300 -- οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τῆς Ῥωμαίων γῆς ἔξω τε ὢν ὁμοῦ καὶ κρατῶν καὶ τὸ μὲν σῶμα ἔχων ἐν τῇ πολεμίᾳ, τὴν δ' οἰκείαν ὑπὸ τῇ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ταὐτὸν δυνηθεὶς πρός γε τὸ πάντα ἡσυχάζειν ἀπών τε ὁμοίως καὶ παρών.

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common enough with the γῆ or χώρα understood.[232] If that is not so, then Libanius' rhetoric must necessarily have fallen on deaf ears. For what was Julian's accomplishment if it were not ruling the "land," not just the people, of the Romans even while he was specifically outside of it? Although hard data on worldview shifts would be impossible to discover, such references do suggest a change in frontier consciousness as well as a consequent change in ways of imagining territory. Other examples come from a variety of Late Roman sources. Sozomen records that Julian, after he had defeated Ctesiphon, was "no longer desirous of proceeding further, but wishing only to return to the Roman Empire," burnt his vessels. A guide, although a secret Persian sympathizer, volunteered to take his "army very speedily to the Roman frontiers."[233] The implication, again, is that there was a definite point at which they would be in Roman territory, not just "among the Roman people rather than among the Persian people" or something to that effect.

A further example comes from a letter of Libanius written to a certain Aristainetos, concerning an ambassador to the Persians named Spectatus. Libanius records that upon Spectatus' return from the embassy, many saw him as very fortunate because he had seen the land, mountains, and rivers of the Persians.[234] Such examples as these could be multiplied many times over

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[232]See Liddell and Scott, for references.

[233]Sozomen, *historia ecclesiastica* 6.1.9-12 — *fore ut brevi exercitum in Romanorum finibus sisteret.* D&L 270.

[234]*Epistula* 334. St. Basil, *Epistula* 1, also writes of a philosopher friend taking the road to Persia (ἐπὶ Πέρσας), another of many possible references to Persia as a territory, not just conected with an ethnic designation. Interestingly, in the same passage he also mentions the "uttermost region of the barbarians" (μήκιστον τῆς βαρβάρων), showing that the older notion of viewing peoples rather than territories did not die out.

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for the later Empire to show that Roman audiences conceptualized boundaries as literal divisions among the space-claims of various peoples. The boundaries then, *pace* Isaac, did indeed have relevance. The ancient knowledge of space seems not to have been limited to the concept of hegemony over peoples occupying a given space.

Egeria's account of her pilgrimage also provides examples. When she asks a bishop the whereabouts of Ur, she is told that "the place you seek is 10 staging-posts from here, inside Persian lands. From here to Nisibis is five staging-posts, and it is five more from there to Ur, which was the city of the Chaldees; but at present, Romans are not allowed to go there, since that whole area belongs to the Persians." "This area in particular," the bishop continues, "lies on the border between Roman, Persian or Chaldean lands" and "it is called the Eastern province."[235] Such descriptions are difficult to imagine absent literal boundaries which were known and appreciated by Romans locally at the frontier. Again, however, at the end of the passage, the bishop tells Egeria that the area she seeks is in the "borderlands between Romans and Persians" (*confinium Romanorum et Persarum*), suggesting that the notion of borders between people groups persists. This is hardly surprising. Such descriptions of borders between peoples have, in fact, persisted to the present day despite our own modern fixation with nations and clearly demarcated borders.

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[235]20.12 – *Illud etiam requisiui a sancto episcopo, ubinam esset locus ille Chaldeorum ubi habitaurerant primo Thara cum suis. Tunc ait mihi ipse sanctus episcopus: "Locus ille, filia, quem requiris, decima mansione est hinc intus in Persida. Nam hinc usque ad Nisibin mansiones sunt quinque, et inde usque ad Hur, quae fuit ciuitas Chaldeorum, aliae mansines sunt quinque; sed modo ibi accessus Romanorum non est, totum enim illud Persae tenent. Haec autem pars specialiter orientalis appellatur, quae est in confinium Romanorum et Persarum vel Chaldeorum.* Wilkinson trans.

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Did Frontiers Matter?

> Since almost nothing is so unimportant that it does not obtain the greatest forethought from Our Clemency we consider that especial care must be bestowed upon the borders, by which the whole state is protected.[236]

A recent historiographical trend presents boundaries and frontiers as irrelevant concepts in the Roman mind. Isaac writes,

> It is not at all clear that the concept of an imperial frontier as such was of great importance. It was not marked by any boundary stones and the only ancient map we have, the Peutinger Table, nowhere indicates the boundary of the empire as such . . . The only boundaries which had actual relevance were those of provinces.[237]

Besides the fact that such descriptions ask Romans to adopt our own notions of how they should have marked frontiers, this view ignores the crucial role which frontiers did hold in a Roman world-view. World-view, as spelled out in the previous chapter, is often tacit; crucial elements of it rarely are spelled out in the sources. Additionally, it is clear in the sources that Romans, especially those of the later Roman Empire, did in fact care about where their imperial frontiers fell and that they remained intact. Isaac's analysis here as well as those who have followed it[238] seems to have frozen early imperial ideology in place and time and to have read it arbitrarily into the later Empire.

One of the key ways of assessing late Roman frontier consciousness is to look at how the loss of territory was viewed. To return to an example used

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[236]*Theodosianae Novellae* 24.1

[237]Isaac, "Luttwak's 'Grand Strategy' and the Eastern Frontier of the Roman Empire," in French and Lightfoot, 223, cf. his *Limits*.

[238]Such as D. Cherry, who writes "the object of Roman imperialism is understood to have been ethnic rather than territorial or geographic," *op. cit.*, 32. For very similar wording, see B. Isaac, *ibid* in French and Lightfoot, 223.

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throughout this study -- after the famous surrender of Nisibis in 363,

Ammianus Marcellinus, far from the only one to find the occasion alarming,

gives the following historical analysis.

> Never (I think) since the founding of our city can it be found by an
> unfolder of chronicles that any part of our territory has been yielded to
> an enemy by an emperor or consul; but that not even the recovery of
> anything that had been lost was ever enough for the honor of a
> triumph, but only the increase of our dominions.[239]

This passage is helpful in a few different ways. For one, it shows that

Ammianus, an avid reader of history himself, had come across no indication

that Roman territory had shrunk previously. It had, in fact, and the ignoring

of that shrinkage in territory fits in well with the predominant model of

imperium sine fine, so prevalent up until the third century. In the world-

view of writers and readers in the early empire, the notion of losing territory

was unthinkable, and hence, perhaps, it had gone unrecorded in earlier times.

Hadrian's concessions following Trajan's expansions, noted more clearly by

St. Augustine than Hadrian's own contemporaries or Ammianus, is but one

example.[240] For another, this passage shows that in the later fourth century,

people were thinking of the Roman Empire in terms of a bounded territory,

not just people (the people of Nisibis, in fact, were moved into another city

which was then named Nisibis[241]). And that is specifically what makes the

loss of Nisibis so poignant -- it caused Roman frontiers to shift and led to a

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[239]25.9.9 -- *Numquam enim ab urbis ortu inveniri potest annalibus replicatis (ut arbitror), terrarum pars ulla nostrarum ab imperatore vel consule hosti concessa, sed ne ob recepta quidem quae direpta sunt, verum ob amplificata regna triumphales glorias fuisse deletas.*

[240]*De civ. D.* 4.29.

[241]A similar procedure was followed with the surrender of Dacia under Aurelian. The inhabitants were moved to the other side of the river and a new Dacia, so-called Cis-Danubian Dacia, was founded.

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consequent loss of territory. St. Augustine's assessments, already mentioned, well express Hadrian's concession in a way which Ammianus seems to not have known or to have forgotten. Again, the key to the disaster was specifically the "loss of territory" and the establishment of a new frontier.[242] Later, Agathias would connect the loss of territory and the establishment of a new frontier, both of which were devastating to the Roman state. The shameful and disgraceful truce was so bad that it "is even now harmful to the Roman state, by which means he made the empire contract into new boundaries and cut off the outer parts of [Jovian's] own territory.[243] Here, space, territory, and boundaries are brought together to suggest the impact that the loss had on the Romans. Clearly, Romans of the later Empire did, in fact, find the concept of an imperial frontier significant.

Other references to the loss of territory are found in the *Orations* of Libanius. As speeches, these would have had a wide audience, and would reflect at some level the expectation and knowledge of the audience. On two different occasions, Libanius praises emperors at the expense of Constantius, whose *post mortem* memory he and others handled less than gently. In the funeral oration of Julian, he records how Constantius would generally arrive after engagements in which Roman territory had been lost to the Persians, and then Constantius would just express thanks that they did not do worse.[244] The point is that Constantius was an ineffective emperor for

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[242]*Ibid. — nisi placito pacis illic imperii fines constituerentur, ubi hodieque persistunt*, and 5.21 — *Romani imperii termini moverentur*. Zosimus 3.32 also mentions the loss of territory, specifically that which was established as the limits of Empire, the Tigris and the Euphrates.

[243]Agathias, *historiae* 25, 6-7; D&L 238.

[244]*Oration* 18.205-207.

allowing territory to be lost. Echoing the same sentiment, in more direct wording, Libanius records that even as the Persians came every year to "nibble away bits of our territories and increase theirs at our expense," Constantius enjoyed favor because he had the eastern cities on his side.[245] Again, the implication is that Constantius was a bad emperor because he allowed Roman territory to be lost, regardless of his reputation in the East. It is difficult to square such references with Isaac's conclusions. Romans clearly were interested in territory, and that interest, especially during the later empire, strengthened a frontier consciousness.

A later universal history looks back on how the Roman people could be distressed by the loss of regions. Zonaras, a twelfth century Byzantine writer, records how Philip, upon learning that the Romans were upset by the loss of Armenia and Mesopotamia, broke a peace treaty in order to regain them.[246] Philip, who reigned from 244-249, had acted upon the idea that Romans were disappointed by the loss of territory. It is important to note, however, that Roman reactions to such losses were not consistent. Reactions would have have had something to do with available news. Nowhere in our sources, for example is there recorded any negative reaction to the surrender of the province of trans-Danubian Dacia by Aurelian in 282.[247] A new Dacia, cis-Danubian, was then founded and seems to have taken its place. In such regions, it appears that the Roman memory of borders could be short-term. It would be difficult to answer whether Romans cared or not about this loss because there survives absolutely no sources reacting to the concession. The

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[245]*Oration* 19.49.

[246]12.19. D&L 47.

[247]See A. Watson, *Aurelian and the Third Century*, (London: Routledge, 1999).

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absence of references, juxtaposed with the abundant references to anything that happens near frontiers afterward, attests to the fact that the Tetrarchs, led by Diocletian, reorganized the frontiers.

Memories of the recovery or addition of territory could provoke joyful reactions, and demonstrate again that Romans were interested in territory and not just peoples, and that they were attuned to frontier shifts. In his *Satire on the Caesars*, for example, Julian presents Constantine as claiming to rank equal to Trajan "on the score of that territory which he added to the empire, and I recovered."[248] The reference is obviously tongue-in-cheek, but the humor would have to be grounded in the idea that the Roman people accorded greatness to one who added or regained territory. Again, Roman focus is not just on peoples now, but on territorial space, which would be bounded by frontiers. Orosius records that Aurelian overcame the Goths and established rule within the "former boundaries" of the Empire; he, at least, had a clear idea of where they ran.[249] Diocletian specifically is singled out in panegyric for his restoration and advancing of Roman frontiers, although in fact some sections were abandoned under him.[250] Later, Zosimus would record that the "Antonines were good men because they recovered [territory] their predecessors had lost and even added to the empire."[251] Such a description is obviously based on Zosimus' own notion of territoriality; such references are much more prevalent in his own context, and do not, to my knowledge, exist from before the third century. A very famous passage,

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[248]392.

[249]*Historia ad paganos* 7.23

[250]See especially *Panegyrici* N&R 9.1-2; 3.11.5.4; 6.6; 7.1; 4.8.3.

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which Zosimus uses to criticize Constantine by contrast, praises Diocletian for restoring Roman frontiers by setting up extensive defensive systems along them.[252]

In their haste to distance frontier studies from nineteenth-century notions, nurtured mainly in a British Imperialism focusing on "territorial control, defined frontiers, clear divisions of responsibility, and channels of communication,"[253] recent historians have overcorrected. To suggest, as foremost frontier scholars have done, that frontiers did not matter much to Romans, completely misses the point of the role they did play in a late Roman world-view. Frontiers loomed large in a late Roman worldview, specifically because of their connection to cosmology and to a growing sense of bounded territory. As will be seen in subsequent chapters, such a growing consciousness of frontiers would come about in part because of a heightened proliferation of news throughout the later Roman Empire, much of it from and about the Roman frontiers.

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[252]2.34.

[253]The list comes from A. Lintott, *op. cit.*, preface.

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CHAPTER THREE – ῟ΟΡΟΣ ᾿ΑΡΧΑΙΟΣ: NATURAL FRONTIERS IN A LATE ROMAN WORLD-VIEW

> Here let the most noble accomplishments of the bravest Emperors be recalled through representations of the separate regions, while the Twin rivers of Persia and the thirsty fields of Libya and the recurved horns of the Rhine and the many-cleft mouth of the Nile are seen again as eager messengers (*nuntii*) constantly arrive . . . For now, now at last it is a delight to see a picture of the world, since we see nothing in it which is not ours.
>
> Eumenius, *Panegyric* 9.21[254]

Very late in the third century, sometime in the final two years, a high-ranking civil servant delivered these lines in panegyric to an otherwise unknown Diocletianic governor. Eumenius was trying to convince the governor to allow him to donate his salary toward the rebuilding of the rhetoric schools of his hometown of Autun, in Gaul.[255] In addition to the rare insight the whole of this panegyric gives into later Roman educational structures, it reveals how Romans perceived some of their "natural" frontiers, as well as how they came to possess that knowledge. Eumenius had just finished describing a great wall map in the porticoes of the Autun school. The map, he claims, let "young men see and contemplate daily every land and all the seas" as well as "the sites of all locations with their names, their extent, and the distances between them, the sources and terminations of all

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[254]*Panegyrici* N&R 9.21 -- *Ibi fortissimorum imperatorum pulcherrimae res gestae per diuersa regionum argumenta recolantur, dum calentibus semperque uenientibus uictoriarum nuntiis reuisuntur gemina Persidos flumina et Libyae arua sitientia et conuexa Rheni cornua et Nili ora multifida . . . Nunc enim, nunc demum iuuat orbem spectare depictum, cum in illo nihil uidemus alienum.* For extended commentary on this passage see the notes at *Panegyrici* N&R, pp. 172-177.

[255]For dating and biographical detail see *Panegyrici* N&R, 145-150.

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the rivers, the curves of all the shores, and the Ocean, both where its circuit girds the earth and where its pressure breaks into it."[256] Eumenius then speaks the finale of his panegyric -- the passage with which this chapter begins. The selection is fascinating for what it reveals about a scarcely attested aspect of Roman geographical education as well as the way it highlights some natural frontiers.

The orator's focus is on the frontiers, frontiers which within the very recent past had been challenged, strengthened or reestablished.[257] The students, he had affirmed, needed to "see clearly with their eyes what they comprehend less readily by their ears."[258] The map, then, was regularly updated "as eager messengers (*nuntii*) constantly arrive" with news. The speech itself obviously is informed by very recent news from such messengers. These messengers are coming from the peripheries of empire, expressed specifically in terms of rivers, deserts, and Ocean. The arrival of very recent news from the frontiers let the limits of the empire be "seen" again, to delve in the synesthesiatic oratory of Eumenius. An effective education, Eumenius argues, depends on having "the best masters of all virtues" (20.1) skillfully communicate the recent happenings of the world --

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[256]*Panegyrici* N&R 9.20.2.

[257]The specific historical situations and contexts, all very recent, referred to by Eumenius are Galerius' defeat of the Persian Narses in Mesopotamia (298) -- "twin rivers of Persia"; Maximian's defeat of the Moors in North Africa (297?) -- "thirsty fields of Libya"; Constantius' campaign against Carausius and Allectus (296) -- "recurved horns of the Rhine"; and Diocletian's quelling of Domitianus in Egypt and re-settling of the extreme southern frontier (298)-- "many cleft mouth of the Nile." For more specific historical commentary on this panegyric, see Nixon's and Rodger's notes at *Panegyrici* 9. On an explanatory note, *Expositio Totius Mundi* 34 presents Egypt as surrounded by the Nile.

[258]*Panegyrici* N&R 9.20.2.

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i.e. news -- to students visually as well as verbally.[259] The rest of the public, with "their minds . . . gazing upon each of these places, will "see" the peripheries of the Empire in the words arriving with the messengers.[260] News would thus shape perceptions of their peripheries. This passage is unique but it gives helpful insight into both news and frontier consciousness in the Later Roman Empire.

Although there is much debate over their "actual" role, natural features were perceived as frontiers and barriers by Romans, especially during the late Empire. Natural features at the frontiers, as suggested by Eumenius, loomed large in a Roman world-view. This world-view was shaped by news coming from the frontiers inasmuch as news was interpreted against it.[261] This chapter is based on the assumption that people act and respond to the world as they perceive it -- a world-view.[262] It explores features of the landscape which were viewed as forming frontiers or barriers to the empire -- rivers, primarily, but also mountains, desert and the sea or ocean. Rivers are prominant here because they appear much more often in Roman texts. As is often the case with frontiers in general, references to natural frontiers usually

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[259]On the role of geography in Roman education, see *supra* 78.

[260]*Panegyrici* N&R 9.21.2. Eumenius specifically mentions that they will "imagine Egypt, its madness given over, peacefully subject to your clemency, Diocletian Augustus, or you, invincible Maximian, hurling lightning upon the smitten hordes of the Moors, or beneath your right hand, lord Constantius, Batavia and Britannia raising up their muddied heads from the woods and waves, or you Maximian Caesar [Galerius], trampling upon Persian bows and quivers." See note 257 above for the historical references here.

[261]As laid out in Chapter One, I am basing such contentions partly on the Practice Theory of P. Bourdieu. See *supra* 39- for a discussion of how this fits with what M. Kearney and W. Dilthey analyze as "world-view."

[262]See *supra* 17-18.

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appear after moments of crisis or exultation-- protests and grief over transgressed frontier zones or in celebration of victory over extended frontiers. Much of our knowledge about the way that Romans viewed their peripheries is found in images in public oration and in visual arts. This chapter proposes to use these images to illuminate Roman frontier consciousness, of the later empire in particular. It further contends that the association of natural features with the frontiers of empire was solidified in the later Roman Empire, and specifically reveals a Late Roman frontier consciousness.

Early in the third century, the historian Herodian looked back on the policies of Augustus, contrasting them to those of the Roman Republic as well as the recent ones of Septimius Severus. Augustus, Herodian claims in this brief aside, had changed the Republic by stationing mercenary troops all around the empire to act as a "wall of the Roman Empire."[263] Furthermore, he had, according to Herodian, "fortified the empire by hedging it around with major obstacles, rivers, and trenches and mountains and deserted areas which were difficult to cross."[264] Herodian's presentation here is probably anachronistic in that it summarizes frontier ideology developing in his own day rather than that of Augustus. The image of the wall of empire, fortified by natural barriers is, in fact, an artifact of his own recent past and cannot be traced to the early Empire. To be sure, Augustus had bragged in his *Res Gestae*, of expanding the empire to the natural limits of Roman *imperium*.[265]

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[263]Herodian 2.11.5 -- τείχους τῆς ʻΡωμαίων ἀρχῆς. For an extended discussion of metaphor of the wall of Empire, see *infra* 150.

[264]*Ibid.*

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The rivers and other physical features of the Empire were seen as a natural places to stop expansion. But at no time prior to the late second century does one see these limits emerge specifically as "barriers" or "walls" rather than just natural, logical stopping points.

By the later Empire, the image is more concrete.[266] At one level of Roman ideology, it seems, Romans began to imagine physical features as their frontiers whenever possible. The Roman Empire became seen as bounded by various physical or topographical features. Mountains, rivers, deserts, and, the sea, were all recognized as the frontiers to Roman holdings.

Recent challenges to the concept of "natural frontiers" have questioned whether physical features actually functioned as frontiers of empire. J.C. Mann nails his colors to the mast:

> To the unthinking, the Rhine or the Danube can appear as a "natural frontier." No such thing as a "natural frontier" exists. Rivers in particular hardly ever function as effective boundaries between groups.[267]

Such challenges generally come from "structural functionalists," many of whom have been strongly influenced by the *Annales* school.[268] Although

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[265]See the *Res Gestae*; for a geographical analysis of this work see Nicolet, *Space*, "Chapter One -- The *Res Gestae* of Augustus: Announcing the Conquest of the World."

[266]See *infra* 150- for an extended discussion.

[267]"The Frontiers of the Principate," in *ANRW* II.1:508-33, at 139. V. Maxfield concurs, stating "they are highways which unite, not barriers to divide," in his "The Frontiers: Central Europe," in D.J. Breeze et al. eds., *The Roman World* I, part 4 (London, 1987), 139-325, at 139; and C. Wells, *The German Policy of Augustus:An Interpretation of the Archaeological Evidence*, (Oxford, 1972), 24, "Historically, rivers are not natural frontiers; they join rather than separate, and serve more readily as highways than as barriers. They are convenient lines of demarcation, if two powers wish to negotiate a frontier."

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Whittaker describes himself as somewhere in the middle between structural functionalists and behaviorists, his own position on this issue puts him clearly with the former. He claims that "politicians find rivers or mountains convenient geographic markers around which to bargain or focus patriotic fervor," but natural frontiers never really functioned as frontiers.[269] He and many other Roman historians see mountains, rivers, and deserts not as real barriers but as having been "'promoted to the dignity of being a natural frontier' by victorious nations in the process of expansion, and in the desire to define space."[270]

Such statements appropriately caution against taking ancient references too quickly at face value, especially the type of rhetorical sources used throughout this study, but they also seem to overstate the case. Many of Whittaker's examples are drawn from 19th and 20th century contexts, and say little about the ancient context and ancient responses to geographical features of the landscape. To say, as he does, that the duke of Wellington rejected the Indus River as a frontier in India in 1808, for example, need not mean that the same could be said of the Romans and the Danube.[271] In terms of world-view,

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[268]Ironically, such historians often adapt a form of *Annales* history with the *mentalité* left out. They like the geographical emphasis but often forget that Romans viewed the world differently than we do.

[269]Whittaker, *Frontiers* 61 and 26-7.

[270]Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 27 and 61 (cited at both places). Whittaker is quoting here from L. Febvre, *La terra et l'evolution humaine*. (Paris, 1922), 325-31.

[271]Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 61. It seems the fashion among British ancient historians to provide a litany of comparisons to scientific colonialism of the nineteenth century. The comparisons, I think, do little to illuminate the ancient situation. Whittaker's contention, however, that "many have accepted the classical *Weltanschauung* as a statement of Roman fronter policy" is one of the more compelling arguments of his work. He convincingly argues that Roman imperial policy should not be read from references to *imperium sine fine*, for example.

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physical features were crucial to Roman understanding of frontiers. Perhaps natural features are ineffective militarily (although even a certain number of Roman military historians are beginning to seriously doubt this once-unanimous contention[272]), but ideologically it is perfectly natural to imagine them as frontiers or boundaries. The sources say as much, even, and especially, those which were not part of the Roman political propaganda machine.[273]

In a bold recent statement, already quoted *supra*, which has not gone unchallenged, B. Isaac claims

> there is no evidence, in fact, that geography determined the boundaries of the empire. . . What we know of ancient geography indicates that it had by no means reached the level required to provide military planners with global, strategic insight of the sort required for a territorial strategy.[274]

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[272]See, in particular, the critiques at Austin and Rankov, 173-184: "The observation that rivers do not form natural boundaries in themselves but serve to link rather than separate has caused them to be seen as providing militarily ineffectual frontiers. This notion has gained a considerable vogue in recent works, but it crucially ignores the effect of planting fortifications and a military road along one bank of a river. The manner in which this was accomplished along the Rhine and the Danube makes sense only in terms of military defence since it can be shown to be incompatible either with convenience or ease of cross-frontier control or even of ossification of line of advance," (173) and M.J. Nicasie, *Twilight of Empire*, 121-125 — "to suggest that rivers do not constitute barriers and are militarily untenable is seriously misleading," 123.

[273]This point is stressed in opposition to views like Whittaker's, which read all references to rivers as frontiers as propaganda. C. Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) provides a fascinating look at imperial history as the playing out, in effect, of the Roman propaganda machine through a process of Bourdieuan consensus building. My problems with this view will be addressed in Chapter Four.

[274]"Luttwak's 'Grand Strategy' and the Eastern Frontier of the Roman Empire," in French and Lightfoot eds., 1989, 231-34, at 233.

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Such statements as this demonstrate the difference in view between what I am proposing in this chapter and a view which primarily or exclusively considers frontier policy and military planning. Such views as Isaac's are motivated by a desire to see how the frontiers "actually functioned," usually in military or strategic terms, and he does much to illuminate the Eastern frontiers in an ancient military context. But he, like Whittaker, is concerned much "less about ideology than about actuality."[275] What Isaac, Whittaker, and others seem to be questioning is whether physical features actually served as strategic frontiers in any meaningful sense. Were they used to shape a frontier policy or strategic planning in any global or long-range sense?

I would not suggest that these questions are unimportant but rather that they are irrelevant to this study. Whittaker himself claims, in commenting on Roman imperial ideologies, that "ideology is no guide to the reality of frontiers."[276] Turning this idea on its head, I propose to look more at ideology than at actuality. My interest is not so much in how frontiers or "natural frontiers" functioned in a political or military sense, but rather in how they were perceived -- the *habitus* shaped in schools like Autun. Glimpses of those perceptions in media of the day are vitally important for understanding how Romans viewed their frontiers and their world.

In his famous polemic against the pagans, Orosius gives a fascinating overview of the whole world, noting its divisions into three major parts as well as by regions and provinces.[277] This work can be considered a medium

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[275]See Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 73-74. Although, throughout, Whittaker gives much more attention to cosmology and ideology than does Isaac.

[276]*Ibid.,* 69.

[277]*Historiarum adversus paganos libri VII* 1.1. The geography section extends throughout 1.2; it provides a helpful overview of the world from a late

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in that it reports on current problems to people demanding an explanation

for recent happenings within the Roman Empire.[278] The whole world, he

notes, is under the control of the City of Rome, even to his present time. As

he describes each region, he specifically notes the boundaries -- just as

Romans from at least Pliny onward were extremely interested in boundaries,

internal or external.[279] In almost every case, the critical border for each

region, large or small, tends to be a river, a mountain, or the sea. When

Orosius defines what separates Roman territory from "barbarian," he records,

for example, that the "Danube separates territory from the land of the

barbarians in the direction of Our Sea."[280] The "farthest boundaries" of Africa

are the Atlas Range. Orosius, a Spanish monk, does not seem to be

promoting natural boundaries to the level of frontier as imperial propaganda,

unless that itself forms a central, if unconscious, part of his *habitus*. He does

praise the Roman Empire as the fulfillment of God's plan for the earth, but he

is not blind to problems and losses. In other parts of his work, he is content to

see that God himself controls the Empire's frontiers and allowed barbarians to

enter or violate them simply by removing His protective hand.[281] And yet

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Roman vantage. For an overview of Orosius on geography, see Y. Janvier, *La Géographie d'Orose*, (Paris: Sociéte d'Édition "les Belles Lettres," 1982).

[278]I take the idea that historiography can be media from D. Mendels, *The Media Revolution of Early Christianity: An Essay on Eusebius's* Ecclesiastical History, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). See especially his Chapter One, "Media Studies and Historiography," which provides a very helpful overview of the utility of media studies for historical research.

[279]The key features of Pliny's descriptions in *Natural History* are usually natural boundaries to regions and the number of *ethne* in each area. Orosius, although more cursory, follows this general pattern.

[280]Orosius, 1.2 -- *nunc quidquid Danubius a barbarico ad Nostrum secludit, expedim.*

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Orosius is convinced that boundaries to empire or within provinces primarily are focused on physical and natural features. Perhaps he has imbibed imperial ideology here, but I find it helpful to set this type of ideology in context of his own thought and that of his contemporaries, for clearly it had a strong hold on at least his own world-view. It shapes his whole view of geography.

Mountain ranges, oceans, deserts, and rivers often are linked together as natural frontiers in Roman sources, especially those of a rhetorical nature. The first three rarely stand on their own in later Roman sources, but rivers regularly do. Thus, I will explain the first three together and then treat rivers separately for the bulk of the chapter. In what is most likely the only formal definition of a Roman frontier term from before the modern period, Suidas, a tenth-century Byzantine lexicographer, offers the following, using a popular Late Roman example.[282]

> 'Εσχατία. The areas near the τέρμασι of the land are called ἐσχατία, which are bounded by a mountain or the sea . . . Again, Diocletian, when considering the state of the empire thought it necessary to strengthen all ἐσχατία with sufficient forces and to build forts.[283]

In Greek sources of the Roman period ἐσχατία is the equivalent of the Latin *limes*.[284] Suidas probably based his example here on descriptions in

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[281]7.22 — *solvuntur repente undique permissu Dei ad hoc circumpositae relictaeque gentes. laxatisque habenis in omnes Romanorum fines in invehuntur.* ("Suddenly from all sides, by the permission of God, the peoples located on the boundaries of the Empire and left there for this purpose are loosed and, with the reins relaxed, rushed into the territories of the Romans.") Quoted also in Chapter Five.

[282]Isaac considers it as such. See "The Meaning of *Limes* and *Limitanei* in Ancient Sources," in his *The Near East Under Roman Rule: Selected Papers*, (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 362.

[283]Suidas, *Lexicon* s.v. ed. Adler, I, 2, p. 432 (Leipzig, 1933).

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Zosimus.[285] It is interesting that he singles out mountains and the sea specifically as the site for ἐσχατίαι.

The notion that mountains divide territory has a long history. The Romans were not exceptional among peoples, ancient and modern, in imagining that mountains bounded their territory of control. Herodian, it will be recalled, claimed mountains as one of the natural features with which Augustus fortified the boundaries of the Roman Empire.[286] This passage links together rivers, trenches, mountains, and deserts. A similar reference occurs in Themistius. Dismayed over the "indescribable Iliad of disasters" of the barbarian invasions of the late fourth century, he would claim that not even "uncrossable mountains" could hold out the hordes of barbarians.[287] But, this reference is linked to "unfordable rivers" and "unpassable wastes." Ammianus likewise presents the Taurus mountains as separating the peoples beyond the Tigris from Armenia.[288] From a later period, Procopius mentions how the "Persians opened the way from Iberia into Colchis which was beset at every point by precipitous ravines and unmanageable brush, with woods so thick that, before the Persians, it seemed impassable even to a fit man."[289] Mountain passes could be perceived as impassable barriers.

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[284]For a chronological history of the use of the Greek term from Homer to John Chrysostom, see M. Casevitz, "Sur ἐσχατία (eschatia). Histoire du mot," in Rousselle, *Frontières*, 19-30. The Greek λίμιτες is also used.

[285]Compare Zosimus 34. 1-2. See also the reference in D. van Berchem, *L'Armée de Dioclétien et la réforme constantinienne*, (Paris,1952), 115.

[286]11.2.5.

[287]*Or*. 16.206d-207a. trans., Lenski, *op. cit.*, 143.

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Oceans, and to some extent, the sea, also functioned as frontiers and boundaries in a Roman world-view. The author of the *Expositio Totius Mundi* refers to the Ocean as "a waste, and there is the end of the world."[290] There was a tradition in Roman thinking which treated the ocean as part of the boundary of the earth itself. The elder Seneca, for example, presented, "the outer ocean" as "earth's boundary, the border of nature itself, oldest element and birthplace of the gods -- darkness prevails here."[291] Ocean himself was the father of rivers, and was a god himself.[292] In oration and panegyric, ocean functions more visibly as a boundary. The linking of Roman rule to this type of "from sea to sea" imagery is fairly common. As Libanius put it at one point -- "Constantius, besides possession of the islands and regions lying upon the Atlantic was master of the land from the very far shores up to the streams of the Euphrates."[293] An inscription to Julian records that as "lord of the whole world" his rule extends at one extreme from the Britannic Ocean.[294] A panegyricist sees the two Oceans as the places where the sun sets and rises -- all, of course, under the sway of the emperor.[295]

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[289]*Gothicus* 8.13.5 and D. Braund, "Coping with the Caucasus: Roman Responses to Local Conditions in Colchis" in French and Lightfoot, 1989, 31-43.

[290]59.

[291]*Suasoriae* 1.1-16; See M. Beagon, *Roman Nature* 185-87.

[292]On imagery of Ocean in Late Antiquity, see "Ocean" in *LA*, 617.

[293]18.205-07.

[294]*ILS* 754.

[295]*Panegyrici* N&R 11.6.6 -- *Vobis Rhenus et Hister et Nilus et cum gemino Tigris Eufrate et uterque qua solem accipit ac reddit Oceanus et quidquid est*

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Oceans also hold a crucial position in the Roman cosmology. The so-called Near Eastern cosmology envisioned the ocean as Chaos surrounding the Cosmos. The Ptolemaic cosmology did not dispense with this image entirely, even as it imagined a more planetary picture of cosmos. Eusebius writes -- "In the Middle, like a core, He laid out the earth, and then encircled this with Ocean to embellish its outline with dark-blue color."[296] The ocean is more decorative now than a threat to the Cosmos, as it is presented in the Old Testament and other Near Eastern writings. St. Augustine would summarize his own, similar view of the world in commentary on Ps. 72:8:

> For the land is encircled by a great sea which is called the Ocean: from which there flows in some small part in the midst of the lands, and makes those seas known to us which are frequented by ships. Again, in *from seas unto sea*, that from any one end of the earth even unto any other end, He would be Lord.[297]

He explains this passage again in a letter concerning the end of the world. He writes that the "universe is surrounded by the Ocean Sea," and then he refers to "the whole world which is, in a sense, the greatest island of all because the

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inter ista terrarum et fluminum et litorum, tam facili sunt aequanimitate communia quam sibi gaudent esse communem oculi diem. Ita duplices uobis diuinae potentiae fructus pietas uestra largitur: et suo uterque fruitur et consortis imperio. "The Rhine, The Danube, The Nile and the Tigris with its twin the Euphrates and the two Oceans where the sun sets and rises and whatever lands, rivers and shores are between them are as easily and readily common to you as the daylight which the eyes rejoice is common to them. So your piety bestows on you double rewards of divine power."

[296]*Vita Constantini.* in A. Cameron and S.G. Hall eds. and trans. *Eusebius: Life of Constantine, Introduction, translation, and commentary*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999). H. Maguire calls this "a common concept of late antique cosmography." It is also a common classical motif; see J. Romm, *Edges of the Earth.* For further references to emperors and Ocean in Eusebius, see 1.25.1; 4.9; 4.50.

[297]*Enarrationes in Psalmos.*

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Ocean also girds it about.[298] To St. Augustine, as to his contemporaries, the Ocean was the ultimate boundary. Later, Isidore of Seville would envision Terra as a region surrounded everywhere by the Ocean which "flowing around encompasses its borders in a circle."[299] Orosius likewise shares this cosmography of the ocean.[300] In his view, like that of Augustine, the whole world is surrounded by a periphery of ocean. The boundary of Europe is the Western Ocean, "where the Pillars of Hercules are viewed near the Gades Islands and where the Ocean tide empties into the mouth of the Tyrrhenian Sea." But at the same time, Orosius could present the Roman empire as extending almost to the outer part of the ocean: "The boundaries of Africa toward the west are the same as those of Europe, that is, the mouth of the Strait of Gades."[301] His wording suggests the difficulty at times of distinguishing cosmological references to the bounds of earth and the boundaries of the Roman Empire. As seen in Chapter Two, the conflation of cosmology and Empire is a significant element of the Roman world-view.

The connection of ocean to boundedness was very powerful in late antique art and iconography. Abundant mosaics, as with the literature, present Ocean as encircling the earth.[302] This idea is echoed in a mosaic inscription from

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[298]*Ep.* 199.47 — *quoniam mari Oceano cingitur universus . . . quae tanquam omnium quodammodo maxima est insula, quia etipsum cingit Oceanus.*

[299]*Etymologies* 14.2.1.

[300]The following comes from 1.2 of his *Historiarum adversus paganos libri VII.*

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[302]See H. Maguire, *Earth, passim* for the many mosaics with borders of Sea and Ocean.

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the transept of the basilica of Dumetios in Nikopolis which describes a scene portrayed there:

> Here you see the famous and boundless ocean
> Containing in its midst the earth
> Bearing round about in the skillful images of art everything
> that breathes and creeps
> The foundation of Dumetios, the great-hearted archpriest[303]

This same image is expressed in panegyric, where Ocean is said to "gird the earth."[304]

As seen with Themistius, deserts also functioned as frontiers.[305] The desert frontiers were quite extensive, reaching from southern Syria and across Africa to Mauretania and the Atlantic. Surprisingly, given the very real existence of deserts, they figure only slightly in the Roman ideology and cosmography. Successful invasions did not come from the desert frontiers, and their place in the sources is consequently small. In the words of C. Daniels, "in short, the desert frontier was successfully held, over immense distances and by the smallest regional armies, for something over half a millennium."[306]

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[303]Mosaic and text pictured in E. Kitzinger, "Studies on Late Antique and Early Byzantine Floor Mosaics, I: Mosaics at Nikopolis," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, VI, 1951, 83-122. Text at p. 100.

[304]*Panegyrici* N&R 9.20.2. For other mosaics picturing Ocean, see K. Dunbabin "*Baiarum grata voluptas:* Pleasures and Dangers of the Baths," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 57 (1989): 26-7; P. Voûte, "Notes sur l'iconographie d'Ocean: À propos d'une fontaine à mosaïque découverte à Nola (Campanie)," in *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome, Antiquité* 84 (1972): 639-673.

[305]See, in particular, C.M. Wells, "The Problem of Desert Frontiers," *Roman Frontier Studies* 1989, 14th International Congress, ed. V. Maxfield and M. Dobson, (University of Exeter Press, 1991), 478-481, with references.

[306]"The Frontiers: Africa" section 4, in J.S. Wacher, ed. *The RomanWorld*. (London: Routledge, 1987), 223-65 at 265. Interestingly, Orosius 1.2 describes

Rivers

It was not until the early 1970s, particularly with C. Wells *German Policy of Augustus*, that Roman historians seriously began to question the significance of rivers to the Empire and its frontiers.[307] It had long been assumed by most writers of history (of any era and context) that rivers served as "natural barriers." The Roman Empire was pictured by most historians as clearly bounded by the Rhine, Danube, and Euphrates on its northern and eastern frontiers, for most periods. The rivers themselves complemented a firmly held view which saw linear barriers, like Maginot lines, surrounding the Roman Empire. Beginning with Wells and company, for Roman history the argument was proposed that rivers in fact more often served as links between peoples on both banks, or as modes of transportation and communication rather than as boundaries. Rivers, in effect, came to be seen as highways or bridges rather than as barriers.[308] From that time until very recently, any dissent from the view of rivers as connectors rather than as dividers was out of step with the field of frontier studies. Roman historians following this trend have effectively challenged a simplistic view of a Roman Empire surrounded by linear barriers.

Initially, the "bridges rather than barriers" view of rivers gave little if any credit to the *Annales* historian L. Febvre. Writing exactly fifty years before the

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the "boundary line of the whole of Africa" without once mentioning desert frontiers. He mentions mountains, oceans, and rivers as boundaries throughout the world, but for the desert areas he names only the local peoples.

[307]See *The German Policy of Augustus.* Taken up most recently by Isaac, *Limits*, 410 — "rivers, like highways, are not barriers but means of lateral communication and transport."

[308]See C. Wells, *op. cit.*, 24 and V. Maxfield, "The Frontiers: Mainland Europe," in D.J. Breeze, C. Daniels, and D. Kennedy in J. Wacher ed., *The Roman World* I, part 4, London, 1987, 139-325 at 139.

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publication of C. Wells' book, he first proposed (in his *La terre et l'evolution humaine*) that rather than serving as "natural frontiers," rivers in fact link groups together for common activities such as trade and communication.[309] It had taken exactly half of a century for Febvre's idea to hit mainstream Roman historiography.[310] Strategic Roman historians in particular, following Wells, have essentially argued that rivers were never military barriers and hence did not serve in a significant sense as the barriers which ancients and moderns alike had imagined them as being. The argument has been made for many contexts and not just for the Roman Empire.[311] While it certainly may be debated to what extent rivers function as military or strategic barriers in reality, it remains important not to ignore the place of rivers in the

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[309]This work was translated into English by E.G. Mountford and J.H. Paxton, *A Geographical Introduction to History* (London, 1932).

[310]Febvre's "thesis" on rivers, in fact, has been singled out in a recent work on historical theory as the most important contribution of his work. See A. Marwick, *The Nature of History* 3rd ed., (Chicago: Lyceum, 1989).

[311]Trends in frontier studies, thanks in part to the Oklahoma Comparative Frontier Symposia, tend to transcend any given historical context. C. Wells, *"Profuit invitis te dominante capi*: Social and Economic Considerations on the Roman Frontiers," *JRA* 9 (1996): 436-446, at 438 gives them credit for getting him to think of frontiers as more than just the "most advanced military posts, beyond which there might however be territory of ambiguous status which the Roman army routinely patrolled or into which it might at least be expected to launch punitive raids to keep 'the tribes' pacified." Oklahoma taught him, he claims, that frontiers were a zone rather than a line, "and a zone of cultural and economic exchange." The comparative nature of the Oklahoma symposia shows why questions about Hadrian's wall, for example, tend to follow the same trends as questions on the Great Wall of China. On the Great Wall, see P.R. Gaubatz, *Beyond the Great Wall: Urban Form and Transformation on the Chinese Frontiers*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). The comparative nature of frontier studies has produced some excellent scholarship. Yet the homogenized agreement of a wide variety of scholarship on an issue such as natural frontiers need not suggest that anyone has arrived at the final word.

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worldview of ancients.[312] A Roman view of rivers encompassed a variety of factors, cosmological and religious among them. Romans should not be expected to have looked past all the trappings of their intellectual and cultural context when "important" things like preserving or defending the empire were on the line. Most modern strategic historians of the Roman Empire would have us believe that military men then should have been concerned with rational defense in much the same way as military men now in order to be effective.

Here, as elsewhere, the problem seems to lie not in the ambiguity of the ancient evidence but in the presumptions of the modern historian. To be sure, available sources do refer to rivers as modes of transportation and communication. Gregory Nazianzus, for example, in describing Julian's Persian expedition, presents him using the Tigris as a way to carry his provisions as he marched next to it.[313] And Persians were notorious for being able to cross the Euphrates very easily by building temporary bridges.[314] And yet it does not follow that such pictures invalidate rivers as significant boundaries in the minds of Romans.[315] It is far from clear to me how rivers

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[312]Especially helpful is the short but insightful article by D. Braund "River Frontiers in the Environmental Psychology of the Roman World" in Kennedy, *Army*, 43-47.

[313]*Oration* 5.9; D&L 249.

[314]Procopius, *Wars* 2.12.4 and Libanius, *Oration* 59.103, 114.

[315]That rivers do, in fact, constitute divisions (not exactly the focus of this study) is given some credence in the modern situation along the Euphrates. Toni Cross, on-site director of the American Research Institute in Turkey at Ankara, shared with me a conversation she had with an epidemiologist in Turkey just before the construction of the Atatürk Dam. This epidemiologist expressed a general concern among medical experts that the dam would allow peoples separated by the river to come into contact for the first time ever, thereby spreading disease for which each group had little if any immunity.

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"could hardly have served as a line of communication" if, in fact, they "became considered a defensive line."[316] Whittaker here denies, in fact, that they were considered a defensive barrier, but that seems an overstatement in light of the evidence.

The abundance of references in Roman sources to rivers as boundaries speaks strongly to the contrary. A full range of factors, including cosmological and religious ones, shaped the ways that Romans viewed their rivers and their frontiers. In the recent words of D. Braund, one of a growing number of dissenters from the Febvre/Wells thesis,

> For Romans, boundaries were redolent of rivers and rivers of boundaries at centre and periphery alike.... From a Roman perspective, rivers were indeed natural boundaries in a sense that includes their religiosity, their natural power and their tendency to divide and to bound . . . Modern strategists . . . miss much of the point which lies embedded in the environmental psychology of the Roman world."[317]

M.J. Nicasie is another recent historian who has begun to question the current trend which holds that rivers do make sense as barriers in military terms.[318]

The multiplication of disease along the Euphrates river today suggests that this fear was well founded. The "swift-flowing" Euphrates has, until very recently, separated some peoples even as it has aided the contact of others.

[316]Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 201. Communication presumed only small-scale crossings of rivers by trained experts. This is a far cry from crossing whole armies, the difficulties of which are highlighted in multiple ancient sources.

[317]"River Frontiers in the Environmental Psychology of the Roman World," in Kennedy, *Army*, 43-48.

[318]Nicasie,*Twilight*, 123. Be aware, however, that in spite of Nicasie's argument that rivers and mountains did serve as boundaries of empire, his plethora of examples are all drawn from references to *internal* boundaries — i.e. the river Melas, north of Italy, the Alps, etc. His point is well taken, but lacks support from references to these as actual or perceived boundaries of empire.

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One of the strongest attempts to refute the "natural frontiers" model with actual ancient evidence is made by B. Isaac.[319] A critical dialogue with his view might explain how mine differs both in emphasis and conclusion as well as in interpretation of the ancient evidence. His *modus operandi* is, first of all, to quote passages to the effect that rivers were not difficult to cross when bridges, boats, and trained swimmers were available. The specific swimmers he mentions, the Batavians, were known for their abilities, and he refers to Tacitus and Dio to that effect.[320] But Isaac fails to mention that the same passage also records that other barbarians were terrified by the demonstration of the Batavians; i.e. that it was not a normal "barbarian" thing to be able to swim rivers with ease. Other swimmers, described as Germans, actually fought on the Roman side during Claudius' campaign. Isaac draws from this fact that if any army were to be hampered by rivers it would, in fact, be the Roman rather than the barbarian.[321] Isaac then uses Dio

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[319]Isaac, *Limits*, 410-413. Most historians, Whittaker included, merely pass on the "bridges not barriers" view without much explanation. But Whittaker, at least, gives credit to Febvre. Most now seem to just pass on the idea from Wells, Isaac and Whittaker.

[320]Dio, *Roman History* 69.9.6; 60.20, and Tacitus, *Annales* 2.8 and *Historia* 2.17. One of the swimmers is memorialized in *CIL* 3.3676. See, specifically, M.P. Speidel, "Swimming the Danube under Hadrian's Eyes. A Feat of the Emperors' Batavi Horse Guard," *Ancient Society* 22 (1991), 277-82, a source which came out after the original publication of Isaac, *Limits*.

[321]Note, however, the problems faced by the Goths in settling across the Danube in 376 (Amm. Marc. 31.4.5). The Danube, "by far the most dangerous of all," and swollen with rains besides, claimed the lives of "a good many" who tried to swim across. Earlier, Valens tried until late autumn to cross "extensive floods" of the Danube (Amm. Marc. 27.5.5). He gave up because the extent of the waters and the currents. He tried again the subsequent year with boats and was successful; crossing the river he "forced his way into barbarian territory" (*simili pertinacia, tertio quoque anno, per Novidunum navibus ad transmittendum amnem conexis, perrupto barbarico*).

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to show that rivers can be bridged with little difficulty, as Roman soldiers regularly practiced building bridges on the Danube, the Rhine, and the Euphrates.[322] So far, so good -- but the issue at stake seems to be whether barbarians were building bridges at all, and neither Isaac nor his references give any hints. Thus, it seems that the point stands that barbarians would also have been hindered in crossing rivers if even bridge-building Romans in fact were.[323] Isaac does not prove his case here, but rather turns the issue around by showing that Romans were hindered rather than answering whether the barbarians were actually blocked out *en masse* by rivers. It seems, in fact, even as his own examples make fairly clear, that they were.

Next, Isaac turns to a passage from *de rebus bellicis* which provides, as he sees it, crucial refutation of the concept of natural frontiers. I quote at length the same section he does, written circa 368/9[324]:

> First of all it must be recognized that frenzied native tribes, yelping everywhere around, hem the Roman empire in, and that treacherous barbarians, protected by natural defenses, menace every stretch of our frontiers. For these peoples to whom I refer are for the most part either hidden by forests or lifted beyond our reach by mountains or kept from us by the snows; some, nomadic, are protected by deserts and the blazing sun. There are those who, defended by marshes and rivers,

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[322]Isaac, *Limits*, 411, referring to Dio, *Roman History* 71.3 who then provides a description of the technique.

[323]On the Romans' general reluctance to build bridges at all, see Austin and Rankov, 174-177. They conclude their detailed discussion, drawn from early imperial examples, "The major rivers, then, were seen by the Romans as barriers to invasion so important that they must not be bridged, even at the cost of hindering their own movement across. This implies that on the river frontier the Romans had adopted a general principle of dealing with threats only as they manifested themselves on the frontier line, even as the enemy were crossing and landing. It also strongly suggests that patrolling across the frontier was not a primary Roman objective," at 177.

[324]For this date, see A. Cameron, "The Date of the Anonymous *de rebus bellicis*, in *De Rebus Bellicis* Part 1, (*BAR* Int. Ser. 63, 1979), 1-7.

cannot even be located easily, and yet they tear peace and quiet to shreds by their unforeseen attacks. Tribes of this kind, therefore, who are protected either by natural defenses such as these or by the walls of towns and towers, must be attacked with a variety of novel armed devices.[325]

The passage is significant, Isaac claims, because it shows "genuine ancient comments on the value of natural obstacles as the frontier, made by a man with a professional interest in military affairs."[326] Natural features, he concludes, are then obstacles to Roman action rather than barriers to repel barbarians.

This simply does not follow. The passage occurs in a description of offensive military machines, and does not seem to be making overarching statements about the defense of the empire against the "yelping savages." Truly if the river is a barrier to action for the Romans on one side of the river, it will be so (if not more so) for barbarians on the other, as well. The anonymous author seems to be giving us a view from only one side of the river here, interestingly, the defense against the barbarians. None of this precludes the view from the other side, namely that the Romans also are protected by such obstacles from those who "menace every stretch of our frontiers." To continue, as Isaac does, that the "only strategy he [the anonymous author of *de rebus bellicis*] can conceive of is preventative or retaliatory attack across the frontier," is an argument from silence at best. The context, again, is a description of military equipment, and that focuses the author's presentation -- any argument about the real limits of his conception from this passage seems a bit extreme.

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[325]*De Rebus Bellicis*, Part 2 (*BAR* Int. Ser. 63, 1979), ed. and trans. R. Ireland, vi, p.28.

[326]*Limits*, 411-412.

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Rivers were easy to ford, Isaac continues, because of easily transportable bridges which the Romans could carry, and which Anonymous in fact describes. But what about the barbarians, who, it seems, should be the real focus? We are not told here or elsewhere whether the barbarians had transportable bridges. Other evidence suggests, in fact, that they generally did not.[327] Therefore, it seems to me that the passage could in fact be implying the opposite of what Isaac argues -- namely that the rivers did a better job keeping barbarians on one side of them than Romans, even if rivers and other natural obstacles also served to shelter the barbarians (and hence the need for military machines). Again, without the benefit of bridges and machines, how effective could the barbarians be against the Romans?

Isaac continues with references to easily-crossed rivers, but, again, his examples generally fail to convince. He cites as evidence barbarians crossing on the frozen Danube, from Pliny's *Panegyric* and Florus' *Epitome*. He concludes: "In other words, the river, at least in winter time, did not help in keeping them out." So much is true, although that did not seem to restrict barbarian campaigns to that time of year, either.[328] Such statements should

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[327]The very few times barbarians are recorded as building bridges they are helped by Roman captives -- John of Ephesus, *Historiae Ecclesiasticae pars tertia* 6.24 (Avars). Lee believes that the Huns' efforts (Priscus *fr.* 6,2/7) also relied on captive Roman craftsmen. See Lee, *Information*, 96. Lee further points out that barbarians are only recorded as crossing tributaries rather than the Danube. He gives a very specific assessment of the difficulties of crossing the Danube as well as some exceptions, 96ff.

[328]References to the Danube freezing over are at Dio, *Roman History* 71.7.1, Philostorgius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 10.6; Claudian, *In Rufinum* 2.26; Agathias 5.11.6 (refers to the phenomenon as regular); See Lee, *Information*, 96, for a listing of incursions which occurred in the summer and fall. For the Rhine and Danube see Ovid, *Tristia* 3.10.27ff; *From Pontus* 1.2.79-80; 4.7.9-10; 10.32-4; Pliny, *Panegyric* 12.3; 82.4-5; Herodian 6.7.6-7; Amm. Marc. 19.11.4. For a reference in panegyric to an emperor being so strong that not even a freezing or drying river frontier would be of any consequence, see *Panegyrici* 10.7.4.

not be taken as a general refutation of rivers as barriers. Although it did freeze regularly, it did not do so consistently.[329]

Isaac's further analysis of *Panegyric* 6.11.1 is generally unconvincing as well. "We are not now defended by the waters of the Rhine, but by the terror of your name," strikes me as epideictic praise of the emperor rather than, as Isaac suggests, the general denial or depreciation of a river barrier, as such.[330] Isaac continues with the panegyric -- "Nature does not close off any land with such an insurmountable wall that courage cannot cross it." But, again, this statement seems to be in praise of the type of courage which can surmount the difficult-to-cross bounds set by Nature. If just anyone could cross them at will then what is so praiseworthy about this emperor? Isaac's own reference seems, again, to argue against his own case. His final example, from Procopius, that Persians could cross the Euphrates easily because of bridge-building equipment, is more convincing.[331] And yet it, also, shows that

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[329]Even worse for the barbarians, rivers could thaw unexpectedly, as with the Chatti who were prevented thus from crossing the Rhine in AD 89 -- Suetonius, *Domitianus* 6.2, and the "huge multitude of Germans" were caught in the center of the Rhine on an island, cut off by a sudden thaw -- 6.6.4.

[330]To my mind *"neque enim iam"* indicates that the panegyricist is trying to imply that such *was* the case before this glorious emperor appeared.

[331]Procopius, *Wars* ii.21.21ff. Libanius (*Oration*. 59.103) also speaks of Persian bridgemaking skills, although Isaac does not mention it. Challenging even this view is Libanius, *ep.* 49 which records the alarm of the Romans as they are finally able to bridge the Tigris after a long struggle to do so. Note the section Isaac leaves out in his quotation from Panegyric 10.7: "let this river dry up with the heat of summer or freeze with the cold as it will, the enemy will dare to exploit neither opportunity to cross." This section again emphasizes the power of the emperor by exaggerating the contrast; it does not seem to depreciate the rivers as frontiers, as such. The perspective I am taking here, in fact, is exactly the one which Isaac takes elsewhere ("The Meaning of *Limes* and *Limitanei* in the Ancient Sources," 356). In this article, Isaac defends the opposite approach to reading the panegyric because it suits a

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rivers would generally be crossed only for large-scale invasions. Isaac thus proves the point I will argue below: that crossing a frontier river was perceived as entering a foreign land.

Isaac's case against rivers as natural frontiers simply does not hold much water, in my estimation. My point here is not necessarily to resuscitate rivers as "scientific" boundaries, but rather to argue that they were, in fact, *perceived* as frontiers of the Roman Empire by the Romans, and probably the barbarians as well. They thus served an important role in the world-view of Romans. This point is crucial to all subsequent chapters of this dissertation, and essential to argue at length.

The treatment of rivers as frontiers is clear both in terminology and in concept. In the early Empire, rivers were presented at times as the natural bounds of *imperium* or imperial power. By the later Empire, however, they are seen more as linear boundaries. From the early Empire, the term *ripa*, "river-bank," was used to designate a river-boundary.[332] Tacitus records one such example: "It was no longer the land and river-boundaries of the empire, but the winter quarters of the legions and the ownership of territories which were in danger."[333] Here Tacitus distinguishes land and river boundaries, a

different argument. All of this is crucial because it raises the sticky question of how to read panegyrics. The danger, of course, is that one can read them in a variety of ways; consistency is very difficult.

[332]See, in particular, P. Trousset, "La notion de 'ripa' et les frontieres de l'empire," in *Colloque International "le Fleuve,"* Lyon, Mai 1992. See also Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 201, with references, and P. Ørsted, *Roman Imperial Economy and Romanization.* (Copenhagen, 1985), 271-72.

[333]*Agricola* 41.2 — *nec iam de limite imperii et ripa, sed de hiberniis legionum et possessione dubitatum;* quoted in Isaac, "The Meaning of *limes* and *limitanei*," repr. in B. Isaac, *The Near East under Roman Rule: Selected Papers,* (Leiden: E.J.Brill), 1998, 345-387 at 350. As Isaac points out, Tacitus is distinguishing land and river boundaries here (*limes* vs. *ripa*).

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separation which does not hold past the fourth century, when *limes* becomes a term used as well for river. But here we see rivers serving as the boundaries of imperial power or *imperium*.

A further example shows this same tendency to distinguish land and river boundaries, and gives hints to the way that Romans imagined natural barriers. Although it is difficult to determine whether the author is presenting a late imperial or a second century perspective, the author of the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* records, in a reference to Hadrian's reign, how a river separates Roman from barbarian. "In many areas where the barbarians are separated [from the empire] not by rivers but by land boundaries he [i.e. Hadrian] shut them off with high stakes planted deep in the earth and fastened together so as to form a palisade."[334] The implication here is that rivers were imagined as the boundary separating Roman from barbarian, and their absence was seen as a lack of such a boundary.[335] Otherwise, it would hardly be worth mentioning the fact that in some places barbarians were not so separated. The construction of the palisade seems to be an attempt to make up for nature's deficiency.[336]

By the later Roman empire, the term *limes* became less more clearly associated with rivers in a way that it never was for the earlier empire.[337]

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[334]*in plumiris locis, in quibus barbari non fluminibus sed limitibus dividuntur, stipitibus magnis in modum muralis saepis funditus iactis atque conexis barbaros separavit* — *Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Hadrian.* 12, Isaac, "Meaning" 351 — again, only the land, not the river boundary is known as *limes* at this early stage.

[335]One must take seriously Whittaker's contention that boundaries were always "ethnically confused" and that we should not accept readily an ancient model that sees divisions as so distinct, Whittaker, *Frontiers* 62.

[336]See *infra* 150-, for further development of this idea.

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Perhaps the constant association through time of rivers at or near *limites*

blended the two in Roman minds. News from their frontiers often was

associated with rivers, particularly on their northern and eastern frontiers.

Ammianus, for example, could write in the late fourth century that the

"*limes* of the East, extending a long distance in a straight line, reaches from

the banks of the Euphrates River to the borders of the Nile."[338] The

association of *limes* and river is clear, and specific to the later Empire.

Another late imperial source likewise refers to "forts on the Rhine, Danube,

and Euphrates frontiers."[339] Jerome refers in an epistle to the fact that the

"frontier of the Danube has been shattered" by barbarian invasions.[340] As

will be seen below, he is communicating news about the frontier in this letter,

and he equates the frontier with the Danube river. This change in

terminology seems to indicate a shift in frontier consciousness, where rivers

no longer serve as the outer limits of expansion or just dividers of peoples,

but as the frontier and *limes* of Empire.

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[337]The direct association of *limes* with rivers reflects a fourth century and
later usage of the term. See Isaac, "The Meaning of *limes* and *limitanei* in the
Ancient Sources," 350-51, etc. Earlier sources, as Isaac points out with the
Hadrian passage in *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, distinguish river- and
land-boundaries: "only the latter are called *limites*. As with any use of the
term *limes* anymore, extreme caution is advised -- take, for example, Isaac's
bold and hard-to ignore-statement -- "If there was no term in second-century
Latin for what modern archaeologists call a "*limes*" it is quite possible that the
entire concept is an anachronistic construct. It is uncomfortable for those
who spend their working lives studying what they call a '*limes*' to remain
without a usable term for their object of study."

[338]Amm. Marc. 14.8.5 -- *Orientis vero limes in longum protentus et rectum,
ab Euphratis fluminis ripis ad usque supercilia porrigitur Nili.*

[339]*Panegyrici* N&R 9.18.4 -- *Nam quid ego alarum et cohortium castra
percenseam toto Rheni et Histri et Eufratae limite restituta.*

[340]*Ep.* 123.16 -- *fracta Danubii limite.*

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One could object that because the term *limes* occurs more frequently in later sources than earlier it might mean little, then, to say that its application to rivers is also more frequent. But we have gone from absence to frequency, a change that cannot be ignored. The change in meaning is further highlighted by usage in other fourth century writers. Ausonius, a fourth-century teacher and writer, speaks of a river as a *limes*. He describes the emperor Gratian in glowing terms: "a most powerful emperor: the witness, pacified in one year, is the *limes* of the Danube and the Rhine."[341] The *limes* seems to qualify the rivers.

This is not to say that *limes* became exclusively associated with river. In fact, other writers from the fourth century continue to see a difference between them, although the association is still stronger than in early imperial writings. Festus claims that "Trajan made Armenia, Mesopotamia, Assyria and Arabia provinces and established the eastern *limes* beyond the banks of the Tigris." And "Mesopotamia was restored and beyond the banks of the Tigris a *limes* was re-established, so that we gained sovereignty over five peoples beyond the Tigris."[342] Such references seem to be anachronistic and reflect a late imperial change in meaning of the terminology, which can allow it to be more strongly associated with rivers.

Even where the term *limes* is not specifically connected with rivers, available sources present rivers as the actual boundaries of Empire. The

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[341] Ausonius, *Gratiarum Actio* 2.7 – *Imperatori fortissimo: testis est uno pacatus in anno et Danuvii limes et Rheni.* See Isaac, "The Meaning of *limes* and *limitanei* in the Ancient Sources," 358.

[342] Festus, *Breviarium* 14 – *et per Traianum Armenia, Mesopotamia, Assyria et Arabia provinciae factae sunt ac limes Orientalis supra ripas Tigridis est institutus;* and *Mesopotamia est restituta et supra ripas Tigridis limes est reformatus, ita ut quinque gentium trans Tigridem constituarum dicionem adsequeremur.* (trans. Isaac, "Meaning," 360)

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existence of rivers at the frontiers was a clear indication of their place in the world-view of the Romans. The connection of rivers to imperial power was strong from earlier times, but its expression would change in the later Empire. The tie could be summed up for the early empire in a phrase from Propertius (born c. 50 B.C.) -- *"Tigris et Euphrates sub tua iura fluent"* (the Tigris and Euphrates flow under your jurisdication).[343] Here the eastern rivers flow under the jurisdiction of Augustus, rather than serving as the literal limits of Empire. The ambiguity of Rome's imperial "reach" is apparent in such early references. By Late Antiquity, Romans could look back, even anachronistically, on a long history of eastern rivers serving as their *limes*. Much earlier rivers had functioned as some type of division, at least in the mind of Romans. As early as the 90s B.C. a governor of Cilicia negotiated an agreement with the Parthian king in which the Euphrates was set as the bound of their respective holdings.[344] Crassus, according to one Late Antique source, was rebuked by the Parthians for crossing the Euphrates contrary to a treaty made between Lucullus and Pompey.[345] The Parthians, it seems, held the Romans to that agreement. Later developments challenged this arrangement. Trajan, for example, established the eastern frontier at the

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[343]Propertius 3.4.4; similar formulae at Virgil, G. 4.560ff and Claudian, *Panegyricus de Sexto Consulatu Honorii Augusti*. ed. and trans. M. Dewar 295.

[344]Plutarch, *Sulla* 5; Appian, μιθριδάτειος 1057; Livy, *Periochae*. 70 -- see Mitchell I, 118 -- this *limes* was recognized later by Vespasian. See also C. Nicolet et al., *Rome et la conquête du monde méditerranéen* ii: *Genèse d'un empire* (Paris, 1978), 796-79.

[345]Orosius 6.13 -- it seems, at least, that the Parthians had a long memory as well of such an arrangement. Orosius implies that Crassus might have been spared had he not angered the Parthians excessively by breaking the agreement.

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Tigris -- although Festus, in terms more comprehensible to a fourth- than a second- century audience, records a *limes* beyond the Tigris -- a move rejected by Trajan's successor Hadrian, who wanted the border between the Persians and the Romans to be the Euphrates.[346] These arrangements had a long resonance within the collective memory of the Romans.[347] They became, in effect, benchmark moments of Roman history by which Romans could evaluate the condition of the present empire. Galerius' defeat of the Persians in 298, for example, was seen as re-establishing the boundary between Rome and Persia set by Trajan.[348]

Clearly, then, the status of rivers as boundaries played a key role in frontier consciousness and this "consciousness" became solidified in the later empire. In the later Empire, the memory of the river bounding the two Empires was long. Julian calls the Euphrates the "ancient boundary" (ὅρος ἀρχαῖος) between "that country and ours."[349] The pilgrim Egeria claims that the Euphrates was the *fines Mesopotamiae*.[350] In reference to what Persians could have taken from the Romans, Libanius uses the formula that they could have extended "all the way to the Euphrates, the Orontes, the Cydnus, the Sangarius, or to the Bosphorus itself."[351] The reference points for

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[346]Festus, *Breviarum* 14.

[347]*Ibid.*; also in Eutropius, *Breviarum* 8.6.2.

[348]Note that it is the fourth-century sources which refer to it as such. On the episode, see Festus, *Breviarum* 25; Amm. Marc. 25.7.9; and Petros Patricius fr. 14. See J.W. Eadie, "The Transformation of the Eastern Frontier, in Mathisen and Sivan, 72-82 at 74-75 on the political boundary of the Tigris. See also E. Winter, "On the Regulation of the Eastern Frontier of the Roman Empire in 298," in French and Lightfoot, 555-571.

[349]Oration 1.23d -- "τῆς χώρας ἐκείνης πρὸς τὴν ἡμετέραν."

[350]*Itineraria Egeriae* 18.1.

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territorial conquest, at least from a Late Roman perspective, has become rivers.

The idea of rivers as boundaries occurs in most historical accounts from later Roman sources.[352] Theodoret (393-466), monk, bishop, and native of Antioch, writes of the Persian campaign of 363 that Julian's folly was that he "crossed the river which separates the Roman Empire from the Persian, " and burned his ships.[353] To Zosimus as well, crossing a frontier river was synonymous with leaving the Roman Empire itself. He claims that Julian's crossing of the Rhine in 357 was a way to assure that war was fought in "barbarian rather than Roman territory."[354] He further writes that on the Danube, "Romans were to retain what they previously possessed with full security and the barbarians were forbidden to cross the river or to enter Roman territory at all." The two actions, it must be noted, are contemporaneous; crossing the river *is* entering Roman territory.[355] The besieged Palmyrenes decide to "flee to the Euphrates and there seek aid from the Persians against the Romans."[356] When describing barbarian affairs

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[351]*Or.* 18.278.

[352]Herodian 6.4.7 -- "while Alexander Severus was preparing to cross the rivers and lead his army into barbarian territory," (D&L 20). An understanding of rivers in the world-view of the Romans can show us that Herodian is in fact using the river here as a way of expressing liminality, although he does not use the term *limes*. Crossing the rivers was, in essence, entering enemy territory -- the acts clearly go together.

[353]*Historia Ecclesiastica* 25.1 -- *Nam cum fluvium qui Romanorum Imperium a Persarum regno separat traiecisset;* D&L 271. (but, compare with 3.21 -- "No sooner had the Persians heard of the death of Constantius than they took heart, proclaimed war, and marched over the frontier of the Roman Empire.")

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beyond Roman borders he writes that the Saxons sent the Quadi into Roman territory, but were "hindered from crossing the river by the neighboring Franks."[357] Again, crossing the river is tantamount to entering or exiting Roman territory. Zosimus further writes concerning the eastern frontier, that when Julian "penetrated the Persian frontier," he was crossing the Euphrates river.[358]

There was also something intrinsically symbolic for Romans about crossing rivers as frontiers. This aspect can be seen early in Roman imperial history with Caesar's famous crossing of the Rubicon, which Suetonius calls "the boundary between Gaul and Italy."[359] The theme continues, even as the boundaries are stretched far and wide. According to Ammianus, one of the two central oaths of conquest which Trajan would swear was: "as I hope to cross the Hister and the Euphrates on bridges."[360] Trajan's column uses scenes of river-crossing to represent Roman departure into barbarian land. It

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[356]1.55.

[357]3.6.

[358]3.14. This passage continues with an example which suggests that the space taken up by rivers themselves formed a sort of no-man's land unless occupied with a fort on an island. Julian besieges such an island fort in the Euphrates and is then said to have escorted the people "into Roman territory," i.e. ferry them back across to the Roman side.

[359]*Iulius* 3 – Suetonius records Caesar's declaration – "we may still draw back but, once across that little bridge, we shall have to fight it out." A similar description may be found at Plutarch, *Caesar* 32. This episode highlights also that the sources are more likely to describe internal boundaries with natural features than, as later, the limits of the Empire. The Rubicon continued to be viewed into Late Antiquity as symbolic of separation – See Claudian, *Panegyricus de Sexto Consulatu Honarii Augusti*, 365.

[360]24.3.9. Trajan did bridge the Danube in 105 as pictured on his column in Rome. Compare also Pliny's Panegyric to Trajan (16.2) – *magnum est, imperator Auguste, magnum est stare in Danubii ripa*. The other oath was "as I hope to see Dacia reduced to the form of a province."

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It begins with a series of forts along the Danube river and proceeds with figures crossing in boats.[361] And crossing rivers, especially those near the Eastern frontiers was suggestive of invading a foreign power. The column of Marcus Aurelius does much the same thing.

The later empire saw the solidification of these symbols of the earlier Empire. As Libanius writes of Julian's campaign, "While [Julian] is still crossing rivers, facing the might of Persia, pondering upon his invasion, and considering how, when and where to attack the foe."[362] Here, news from the front, the type Libanius craved and for which he carried on his lively letter exchange, is couched in language of crossing rivers. Rivers could be crossed in both directions; Libanius suggests in a letter that Julian needs wings to bring himself quickly back over the Euphrates to be restored to Roman territory, symbolized by "our river, the Orontes."[363] Libanius also records in panegyric that a foe "cannot capture cities by the Euphrates or attempt to cross the Tigris ... for the emperor's fortune fortifies them."[364]

This idea of crossing a river as equivalent to entering another's territory is captured well in an inscription from Ancyra. Julian, "lord of the whole world" is praised for conquering right up to and crossing the Tigris after defeating the barbarians in the West. The inscription is both a tribute to the fact that crossing the Tigris was symbolic of leaving the Roman Empire and to

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[361]See M. Galinier, "La Colonne Trajan: Images et Imaginaire de la Frontière," in Rousselle, *Frontières*, 273-288.

[362]Libanius, *Oration* 16.52. March/April 363.

[363]Libanius *ep*. 367.

[364]*Ep*. 49; D&L 223.

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the fact that news could travel very quickly from the Eastern frontier to communication centers like Ancyra.[365]

Perhaps because of their tendency to use symbols and metaphor, orations and panegyrics from Late Antiquity often imply that rivers were boundaries, at least in the minds of Romans hearing these speeches. In them we also can see that the idea of "boundariness" of rivers is functioning even more strongly than in earlier times.[366] Reading panegyrics is tricky, however, as it involves appreciating the hyperbolic conventions of epideixis while still gleaning hints of world-view and actual fact. Panegyrics are a way of communicating news, and even news about the frontiers, of heightened interest from the fourth century onward. Libanius gets much of his material from letters from or beyond the frontier. It is when requesting such information from beyond the eastern frontier that he tells one informant: "you will inform me of the bare facts, I will clothe them in the garb of oratory."[367] In one panegyric, Julian connects directly Constantius' crossing of the Tigris with entering the enemy's country. "You often crossed that river [Tigris] with your army and spent a long time in the enemy's territory (ἐν τῇ

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[365]*ILS* 754 — *domino totius orbis / Iuliano Augusto / ex Oceano Britannico / vis per barbaras gentes / strage resistenti/um patefactis adus/que Tigridem una aestate transvec/to, Saturninus / Secundus v.c. [praef.] praet. [d] / n.m. [q.].* More on this inscription in the next chapter. It shows how quickly news could reach Ancyra and how inscriptions served as a form of media, themes to be explored *infra* Chapter 4, I a.

[366]As already seen, this emphasis can lead to a rhetorical reversal as the emperors of the later empire are shown as protecting the Empire now instead of just the rivers (*Panegyrici N&R* 6.11.1). But, when read in terms of world-view, it seems that rivers are functioning more strongly as boundaries, which makes them a convenient target for the type of hyperbole upon which panegyric thrives.

[367]*Epistula* 1434.

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πολεμίᾳ).[368] Libanius would praise Constantius as "master of the land from the very far shores up to the streams of the Euphrates."[369] Libanius later recanted such praise, bestowing it upon Constantius' rival, Julian. The river now became for Constantius a symbol of loss: "Every year Persians would cross the rivers and desolate cities; Constantius would arrive and be thankful that they did not do worse." Julian would then be praised in Constantius' place as the master of the rivers -- "although 70 days march from the Tigris, you caused panic among the Persians who were threatening our cities."[370] Libanius also used riverine allusions to praise Julian after he heard news of that emperor's victory in the West. Messengers brought the news first to Constantius, but could not contain the news flow:

> many messengers sped to your senior colleague, but none requested an army of reinforcement; all bore tidings of victory. The news spread and burst upon the Persians, and then they prayed for you to stay in Rhine regions, while the Germans prayed for you to cross the Tigris.[371]

Libanius, in effect, conceives of the rivers as the boundaries between the Roman and Persian and barbarian lands. In a panegyric to the Emperor Theodosius II, Claudian presents a personified Roma asking a series of questions:

> Was it with a looser grip that the men of old held the Danube and the Rhine, they who made me their home? Did Tigris and Euphrates tremble less, when from this place, and from my citadel, the Indian and the Mede begged for treaties that would give them peace?[372]

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[368]Or. 1.22C.

[369]Libanius, Or. 18, 205-11; D&L 226.

[370]Or. 13.73.

[371]Libanius, Or. 13.32.

[372]Claudian, *Panegyricus de Sexto Consulatu Honorii Augusti*, ed. M. Dewar, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1. 415-419.

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All three major frontier rivers are presented as setting out the limits of the inhabitation of the Romans.

The invasions and warfare of the third and fourth centuries prompted a heightened proliferation of news about frontiers in general, and is no doubt partly behind the shifts in meaning which concepts like *limes* were undergoing. Rivers functioned as the specified frontier between Roman and Other. Rivers could serve as demarcations of culture, at least in media. The thirteenth Sibylline oracle, in reference to battles of the third century, describes the appearance of a mysterious figure:

> When the swift-moving man flees from Syria through Soura, escaping
> the Romans across the flood of the Euphrates, no longer like to the
> Romans, but to the arrogant arrow-shooting Persians, then the king of
> the Italians will fall in battle, smitten by gleaming iron, in a state of
> disarray; and his sons will be destroyed by him.[373]

In crossing the Euphrates, the mysterious figure begins even to look more like a Persian. Whether this passage is meant to be taken literally or not, its symbolism is clear -- crossing the river makes one actually look like the Other across it. St. Jerome would write in response to events since the infamous Battle of Adrianople in 378:

> Now for a long time, from the Black Sea to the Julian Alps, our land
> has not been ours. During the last 30 years, the frontier of the Danube
> has been destroyed and war has fallen upon soil in the very center of
> the Roman empire.[374]

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[373]*Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle ll.* 95-102 -- complete text in D. Potter, *Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire: A Historical Commentary on the* Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). This figure presumably captures the frontier city of Hierapolis (p. 277) which plays an important role in frontier defense and in prophetic and apocalyptic imaginings of the frontier. For more on the sibylls, see Chapter Five.

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In imagining what was at one time at least a demarcation between Roman land and that of others, Jerome sees a crucial moment of transition to be the destruction of the Danube frontier. The problems have even gone from periphery to center, and the loss of the *Danubii limites* has brought catastrophe throughout the Roman empire. Referring to the same catastrophe, the orator Themistius lamented how the "indescribable Iliad of disasters on the Danube" had led to the Roman empire being overrun -- not even "unfordable rivers" had been able to keep out the barbarians. The implication here, once again, is that the rivers were, at some level, construed as natural boundaries for keeping the barbarians out.[375] The shock of the barbarian conquest is that the Goths had surmounted such impossible obstacles.

Further hints to the place of rivers in the world-view of the Romans may be found in visual and verbal references to the sacredness or even divinity of rivers.[376] Like the Greeks before them, the Romans imagined rivers as gods, descending from Oceanus, the father of all rivers.[377] Danube, for example, was revered locally as a deity.[378] Their sacred character may also be seen in

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[374]*Ep.* 123.16 — *olim a Mari Pontico usque ad Alpes Iulias non erant nostra quae nostra sunt, et per annos triginta fracta Danubii limite in mediis Romani imperii regionibus pugnabatur.* (Lenski trans. p. 158).

[375]*Or.* 16.206d-207a, (Lenski trans., 143).

[376]Much of my research on this section has been prompted by D. Braund, "River Frontiers in the Environmental Psychology of the Roman World," in Kennedy, *Army*, 43-47.

[377]See L. le Gall, *Recherches sur le culte du Tibre*, (Paris, 1953), and G. Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer*, (Munich, 1912).

[378]For the cult to the to the Danube, see *CIL* 3.3416, 5863, 10263, 10395, 3.11894; to the Rhine, see *CIL* 13.55255, 7790-91, 8810-11. References listed in Braund, "River Frontiers," 44.

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the ceremonies of propitiation required for crossing them.[379] The river gods were to be appeased with sacrifices before a bridge could be built across a river.[380]

Statues and depictions of river gods abound, and give some visual insight into the place of rivers in a Roman world-view. Multiple depictions of river gods, often assuming reclining poses, may be seen in the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae.*[381] Euphrates often appears in a reclining pose, suggesting a supine boundary.[382] Some rivers appear here with long, flowing tails, signifying the flow of the river.[383] Trajan's column depicts the Roman troops leaving Roman territory by crossing the Danube while the river god Danuvius looks on immersed up to his midriff in the water.[384] The deified Euphrates and Tigris appear on Trajan's arch at Benevento. And the Merida Mosaic Map has personifications of Euphrates on it.[385] That the theme continued in Late Antiquity can be seen in the grand effigies of Nile and Tigris in the Baths of Constantine.[386] The iconography of

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[379]D. Braund, "River Frontiers," 43-47

[380]*Ibid.*

[381] iv.2 *fluvii* 45 and 46 (Artemis Verlag, Zürich and München).

[382]See *Inscriptiones grecques et latines de la Syria.* L. Jalabert and R. Mouterde et. al. 1929-.

[383]*Ibid., fluvii* 5

[384]For clear panel depictions of this column and description of its presentations of the Roman frontier, see M. Galinier, "La Colonne trajane: images et imaginaire de la frontière," in Rousselle, *Frontières,* 273-288. For river gods in a late antique text, see Claudian, *Panegyricus de Sexto Consulatu Honorii* 164-68.

[385]Dilke, *Maps,* 149.

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rivers reminds us of their sacred status as well as their status as a boundary. Abundant numismatic evidence suggests more of the same functions.[387]

In the later Empire, rivers continued to be deified or, in a Christian context, personified. Numerous mosaics depict personified rivers. The Basilica of Thyrsos, for example, depicts Tigris and Euphrates as persons.[388] The iconography of rivers is also expressed in terms of the rivers of paradise, flowing somewhere near the eastern bounds of the world. In Christian cosmology, the rivers of paradise often were depicted as surrounding the whole earth, as the outer frame of the terrestrial world. Their appearance on mosaics, especially at the frames, suggests a continuity of the idea of rivers as boundaries.[389] The four rivers of paradise often serve as the outer frames of depictions of the terrestrial world, blending iconographically with Ocean.

Related to their role in the religious world of Romans, rivers were believed to have been put in place by forces of nature which were not to be disturbed. The Elder Pliny presents rivers as having a harmonious relationship with man.[390] Sometimes, they could even serve as prophets of

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[386]See E. Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, 2 vols. (New York: Praeger, 1961), *Thermae Constantini*. Sidonius, *Carmina* 22.41ff presents Bacchus leading the river god Ganges in procession, suggesting that the iconography is alive an well in Late Antiquity.

[387]For river gods depicted on coins scan Imhoof-Blumer, *Revue suisse de numismatique* 23 (1923) 174-421.

[388]Maguire, *Earth*, fig. 16.

[389]For the rivers of paradise on mosaics see Maguire, *Earth*, 23-28, 45-45, 51-52 and *passim*. These present continuity of the classical image of surrounding waters, now imbued with a Christian significance.

[390]I use Pliny throughout this thesis as a benchmark of early Roman imperial thought generalized. Although Pliny writes at a seemingly rarefied level, Beagon and others have argued that he in fact presents a common low-level elite knowledge of the natural order of things. He himself was a non-specialist, generally writing to non-specialist aristocrats. See M. Beagon,

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warning, at other times demarcations.[391] Rivers, as part of the natural order, were in place for a reason. Pliny, for example, sees changing their course as *"contra naturam."*[392] Although this could equally refer to rivers at the center as at the periphery, it is specifically invoked for the frontier rivers. There was something about their placement which implied dividing and bounding.

This ideology continued into the later empire. In his "Satire on the Caesars," Julian depicts Octavian in an argument with Alexander the Great over who was the greater ruler. Octavian claims "For I did not give way to boundless ambition and aim at enlarging her empire at all costs, but assigned for it two boundaries, defined as it were by nature herself, the Danube and the Euphrates."[393] Inflated rhetoric aside, Nature herself had determined these boundaries, at least from Julian's perspective. In a panegyric already referred to in part, one emperor is praised because now his own name makes up the boundary of the empire while "previously it seemed that Nature herself had

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Roman Nature: The Thought of Pliny the Elder, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), v and *passim*.

[391]*Natural History* 5.84ff. See Beagon, *Roman Nature,* 195-200; Earlier, Pliny had presented the Euphrates as an untamed natural force fighting the rugged Taurus Mountain range.

[392]Beagon, *op. cit.* 197. For internal rivers: Tacitus, for example, records the reactions against rerouting the Tiber in *Annales*.

[393]"Satires on the Caesars," 326 p. 391. Interestingly, Julian's view here of Augustus' actual agenda is much more accurate than its expression in Herodian or Dio. The "Satire" often uses river crossing as symbolic of greatness. It is a humorous piece depicting emperors arguing with each other and with Alexander the Great over who is the greatest. Each ruler in turn touts his exploits which qualify himelf for more glory. One of the key elements is how many times a given ruler can claim to have crossed rivers. One emperor can claim to have crossed the Danube once and the Rhine twice (p.377). And Alexander the Great can chide the Romans for carrying on "a war of more than 300 years" on the Eastern front while not having conquered a province beyond the Tigris (p.387).

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mapped out the Rhine so that the Roman provinces might be protected from the savagery of the barbarian by that boundary."[394] Nature was behind the placement of the rivers, and their role as frontiers is fairly clear.[395]

Christians, likewise, saw rivers as a part of Nature, although their view of how Nature was governed was quite different than traditional Roman views (see Chapter Five).[396] Basil describes natural boundaries in an extended reference in one of his homilies.

> How is it that all the different species of fishes, having been allotted a place suitable for them, do not intrude upon one another, but stay within their own bounds? No surveyor apportioned the dwellings among them; they were not surrounded with walls nor divided by boundaries; but what was useful for each was definitely and spontaneously settled. This bay gives sustenance to certain kinds of fish and that one, to other kinds; and those that teem here are scarce everywhere. No mountain extending upward with sharp peaks separates them; no river cuts off the means of crossing; but there is a certain law of nature which allots the habitat to each kind equally and justly according to its need. (4) We, however, are not such. Why? Because we pass beyond the ancient bounds [ὅρια αἰώνια] which our fathers set.[397]

This passage, and the quotation from Proverbs 22:28 at the end, suggest much about how Romans, perhaps specifically Christians, viewed the boundaries set by God through Nature. At one level, Basil's homily here may be read in

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[394]*Panegyrici* N&R 10.7.3 -- the panegyricist continues with reference to the Euphrates serving as a shelter in the East.

[395]This panegyric shows the difficulty of reading this genre. For the orator goes on to claim that because of Maximian "all that I see beyond the Rhine is Roman."

[396]Homily 4, p.58.

[397]Homily 7.3-4. Note that both Basil and Julian (ὅρος ἀρχαῖος) use similar and strong terms to describe natural frontiers, words which root them in the far distant past if not the order of the universe itself.

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terms of a Cappadocian civic patriotism.[398] Throughout his letters and

homilies, he is complaining about efforts by non-Cappadocians to take over

his territory. People impinge on others by taking over parts of their villages,

cities, provinces, and countries.[399] It is the "law of nature" which constrains

the fish -- humans, Basil implies, need visible boundaries, like surveyor lines,

mountains, and rivers. Passages such as this can reveal much about attitudes

toward such natural boundaries. Why would Rome want to impinge on the

territories of others when clear natural boundaries existed?[400]

The Euphrates River, particularly, becomes a reference point for boundary

or limit from the Scriptures. Examples of its use can show the effects of

Scriptural texts and their echoes in the world-view of Late Romans. The

Euphrates functions as a border in the Scriptures, a fact not lost on Romans of

the later Empire. Genesis 15:18, for one of many such examples, sets the

boundaries of the Israel's Promised Land "from the river of Egypt unto the

great river, the river Euphrates."[401] All these passages could be read by

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[398]On Cappadocian civic patriotism, see T.A. Kopecek, "The Cappadocian
Fathers and Civic Patriotism," in *Church History* 43 (1974): 293-303.

[399]Homily 7, p. 111.

[400]43. A further references to God being in control of rivers occurs in Basil's
Homily 4. God, in His creation, gave the signal for rivers to flow -- Basil asks
his congregation to contemplate them sometime. Theodore of Sykeon, 43,
presents God's control over Nature at one point by praying over a violent
river making it safe and easy to cross. And Gregory of Nyssa suggests that
their movement could be the cause of human fate -- PG 45.161a; *Oxford
Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 2, 1798.

[401]Other Scriptural references to the Euphrates as a border include:
Deuteronomy 11:24, repeating the limits of the promised land at "the river,
the river Euphrates"; II Samuel 8:3, where David kills the son of a king as he
"went to recover his border at the Euphrates." (Cf. I Chron. 5:9); Psalm 72,
which promises that the Kingdom of Messiah "shall have dominion from sea
to sea, and from the River [Euphrates] to the ends of the earth" (vs.8).

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Romans, at some level, with reference to the Roman Empire and its

boundaries.

We have explicit proof that some were. Egeria, the western pilgrim, in

describing the Euphrates, quotes Genesis 15:18:

> The Bible is right to call it 'the great river Euphrates.' It is very big, and
> really rather frightening since it flows very fast like the Rhone, but the
> Euphrates is much bigger. We had to cross in ships, big ones ... After
> crossing the river Euphrates, I went on in God's name into the region
> of Syrian Mesopotamia.[402]

Later, Cosmos, the Christian "cosmographer" would write that the eastern

border of the world itself is Paradise from which flow 4 rivers, the Nile,

Tigris, Euphrates, and the Pheison (Indus).[403] Cosmos' reference point for the

eastern frontier or border of the world is river sources. We might be able to

critique his topographical "accuracy," but that would do little justice to his

own world-view which saw rivers on the eastern border of the world itself, a

world-view apparently shared with many sixth-century Romans.[404] The

author of the *Expositio Totius Mundi* likewise devotes a space in his short

geography of the world to speak of the centrality of these four rivers to

universal topography.[405]

Augustine, however, takes this river to be the Jordan, on account of the
baptism of Christ there.

[402]*Itineraria Egeriae*. 18.2-3

[403]For the text and notes see *Cosmas Indicopleustes: The Christian
Topography of Cosmas, an Egyptian Monk*, ed. E. O. Winstedt, (Cambridge,
1909). See W. Wolska, *La topographie Chrétienne de Cosmas Indicopleustés:
théologie et science au VIes*. (Paris, 1962).

[404]"There can be little doubt that the Antiochene conception of the world, as
exemplified by Cosmas, reflected the views of the average [sixth-century]
Byzantine" -- C. Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome* (London,
1980), 176, quoted at Lee, *Information*, 83.

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The Old Testament specifically provided a timeless ideological model of

frontiers. Its references seem to have been taken outside of historical time

and into a continuous present, often with specific reference to the Roman

Empire, rather than the land of Israel. Ammianus himself uses phrasing

which seems to echo biblical passages.[406] In his formula connecting the Nile

and Euphrates together as the *limes* of the East, his wording seems strongly

reminiscent of the wording of Genesis 15:18 which also connects the two

rivers as a boundary.

> But the *limes* of the East, extending a long distance in a straight line,
> reaches from the banks of the Euphrates to the borders of the Nile,
> being bounded on the left by the Saracenic races and on the right
> exposed to the waves of the sea.[407]

My point here is not that Ammianus studied scripture regularly, or that he is

even intentionally echoing scripture here, but rather that its images shaped,

at some level, the way that he and others, possibly raised as Christians,

viewed their world. A "biblical geography," so to speak, was not unique to

Christian pilgrims like Egeria or monks like Cosmas.[408]

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[406]Although the old question of whether Ammianus was a Christian has
been long settled in the negative, the question of the extent of Christian
influence on him is still an open one. T.D. Barnes, in his *Ammianus and the
Representation of Historical Reality*, (Ithaca: Cornell, 1998), argues that "there
are good reasons for holding that Ammianus was brought up a Christian," 63.
He notes that "Ammianus often uses Christian language and Christian
modes of thought and expression without any apparent sign of self-
consciousness," 82. Barnes does not mention the example I am proposing
here, but I think that it would support his basic argument. See R.L. Rike,
Apex Omnium: *Religion in the* Res Gestae *of Ammianus*, (Berkeley:
University of California Press, 1986), 1-7 for the debates over Ammianus'
religious persuasion. See also E.D. Hunt, "Christians and Christianity in
Ammianus Marcellinus," *Classical Quarterly* n.s. 35 (1985): 186-200.

[407]14.8.5 — *Orientis vero limes in longum protentus et rectum, ab Euphratis
fluminis ripis ad usque supercilia porrigitur Nili, laeva Saracenis
conterminans gentibus, dextra pelagi fragoribus patens.*

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Epilogue: Shaping the Physical and Metaphysical Context

One thing is certain about the constructed barriers which survive from

Roman times in England, North Africa, Germany, and elsewhere -- recent

historians are far more eloquent on their purpose than are ancient writers.

Glimpses of their usage in ancient sources only barely emerge at any period of

the empire. Procopius, for example, describes the function of walls in the

East, perhaps exaggerating a bit:

> For the Saracens are naturally incapable of storming a wall, and the
> weakest kind of barricade, put together with perhaps nothing but mud,
> is sufficient to check their assault.[409]

Such walls would have been smaller projects, and can hardly approximate the

larger and more famous and involved ones in Britain and North Africa. The

author of the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* was clear that walls were

intended "to separate barbarians and Romans."[410] This same author reveals

that Hadrian built structures wherever Romans did not have a natural barrier

like a river to keep the barbarians out.[411]

Most surviving structures, in fact, are attributed to Hadrian and a frontier

policy of solidification and containment following Trajan's expansion.

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[408]On the idea of a biblical geography in general, see E.D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire, A.D. 312-460*, (Oxford, 1982), 83, 88. Here Hunt speaks of a Bible "disembodied" from its physical context. Only gradually did the two come together more comfortably, he argues. J. Matthews argues that Eusebius' *Onomasticon* was part of the process of putting religion more firmly into its physical context and historical setting. He tells how Jerome produced a Latin translation in the later fourth century to meet the growing needs of a Western audience. See his "Hostages, Philosophers, Pilgrims, and the Diffusion of Ideas in the Late Roman Mediterranean and Near East," in Clover and Humphreys, eds., 29-49, at 44.

[409]*De aedificiis* 2.9.3-9; quoted in E. Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 93.

[410]*Scriptores Historiae Augustae* 11.2 — *barbaros Romanosque divideret.*

[411]See *infra*, 150-.

Perhaps the most famous "frontier" feature surviving from Roman times is the wall of Hadrian in Britain, followed distantly by the wall of Antoninus Pius. The role of such structures long has been debated and modern views seem to change periodically with new interpretations of such barriers in general across human history.[412] Their role in the later Empire is even less clear. Other examples are the *fossata* ditches and *clausurae* walls of North Africa, also generally agreed to be of a Hadrianic construction, mostly through analogy with Hadrian's other wall projects. It is far from certain what these ditches and small fence-walls were actually used for; even less can we can generalize on their function over time and into the later Empire. Some of the latest arguments present them as designed to regulate the movement of pastoralists near North Africa's frontier.[413] Rare, however, are real

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[412]For comparison of arguments about Hadrian's Wall with those of the Great Wall of China see P. R. Gaubatz, *Beyond the Great Wall: Urban Form and Transformation on the Chinese Frontier*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), which look like the acculturation arguments proposed by Whittaker. For current debates about the role of Hadrian's wall, see D.J. Breeze and B. Dobson, *Hadrian's Wall*, (Harmondsworth, 1976, 4th ed., 2000) and D. J. Breeze, "Britain," in J. Wacher ed., *The Roman World*, vol. 1 Part IV, "The Frontiers," 198-217, at 208.

[413]See Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 80-81, *passim*. Whittaker claims that the Roman frontier policy in North Africa was meant to regulate the movement of pastoralists (91). See also P. Trousset, "Les bornes du Bled Segui: Nouveau aperçus sur la centuriation romaine du sud Tunisien," *Antiquités Africaines* 12 (1978): 125-77; *idem*, "Signification d'une frontière: Nomades et sedentaires dans la zone du limes d'Afrique." in *Limeskongress XII* W.S. Hanson and L.J.F. Keppie ed., *Roman Frontier Studies* XII, 1979, (*BAR* s71), 931-942. Trousset specifically argues that the walls were designed to control transhumance and to keep nomadic people from trampling Roman crops. Whittaker references *CIL* 8.22782-88 which show boundary stones south of the *fossata*, to argue that the ditch-walls were not intended as linear frontiers. B. Shaw, "Fear and Loathing: The Nomad Menace and North Africa," in *idem, Rulers, Nomads, and Christians* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), VII, argues that the walls were intended to ward off "low intensity threats" from pastoralists. More recently, these views have been challenged by D. Cherry,

indications in the sources of what these structures were used for or how

Romans perceived them. While it is thus difficult to place them into the

context of this chapter, it remains necessary to comment on their existence.

Possibly, these structures were a way the Romans sought to surround their

Empire with barriers of some sort if nature was not kind enough to provide

such for them.

In one intriguing reference, an edict by Honorius (409) states that land in

Africa was granted to *gentiles* for the care and maintenance of the frontier

and *fossatum*.[414] The association of *limes* and the *fossata* is explicit here, but

this type of reference is quite rare, and few if any other references survive for

corroboration. While it is thus tempting to suggest that the *fossata* were

perceived as the *limes* by the fifth century, such a conclusion is far from

certain. Trousset, using boundary markers from beyond the *fossata*, warns

against a picture which sees them as functioning literally as the limits of

Empire. Recent debates over the role of the *fossata* and *clausurae* have, in

fact, ranged far and wide. Most now see them as elements of control and

channeling of the north-east and south-west seasonal transhumance

routes.[415] Some, however, have begun to challenge any picture which sees

them purely as regulators of nomadic movement. Perhaps, as Rushworth

contends, they are better seen as a whole series of responses to various

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Frontier and Society in Roman North Africa (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 62. Cherry argues that the walls and ditches served the dual purpose of providing security for the Roman soldiers on the frontier and to enable the army "to tax the products of pastoralists." Cherry also warns against views which ascribe only one purpose to all North African structures. See also M. Euzennat, "La Frontière romaine d'Afrique," *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres* (1990): 565-80.

[414]*CT* 7.15.1 — *munitionemque limites atque fossati.*

[415]C. Daniels, "The Frontiers: Africa," 241-2; 246. The free-ranging movements of North African peoples could thereby be checked.

problems on the frontier zone, rather than just transhumance.[416] Rushworth

allows that such barriers were perceived, in an ideological sense, to divide

Roman from "barbarian" and "set clear limits to the Empire," although he

imagines that they were utilized locally "for far more prosaic concerns" as

well.[417] It remains unclear how one should interpret ideology from these

silent monuments (i.e. those without images or words), but it is certainly

feasible that they could have functioned as barriers in the world-view of the

Romans.[418]

References to barriers and walls are elusive in Late Antique sources.

Ammianus describes how Diocletian encircled the city of Cercusium,

> whose walls are washed by the Ebora and Euphrates rivers (which
> formed a kind of island) with walls and towers when he was
> arranging the inner lines of defense on the very frontiers of the
> barbarians in order to prevent Persians from overrunning Syria, as had
> happened a few years before with great damage to the provinces.[419]

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[416]"North African Deserts and Mountains: Comparisons and Insights," in
Kennedy, *Army*, 297-320, at 309.

[417]*Ibid.*

[418]A related question relates to the problem of boundary stones. If, as
Whittaker asks, Roman boundary stones are found beyond the walls and
ditches, then how can the walls be considered boundaries of empire? Many
have stated outright that no boundary stones separating Roman from
barbarian have ever been found. However, that may not be the case.
Ammianus records events "in the region called Capillacii or Palas, where
boundary stones marked the frontiers of the Alamanni and Burgundians."
Ammianus Marc. 18.2.15 -- *ad regionem (cui Capillacii vel Palas nomen est)
ubi terminales lapides Alamannorum et Burgundiorum confinia
distinguebant.* At first glance this does not seem relevant to the discussion,
but D. Potter contends that the best manuscripts record, not *Alemannorum*
but *Romanorum* and that these boundary stones, although irrelevant in 359,
nonetheless marked Roman from barbarian territory. See his "Empty Areas
and Roman Frontier Policy," *American Journal of Philology* 113.2 (1992): 269-
274, at 272.

The walls of one city, anyway, were seen as protecting a section of the Empire. The later Empire saw a number of city walls constructed, such as the Theodosian Wall of Carthage, largely in response to barbarian threats, real or perceived. Speculating on how these walls were perceived in terms of some sort of a system is tempting but necessarily goes well beyond available ancient evidence.

One of the key developments we can trace in available sources, however, is the erection of ideological walls, protection which was imagined as a wall around the empire. Such references have been commented on before, but there is much controversy here as well. Interestingly, there exists no general study of this phenomenon which takes into account all available evidence from the later Roman Empire. Following, most likely, from the type of containment carried out in various parts of the empire under the direction of Hadrian, the empire was imagined as encircled by a wall. At all events, "Hadrian's Wall's" appearance in the literature coincides with Hadrian's policies. Appian is the first extant author to speak of this figurative wall around the empire, and the image persists far into Late Antiquity.

Appian speaks of a wall in a circle blockading and guarding the great army camp, pulling together the earth and sea as if a country.[420] A little later, Aelius Aristides speaks in these terms: "Beyond the outermost ring of the

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[419]23.5.2 — *cuius moenia Abora et Euphrates ambiunt flumina, velut spatium insulare fingentes . . . muris turribusque circumdedit celsis, cum in ipsis barbarorum confiniis interiores limites ordinaret, documento recenti perterritus, ne vagarentur per Syriam Persae, ita ut paucis ante annis cum magnis provinciarum contigerat damnis.*

[420]*Praef.* 28. See Potter, *Prophecy*, 288-89. Potter writes: "the view of the empire as an area existing within confines provided by a line of fortifications is a radical change from earlier notions that there were *termini imperii* which it was possible to pass beyond. See also Potter's "Empty Areas and Roman Foreign Policy," in *American Journal of Philology* 113.2 (1992): 269-274.

civilized world you drew a second line, quite as one does in walling a town . .
. An encamped army, like a rampart, encloses the civilized world in a
ring."[421] Herodian, in a passage already mentioned above, also speaks of the
Empire as an army camp surrounded by a wall – τεῖχος τῆς 'Ρωμαίων
ἀρχῆς.[422] From the third century, the *Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle* refers to
the barbarian invasions in general as "disorderly races" coming up against the
walls of Rome (ἐπὶ τείχεα 'Ρώμης).[423] The usage appears metaphorical of
barbarian invasions throughout the Roman world.

By the later Roman Empire, the reference to such an ideological wall (or
walls) had become more standard, and appears in a wide variety of sources,
none of which have been systematically explored in the debates over the use
of the wall metaphor. Ammianus, in a passage to be analyzed further in
Chapter 5, refers to Jovian's concessions of 363 as "abandoning the *murus* of
the provinces, behind which they had remained unshaken since earliest

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[421]*Ad Rom.* 81-2. See Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 38, for an alternative analysis to
what I am proposing with this and other passages.

[422]Aristides, *Ad Rom.* 26.29.82-4, 35.36 and Herodian 2.11.5. For the
development of the theme of the wall of the Roman Empire cutting off
civilized from barbarian, see J. Palm, *Rom, Römertum und Imperium in der
griechischen Literatur der Kaiserzeit*, Acta Regiae Societatis Humaniorum
Lietterarum Lundensis 57, (Lund: Gleerup, 1959). Whittaker specifically
rejects the idea that these images give any real hint to mentality of defensive
imperialism. See Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 37. He quotes another reference in
Aristides -- *Ad Rom.* 10 -- "you [Rome] recognize no fixed boundaries, nor
does another dictate to you to what point your control reaches." Whittaker,
however, does not account for the fact that Aristides seems to be wielding a
new ideology with the wall metaphor, and it is perfectly natural that he
should not be using it consistently throughout. The weight of tradition is not
necessarily cast completely aside with ideological innovation; surely the
elements can exist in tension and even ambivalence. See also Whittaker's
refutations in his "Where are the Frontiers Now?," in Kennedy, *Army*, 36-38.

[423]*ll.* 105. See note at Potter, *Prophecy*, 288-89.

times."[424] Here, the eastern frontier, anyway, was imagined as a protection of the eastern provinces. John Chrysostom makes a similar suggestion when he writes of Nisibis itself as "an unbreachable circuit wall" and a "bulwark" for the Empire.[425] Libanius echoes such an image when he speaks of the "cities, territories, and provinces that formed the defensive walls (τὰ τείχη) of the Roman Empire".[426] In one panegyric to Julian, he speaks of how Julian's eloquence itself "is the τεῖχος which you have constructed around the Roman Empire."[427] The image continues in hagiographical writers, as will be seen in Chapter 5. Severus of Antioch, for example, praises the holy martyrs who make a "strong wall for all the inhabited earth."[428] In the context of martyr cult which was seen as protecting the Empire, such reference in hagiography and other ecclesiastical writings show the endurance of the wall metaphor.[429]

The development of the wall metaphor, like the shift in meaning in *limes* is just one of many indications that the frontier consciousness of the Romans was in transition and that generalizations about Roman frontiers in Roman thought for the early Empire simply do not apply for Late Antiquity. Walls, real or imagined, were of human construction. Yet it seems that they were

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[424]25.9.3.

[425]*de S. Babyla contra Julianum et Gentiles* 22.124.

[426]*Oration* 18.278.

[427]*Oration* 12.91 — τῇ μὲν οὖν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῇ τοιοῦτον τεῖχος περιήλασας.

[428]James of Edessa, "Hymns of Severus of Antioch," 216 (*Patrologia orientalis* 75.676); E. Fowden, *Barbarian Plain* 46.

[429]The fact that only Greek easterners refer to the walls of Empire, as such, might suggest that in the absence of literal walls like the *fossata* or Hadrian's Wall, the Greek writers simply preferred metaphorical frontiers.

also a way to mirror natural frontiers, the ideal boundaries of empire, at least according to late Roman frontier consciousness. So much is implied, at least, by the teaching which one would hope was able to proceed in the restored schools in Autun.

CHAPTER FOUR -- THE TRIUMPH OF PERIPHERY: MEDIA AND CONTEXTS

Rumor (*Fama*), the swiftest messenger of sad events, outstripping these messengers, flew through provinces and nations, and most of all struck the people of Nisibis with bitter grief . . .

--Amm. Marc. 25.8.13[430]

Rumor (Φήμη), the messenger of good news, does not cease announcing to us that you have been darting about like the stars, appearing sometimes in one part of the barbarian land, again in another . . .

--St. Basil, *Epistula* 196[431]

The striking contrast between these two statements, both written in the late

fourth century, reflects more the immediate mood of the writers than any

significant difference in outlook. Rumor has been alleged, in all ages, to be

the most active source of news and information, accurate or not, good or bad.

Often Roman writers get no more explicit in describing how news moved

from one place to another. Ancient persons observed, as we often do, that

"news just travels." Not as technical nor as scientific in their explanations as

we moderns, they imagined Rumor as a divine being, flying with wings. In

Athens, an altar to Rumor reinforced its divine status.[432]

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[430]*Hos tabellarios fama praegrediens, index tristiorum casuum velocissima, per provincias volitabat et gentes, maximeque omnium Nisibenos acerbo dolore perculsit.*

[431]The word for messenger used here is ἄγγελος. Emperors also are depicted using meteorological imagery, moving about quickly and appearing suddenly. Amm. Marc. 21.9.6 depicts Julian as "*fax vel incensus malleolus.*" C. Ando cites Pliny *Panegyric* 80.3 to illustrate the long history of the association. See his *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 196.

[432]See Aischines, 2.145.

Since at least the days of Hesiod, φήμη or *Fama* reported on events in a way mysterious in its quickness.[433] The common translations of φήμη as both"common report" or "the god Rumor" show the lack of a clear divide between the divine and human realms of news. Even St. Basil's reference retains the idea of Rumor as a person or entity; his description is probably not just poetic personification. Ammianus, like Greeks of the classical period before him, saw Rumor as a divine source of information, coming, seemingly, from nowhere, and, if interpreted correctly, always true.[434] When describing at one point how news was able to circulate so quickly throughout the eastern provinces and even beyond, Ammianus gives insight into his own world-view: "We believe (nor in fact is there any doubt of it) that Rumor flies swiftly through the paths of the air" with the "circulation of the news of these events."[435] Such a description fits in well with the general tendencies in the fourth century toward popular belief, at all levels. The fact that Ammianus, in effect, expresses his beliefs so strongly (*neque enim dubium*

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[433]See Hesiod, *Works and Days* 763-4 -- "Rumor which many people spread (φημίζωσι) never dies entirely; Rumor also is some kind of divinity (θεός)" ; For references to Rumor's divine status in early imperial sources, see Ovid, *Pont.* 2.1.19; Vergil, *Aeneid* 4.174; Lucan 4.574; Martial 7.6.4.

[434]On the place of Rumor in classical Greece, see S. Lewis, *News and Society in the Ancient Polis*, 12-13, *passim*. See also J. Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), Chapter Three. See also the references at φήμη in *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*.

[435]18.6.3 -- *Credimus (neque enim dubium est) per aerios tramites Famam praepetem volitare, cuius indicio haec gesta pandente, consiliorum apud Persas summa proponebatur.* In this particular reference, Ammianus is trying to explain how the Persians received word of events and were able to take quick council. For other references to Rumor in Ammianus, see, for example, 26.1.4; 21.9.3; 22.2.3; 22.2.5. For Rumor in Libanius, see ep. 1402. Both writers use the word frequently, sometimes with clear divine or personified reference as in the examples given above.

est) shows that he is not just talking of "Rumor flying" in a poetical way, but rather affirming his belief in Rumor as deity.[436] This fact should not be forgotten, as it shows ways in which views of news could reflect ancient world-views.[437]

As also suggested in the opening quotations, rumors of events near or even beyond frontiers were of particular interest to Romans of the Later Empire. The recipient of Basil's letter, Aburgius, is traveling with Gratian's western army on the Danube frontier, supplying money to the soldiers, as we are told later in the letter. Rumor, here, effectively crossed natural frontiers. Ammianus' reference highlights how news was spread far and wide of the surrender of Nisibis, defining in the minds of many Romans, the Empire's easternmost point.[438] Rumor from the peripheries was also the most risky --

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[436]On arguments for the popularization of beliefs among late Roman historians, the rise of *superstitio*, see *infra* 252 as well as A. Momigliano, "Popular Beliefs and the Late Roman Historians," in *Popular Belief and Practice*, ed. G.J. Cummings and D. Baker (Cambridge: 1972): 1-18 ; R. MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 74-102 and J. Matthews, *Ammianus*, 249 and 424-. For an attempt to read the Ammianus' passages in purely technical and strategic terms, leaving out the religious and belief aspect of them altogether, see M.J. Nicasie, *The Twilight of Empire: The Roman Army from the Reign of Diocletian until the Battle of Adrianople*, (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1998), 157.

[437]On Rumor in general in Roman sources, see the still-helpful W. Riepl, *Das Nachrichtenwesen des Altertums (mit besondere Rücksicht auf die Römer)*, (Leipzig, 1913), 235-240.

[438]Amm. Marc. 19.10.1 characterizes the arena of action near Nisibis and Amida as the "extreme East" (*in Orientis extimo*) from the perspective of the city of Rome (*dum haec per varios turbines in Orientis extimo festinantur, difficultatem adventantis inopiae frumentorum urbs verebatur aeternae*). The association was common. See, for example, Augustine, *De civ. D.* 4.23 and 5.2. See also John Chrysostom, *De S. Babyla contra Julianum et Gentiles* 22.124, where the city is presented as an "unbreachable wall" at the east of the Empire. For a discussion of such ideological walls, see *supra* 150-.

long travel distance and long-standing images of those near and beyond the frontiers could make the interpretation of peripheral rumor difficult.[439] But perhaps that added to its very attraction.

The sources also can describe the spread of news in far more mundane ways, although the element of mystery often lingers. But the actual passage of news is one of the most taken-for-granted aspects of the ancient world. The Romans, like the Greeks, are generally reticent about their media. We frequently hear in the sources of someone learning of something or hearing of something. We catch but fleeting glimpses of its spread in such phrases as "news reached"; "news circulated"; "news spread and burst upon . . ."[440] The means of communication is rarely if ever mentioned. The ancients' apparent disinterest in describing what we would call media, does not, of course, deny media a present and active role in their world.[441] Unless, of course, we are content to believe with Ammianus, Basil, Libanius, and others that news

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[439]Take, for example, the legendary images of peoples beyond the North African frontiers, such as the Garamantes ("outermost Garamantes"), the acephalous Blemmyae, etc. See C. Daniels, "The Frontiers: Africa," in J.S. Wacher, ed., *The Roman World*, (London, 1987), 223-265, at 235. Other creatures to come from Africa include Goat-Pans and Satyrs. I would suggest that a lack of news flow from the North African frontier in general encouraged such images in the late Republic and the early Empire.

[440]From *Life of St. Daniel the Stylite*, 56; Julian, *Misopogon* 360, p. 48, p. 483; Libanius, *or.* 13.32.

[441]For a helpful discussion on applying media studies to ancient history, see D. Mendels, *The Media Revolution of Early Christianity: An Essay on Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), Chapter One "Media Studies and Historiography," in particular. As Mendels points out, "our problem as those who study ancient history is our inability to measure the impact that such communicative messages had on their audiences," 2. But as Mendels goes on to relate, we can use some tools of modern media studies to analyze our texts in such a way that ancient news media become more apparent.

literally flies on wings, we are left with historical questions about human

agency and the human-created structures through which news moved. The

clues are there, if somewhat spotty; but it does seem a bit counter-productive

to dwell on the lack of organized news media as if the ancients constantly

lived in a state of disappointment or frustration at not having modern

media.[442]

The role of news in Late Antiquity, as in many ancient contexts, has

received little systematic attention.[443] In a sense, news flow was hardly worth

noting by the ancients due to what one historian has called its unspoken

"very ordinariness."[444] A.D. Lee's work on the foreign relations aspect of

news is thus an important contribution to a field just beginning to develop in

Late Antique studies.[445] Lee explores the dynamics of news flow using tools

of sociological analysis; my own exploration began with his work. The focus

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[442]As does Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 69 -- "The personal character of imperial rule and a very limited flow of information produced eccentric, not scientific decisions." See also the critique of Luttwak in J.C. Mann, "Power, Force, and the Frontiers of the Roman Empire," *JRS* 69 (1979): 175-83. The basis for Mann's critique, as for most critiques of Luttwak is that the Roman's "poor communication" coupled with "distorted notions" of geography and cartography rendered impossible a "Grand Strategy." F. Millar, "Emperors, Frontiers, and Foreign Relations, 31 B.C. to AD 378," *Britannia* 13 (1982): 1-25, addresses the spread of information with a bit more sympathy for Roman perspectives and world-views. Yet his analysis is limited to the emperor's knowledge base and strategic intelligence, and remains somewhat dismissive.

[443]Lewis, *News and Society*, notes two reasons for the lack of studies of ancient news. The first is that our own view of news in the modern world is too rooted in print culture to appreciate or explore its role in more oral societies without hinting at "inadequate media." A second reason is that for all of the ancient world, analyses of communication have been limited to military studies and certain visible institutions for transmitting intelligence.

[444]S. Lewis, *News and Society*, 5.

[445]Lee, *Information*.

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of this chapter, however, is not foreign relations so much as the origin, character, and context of news flow from the frontier during the Later Roman Empire, with some specific reference to the East and North Africa.

The Roman Empire itself remained together, in a sense, because of formal and informal channels of communication, channels of human construction. These channels became more important, I argue, in the later Roman Empire, as they carried news from and about the frontiers to people increasingly attentive to happenings on them. Part of this interest was the increased presence of the emperors on the frontier as well as escalating transgression of the frontiers by outsiders. But there is more to the story. This shift was roughly concurrent with what J. Eadie calls "the general collapse of the centre of gravity in imperial politics and the triumph of the frontier."[446] Eadie traces this phenomenon with reference to the third century insurrections in the East, but other factors played. Images of frontiers were passed via expanding media through the human context. A wider and stronger proliferation of media reporting on frontiers placed them at the fore in a later Roman world-view. Reconstructing a context of news flow is difficult, but vital. The connection of salient structures with specific news reports is perhaps, ultimately, an impossible task, but the available evidence can allow for reasonable attempts to elucidate the general dynamics of the process.

News and information afford crucial insight into the study of Roman frontiers in Late Antiquity, and especially of a late Roman frontier consciousness. Consciousness is shaped by one's world-view as well as new information which complements or challenges that worldview.[447] In his

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[446]"One Hundred Years of Rebellion: The Eastern Army in Politics, A.D. 175-272," in Kennedy, *Army*, 135-151 at 135.

study of news in the Greek *polis*, S. Lewis argues that news is always mediated by a particular set of beliefs and expectations.[448] As news entered the *polis*, he claims, it could only be analyzed against a backdrop of pre-existing, if tacit, knowledge. Orators and writers appealed to this backdrop in proclaiming their messages. Thus, a modern reading of an ancient text should include, in a sense, consideration of both the knowledge backdrop and the expectations of the audience. Both can help elucidate news flow.[449] Such an approach assumes analysis of tacit knowledge.[450] As. P. Bourdieu so succinctly put it,

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[447]Although Bourdieu, to my knowledge, never uses the term world-view, his approach is conducive to this type of study. The principal reference here is *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. R. Nice, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995 [1977]. For Bourdieu, the *habitus* is a "product of history" which affirms and produces individual and collective practices, 82. The *habitus* becomes the site of negotiation between the "objective structures" of a society, and its practices. Practices become legitimate through a process of "universal mediation which causes an agent's practices to be sensible or reasonable," 75. The product of this mechanism is a "common-sense world endowed with objectivity and secured with a consensus of meaning," 83. This is close to what I call world-view. New information can challenge and change this system -- a heterodoxy challenges doxa, a situation in which there is no dissenting voice. In turn, a defensive orthodoxy emerges which struggles with the heterodoxy.

[448]*News and Society*, 25. My use of world-view in this project (explained *supra* 39-) is roughly similar to what Lewis is describing here. He combines a "background of knowledge" with assumptions about the world, albeit without using the term world-view.

[449]In his analysis of Greek democracy, J. Ober, *op. cit.*, presents texts as "symbol systems that must be understood in relation to their receptors." His approach, which presents "community" as assuming a "minimal level of shared values," is not perfectly adaptable to analyses of the later Roman Empire, but it is instructive here in that it suggests that texts are not just personal reflections, however strong their potential idiosyncrasies.

[450]The assumption here is that humans operate on the basis of knowledge and presuppositions which they do not necessarily articulate, nor do they see the need to either. As J. Habermas puts it "speaking and acting subjects know how to achieve, accomplish, perform and produce a variety of things without explicitly advertising to, or being able to give an explicit account of, the

"What goes without saying, goes without saying."[451] There is a type of objective consensus which shapes a "commonsense world" which does not have to be rationalized, analyzed, or made explicit.

Various studies have explored the time of news travel, usually focusing on the deaths of emperors or the results of battles or invasions.[452] These studies are crucial to understanding communication and action in the ancient world. But analyzing news involves more than tracing the speed at which information travels and against which policy decisions were made. News structured thoughts and lives; it defined communities.[453] For the Roman world, more so than for the Greek, we know about formal channels of communication, the likes of which are necessary for holding together a vast empire. More, in fact, can be said about the content and form of news in the Roman world simply because, for much of the empire's existence anyway, we

structures, rules, criteria, schemata, and the like on which their performances rely." Quoted from Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*, 22. Habermas calls this a "life-world"; it appears to be roughly similar to what I have borrowed from Dilthey as World-view or *Weltanschauung*.

[451]P. Bourdieu, *The Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. R. Nice, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 167.

[452]The starting point for time of ancient news travel is R. Duncan-Jones, *Structure and Scale in the Roman Economy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), "Part I: Time and Distance." Duncan-Jones analyzes how long it took for the news of the death of emperors to reach Egypt, for example, where it is recorded in papyri. See also M. Peachin, *Roman Imperial Titulature and Chronology, A.D. 235-284*, (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1990). See now C. Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 121-, especially his notes on these pages.

[453]See Lewis, *News and Society* on this issue, 2-3, 5-7, etc. "The Greeks themselves saw news as one of the factors that could define their communities" (5) even as they were reluctant to share explicitly how they received it.

know of the roads on which it was carried and often the officials responsible for disseminating the information. But therein also lies a danger inherent to most studies of ancient communication in general, and of the knowledge of frontiers in particular. We should not overemphasize the role of the official (usually political or military) channels of communication to the neglect of more "popular" and/or implicit means of communication. Our sources do tend to highlight the role of military news when they mention news at all, but there was much more at work, structuring the Late Roman imagination and in particular, as I am arguing, its frontier consciousness.

I. Modes of Communication

My focus is on news, as such, and not on military or strategic intelligence.[454] It is, however, difficult to escape the emphasis on "wars and rumors of wars," so central to the ancient sources. Much, but not all, of our knowledge of news in Late Antiquity does concern wars, usurpations, and the like.[455] It is my contention, however, that an understanding of the more obvious pictures given in the sources can give clues concerning the diffusion of news about and from frontiers in a more general sense.[456] It can also give

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[454]For a detailed (and copiously documented) study of Roman intelligence gathering, see Austin and Rankov, although the work has a heavy emphasis on the earlier Empire. More specific for Late Antique military intelligence is N.J.E. Austin, *Ammianus on Warfare* (Bruxelles: Collection Latomus 165, 1979). See also Lee, *Information, passim*. Since these aspects have now been very well explored I will not go into any depth on Roman intelligence officials, except as they intersect with or shed light on my general theme.

[455]On which see V. Chauvot, "Guerre et diffusion des nouvelles au Bas-Empire," *Ktema* 13 (1988): 125-35.

hints to world-view. I will handle a variety of media of communication individually, organized within broad categories borrowed widely from modern media studies.[457]

The Written Word

As a key element of long-distance communication throughout much of human history, the written word often preserves news in a way impossible with more ephemeral modes. It can also record reception of news in a way impossible for any other mode. Communication over space and time is a prime mark of "literate and civilized societies." "Civilization is built on literacy because literacy is a universal processing of a culture by a visual sense extended in time and space."[458] As mentioned throughout this dissertation, the Roman Empire was an "empire of the written word."[459] Harris estimates that at best the rate of literacy in the Empire was 10%, with significant regional variation.[460] Late Antiquity probably saw a steady decline from this

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[456]Potter, *Prophets*, 110-130, provides a very helpful list of news media types in the Roman world. All of these could and did provide information to the people of the Roman Empire. My own analysis, although it goes in very different directions, has been shaped by his list. He is more interested in how the emperor's message was relayed throughout the empire (i.e. propaganda).

[457]In particular, M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), D. McQuail, *Media Performance: Mass Communication and the Public Interest*, (London: Sage Publications, 1992), and *idem.*, *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (London: Sage Publications, 1994).

[458]McLuhan, *op. cit.*, 84.

[459]Potter, *Prophets*, 94-95. For ancient literacy in general see Harris, *Literacy*.

[460]Harris, *Literacy*, 329.

rate for reasons outlined by Harris in his analysis of that period.[461] Yet, the

cultural influence of literate people on the rest of the population continued to

be significant, and was felt far beyond their shrinking circle. The written

word thus continued to function at all levels of Late Antique society.[462] The

predominance of more visual media and symbolic modes of communication

in the later Roman Empire further suggests that news continued to

proliferate alongside, or even in spite of, the decline in literacy.

Our most detailed written source for any period of Late Antiquity,

Ammianus' *Res Gestae*, is one example of how historiography itself is a form

of media.[463] He was writing, at least in the surviving books, contemporary

history.[464] Much of his *Res Gestae* is, in one sense, a medium for

transmitting news, much of it gleaned first-hand, to a public.[465] News

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[461]*Ibid.*, 285-322. Harris mentions the great variety throughout the Roman world, but does explain the general factors of decline, dated to the third century and following. These include the decline of urbanization, the dwindling of the city elites, and weakening of the schools.

[462]See "Literacy" in *LA*, 543-44, which provides a helpful list of questions for analyzing literacy in the Roman world. The Roman legal system and tradition of written law presumed a centrality of the written word at all periods of the Empire. A.K. Bowman and G. Wolf eds., *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), contains some helpful essays, especially the introductory essay and others to which I will refer below.

[463]On Ammianus' method see G. Sabbah, *La méthode d' Ammien Marcellin: Recherches sur la construction du discours historique dans les "Res Gestae,"* Part II (Paris, 1978): 115-239.

[464]C. Ando provides the simple but helpful definition here of "contemporary" as "within living memory." See his *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 122.

[465]On Ammianus' sources in general, see Matthews, *Ammianus*, 376-382. On the topic of Ammianus' military knowledge and communication, see in particular N.J.E. Austin, *Ammianus on Warfare: An Investigation into*

contained in historical writing generally was slower than that from other modes in reaching the public (and slower still in reaching the illiterate public, if it did so at all). But such information also tended to be viewed as the most accurate. This is not to say that the educated public trusted historians implicitly. Rather, there was a general expectation that historians, unlike, so often, the panegyricists, had done some comparative research.[466] As a crafter of this medium, Ammianus was very aware of his own audience and their expectations as he wrote; to use modern terms, he was attuned to his public. At times he expressed frustration with his ever-demanding public. In a passage which says as much about his own historical theory as the role of his writing as media, Ammianus writes:

> Having narrated the course of events with the strictest care up to the bounds of the present epoch, I had already determined to withdraw my foot from the more familiar tracks, partly to avoid the dangers which are so often connected with the truth, and partly to escape unreasonable critics of the work which I am composing, who cry out as if wronged, if one has failed to mention what an emperor said at table . . . or because in an ample account of regions he ought not to have been silent about some insignificant forts . . . and many other matters which are not in accordance with the principles of history. For it is wont to detail the high lights of events, not to ferret out the trifling details of unimportant matters. For whoever wishes to know these may hope to be able to count the small indivisible bodies which fly through space, and to which we give the name of atoms.[467]

Ammianus; Military Knowledge, Coll. Latomus, vol. 165 (Brussels 1979). See also, the expanded treatment in Austin and Rankov. For a cautionary note on taking Ammianus as more than "only one in a chorus of voices," with specific references to his reporting on the Battle of Adrianople, see N. Lenski, *"Initium mali Romano imperio*: Contemporary Reactions to the Battle of Adrianople," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* vol. 127 (1997): 129-168.

[466]See *supra* 86- on the historical reliability of panegyric.

[467]26.1.1.

I quote this passage at length for what it reveals about audience interest and the place of the written word in communicating news meaningful to Romans, not to mention the difficulties of meeting the demands of that audience. And yet the very fact that Ammianus mentions the complaints gives a sense of his sensitivity as both an historian and a crafter of media -- in short, he knows what people will say because he has heard their complaints, and he does care. He even shifted his emphasis to avoid having to listen to them. This passage suggests that Ammianus is interested in what the audience considers "relevant," even as his professed deviation from that standard gives clues of the expectations of Roman audiences. The interest in the emperor and forts, both of which often were located at or near frontiers, is readily apparent in the passage as well.

Ammianus' audience included potential informants as well. Writing contemporary history in the Roman world came with its own set of dangers and problems as well as responsibilities.[468] Ammianus, like most Roman historians, is aware of the dangers of offending someone in power or potentially coming into power. His reference above to the "dangers which are so often connected with the truth" is, no doubt, acknowledgment of the risks all Roman historians faced. Accuracy in reporting news had to be balanced against saying too much, or even too little, in a dictatorship sensitive to the value of news in shaping perceptions.

A further example of Ammianus' sensitivity to his audience occurs at the beginning of the his account of Julian, whom he greatly admired. He writes:

> I shall describe [his achievements] one by one in progressive order, deploying all the resources of my modest talent, if they will suffice.

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[468]See, in particular, C. Fornara, *The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 47-90.

What I shall narrate will come close to the category of panegyric, yet it is not made up of eloquent deceit, but is a wholly truthful account, based on clear evidence.[469]

Again we see his historical theory merging with his self-reflexive sense of being a crafter of media. This passage also gives us a sense of how Ammianus though an audience would receive panegyric, as well. He is aware of his audience and he is sensitive to its critiques and hesitations. Media communication has as one of its primary essentials that it respond to the expectations and demands of the audience.[470] Much of what Ammianus wrote would not have been otherwise known by his audience.[471]

Major written histories, like Ammianus', were themselves in part the products of the written word in their dependence on shorter written accounts, even for contemporary events. On a much smaller scale than would historians, soldiers, out of duty or just curiosity and interest, wrote accounts of campaigns and journeys to and from the frontiers.[472] These accounts kept

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[469]16.1.2-4.

[470]D. McQuail makes the following comment, from the perspective of modern media studies -- "News, we are often reminded . . . is still a narrative of people and events, with elements of drama, myth, and personalization as well as of fact . . . these features are embedded in the history . . . and in current practice of news . . . and are likely to influence how news is 'read' by its audience and also *why* it is read in the first place," McQuail, *Media Performance*, 189, quoted in D. Mendels, *Media Revolution*, 18.

[471]A further example may be found at 18.1.15 -- "And since I think that perchance some of my readers by careful examination may note and bring it against me as a reproach that this, and not that, happened first, or that those things which they themselves saw are passed over, I must satisfy them to this extent: that not everything which has taken place among persons of the lowest class is worth narrating; and if this were necessary to be done, even the array of facts to be gained from the public records themselves would not suffice."

[472]These writings are not the same as the official written military records common up until 256 in the East, to be revived under the tetrarchy. Their

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the frontiers more in the public arena by their proliferation and by the increased number of them, specifically along the eastern frontier. These minor writings generally do not survive; we know about them through fortunate reference among the letters of Libanius and others. Their role in spreading news must have been vital. When Libanius was plying the *notarius* Philagrius for information, he notes that Philagrius would, while on campaign with Julian "examine and put into writing every particular, the nature of the localities, the dimensions of cities, height of fortresses, width of rivers, and all successes and reverses."[473] It seems that as a *notarius* (a fact noted by Ammianus rather than Libanius) Philagrius was expected to do this. It is in this letter that Libanius claims that he will take the "bare facts" and "clothe them in the garb of oratory."

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availability to a civilian suggests that they were more "popular" in nature than the official reports. See R.O. Fink, *Roman Military Records on Papyrus*, (Cleveland, 1971) and Harris, *Literacy* 293. The substance of these reports are generally name rosters, supply lists, receipts, and the like. They are not narratives accounts, although it certainly is possible that they could have been consulted in the construction of historical narratives. From a later context, Vegetius 2.19, records that "since there are many offices in the legions which require educated soldiers [*litteratos milites*], it is appropriate that those who test the recruits should examine the stature, physical strength and mental alertness of all of them; but in some cases skill in note-taking [*notarum peritia*] and practice in arithmetic is selected"(quoted in Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 294). This passage shows that literacy among soldiers was desirable and elevated some about the rest. On the literacy of soldiers, see A.K. Bowman, "The Roman Imperial Army: Letters and Literacy on the Northern Frontier," in A.K. Bowman and G. Wolf, *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, 109-125.

[473]*Epistula* 1434. This Philagrius is recorded in Amm. Marc. 21.4.2 as *comes postea Orientis*, and would have been based in Libanius' Antioch. See also Matthews, *Ammianus*, 376 and *PLRE*. On the role of the *notarius* in general see A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey*, index, "notaries"; "*notarii* in *LA*, 611-612; and H.C. Teitler, Notarii *and* Exceptores: *An Enquiry into the Role and Significance of Shorthand Writers in the Imperial and Ecclesiastical Bureaucracy of the Roman Empire*, (Amsterdam, 1985).

Other examples come in the aftermath of disaster. Immediately after the death of Julian and the subsequent retreat from the Eastern frontier, Libanius begins to ply persons passing through his native Antioch for news from the frontier. His writings suggests that he was searching for news from, and from beyond, the frontier to incorporate into his orations, and that some of the news was of a more popular nature than would be contained in official military records.[474] He rounds up all the "usual suspects" for information, but suddenly no one wants to give him the news he craves. In his complaints over the reluctance of participants to talk about the "disregarded" Julian, he mentions those who would never neglect to keep a "written account of such events."[475] These people, even his friends, he claims, said that they did have such accounts and that they would give them, "but none did"; in fact, they refused even to give verbal accounts. Libanius admits that he did get a few lists of "some days and route distances and names of places," from a few strangers, but that the news coming from the frontier was far less than he expected. He specifically wanted a detailed account of Julian's achievements so that he could "fully explain" the campaign beyond the frontiers. Libanius closes the epistle hinting that there are written accounts to be had, but that he is having trouble getting them.

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[474]Again, if one views texts, especially rhetorical texts, as responding to audience interest, then we can assume that Libanius' audience was expecting news from and beyond the frontiers and that this was not just a personal fascination of Libanius. See J. Ober, *op. cit.*, for examples of reading texts as symbol systems which responded to popular expectation to some extent.

[475]*Epistula* 1220.7. A similar passage records Libanius attempting to get information from eyewitnesses (*Epistula* 1434). Such references also highlight the dangers of ancient reporting -- his informants became fearful for their lives because of the turn of events.

The implication here is that written accounts of a popular as well as technical nature were quite common in association with military campaigns, and hence gave news about and from frontiers and beyond. They covered a variety of topics beyond just troop movement. The fact that people would, under normal circumstances, part with their writings, even to strangers, suggests that they recorded them for just such purposes.[476] Although none of these written accounts survive, they do suggest the importance and proliferation of the written word in Late Roman society.

Libanius was primarily interested in getting news to fill his orations and letters. Many of his orations he delivered to critical acclaim in Antioch; he also had them circulated in written form throughout the Greek-speaking world, where his status as a literary figure was immense. Libanius thus provides one example of how the influence of the written word, even that written by an army commander or scribe, could go far beyond the small circle of the literate to touch a much wide audience. Such news from the frontiers, highly regarded (and progressively more so), was also shaping and expressing frontier consciousness.[477]

We also know that written records of events were stored in major cities. These records served official purposes, but they were available to historians and others as well.[478] Ammianus notes "extant statements filed among the

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[476]That it was normal for these writings to be dispersed is hinted at by Libanius' frustration at not having access to them this time. His access now was limited because people feared for their lives if they had praised Julian.

[477] Libanius records news arriving from the Eastern frontier to Antioch in *Epistulae* 758.4; 802; 1220.8; 1402; 1426; 1434. See Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*, 128.

[478]On their use in administration in particular, see C.M. Kelly, "Later Roman Bureaucracy: Going through the Files," in A.K. Bowman and G. Woolf eds., 161-176.

public record houses" which he used in writing his own history.[479] The

collection must have been extensive; as recorded above, when Ammianus

claims that not everything done is worth recording in a historical account, he

claims that if he wanted to relate everything done by the lowest class of

people, "even the array of facts to be gained from the public records

themselves would not suffice."[480] Ando interprets such records as pieces of

information which "formed part of the larger history of the imperial

commonwealth."[481] The information was not placed here for the benefit of

historians, but nonetheless gave a benefit to all in the form of diffused and

available news.[482] In a fascinating topographical study of Eusebius'

Onomasticon, B. Isaac has argued that Eusebius wrote this whole geographical

work with its full reference to roads, cities, and topographical features,

primarily from information in the archives.[483] Evidently, the material

available in archives was quite extensive and available for perusal.

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[479]16.12.70. Ammianus refers to such public record houses at 28.1.15 as well.

[480]Amm. Marc. 18.1.15.

[481]Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*, 118.

[482]Ando further interprets this information as part of sharing an
"iconographic language through which they could share their emperor." *Ibid.*,
118. Such descriptions assume that propaganda was the central fact of the
Roman Empire, and that the Roman people lived under some type of
"manufactured consent." Although I realize that Bourdieu himself, from
whom I have gained much, views all social interactions as power
relationships, I think the view is too cynical and can deny humans any real
agency. The question is not a matter of the ancient evidence, but one of
historical theory. I remain unconvinced that propaganda, and the power it
implies over the people, is the central or even a central focus of the study of
information in the late Roman Empire.

[483]"Eusebius and the Geography of Roman Provinces," in his *The Near East
Under Roman Rule: Selected Papers*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998), 284-306.

Another form of written news was short pamphlets (βιβλίδια). These seem to have been circulated widely for people to read. They could be incorporated into longer histories, but sometimes they stood on their own. One example is recorded for Julian who, "enthused by his own achievements" wrote up a βιβλίδιον of his campaign on and over the Rhine frontier. Eunapius notes that he would not repeat the account in his own but rather suggests that "those who wish to observe the greatness of his words and his deeds I shall direct to turn to his βιβλίδιον and to the splendors of his account."[484] It seems that such accounts were in demand and readily available, else Eunapius' injunction to read them would be empty and would imply that Eunapius was just being evasive.

Similar to these would have been personal memoirs which were made available to historians. One of these, a particularly valuable source, was written by Oribasius of Pergamum, the doctor and close friend of the emperor Julian. He was familiar, we are told, with all the details of the campaign, "having been present at them."[485] He wrote up for Eunapius "a detailed memorandum" designed especially to further Eunapius' historical work.[486] There is some indication that Ammianus and Libanius made use of this memoir as well.[487]

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[484]Eunapius, *fragment* 17.

[485]Eunapius, *fragment* 25

[486]*Ibid.*

[487]On the piece, see Matthews, *Ammianus*, 161-75, 505. The suggestion that Ammianus and Libanius used it comes from F. Paschoud, "Quand parut la première édition de l'Histoire d'Eunape?," in *HAColl, Bonn* 1977/78 (1980): 149-62.

Written legal texts and imperial pronouncements also funtioned as media for dissemination of news.[488] Ammianus describes how Constantius sent "laureled letters" of his "conquests" (at some of which he was not even present) for proclamation through edicts. Constantius' own utterance were "deposited in the public record houses." Ammianus used these very records in composing his own history, although he remained skeptical of Constantius' outrageous claims of victories in battles in which he was not even a participant.[489] Imperial letters and edicts present the blurring of the boundary between the spoken and the written word, and show how news, in the form of imperial pronouncements, was disseminated. The fact that they often were read aloud also breaks down, or at least weakens, any real or imagined barrier between the literate and illiterate in late Roman society, in terms of news reception.[490]

One type of written news, channeled through official pronouncements, was less direct in the way it could reach the public. In a law of 443 we are told that the Eastern *magister officiorum* was required to submit an annual report every January concerning the frontiers in Thrace, Illyricum, Oriens, Pontus, Egypt, and Libya for the sake of rewarding and punishing frontier commanders.[491] Such a report implies news-gathering on or near the

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[488]See J. Matthews, "The Making of the Text," in *The Theodosian Code: Studies in the Imperial Law of Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Harries and I. Wood, (London: Duckworth, 1993), 19-44, at 19.

[489]Ammianus, 16.12.69-70. Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty* notes this reference at 117, and further cites *CT*, which refers to texts in imperial archives in cities, 118.

[490]See *infra* 201 on the public reading of legal texts before they became inscribed or deposited in the public record houses.

[491]Theodosius II, *Novellae* 24.5 in *CT*.

frontier. But through the "worthy rewards" and "suitable indignations," public acts themselves no doubt, the message would have been spread of the importance of defending the Roman frontiers. Such laws show, again, the interest of the center in the peripheries of the Empire, and the increased attention to news and information from there. The edict goes on to imply that the purpose was to spread abroad the report on the stability of the Roman frontiers.

The written word was proliferated widely through inscriptions as well, especially in cities, although the question of readership and reception is vexed.[492] One can imagine that these would have been read much less than are modern historic markers, because they were much more common. But we do have some evidence that new inscriptions in particular could garner attention. In a commentary on Deuteronomy 6:5 a rabbi claims that the things "which I command thee this day ... should not be in your eyes like some antiquated edict to which no one pays any attention but like a new edict which everyone runs to read."[493] This reference shows that Romans were interested in news as much as people in any age. So-called "history walls" are quite common as well and show emperors, specifically, trying to shape an image by enumerating their accomplishments, often at or near Roman frontiers. As D. Potter points out, they differ from ordinary civic inscriptions

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[492]D. Potter suggests that public inscriptions might have become so commonplace that they were forgotten or disregarded altogether. He imagines that the emperors then turned to other, more attractive media, such as eye-catching pictures with brief inscriptions, or inscriptions on statues. See Potter, *Prophets*, 121.

[493]R. Hammer, *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 62. This passage is quoted in S. Lieberman, "Roman Legal Institutions in Early Rabbinics and in the *Acta Martyrum*," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 35 (1944): 6-9; also cited in Potter, *Prophets*, 110-111.

"in that they were assembled over a period to form a coherent group: they were not *ad hoc* inscriptions reflecting immediate public concerns."[494] Examples here are abundant, and I will choose one which specifically shows the importance of frontier information. Julian is praised in an inscription from Ancyra as the "lord of the whole earth" who has conquered up to the Tigris River.[495] The bounds of Julian's conquest are the natural frontiers of Ocean and the Tigris River. The movement to Ancyra of news from and about the frontier thus is proclaimed by the written word.

One interesting phenomenon which has been demonstrated for the later Roman Empire is the increasing number of inscriptions which proclaim that an emperor has constructed a defensive work. J.J. Wilkes has documented this phenomenon, drawing attention to inscriptions such as one concerning Constantine:

> following the subjugation and control of the Franks through the excellence of Constantine, the *castrum* of the *Divitenses* was constructed in their territory in the presence of the emperor himself.[496]

Such a picture further corroborates the heightened frontier consciousness during the later Empire, a consciousness to which emperors could appeal, not just try to shape through propaganda.

Inscriptions directly at or on the frontier also could proclaim a message about the frontier. Although their audience would have been very small, their impact would have been clear. Their role is hotly contested -- not surprisingly since they suggest a linear frontier -- but a few such inscriptions

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[494]For specific examples, see *Prophets*, 118-119.

[495]*ILS* 754.

[496]*CIL* 13.8502 and J.J. Wilkes, "British Anonymity in the Roman Empire," in D.E. Johnston ed., *The Saxon Shore*, (London, 1977), 76. See also F. Millar, "Emperors, Frontiers, and Foreign Relations," 14.

are possibly attested in the literature, even if none have been discovered yet.[497] Malalas, in describing how Diocletian built "forts on the *limes* from Egypt to the border of Persia" explains the system by which *duces* were assigned to frontier zones in order to ensure security. He records that there then were erected "boundary posts" or "statues" to the emperor and the Caesar right on the *limes* of Syria.[498] It is possible that these "statues" were actually inscriptions recording the emperor's exploits at or near the frontiers. Whatever the translation, it appears that the purpose of demarcation was clear, at least to Malalas. One other inscription marking the boundary of empire is possible. If "Romans and Burgundians" is the correct reading of the manuscript of Ammianus *Res Gestae*, as Potter and others think it is, this is another example of Romans marking, or at least imagining, boundaries this way.[499] It is interesting to see the debates over this passage. Those who see a

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[497]If these potential examples are demonstrated as real, they challenge Whittaker's basic contention that "no Roman geography or map tells us where the boundaries of the empire actually lay or whether there were ever any marker stones," *Frontiers*, 68. Both of these contentions are questionable.

[498]Malalas 308 (=12.40). The text is very difficult to make out here. The Latin translation of Malalas reads *stativa*.

[499]Amm. Marc. 18.2.15 -- The text of this passage itself is heavily debated. Potter defends "*ubi terminales lapides Romanorum et Bugundiorum* [sic] *confinia distinguebant*" on the basis of what he calls the best manuscripts and other early editions. See "Empty Areas and Roman Frontier Policy," in *The American Journal of Philology* 113:2 (1992): 269-274. Seyfarth also puts this reading in the Tuebner text of 1978. Matthews challenges this reading, supporting the reading which appears in the Loeb, "*Alemannorum et Burgundiorum.*" He bases his challenge to the Teubner reading on the unlikely placement of this stone -- "How did the Romans, beginning in Mainz (18.2.7), burn and pillage their way through Alemannic territory and come to their own frontiers with the Burgundians?" Matthews, *Ammianus*, 524. But as Potter points out, "this leaves the possibility that Ammianus was wrong about whose stones these were, but it is significant that Ammianus thought that a boundary could be marked this way," 272. See similar

defensive view of the Empire developing in Late Antiquity read *Romanorum* in the manuscript; those who reject any change in Roman understanding read *Alamannorum*.

Letters among the *literati* were also a very effective means of spreading news, particularly if the direct recipients were orators or preachers. Letters generally were not a private matter in antiquity anyway, and were more available for wider circulation and diffusion than today.[500] Epistolography was the major way of directing news and information across and throughout the empire. The letters exchanged between Julian and Libanius provide fascinating insight into how information could move from the frontiers to more interior regions.[501] And again, such news as found in the letters would often make it into Libanius' orations, diffusing that news widely and effectively.[502] In one oration he specifically mentions getting news in the form of a letter straight from the frontier[503]:

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arguments in D. Potter, "The *Tabula Siarensis*, Tiberius, the Senate, and the Eastern Boundary of the Roman Empire," *ZPE* 69 (1987): 269-75, and Isaac's challenge in "The Meaning of *Limes* and *Limitanei* in the Ancient Sources: Postscript" in his *Near East Under Roman Rule*, 382-83.

[500]Harris, *Literacy*, provides helpful analyses of letters in the Roman world. See his index, "letters."

[501]Libanius relied on any source of information possible, including military couriers (see *epistula* 1367, to Modestus) -- Libanius mentions a mixture of truth and falsehood in such reports. Many of Libanius' letters and orations survive because they came to be used as models. Also, he collected and duplicated them himself, for publication -- *epp*. 88.5; 1218.2; 1307.1-3. Hence they would continue "broadcasting" for years to come.

[502]Libanius' "letters reveal, for example, that he expected emperors and imperial officials to supply him with raw material for his panegyrics: he wrote to Julian and Rufinus requesting information well ahead of drafting his texts." See, in this context, Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty*, 127. See *epistulae* 760 and 1106.

He [Julian] sent me a last letter from the frontier of the Empire (ἀπὸ τῶν τῆς ἀρχῆς ὅρων), and marched on, ravaging the countryside, plundering villages, taking fortresses, crossing rivers, mining fortifications, and capturing cities.[504]

The fact that the letter is seen by Libanius as coming from the frontier gives a clear sense of the way that news from the frontier itself could proliferate in official channels. Yet the frontier marked an end to formal channels of communication. This passage, delivered in oration, also shows the news that a Roman public was getting, and how it could come from "private" letters.[505]

In a letter to a certain Modestus, Libanius also mentions together frontiers and the passage of letters. This time the letter is going from the interior provinces toward the frontier, as did many of Libanius' own letters to Julian. Libanius exclaims, concerning a letter sent by Modestus: "But your letter has crossed the Euphrates; no wonder then that it only arrived lately in the emperor's hand."[506] The Euphrates, as a natural frontier, was permeable, but

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[503]The letter referred to is *epistula* 98. Julian wrote this letter from Hierapolis, underscoring the importance of this city as a frontier city or imagined as a frontier itself. Julian was here in mid-May 363 according to Ammianus' (23.2.6) and Zosimus' (3.12.1) accounts.

[504]*Oration* I.132-34. The description of what Julian actually did beyond the frontier was pure conjecture after he received the letter, Libanius admits. Subsequent reports would give him some indication as will be seen below. But, he claims, there were "no messengers to tell us of any of these achievements, but we rejoiced just as if we saw them, confident that events would happens as they did, as we looked to him."

[505]That Libanius used material from his informants in his orations is almost too obvious to mention, but he does specifically request such information from the *notarius* Philagrius (*epistula* 1434). Libanius did not deliver all of his orations. He himself speaks of some reticence or slowness in speaking or publishing some (*epistulae* 33, 283, 916, 877). For the controversy over the date and circumstance of the delivery of *or.* 1, see A.F. Norman's introduction to Libanius, *Oration* I, p.xvii.

[506]*Epistula* 1367.

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news was neither quick nor efficient moving across it.[507] And it could slow down communication both ways. Libanius goes on to tell what he knows the emperor Julian is doing beyond the frontiers through reports from prisoners of war, on which more below.

Letters from North Africa also show news from frontiers and efforts to diffuse it. As in the East, references often are to conflicts of some sort, although those in North Africa were much smaller in scale. References are much fewer, probably due to the comparative inactivity on the frontier there, the infrequency of the emperor at the North African frontier,[508] and the lack of writers, such as those who covered the East, analyzing current situations there.[509] In short, North Africa lacked the momentous event, the mainstay of ancient historiography and, it seems, audience interest as well.

St. Augustine reports occasionally on the North African frontiers. Very interested in the placement of the Eastern frontier, he gives us only an

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[507]See *supra* 27-29 for debates, beyond the scope of this section, on the extent to which frontiers were information barriers. Lee, *Frontiers*, has settled the issue, to my satisfaction, in favor of information-permeable barriers.

[508]A fortunate survival on papyri of a report of Diocletian's visit to Upper Egypt is helpful. Upon hearing news that the emperor was coming to Panopolis, there was a concentrated effort by the local administrators to get the frontier town in order before his arrival. See *Papyri from Panopolis in the Chester Beatty Library*, 1 and 2.

[509]Whatever the real threat on the North African frontier, it is clear that the Romans in general perceived it as less than elsewhere. Only one legion was stationed there permanently. Whereas the Eastern frontier garrisoned some 78-85,000 troops, North Africa and Egypt combined had a maximum of 43-45,000. See A. Rushworth, "North African Deserts and Mountains: Comparative Insights," in Kennedy, *Army*, 297-320, at 301. It should also be noted that the North African / Egyptian frontier was the longest one in the Empire, measuring some 2500 miles as the crow flies. See C. Daniels, "The Frontiers: Africa," in J.S. Wacher, ed., *The Roman World*, (London, 1987), 223-265, at 223.

occasional glimpse of those to his south. In a letter to Boniface, ex-governor of Africa, Augustine mentions the "ravaging of Africa" by African barbarians. After referring to how Boniface, during his tenure, had protected the churches of North Africa from the incursions of barbarians, Augustine warns that the barbarian inroads have started again.[510] Augustine specifically mentions the "common talk" of how, upon assuming office, Boniface had made the barbarians tributaries almost immediately. News of the renewed attacks was now circulating in the same way that news had circulated before Boniface had subdued the African barbarians. All we get is a brief insight here, but it makes clear that news of the barbarian pillages filtered freely through North Africa.[511] In another letter, written concerning "the end of the world" (*de fine saeculi*), we get a further glimpse of frontiers. Augustine tells his reader(s) that he gets daily "information" from the North African frontier. He gains this information by seeing actual captives from there regularly.[512]

Another reference shows us that the pastoral nomads on the other side of the Roman frontier were not always so hostile.[513] It also gives some

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[510]Boniface had been disgraced and deposed by Aetius two years before the writing of this letter. Augustine's point throughout is the fear that the barbarians had of Boniface is now gone and that he is needed once again.

[511]*Epistula* 220.

[512]*Epistula* 199.46. *Sunt enim apud nos, hoc est, in Africa, barbarae inumerabiles gentes, in quibus nondum esse, praedicatum Evangelium, ex iis qui ducuntur inde captivi, et Romanorum servitiis jam miscentur, quotidie nobis addiscere in promptu est . . . Interiores autem, qui sub nulla sunt potestate Romana, prorsus nec religione christiana in suorum aliquibus detinentur, neque ullo modo recte dici potest istos ad promissionem Dei non pertinere.*

[513]The North African "nomad threat" was inconsistent and remains difficult to trace. The strengthening of the frontier is recorded in a set of inscriptions

indication of how the frontier functioned. A provincial named Publicola wrote a letter to Augustine in the last few years of the fourth century to ask about an ethical dilemma. Publicola had heard that barbarians who crossed Roman frontiers to work were required to swear by their own *daemones* to the decurion or tribune in charge of the *limes*. He refers to the guard of the *limes* a few more times throughout the letter, highlighting the guard's role as a keeper of the *limes* against the barbarians. His ethical dilemma over whether Romans should require this oath had been provoked by news he had heard from the frontiers.[514] Augustine's response is practical, assuring that peace is secured by the oath of the barbarians, "not only for a single *limes*, but for whole provinces."[515] Such news kept North Africans apprised of the situation on their frontiers.

A final written mode of disseminating news was through pilgrimage and other travel accounts of journeys to frontiers, usually in the east. The rise of

honoring Marcus Aurelius Commodus' late second century efforts to protect the African provinces. Both record construction of watch-towers near Auzia, on the route between there and Rapidum. *CIL* 8.20816 and 22696 record the building of new towers and the repair of old ones "providing for the security of his provincials" (20816 — *Imp. Caesar M. Aurel. Commodus . . . securitati provincialum suorum consulens, turres novas instituit et veteres refecit oper[a] militum suorum* These are commented on at more length in A. Rushworth, "North African Deserts and Mountains: Comparisons and Insights," in Kennedy, *Army*, 297-316, at 302-303. Later inscriptions continue to speak of the strengthening of the North African frontier. *CIL* 8.5352 records a series of towers raised to protect the empire, and aided in their task by Christian martyrs. On the size of the African legions see note 514. For a bizarre look at the North African barbarian questions see B. Shaw, "Fear and Loathing: The Nomad Menace of Roman Africa," in his "Rulers, Nomads, and Christians in Roman North Africa," (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), VII. See in the same volume his "Soldiers and Society: The Army in Numidia," IX.

[514]*Epistula* 46.

[515]*Epistula* 47 — *neque enim tantummodo limiti, sed universis provinciis pax conciliatur iuratione barbarica.*

Christian pilgrimage following upon Helena's famous visit to Jerusalem in the early fourth century allowed Romans living far from the frontiers contact with them. Pilgrimage was a very established institution in the ancient world, but Christianity focused it on the eastern parts of the empire. Pilgrimage would not be confined to the Holy Land, *per se*, but included trips to Old Testament sites as well, often near Roman frontiers.

The most famous pilgrimage to these Old Testament sites was that of Egeria, an account of which she published in the early fifth century. Egeria's home province is debated, but it is certain that she came from Spain or Gaul.[516] After having prepared herself for her pilgrimage to the Holy Land and other sites by a detailed study of the Old and New Testaments, as we are told by a seventh-century Galician monk named Valerius, Egeria was eager to visit all the places with direct Biblical significance along the way.[517] Although her intention was to visit and describe the Biblical sites of the east, she does not neglect more contemporary descriptions and concerns, and she regularly mentions Roman forts and soldiers as she approaches Rome's

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[516]Even her name is debated, recorded in the sources as Eutheria, Aetheria, and Silvia. See E.D. Hunt, "St. Silvia of Aquitaine: the Role of a Theodosian Pilgrim in the Society of East and West," *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 23 (1972): 351-373; H. Sivan, "Who Was Egeria? Piety and Pilgrimage in the Age of Gratian," *Harvard Theological Review* 81 (1988): 59-72; and N. Natalucci, *Egeria, Pellegrinaggio in Terra Santa: Itinerarium Egeria*, (Florence: Nardini, 1991).

[517]Valerius, "The Letter in Praise of the Life of the Most Blessed Egeria written to his Brethren Monks of the Bierzo by Valerius," in P. Maraval and M. Díaz y Díaz, *Égérie, Journal de Voyage (Itineraire) et Lettre sur la Bienheureuse Égérie, (Sources Chrétiennes* 296, Paris, 1996, 321-349 writes that "Egeria began by perusing all the books of the Old and New Testaments, and discovered all its descriptions of the holy wonders of the world; and its regions, provinces, cities, mountains, and deserts." Here he notes that she both looked for biblical sites and noted her contemporary physical context.

Eastern frontier.[518] In doing so, she conveys news, even if unwittingly, about local conditions near the frontier.

In one passage, she describes the Roman frontier city of Nisibis. Egeria asked at a church in Haran (Carrhae) about the whereabouts of Terah, the father of Abraham, when he lived "among the Chaldees." Her description of the response is telling. "My daughter," she records the bishop in reply, "the place you seek is 10 staging-posts (*mansiones*) from here, inside Persian lands. From here to Nisibis is five staging-posts, and it is five more from there to Ur, the city of the Chaldees; but at present, Romans are not allowed to go there, since that whole area belongs to the Persians." "This area in particular," he continues, "lies on the border between Roman, Persian or Chaldean lands" and "it is called the Eastern province."[519] As noted above, the frontier city of Nisibis had been ceded by Jovian about 20 years before Egeria's arrival. The locals presumably recognized a very literal territorial boundary here (as marked by staging-posts), and Egeria includes the detail almost incidentally. She records what she was told, and thus she gives an account of the local view of the frontier. Her account, read into the Medieval West, provided a picture of the Eastern frontier and thus passed into the imagination of the Western Middle Ages a view of the extreme east of the Roman Empire. One late seventh-century monk uses the story as a prod to encourage his monks to learn from the example of this amazing woman who "transformed the weakness of her sex into iron strength" by traveling to the "bounds of almost the whole earth."[520]

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[518]*Itineraria Egeriae* 7, 19, etc. in CC 125. Throughout her account, Egeria notes crossing the frontier (*finis*) between provinces, and she also notes distances from the "frontier of Mesopotamia" (*fines Mesopotamiae*).

[519]20.12. See *supra* 95 for complete text.

News and frontier consciousness could also be passed through visual

media, probably even more so during the later than the earlier Empire.

Visual modes included ceremony and various types of visual art.[521] J.

Matthews makes clear, largely in agreement with MacCormack, that

"ceremonial, in sight and sound, is a mode of communication." The

expanded elaborateness and frequency of public ceremonial in the late Empire

is one of the central features of the period, and one of many which

distinguish it from the earlier empire.[522] Ceremonial served, in a sense, as a

form of popularization of communication.[523] In the ceremonial of Late

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[520]Valerius, *op. cit.* Valerius describes her journey, "an immense journey to the other side of the world," in a letter designed for training monk. The letter was meant to inspire the monks by reminding them of the achievements of mighty saints. "But we are amazed when still more courageous deeds are achieved by weak womanhood, such deeds as are indeed described in the remarkable history of the blessed Egeria, who by her courage outdid the men of any age whatsoever." Valerius' description stresses her journey to the "bounds of the whole earth," and the like. The compiler of a Glossary of the eighth or ninth century also refers to the pilgrimage, "'The Ansileubian': *Liber Glossarum*, either from Spain or France," in Lindsay and Mountford eds., vol. 1, 110, n. 377. Peter the Deacon, a Monk of Monte Cassino and the librarian of the abbey, also mentions Egeria's travels in his book on holy places -- Petrus Diaconus, *de locis sanctis*, CC 175, 93-103.

[521]See MacCormack, *Ceremony, passim*.

[522]See *Ibid., passim* and Matthews, *Ammianus*, 248-249. Matthews gives a succinct summary of why ceremonial became such a critical aspect of the later Empire. He sees ceremonial as one of many ways in which popular modes of communication were replacing "at every level the more literary, philosophical debates about freedom and political rights which, within a much narrower social milieu, had characterised these relations in the early empire." McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), also gives some crucial analysis of the phenomenon as well, tracing Late Antique ceremonial into the early Middle Ages.

Antiquity, emperors could capitalize upon the interest which Romans had in their frontiers. They regularly paraded prisoners of war from beyond Roman frontiers. These processions themselves were a medium of proclaiming news from and from beyond the frontiers of the empire, and were a part of a tradition from the early days of Rome.[524] And yet with the elaboration of ritual and ceremony in Late Antiquity, the message proclaimed became more clear and dominant. The presence of these captives in processions would proclaim the victories of Roman generals at or beyond Roman frontiers. Furthermore, prisoners of war and hostages were for observant Romans an excellent source of information about things going on at the peripheries of the empire.[525] In one of his many laments over the death of Julian, Libanius mourns that Julian could not return, leading prisoners, as a token of his accomplishments. He writes this in the same letter in which he also is complaining that written accounts have suddenly become inaccessible to him.[526] The prisoners themselves become his source of information.

The presence of foreigners in and of itself was a medium for proclaiming established or subdued frontiers. The Blemmyae, for example, seem to have

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[523]Interestingly, this was roughly concurrent with the popularization described *infra* 252.

[524]On the connection of the traditional Roman triumph with the Late Antique *adventus* ceremony, see MacCormack, *Ceremony*, 33ff.

[525]On captives moving within the Roman world, see S.N.C. Lieu, "Captives, Refugees and Exiles: A Study of Cross-Frontier Civilian Movement and Contacts Between Rome and Persia from Valerian to Jovian," in Freeman and Kennedy eds., 1986, 457-505. For a wider description concerned largely with Roman views of foreign and exotic lands, see "Hostages, Philosophers, Pilgrims and the Diffusion of Ideas in the Late Roman Mediterranean and the Near East," in F.M. Clover and R.S. Humphrey, eds., *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 29-49.

[526]*Ep.* 1220.

been a favorite of the Roman people. They, at least by Late Antiquity, had come a long way from their image in the first century, when they were regarded as humans with no heads, and eyes and mouths attached to their chests.[527] Yet still, less than flattering images of African groups persisted. The author of the *Expositio Totius Mundi* describes the desert borders of Africa, "beyond which dwell the worst peoples of the barbarians."[528] The author of the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* records how the emperor Probus, after subduing the Blemmyae beyond Egypt's frontier, sent them northward, and "thereby created a wondrous impression upon the amazed Roman people."[529] The Blemmyae are described elsewhere as being transported around the Roman Empire. A certain Abinnaeus writes in a petition to Constantius II and Constans in 341, that, after serving for thirty-three years in the Roman army, the commander of the frontier region of the Upper Thebaid in Egypt had commanded him to escort a group of Blemmyae to Constantinople. The letter survives on papyrus as part of an archive of his letters and papers. It seems that he spent three years with the group, traveling slowly.[530]

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[527]*Natural History.* Augustine, *De civ. D.* 16.8, also describes an unnamed African people with no heads pictured on a mosaic in the harbor of Carthage. Research on the Blemmyae was carried out in the Later Empire, and slowly such images were changed. Olympiodoros, 35.2, records that he was "spending time in the area of Thebes and Syene for the purposes of research," when the local Blemmyean tribal leaders took him to "Talmis itself, so that I could investigate those regions which lie five days distant from Philae as far as the city called Prima [which had been a Roman fort], which was in olden times the first city of the Thebaid that one reached when traveling from the land of the barbarians," and was still inhabited by the barbarians.

[528]62.

[529]*Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Probus* 17, 1-6.

Again, the very presence of such peoples proclaimed a frontier between

Roman and Other, even if that frontier was far away. Eusebius mentions

"men of the Blemmyan race" as well as others lining up outside of the

imperial palace gates. He describes their

> exotic dress, their distinctive appearance, the quite singular cut of
> their hair and beard; the appearance of their hairy faces was foreign and
> astonishing ... The faces of some were red, of others whiter than
> snow, of others blacker than ebony or pitch, and others had a mixed
> color in between.[531]

It is fairly clear that such persons created quite a spectacle, and served as a

visual medium of communication, pointing to the frontiers where such

people came from and beyond which, to the Roman mind they still belonged.

These also would have been the type of people whose presence in North

Africa gave St. Augustine daily reminders of the frontier to his south.[532]

The presence of a traveling emperor on campaign also served as visual

form of communication, and increased interest in frontier events and news.

With the emperors on frontiers from Marcus Aurelius onward, there was

heightened interchange of information and news between peripheries and

centers.[533] His visible presence on the frontiers generated more news, and

brought together, in effect, center and periphery. It also increased the number

of visitors to frontier regions.[534] Libanius mentions in one oration that, with

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[530]*The Abinnaeus Archive: Papers of a Roman Officer in the Reign of Constantius II* ed. H.I. Bell,V. Martin, E.G. Turner, and D. van Berchem, (Oxford, 1962), section 1.

[531]*Vita Constantini.* in A. Cameron and S.G. Hall eds. and trans, *Eusebius: Life of Constantine, Introduction, translation, and commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999) 4.7.1.

[532]*Supra* 179-1811 and *infra* 314-.

[533]Austin and Rankov, 206, 210, etc.

barbarians harassing Constantius' frontiers (ὅροις) all around, what was needed was the presence of the emperor to rally the troops and stem the flood."[535] As seen in the Panopolis papyri, the presence of the emperor at the frontier, in this case the stern Diocletian, could create a "scene" in more ways than one.[536] The administrative stir occasioned by an emperor's visit was a generator of news and speculation.

Traveling ambassadors also provoked interest in things peripheral. Libanius specifically records how a certain Spectatus, a philosopher and ambassador[537], was seen as "fortunate in the the eyes of many; to some because he had seen so much of the land and the mountains and the rivers of that country [Persia], to others because he had observed the Persian way of life and customs."[538] There are sufficient examples of philosophers serving as ambassadors in the sources to conclude that this type of interchange of news was common enough.[539] Their gifts of persuasion were well used, as we can see in the case of a Neoplatonist philospher named Eustathius. Not only did

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[534]See R. Ziegler, "Civic Coins and Imperial Campaigns," in Kennedy, *Army*, 119-134. Ziegler argues that the emperors' presence led to an influx of visitors as well as the proliferation of bronze coinage. His account traces how numismatic evidence relates to the political upheavals in Asia Minor.

[535]*Oration* 12.40.

[536]See *supra* 179.

[537]On the use of philosophers as ambassadors, see J. Matthews, "Hostages, Philosophers, Pilgrims, and the Diffusion of Ideas in the Late Roman Mediterranean and Near East," in *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity* ed. F.M. Clover and R.S. Humphreys, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 29-49, at 41-.

[538]*Epistula* 331; D&L, 223.

[539]Other examples are recorded at Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 3 (Plotinus trying to travel through Persian territory even to India); Amm. Marc. 25.4.23 (Metrodorus' lies breaking down relations between Rome and Persia).

he almost persuade Sapor II of the terms of his mission, he nearly convinced Sapor to become a philosopher as well (until some magi talked some sense into him).[540] The loquacity and perambulant lifestyle associated with these figures generated interest, and thus led to the delivery of news from the frontiers and beyond.[541] Eustathius, Eunapius records, could not even with effort get away from those wanting to hear him. Philosophers often traveled on personal business as well. One, a certain Hellespontius of Galatia, was "so ardent a lover of learning, he traveled to uninhabited parts of the world to find someone who knew more than himself."[542]

Other visual modes of communication about frontier regions included public maps and paintings of campaigns. These would have displayed to the Roman world happenings at its frontiers. As Eumenius, the orator at Autun, made clear, such visuals were designed to put a picture of the Roman world into the minds of Romans so that they could imagine scenes of action as well their frontiers, as I have argued.[543] Messengers coming from frontiers would present news in relation to such views of the world. The *Tabula Peutingeriana*, a twelfth-century copy of a fourth-century Roman road map, has a few notations which could perhaps be the visual depictions of

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[540]Amm. Marc. 17.5.15. The incident, occurring around 358, is recorded in Eunapius, *Vitae Sophistarum*, 465-66 as well.

[541]On these itinerant intellectuals, see G. Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[542]Eunapius, *Vita Sophistarum*, 504.

[543]*Panegyric* 9.21. Another map appears in a letter from Julian to Alypius (*epistula* 7), referring to both γεωγραφία and διάγραμμα. Vegetius 3.6 records an *itinerarium pictum*. See also R.K. Sherk, "Roman geographical exploration and military maps," *ANRW* ii.I (1974): 534-62.

frontiers.[544] Wording on the Table near depictions of the border of Syria and Mesopotamia records the "*fines Romanorum*," suggesting a frontier of the Empire.[545]

Large visual depictions of campaign scenes were also sources of news.[546] These *tableaux* could be fixed in place or carried in processions. Such depictions appear only in the literary sources; none actually have been discovered. Herodian reports that after his victory over the Parthians in 198, Septimius Severus "dispatched a report to the Senate and people, making much of his achievements and ordering that his battles and victories should be painted and publicly exhibited."[547] He adds that, nearly forty years later, the emperor Maximimus Thrax, having defeated Germans in a difficult battle among some marshes,

> made a report on the battle and his own distinguished part in a dispatch to the Senate and the people. But he went further, and ordered huge pictures of it to be painted and set up in front of the

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[544]See Dilke, *Maps*, 113-120 for descriptions of the *Tabula* and notes to current debates over the date and purpose of it.

[545]Serious difficulties in dating the *Tabula* present more problems, so one must remain tentative when drawing any large conclusions from the absence or presence of something on this Table. Whittaker suggests that this merely marks border between a province and a client state. He points to the words *fines exercitus Syriaticae* — or the end of the responsibility of the Syrian legions — to back up this claim. Whittaker could well be correct. But I am not so convinced of this analysis, and leave it open that here we could have an example of Romans visually defining frontiers. Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 68. See also B. Isaac, *Limits*, 398.

[546]Potter suggests that these might have been intended to catch the attention of those who had become disinterested in reading honorific inscriptions or history walls. His suggestion is attractive, although it would be difficult to prove. Much of his account presupposes that news diffusion implies propaganda — a presupposition I do not share. See Potter, *Prophets*, 121. See also the description at S. MacCormack, *Ceremony*, 11.

[547]Herodian 3.9.12. The senate voted him the honors requested.

senate house, so that Romans would be able to see as well as hear about his exploits.[548]

These pictorial accounts depicted Romans at or near frontiers, and served as media for proclaiming news to the public. It is far from certain how common this practice was in Herodian's day. His own wording suggests that he might be describing something new to his audience. Whatever its origins, the practice is attested into the later Empire. Eunapius mentions such a painting as well, albeit not as positively:

> There was a Persian, a prefect at Rome, who reduced the success of the Romans to mockery and laughter. Wishing to offer a representation of what had been done, he assembled many small panels in the middle of the Circus. But all the contents of his painting were laughable, and he unwittingly mocked his subject in his presentation. For nowhere did the painting show or allude to either the bravery of the Emperor, or the strength of the soldiers, or anything that was obviously a proper battle. But a hand extended as if from the clouds, and by the hand was inscribed, "The hand of God driving off the barbarians" (it is shameful, but necessary, to write this down) and on the other side, "The barbarians fleeing God," and other things even more stupid and odious than these, the nonsense of the drunken painters.[549]

The purported unconventional nature of this particular picture gives us a sense of the type of information which should have been on such paintings. Eunapius implies that there was a norm for this type of painting, and these "drunken painters" were certainly not meeting it. It also suggests the boundary between the *habitus* of native-born Romans and new-comers, such

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[548]Herodian 7.2.8. Herodian relates that the picture was destroyed soon after, apparently as part of a *damnatio memoriae*. Whittaker raises the interesting point that Herodian's own account was based on these pictures. He points to the four "scenes" in Herodian's account, 1) crossing a bridge; 2) burning villages 3) barbarians hiding in the forests and marshes, and 4) Maximinus and the battle in the marshes. He suggests that they could have been four panels, and concludes that Herodian probably told the story after studying the pictures.

[549]Eunapius, *fragment* 68.

as this naturalized Persian. This prefect is identified as a Persian, even if he has become a prefect of Rome. Singling out this fact suggests Eunapius' own dislike for him. To Eunapius, the Prefect just did not know the correct way to portray the Romans -- emperors or soldiers. And his portrayal of God driving off the barbarians, although it might have been the view of some Romans, was far from palatable to the pagan Eunapius, and probably rare as well.

The stereotypes Eunapius presents here also give us some indication of how Romans viewed themselves. As so often, these appear in a denunciation of the Other. When Attila the Hun, in Milan, saw a painting of Roman Emperors with Scythians "lying dead before their feet, he sought out a painter and ordered him to paint" himself with Roman emperors bringing him gold.[550] The value of spreading a definite message through visual was not lost on Attila.

Sculpture and coinage were also common visual media for presenting news from the peripheries. The image of the emperor seated in majesty over stylized barbarians was a powerful symbol of frontier conquest.[551] The base of the obelisk of Theodosius in the hippodrome of Constantinople provides one of many possible examples in sculpture. Persians and barbarians are shown in submission, begging for victuals and bringing offerings to Theodosius, who is seated in majesty among the Senators. Such images, placed in areas of high visibility, would provide people in Constantinople with images of the

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[550]Priscus, 22.2

[551]Compare with scenes from the column of Trajan, where preparations for campaign, crossing the Danube frontier and engaging the enemy form the central narrative. The sense is that the empire is being extended and projected among foreign peoples. By late antiquity, the major image is the glory of the emperor and the defeated barbarians. Such visual depictions suggest images of a solidified and static frontier.

conquered as well as news of imperial campaigns on the two most active

Roman frontiers in their own day. The base of the column of Arcadius also

depicts enemies in submission in a similar arrangement to that on

Theodosius'.[552]

Coins fulfilled a similar purpose, and at a much more diffused level.[553]

The submission of barbarians became, by the late Empire, a cliché on coins,

and probably led to a point of diminishing returns in terms of news diffusion.

Yet Emperors continued to put out images of themselves stylized on the

frontiers of Empire, defeating the barbarians.[554] The power of news may be

seen in the quick and efficient quashing of new coinage of the usurper

Procopius in 365 by Aequitius, the military commander of Illyricum.[555]

Procopius had circulated gold coins bearing his own image as a form of

enticement to join in a revolt. Aequitius executed those involved in the coin

circulation. His swift and resolute actions, as well as those of Procopius'

partisans shows the power of coinage in diffusing a message. It is doubtful

that another picture of a defeated barbarian on a coin would have provoked

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[552]For depictions of these and other visual arts from Late Antiquity, see the plates at the end of S. MacCormack, *Ceremony.*

[553]For a debate over the propaganda and/or communication value of Roman coinage see A.H.M. Jones, "Numismatics and History," *Essays in Roman Coinage Presented to Harold Mattingly,* ed. R.A.G. Carson and C.H.V. Sutherland (1956), 13-33, and the reply to it at C.H.V Sutherland, "The Intelligibility of Roman Imperial Coin Types," JRS 49 (1959): 46-55. See response to both in J.D. Evans, *The Art of Persuasion: Political Propaganda from Aeneas to Brutus,* (Ann Arbor, 1992), 1-32. See now C. Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire,* see index, "coinage."

[554]On the visual value of coinage for the historian see, in particular, MacCormack, *Ceremony,* 11-12 and plates. For examples of defeated barbarians, an extremely common theme on late third and fourth century coins, scan *Roman Imperial Coinage.*

[555]Amm. Marc. 26.7.11.

any type of particular response, but the very presence of frontier peoples on coins would serve to keep the frontier in the minds of Romans.

Spoken Modes

Spoken modes of communication are, of course, the most predominant; yet their ephemeral substance is at the same time the least recoverable. We can be sure that Romans were talking to each other, and, if their writings are any indicators, talking more and more about developments on their frontiers. Verbal accounts were, by some estimations, the most believable. One late Roman historian contrasts written history with oral history, which he defines as contemporary history.

> In the case of persons and events before our generation, we must defer to written authorities or to the reports about them which memory passes down to us via an oral tradition. But contemporary events we must hand down to posterity with due regard to truth, as Plato says.[556]

A close reading of available sources does reveal some of the possibilities of such spoken modes of communication and about the type of contemporary events which late Roman audiences found significant enough to discuss.

Often it is difficult to discern whether written or spoken modes were used in communicating news. For example, it seems as if the messengers which Eumenius mentions in his request for the restoration of schools at Autun delivered their messages at least in part by speaking (such is implied, at least, by the description of them as *nuntii*).[557] Internal revolts and external problems on various frontiers had led to a heightened news flow from

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[556]Eunapius, *fragment* 30.

[557]*Panegyrici* N&R 9.21.

periphery to center.[558] Eumenius' panegyric is just one of many hints of the flow of this news and the role which it could play in shaping and expressing a late Roman world-view. The role of messengers, especially those arriving from peripheral areas, must have been significant. Libanius also records their activity when he speaks of reports, true and false, which have filtered back from the Eastern frontier after the death of Julian.[559]

War captives could also play a role in relating verbal information about the frontiers, in addition to their role as ceremonial symbols and visual media. Although he can only imagine, for a while, what Julian is doing beyond the eastern frontiers, Libanius' curiosity is to some extent satisfied, he explains, because "the prisoners of war tell us what he is achieving, and they tell that he is making quick progress and that the towns are in ruins. But we do not know what to do with all the prisoners."[560] So, in Antioch, Libanius is able to keep up with Julian through the steady stream of prisoners who are sent back. He later relates that the information they gave him helps compensate for the lack of news he is getting from the Romans after the death of Julian. Julian also avails himself of information from war captives. He plies one old captive for information on the topography of an area beyond Roman frontiers. The old man is himself forced to tell the truth once he

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[558]The Eastern revolts of 175-272 are well explained and analyzed by J. Eadie in "One Hundred Years of Rebellion: The Eastern Army in Politics," in D. Kennedy, *Army*, 135-151.

[559]*Oration* 18.204-205. In *Oration* 2.53, after hearing of the disaster at Adrianople, Libanius tells how he tore out his hair and then the next day imparted the news to others. Such interchange is, of course, fairly obvious, but the few references in the sources to it should not be ignored.

[560]*Epistula* 1367. D&L 257-58.

discovers how well Julian knew the area from reading books, and that what he said would be verified by Julian's own knowledge.[561]

News could also proliferate verbally as Romans and non-Romans mingled more freely in the later Empire. Julian gives hints in one of his orations that "barbarians" could be found throughout the empire discoursing on matters peripheral with the Roman population. He delivered an oration, while still a Caesar and campaigning in the West, in which he suggests that many in his audience in Gaul knew about the barbarian name of Nisibis because of their "frequent interchange with the barbarians of those parts." The implication is either that people throughout the Empire knew details about the eastern frontier because of foreigners who circulated throughout the empire, or that many members of his audience had actually been to the Eastern frontier.[562] Either way, it is interesting that he notes the sharing of knowledge so freely between Persians (or perhaps Saracens) and Romans.

The choice of Nisibis here is instructive in that it shows that Romans themselves throughout the Empire were talking about the extreme Eastern frontier. A further hint of this type of interaction between periphery and center is provided by the description of the Nisibis and Edessa in the *Expositio Totius Mundi*. This work records that the inhabitants of these frontier cities were "on good terms with all the provinces," implying, again, some level of interaction between frontier areas and those far away from them.[563] Both Nisibis and Edessa are singled out in this passage as the centers of Roman /

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[561]Libanius, *Or.* 18.246.

[562]Julian, *Oration* 2.62B.

[563]22.

Persian trade, a possible further catalyst for such interactions (on which more below).

Travelers in frontier zones would share news from the frontiers or be plied for it by people eager to hear about occurrences at these frontiers or about the state of affairs at them. A significant number of these travelers would have been pilgrims. One can only imagine the number of people Egeria and others like her told about their travels right up to the Eastern frontier. Malchus of Nisibis, a Syrian hermit, once told Jerome, early in the fourth century, that he was stopped at one point in his travels on account of "the closeness of Persia" and Roman soldiers he encountered. His wanderings, he personally tells Jerome, then took him westward by necessity.[564] Such glimpses gave news and information to many who, like the vast majority of Romans, would never get near Roman frontier zones.

Such bits of information impart small yet fortunate glimpses into whole networks of exchange by which people related information from the frontiers. We also hear of an eastern desert saint, nearly 100 years old, living in the east and upset by the pillaging of the town nearby, making his way to Constantinople to report the damage. He never returned, as Theodore of Sykeon tells us, but died on his way back, after relaying the news in person. Here we get a glimpse of the way that news could be spread by travelers.[565] The fact that this old desert saint took it upon himself to travel to Constantinople to relay the news personally suggests that in the region in

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[564]Jerome, *Life of Malchus* 3. The whole of this life describes conditions on or near the eastern frontier, complete with local customs and Saracen raids to travelers on the roads. Malchus tells the story to Jerome when they meet near Antioch, thus passing on news of the frontier first-hand verbally.

[565]*Life of St. Theodore*, 73.

which he lived the news might not otherwise have reached anyone who could do something about it.

Soldiers also were key sources of information when they were traveling back from the eastern front. Libanius' habit of pressing them for details appears throughout his letters and orations, and shows an interest in the frontiers not only by himself but also by his audience. Especially at major stops along the way, a mass of soldiers would attract a significant amount of attention, and thus further the relay of news.[566] And veterans returning to their native communities would have had plenty of stories as well as a wide variety of geographic and ethnographic material from the peripheries of empire to share in addition to the perennially-popular "war story."[567] These stories, in fact, must have been a major, if not *the* major, way of communicating news to local communities throughout Anatolia and elsewhere.[568]

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[566]In addition to the large number of inscriptions which attest to troop movement -- on which see Mitchell I, 224ff. -- recent studies have shown how coinage can be used to trace troop movement. Mitchell argues that the presence of imperial coins, minted primarily for soldiers along the eastern frontier and distributed in finds widely across eastern Asia Minor, show that the troops were far from sedentary and engaged in trade throughout. (I, 242). The presence of imperial coins can be measured against civic coins, which were minted for local spending. R. Ziegler also argues that coinage rate can trace troop movement throughout the eastern sector. See his "Civic coins and Imperial Campaigns," in Kennedy, *Army*, 119-134.

[567]For veterans returning to native communities, see IGR III. no. 865 = ILS 8877; Bean, *Anatolian Studies* 9 (1959) 97 no. 10; MAMA IV, no. 237. *The Life of St. Theodore of Sykeon* gives reference throughout to travelers and military personnel passing the night at the small community on a major trunk road through Anatolia.

[568]On the profound impact of military traffic throughout the Anatolian peninsula, see Mitchell I, 124-135. The interaction between permanent garrisons and local populations is, however, a bit less clear. N. Pollard uses a case study to argue that there was very little interaction between army and

The role of orators themselves was vital, as well, in spreading news through the spoken word. The speeches of Symmachus, for example, were one way for the people of Rome to learn of the restorations going on at the frontier zones.[569] Libanius' role in this respect already has been explored above, as he declared news, often straight out of correspondence reaching him from the frontier itself. The panegyricists gave a wide range of information on Roman frontiers. In panegyric, the frontiers become a crucial indicator of the strength of the Empire. News from frontiers become major themes in the Latin panegyrics of Late Antiquity, expressing the variety of ways of viewing Roman interaction along them.[570] By all these methods, panegyrics served to communicate news about the frontier to Roman audiences, even if it was embedded deeply in epideictic oratory. These, along with rumor, suggest a wide and active network of information-sharing at the inter-personal level, as well.

Panegyrics themselves could, furthermore, be circulated widely. Libanius notes one by Themistius making the rounds in the East, far from the place of its initial delivery.[571] Panegryricists realized their role as "newsmen." In one

civilians in Syria ("The Roman Army as a 'Total Institution' in the East? Dura Europos as a Case Study," in Kennedy, *Army*, 211-227). This study specifically challenges E. Fentress, *Numidia and the Roman Army* (BAR Int. Ser. 53, Oxford, 1979) which presented the army as a mediator between center and periphery. Pollard sides with a study of North Africa by Shaw, which also specifically challenged Fentress by proposing the model of a "total institution," or institution completely separate from wider society. See now Pollard's *Soldiers, Cities, and Civilians in Roman Syria*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); also, Shaw, "Soldiers and Society: The Army in Numidia," *Opus* II, 1983, 133-59.

[569]Matthews, *Ammianus*, 378; 284-85.

[570]See *supra* 86-.

[571]*Epistula* 818.

particularly overblown piece of self-congratulation, the orator Pacatus imagined "distant cities" flocking to him to get information to pass on to subsequent generations.[572]

Orators, understandably, often were accused of overreaching. But they, like historians, were concerned with the accuracy of their accounts and how they would be received by their audiences. Julian, no mean orator himself, describes the heroic deeds of Constantius in florid, poetic language. He pauses at one point, however, assuring the audience, "if there be anyone who declines to heed either the opinion expressed in my narrative or those admirably written verses, but prefers to consider the actual facts, let him judge from those."[573] In the litany of facts to follow, the pride of place is given to an account of Constantius' defense of Nisibis. In one oration, Libanius records events from the battle of Singara, near the eastern frontier. "And let no one distrust the hyperbole before he hears anything..." "Our scouts who personally watched the maneuver brought back news which was based on observation and not on guesswork using other sources."[574] Libanius is diffusing tactical information here in a popular format.

From the same oration, one can also get a sense that orators, like historians, were also concerned about appealing to the needs and range of belief of their audiences. Libanius, at one point, even gets in a jab at historians, some of whom considered historical writing superior in truth-quality to panegrics.[575] Panegyrics could relate contemporary and thus

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[572]*Panegyrici* N&R 2.47.6.

[573]*Or.* 2.62B

[574]*Oration* 59.101. D&L 181

[575]See *supra* 167 for one such critique of a panegyricist by an historian.

relevant and true material, he implies. Referring to the capture of a "not unimportant" Persian city, he writes "For we are not recounting an action which has been blotted out by time, as antiquity fights on the side of falsehood, but I think that everyone bears before his eyes."[576] The rhetoric, appealing to one sense in terms of another, here switches the verbal for the visual mode, but the message is still the same.

The public delivery of edicts, a key element of Roman control and propaganda, was likewise a verbal mode of communication, and it reached large audiences. Before they were made into inscriptions or deposited in the public record houses, all imperial letters would have been read aloud to the people in major cities, and carefully and publicly acknowledged.[577] Libanius records in a few letters how he intended to include letters from the emperor in his panegyrics, thus allowing more information from the frontiers to be passed on to the public.[578]

Due to the way news diffuses orally, it was generally more complete among the people near where the action took place, even news of empire-wide

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[576]*Oration* 59.84.

[577]C. Ando records a helpful example from St. Chrysostom. In *Homilae in Matthaeum* 19.9, Chrysostom mentions how his audience gives calm attention and silence, indeed even upright posture, to the reading aloud of imperial letters. The letters, Chrysostom reveals, would be read in the theatre, suggesting a large audience. If someone should disrupt the proceedings, Chrysostom says, it would show disrespect to the emperor himself and would be a capital offense. But when the "letters from heaven" are read in the churches, written by One "greater than the emperor," "there is constant turmoil everywhere," he admonishes. The implication here is that the reading of the letters was common and held in large capacity places to accomodate all the people. Cited in C. Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Loyalty in the Roman Empire*, 181.

[578]*Epistulae* 758.4. See also 802, 1220.8, 1402, 1426, and 1434. These are referenced in C. Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Loyalty in the Roman Empire*, 128.

importance.[579] Libanius writes that although the "whole empire" was in grief at the news of Julian's death, the greater grief was probably among the areas "where the Greeks live, for they have greater knowledge of the disaster."[580] The proliferation of news in close proximity to events generally comes from word of mouth.

Divine Modes

In addition to Rumor's active role in communicating news to Romans, the source of news often is described as divination. It will be recalled that Julian claimed a divine source for Constantius's knowledge of the "limits and bounds of the whole Empire."[581] The divine aspect will be explored in much more detail in Chapter Five, but some mention of it should be made here. The advantage of divination, of course, is that it can relay news exactly as, or even before, something is happening. This type of news was, at least in the minds of those receiving it, the most accurate of all news, provided it was interpreted correctly. One recent author analyzes this phenomenon in fifth century B.C. Greece:

> Divine news, even if not entirely credited, remained current as an idea in the historical period [of Classical Greece], through the existence of oracles, and the attribution of semi-divine status to rumour. By contrasting infallible divine knowledge with that derived from human sources, the Greeks developed a sophisticated attitude to news, recognising that all news is in some way inaccurate. They saw that

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[579]This does not hold true absolutely, however. The presence or absence of cities and passable roads, as will be seen in the next section, also could determine the range and intensity of news spread.

[580]*Oration* 17.1

[581]Julian, *or.* 1.13-14.

messengers are easily biased, and stories affected by their narrative context.[582]

In a Late Roman context, especially, this analysis could also apply. As argued throughout this study, the later Roman Empire saw a decided rise in forms of popular belief, *superstitio,* at all levels.[583]

Libanius records many such examples. Julian, he claims, heard the news in Gaul of Constantius II's death in Cilicia even before those in Cilicia had heard about it. Libanius proclaimed that Julian had learned this news through divination: "there resulted the strangest paradox of all, that you yourself [Julian] announced the tidings to the bearers of it, and they departed after hearing the news they had come to deliver."[584] The gods, of course, fly more quickly than the fastest of messengers.

Ammianus corroborates Libanius' account, recording that Julian had "inferred from prophetic signs (in which he was adept) and from dreams, that Constantius would shortly depart from life."[585] Ammianus later records that, through liver divination, it was proclaimed to Julian what would soon happen; doubting the sincerity of the soothsayer, Julian learned by another sign the very moment that Constantius died.[586]

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[582]S. Lewis, *News and Society,* 156.

[583]See *infra* 252, etc.

[584]*Oration* 13.40. The rest of this passage suggests the proliferation of the news as Libanius, in fine panegyric fashion, declares that the whole world was rejoicing at the news -- in the country, in houses, theaters, hills and plains, and even on rivers, lakes and high seas.

[585]Amm. Marc. 21.1.6. It is in this immediate context that Ammianus reacts against those who maliciously ascribe Julian's being "learned and devoted to all knowledge" to evil arts for divining future events. He gives a long digression on the power of divination. 21.1.7-14 provides a fascinating overview of a late Roman pagan addressing prophecy and divination.

When the news arrived by normal means (i.e. official envoys) from Cilicia,

Ammianus claims that Julian was merely confirmed in his mind of the

prophecies he had already experienced.[587] When the news, traveling swiftly

as if being "drawn through the air by winged dragons" entered

Constantinople, Ammianus records that "all sexes and ages poured forth, as if

to look upon someone sent down from heaven."[588] This is, of course,

standard panegyric hyperbole buttressed by Ammianus' own love for Julian,

but it nonetheless gives a rare glimpse of news affecting the whole of the

population.

Much less encouraging for Libanius and Ammianus, news of the death of

Julian also was delivered by the gods. About Julian's death, Libanius records:

> But we in Antioch discovered it through no human agency:
> earthquakes were the harbingers of woe . . . we were sure that by these
> afflictions heaven gave us a sign of some great disaster. . . The bitter
> news reached our ears that our great Julian was dead.[589]

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[586]*Ibid.*, 22.1.6.

[587]*Ibid.*, 22.2.1-2.

[588]*Ibid.*, 22.2.3. Ammianus borrows the image of Rumor being driven
through the sky by dragons from Hyginus, *Fabulae* 147 and Ovid,
Metamorphoses 5.641ff.

[589]*Oration* 1.134. W. Riepl argues in *Das Nachrichtenwesen des Altertums*
(mit besondere Rücksicht auf die Römer), (Leipzig, 1913), 235-240, that because
the Romans did not develop a relay system like the Persians they tried to
explain rumor in different ways, resorting to divinity. To Riepl, as with
many modern writers, divinity itself was the ancient's *deus ex machina* when
other more preferred forms of communication broke down. N. Lenski,
"*Initium mali Romano imperio*: Contemporary Reactions to the Battle of
Adrianople," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 127
(1997): 129-168, at 163 also seems to present this position — "despair and
breakdown of communication caused people to look to divine intervention."
It is my contention throughout that ancients did not "resort" to divinity but
that it formed a natural and accessible part of their world-view.

Before it had reached him through word of mouth, then, Libanius already "knew" of the tragedy. Of course, he is interpreting signs in retrospect (*ex eventu*), but divine methods of news flow allowed for this.

Christians worked out their own way of getting news from divine channels. As will be seen in Chapter Five, they did this through Christianizing Sibylline and other oracles as well as by searching the Scripture for up-to-the-minute news on what was happening in the Empire. Often, these searches focused on the empire's violated frontier zones. Claiming a form of "general revelation," some held that the pagan sibyls were declaring the truth for all to hear, and in fact confirmed rather than challenged the gospel. As will be seen , such prophetic and, then, apocalyptic readings of current events further emphasized the frontiers.

News gained through supernatural means must be placed on par with rumor and other sources of information in a late Roman world-view. Although the news relayed by divine sources theoretically should have been superior and flawless (i.e. as descended from gods), its interpretation, of course, remained an issue. To answer skeptics, most likely Christians, of pagan divination, Ammianus quotes Cicero: "'The gods,' says he, 'show signs of coming events. With regard to these if one err, it is not the nature of the gods that is at fault, but man's interpretation.'"[590]

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[590]21.1.14, quoting Cicero *De Natura Deorum* 2.4.12 and *De Divinatione*. 1.52.118.

II. Structures of Communication

> The roads are reopened . . . the traveling stations and inns revived and they are again reinforced with their old ease: the entire empire shares the same breath and the same feeling like a single organism and is no longer split in two and pulled apart everywhere.
>
> --Themistius, *Oration* 16.212

These words, delivered in 382, described one form of Roman recovery after the infamous Battle of Adrianople in 378. A true sign of recovery was not the repossession of a tract of land or the rehabilitation of a legion, but rather the restoration of the communication context, summarized here by the orator Themistius. The structures of communication held the empire together, expressed here in evocative organic terms. "The same breath" holding together the empire expresses the structures of communication. The loss of these communication structures, often taken for granted by any people who enjoy such a vast network, was seen as disastrous to the empire itself and to its people.[591] Loss, in fact, often makes one eloquent about structures that are ordinarily taken for granted. Such moments can be helpful in revealing the ideological context of Roman communication and the world-views inherent in it.

Whenever the sharing of news involved human contact, *pace Fama et portenta*, it traveled through a massive and diffused human network often presented only implicitly in the sources.[592] The Romans are famous for

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[591]For a helpful analysis of the the communication difficulties following the Battle of Adrianople, see N. Lenski, *"Initium mali Romano imperio:* Contemporary Reactions to the Battle of Adrianople," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 127 (1997): 129-168. The translation from Themistius here is Lenski's.

[592]For the whole context of human travel in antiquity, L. Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994; reprinted from George Allen and Unwin ltd., 1974) remains standard.

imposing their will on a wide and varied landscape by their constructing and maintaining of that context to meet their administrative and other needs. Since the spreading and sharing of news is a "process fundamental to all societies"[593] it is useful to trace the context within which it moved in a Roman setting. Holding together a vast empire presumed a system within which information could move as quickly and efficiently as possible. What I am interested in here is both the intentional construction of that system and the unintentional results that news moved about freely, keeping a wide variety of people informed. Themistius gives glimpses of this dynamic, and, I believe, hints at the role which news could play in the life of the Roman Empire at large. Roman highways, like our own interstate highways, were designed first of all for the movement of troops and military equipment. But to tell the story of the Roman (or American for that matter) highway system purely in terms of its foremost official purpose would certainly miss its full significance. Such avenues of communication served a wide range of purposes.

In his analysis of news in the Greek *polis*, S. Lewis contrasts at a critical level the role of news in the Greek and Roman worlds. In the Greek world of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., he argues, "news for news' sake . . . was entirely absent from communication between ancient *poleis*. Individual citizens exhibited a great appetite for news, but the regular and official passage of news between *poleis* was entirely absent."[594] In the Roman world, however, he suggest that the same was not true because Romans developed road networks and institutions which allowed for the conception of the

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[593]The quotation here is from S. Lewis, *News and Society*, 2-3.

[594]*Ibid.*

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Empire as a unity. It was not until the emergence of the Roman Empire, in fact, that the Greek *poleis* collectively saw themselves as parts of a single unity. The structure of news institutions in the Empire serves as a demonstration of the ideology of unity, holding, at some level, the Empire together. This section explores these institutions and contexts, created by Romans, that served, in effect, to facilitate the modes of communication explored above, and so to hold the Empire together.

Roads

Communication of any kind from frontier regions, or even within the Empire presumed the existence of roads, and passable ones. When Libanius remarks that Julian sent him a last letter from the frontier, after which Libanius had to speculate about his doings, the implication is that news could no longer be regular because the Roman road system, as such, had ended at the frontier. There were "no messengers to tell us" but "we rejoiced as if we saw them."[595] This is not to say that the road suddenly stopped at some arbitrary point. It clearly did not. Rather it suggests a limit to Roman maintenance of the road, and says something about the activity of letter-carriers and free movement of peoples, and hence the movement of news, in such areas. The initial meaning of *limes*, as a road which penetrated into enemy territory preserves the sense of making an inroad into foreign territory.[596] Later *limes* came to refer to a series of roads which seemed to mark the boundary of empire itself.[597]

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[595]*Oration* 1.132-34.

[596]See, for example, Tacitus, *Annales*. 1.50 and Frontinus, *Strategameta* 1.3.10.

The role of roads in the "limes debate" is well known, and shows the difficulty of interpreting the primary functions of frontier roads. At issue is whether *limes* roads were intended primarily for the sake of communication or to separate empires or peoples. All agree, obviously, that roads at frontiers served a crucial supply and communication function. Isaac and others have suggested that often "*limes*" means only a garrisoned road in a frontier zone, rather than a boundary or barrier.[598] In fact, Isaac claims, *limes* roads, like rivers, served to enhance travel and communication between the Roman Empire and the Persian Empire or *barbaricum*, rather than to demarcate or separate space. The actual role of roads as necessary ingredients in the spread of information, particularly about frontiers, has been analyzed less.

As asserted above, the Roman Empire itself could not have functioned without the well-known and intricate road system which held it together.[599] Roads carried soldiers and civilians throughout the empire, and served, along with sea lanes, as the primary communication routes throughout the empire.[600] Their maintenance up to and at frontier zones highlights the ways in which Romans controlled their context and, intentionally or otherwise, encouraged news flow.[601]

Anatolia and points eastward had an excellent and reliable system of communication maintained into the later Roman Empire, much of which we

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[597]See *Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Hadrianus* 12.

[598]Isaac, *Limits*, 119-23, 171, 199-206.

[599]The starting point on all research on Roman roads is R. Chevallier, *Roman Roads*, (London, 1976).

[600]On the reluctance of Romans to use sea lanes to relay news, see *infra* 204.

[601]On the high cost of maintaining Anatolia's crucial road system, see Mitchell I, 126- . See 126ff for a general description of Roman roads and their functions.

learn about for the later period in the writings of the church fathers.[602] Roads to the active eastern frontier, in particular, were especially important and well maintained. The location and importance of various roads throughout Asia Minor has been well explored both through studies of the roads themselves and of the milestones found along them.[603] My point here is not to rehash the findings of these vital resources, but rather to draw out from their findings some implications for this project.

One of the results of having roads in an area is that they facilitated what A.D. Lee calls the "imageability" of a region.[604] This type of imageability served as a form of background knowledge against which information proliferated, and suggests the role which roads themselves played in shaping a Roman worldview. The ability to imagine a region comes from communication moving from it in sufficient quantity and verifiable quality. Regions not transversed by roads could not, in fact, be well imagined in the Roman mind, because information could not move quickly or effectively across them.

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[602]See Mitchell I, 132-.

[603]D. French has done an impressive amount of research on the roads of Anatolia; his publications of the milestones of Asia Minor have been particularly helpful in the study of Roman roads. See his "A Study of Roman Roads in Anatolia: Principles and Methods,"*Anatolian Studies* 24 (1974): 143-149; "The Roman Road-System of Asia Minor," in *ANRW* ii.7.2 (1980): 698-729; *Roman Roads and Milestones of Asia Minor*, Part I The Pilgrim's Road. BAR International Series 105, 1981; and *Roman Roads and Milestones of Asia Minor*, Part II Interim Catalogue of Milestones, in 2 volumes. *BAR* Int. Ser. 392, 1988.

[604]Lee, *Information*, 89; Lee borrows the term from K. Lynch -- for a discussion of Lynch's contributions see R.M. Downs, "Geographic space perception: past approaches and future prospects," *Progress in Geography* 2 (1970): 65-108, at 70-75.

Although the general trend in Late Antiquity was toward ruralization, the fourth century saw growth in the status of those cities of Asia lying along the roads connecting Constantinople and the eastern frontier. Lightfoot sees this growth consequent on the creation of the "New Rome," and traces its effects on sites such as Amorium, located on one such major route.[605] The connection of these cities to the eastern frontier was facilitated by the continued and essential upkeep of the roads.[606]

That roads connected the frontier of the empire to points inland is made clear both by archaeological work and written sources.[607] For Late Antiquity, one of the crucial written sources, again, is the *Itineraria* of Egeria. Her account gives much insight into the situation up to, at, and along the eastern frontier. She also gives clear indication that persons of Late Antiquity imagined a fairly clear frontier line along the roads which led into the Persian Empire.[608] Her detailed descriptions reveal stops along the way as well as the extent to which certain areas were guarded by imperial troops. A key piece of

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[605]C.S. Lightfoot, "The Survival of Cities in Byzantine Anatolia: The Case of Amorium," *Byzantion* 68.1 (1998): 56-71. See also Mitchell I, 84-88.

[606]Lee, *Information*, 90, notes that the Peutinger Table shows routes well into Persian territory, but that "apart from roads of Roman construction lying within the former province of Dacia and the *agri decumantes*, confines its information about topography north of the empire to features such as [forests, mountains, wastelands and deserts]".

[607]Literary sources are helpful in that they give hints as to how and why people moved along roads toward and away from frontiers, and what difficulties or obstacles they faced. Ancient writers in general, it seems, liked to dwell on travel problems and discomforts.

[608]The presence of roads throughout the Anatolian peninsula went back nearly a millennium by this point. Herodotus, *Histories* 5.52-3 notes the impressive road system through Asia Minor.

information, already recorded, shows that roads and *mansiones* were used to indicate distance from the frontier itself, from Persian territory.

This passage (recorded *supra* 96) is fascinating for a variety of reasons. The most obvious is the detail which Egeria gives here concerning the Roman frontier arrangement. Most of her account is taken up with descriptions of holy sites and the Jerusalem liturgy. This passage stands out in her pilgrimage account for its contemporary and "secular" concerns. It also shows that people living near the frontier had an acute sense of where the frontier ran. To an extent, they do seem to imagine a type of linear demarcation. The passage also shows staging-posts going directly into Persian territory, the type of arrangement amenable for cross-frontier contact. Yet it also shows that once the frontier changed, Romans no longer could pass beyond certain points, and that the flow of information must thereby have been hindered, albeit not altogether stanched.[609] Romans, at least those who lived near this frontier, did, in fact, admit that their frontiers had changed. The actual observation of frontier regions revealed facts which were newsworthy. Egeria traveled right up to the Eastern frontier, and this fact was noted by the seventh-century monk Valerian as he described Egeria's journey.

The difficulties of passing into Persian territory are further illustrated by a highly hyperbolic passage in a letter written by St. Basil in 357. Trying to convey the difficulties he would surmount in order to be with his friend, an itinerant philosopher named Eustathius, Basil presents himself advancing into and even beyond Persia.[610]

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[609]See *supra* 27-29 for debates over frontiers as information barriers.

[610]On the regular presence of itinerant philosophers in Persian territory, see *supra* 188-89.

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> Nay, so love-sick was I that I was compelled either to take the road to Persia and go with you as you advanced to the uttermost limits of the land of the barbarians -- for indeed you even went thither, so obstinate was the demon who kept us apart -- . . . for if I had not grown weary of following you as a lamb follows the shepherd's staff held out before it, I really think that you would have driven on and on even beyond the Indian Nyssa, or, if there is an uttermost spot of our world, that you would have wandered even there.[611]

That it was even a metaphorical option to walk (βαδίζειν) into the land of the Persians suggests that active roads connected the two empires, along which information and news could travel. And the juxtaposition of two words for outermost limits (μήκιστος, extreme limit, and ἔσχατον) shows the necessity of distinguishing the boundary of both empires with the somewhat extreme image of the boundary even beyond the Persian Empire itself.

St. John Chrysostom describes in more detail the journey to Babylon, mentioning paved roads, regular road stations, towns, and villas along the way.[612] Ammianus records that when a certain Ursicinus was called to travel from Nisibis westward, he encountered "abundant transportation facilities" for his trip to Milan.[613] Although it is fairly certain that he got most of the information from archives, Eusebius records in some detail the roads and features of Roman Palestine, Arabia, and Syria, attesting to an active and well-maintained road system up to the Roman frontiers in some of these areas.[614]

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[611]*Epistula* 1 — ἀλλ' οὕτω δυσέρως ἦν ὥστε ἢ τὴν ἐπὶ Πέρσας βαδίζειν ἔδει καὶ συμπροϊέναι εἰς ὅτι μήκιστον τῆς βαρβάρων (ἦλθες γὰρ δὴ κἀκεῖσε· τοσαύτη τῆς ἦν φιλονεικία τοῦ δαίμονος) . . . δοκῶ γάρ μοι, εἰ μὴ ὥσπερ τι θρέμμα θαλλῷ προδεικνυμένῳ ἑπόμενος ἀπηγόρευσα, ἐπέκεινα ἄν σε καὶ Νύσσης τῆς Ἰνδικῆς ἐλθεῖν ἀγόμενον καὶ, εἴ τι ἔσχατον τῆς καθ' ἡμᾶς οἰκουμένης χωρίον, καὶ τούτῳ ἐπιπλανηθῆναι.

[612]*Ad stagirium* 2.189ff — Cited also in Isaac *Limits* 183.

[613]14.11.5 — *copia rei vehiculariae data, Mediolanium itineribus properavimus magnis.*

So, roads connected the frontiers to interior regions, although it was not always easy or convenient to travel past their limits, which often were marked out by guard posts.

Information coming from or going to peripheral areas relied on these road networks and, of course, persons traveling on them to reach locations more central. The absence of such roads could prevent a flow of information and thereby keep certain regions out of the news circuit. Basil would write to Euphronius, Bishop of Colonia in Armenia:

> Because Colonia, which the Lord has handed over to you for guidance, has been settled far from the highway, frequently even if we write to the other brothers in Lesser Armenia, we hesitate to send a letter to your Reverence, since we do not suppose that there is any carrier going that far.[615]

The implication, of course, is that news of any kind would not be able to reach this area often, even if it originated relatively close by. Such areas may be presumed, to follow Lee's "imageability theory," to have been cut off from the rest of the Empire for certain periods.

Even when roads did connect more and less peripheral areas, news flow was restricted in certain seasons. St. Basil records that the road between Cappadocia and Rome was entirely impassable in the winter -- that, coupled with the presence of enemies along the road, made it necessary to travel by sea, a concession for Romans of this period.[616] In other letters, Basil also

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[614]*Onomasticon.* See B. Isaac, "Eusebius and the Geography of Roman Provinces," in his *The Near East Under Roman Rule: Selected Papers.* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 284-309.

[615]*Epistula* 195.

[616]Contrary to what we might think, sea travel is treated in the Later Empire as a concession to problems which keep one from travelling by land, the preferred method. St. Basil complains in *ep.* 215, for example, that the roads going to and from Cappadocia were so bad that the letter-carrier would have to proceed by sea. The tone suggests that sea travel was a last resort. In

claims winter as an impediment to news travel.[617] One especially harsh winter (374/5) saw the roads closed until Easter and, according to Basil, there was no one in Cappadocia with the courage to face the difficulties of the journey. Basil complains that the clergy in his area had taken up sedentary crafts and did not go abroad in the winter -- so the letters pile up. Basil also notes a general lack of traffic, not necessarily seasonally related, which could stop the flow of news to his area at unexpected intervals.[618]

The danger of travel during invasions made news flow particularly erratic. St. Basil writes of communication problems during the Gothic revolt of 378 -- "Because I have heard that all the roads are filled with brigands and deserters, I was afraid to entrust something into the hands of our brother lest I should become complicit in his death too."[619] News travel along roads, as suggested here and in the earlier reference to Themistius, could be significantly held up by unsafe conditions.

Ancyra as a Case Study

One way of assessing the significance of news along the roads of the later Empire is to analyze the importance of certain nodal points of

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Procopius' complaint against Justinian for dismantling the Roman imperial post, Procopius complains that he thereby forced "the couriers to go all the way from Byzantium to Helenupolis by sea, much as they objected. So they sail in tiny boats of the kind normally used for crossing the strait, and if a storm happens to fall on them they run into serious danger. For since it is their duty to make the utmost haste, any watching for the right moment or waiting for a hoped-for calm is ruled out." *Anecdota* 30 (Penguin translation).

[617]*Epp.* 48, 27, 223. These letters show the interest in conveying news even as it involved multiple hand changes.

[618]*Epistula* 231.

[619]*Epistula* 268 (Lenski trans.). See Lenski, *op. cit.* for a helpful analysis of communication problems following Adrianople.

communication and the role they played. Ancyra is a prime example of one such place. Hardly treated as a world-class Roman city by ancients or moderns, Ancyra shows the taken-for-grantedness of news and communication centers in the sources. Its actual importance, only implicit in the sources, is a testimony to the unheralded and tacit significance of news. We do get enough stray hints, which, when put together, show how its role as an information center lifted its status in certain definite ways. Although it does not loom large in sources from the early or late empire, Ancyra's rise in status in the later Roman Empire further underscores the growing importance of news from and about the frontiers.[620] Culturally, it always lagged behind the upper tier of cities of the Roman East, at the apex of which stood Athens, Antioch, Alexandria, and Constantinople.[621] And yet some extremely important and newsworthy events took place here.

At Ancyra seven roads converged, more than for any other city in Anatolia, and more than almost any other city except Rome. Of the four major communication routes throug Anatolia, Ancyra is central to three.[622] In the words of D. French, Ancyra was thus important as a communication

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[620]For the only concentrated study on Ancyra for any period of antiquity (fortunately for the later), see C. Foss, "Late Antique and Byzantine Ankara," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 32 (1977): 29-87. Foss does much with the limited number of sources available, but his analysis also highlights the paucity of evidence in comparison to other Eastern cities. See also the overview at Mitchell II, 84-95. E. Bosch, in an expectedly thin volume, provides a brief chronological overview of the history of ancient Ankara and a compendium of sources, in *Quellen zur Geschichte der Stadt Ankara in Altertum*, (Ankara: Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1967).

[621]Mitchell II gives an atypical view of cultural and intellectual life of Ancyra. If I have overstated Ancrya's unimportance in other sectors to emphasize its importance as an information center, Mitchell perhaps overstates the cultural status of a second-tier city.

[622]Mitchell I, 127.

center, a "nodal point of a road network designed for a static frontier."[623]

Clues to its importance come from a wide variety of sources. Ancyra is one of only six fortified cities presented on the Peutinger table, suggesting a certain level of importance which does not necessarily come across in other available sources.[624] On the other hand, it did not get a personification on the Peutinger Table, as did Antioch, Rome, and Constantinople, suggesting that as a symbolic or cultural center it did not loom very large. In fact, it does not even have its name on the Peutinger Table, a fact which caused Mitchell to note its "unrecognized potential."[625]

Anatolian road networks were crucial for communication between the eastern periphery and sites inward. As throughout most of antiquity, Anatolia was the great highway of major armies. Much earlier, Herodotus had recorded how the Persians had worked out a very sophisticated system of roads with lodging houses and stations throughout the peninsula.[626] Ancyra became, in the later Empire, the central node of the ancient network of roads throughout this highway peninsula.

Sources from the crucial years of the later fourth century give hints of the importance of Ancyra. It seems that Ancyra was specifically chosen as a site for news-worthy events. The first general synod after Constantine's conversion was held here in 314, probably because the road networks which provided easy access. According to one account, it was also Constantine's

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[623]French, *RRMAM* I: Pilgrim's Road, 13

[624]See Dilke, *Maps*, 117. The other cities are Ravenna, Aquileia, Thessalonica, Nicaea, Nicomedia, all in some sense "capitals."

[625]Mitchell I, 127-

[626]5.52-53.

choice as the site for the Council which, due to extenuating circumstances, met at Nicaea instead in 325.[627] The importance of Ancyra may also be seen in the fact that emperors on Eastern campaigns usually stopped here to conduct important business. Their very arrival in places like Ancyra would be a media event in and of itself, proclaiming that something of importance was pending on the eastern frontier and giving rise to intense proliferation of news and/or speculation. Constantius stopped here to great acclaim on his eastern campaign; the orator Themistius, in fact, delivered his first oration here during Constantius' visit.[628] Julian visited here on his way to the Eastern frontier, and held court, before proceeding "by usual roads" to Antioch.[629]

Julian probably left a memorial here in the form of a large column which stands today in downtown Ancyra (usually with a stork's nest on top). It seems that Julian was very concerned about spreading news about his campaign. Incidentally, and appropriately, Julian passed legislation concerning the *cursus publicus* during his stay here, which involved a series of judicial decisions.[630] The inscription praising Julian as the "lord the whole earth," from the Ocean to the the Tigris, was erected in Ancyra to proclaim news of Julian's campaign.[631] When Julian departed for his ill-fated eastern campaign he left Valentinian in Ancyra "to follow later according to orders."

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[627]On this fact, see Mitchell II, 91 and C. Foss, *op. cit*, 36-7. The tradition is preserved in a Syriac translation of Athanasius. It should also be noted that Augustus erected a copy of his *Res Gestae* here, the only complete copy extant.

[628]Themistius, *Oration* 1.

[629]Amm. Marc. 22.8.8-14

[630] CT 8.5.13.

[631]ILS 754.

Such a placement assumes that Ancyra was excellently located for getting the news quickly to him, and for allowing him to follow along or take other appropriate action at a moment's notice. In this light, the strategic importance of Ancyra is fairly obvious.

Jovian and his son Varronianus assumed the consulship at Ancyra after he had marched back from Persian territory, following his disastrous campaign.[632] After Jovian's death, Valentinian, still waiting at Ancyra, was chosen emperor by men at Bithynia, near the site of Jovian's death. He was informed there of his rise to the purple very quickly, Ammianus notes.[633] Finally, Valens heard of eastern forces arriving after he returned to Ancyra by rapid march.[634] During the contentions between the usurper Procopius and Valens in 365, Valens had proceeded by "rapid march to Ancyra,"[635] just the type of place where he himself could gather and spread news to combat the claims of Procopius. By using news networks effectively, Ammianus implies, Procopius had just saved himself from possible destruction.[636] In the battles over the throne, places like Ancyra were helpful for diffusing news quickly and effectively. All of these examples show the potential of such sites as news centers.

The fact that these highly newsworthy events occurred at Ancyra suggests that the participants could have news of their doings proclaimed widely throughout an information network of which Ancyra was the center for

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[632]Amm. Marc. 25.10.11. Jovian's complete itinerary is given here.

[633]Amm. Marc. 26.1.5.

[634]Amm. Marc. 26.8.4.

[635]Amm. Marc. 16.8.4

[636]14.8.3.

Anatolia if not the whole East. Also, here they could hear of important events occurring near the frontier, or if on the frontier, coming from the centers of the Empire. No other city in Asia was so poised for handling news and information. Later, when Justinian significantly decreased the public post, he actually repaired the highway linking Ancyra with the eastern frontier.[637]

Ancyra did not produce literary luminaries of the likes of Libanius and Ammianus. It could not boast an important philosophical school. In fact, Ancyran students who wanted a first-rate education went to Athens or Antioch. At Antioch in particular, an overflow of rhetoric would praise that city and all that went on there. Thus we have an abundance of information on the happenings of the city, much of it flowing from the stylus or golden tongue of Libanius.[638] Antioch is usually accorded the status of the "city from which the defense of the Eastern Empire was organized."[639] But when looked at as from a communication standpoint, the comparative status of Ancyra rises considerably.[640] It was certainly important for more reasons than the fact that, as the *Expositio Totius Mundi* states, "its inhabitants eat the best and finest bread."[641]

Ancyra serves to remind us of the importance of news, and yet also the way it was taken for granted and so rarely recorded. Ancyra's importance, it

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[637]See C. Foss, *op. cit.*, 55.

[638]Mitchell notes the ten known Ancyran pupils who went to study with Libanius. II, 87.

[639]Dilke, *Maps*, 116.

[640]See French, *RRMAM I*, 1981, p.13.

[641]41.

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seems, arose from its position at so many major road intersections, and by its consequent connection to crucial news from the eastern frontier. The case of Ancyra suggests something of an inverse to Lee's "imageability theory" -- the greater number of roads converging on a city, the more important that city was for imagining the outside world, especially if those roads connected to frontiers.

Imperial Post

The *cursus publicus*, set up by Augustus, was one of many innovations which made the maintenance of such a wide-spread Empire possible. Our most explicit piece of information about the Imperial post, however, comes from sixth-century Byzantium, although it purports to summarize conditions prevalent well before then. In an indictment of Justinian, Procopius records how he had damaged the very welfare of the state:

> The Roman emperors of earlier days took precautions to ensure that everything should be reported to them instantly. . . Secondly, they were anxious that those who conveyed the yearly revenue to the capital should arrive there safely without delay or danger. With these two objects in view they organized a speedy postal service in all directions. The method was this. Within the distance that a man lightly equipped might be expected to cover in a day they established stations, on some roads eight, on others fewer, but very rarely less than five. As many as forty horses stood ready at each station, and grooms corresponding to the number of horses were installed at every station. Always as they rode the professional couriers changed their horses -- which were most carefully chosen -- at frequent intervals; and covering, if occasion required, a ten days journey in a single day, they performed all the services I have just described.[642]

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[642]*Anecdota* 30 (Penguin translation). The ten day journey would be about 240 miles. In support of this speed John Lydus, *De Magistratibus populi Romani*. 3.31, records that the public post through Asiana was entirely abolished.

Although the point of this passage is to show how Justinian damaged the whole postal system, Procopius gives us insight into how it functioned ideally in past times. Although Justinian "allowed for postal service to continue" on "the road leading to Persia," he drastically decreased the number and quality of the stations along the way. The result, Procopius goes on to relate in the passage, "has been that events happening in any region are reported with difficulty, too late to be of any use and long after they happened, so that naturally no useful action can be taken." Although constructed for official strategic reasons, the role of the post in disseminating news more widely should not be overlooked.

Late Roman references to this system in use come from a variety of sources. An organized corps of *agentes-in-rebus* is first attested in 319, although some think that it arose during the tetrarchy to replace the *frumentarii*, who had become disliked by provincials.[643] Libanius kept up on news of Julian through functionaries of the imperial post. As noted earlier, he was very interested in passing along this type of information in public oration. He records that Rumor continues to inform him, and yet he still could keep up on some news about Julian through " the men who spend their lives on the flying camels -- for may their speed be honored by the title of 'wings.'"[644] Libanius mentions one such *agens-in-rebus*, Aristophanes,

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[643]See the helpful overview, *"agens in rebus "* in *LA*, 278-279. See also *A.H.M. Jones, op. cit*, 833-34 for a discussion of the economic burden of the post, the reason Justinian had to discontinue it. E.J. Holmberg, *Zur Geschichte des Cursus Publicus* (Uppsala, 1933) remains standard on the subject. A file of movements on the *cursus* was kept by the station leaders; an example survives in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*. B.P. Grenfell, A.S. Hunt, et al. London, 1898-, 40.4087-88.

[644]*Epistula 1402.1-3; D&L 258.*

who "traversed the world on horseback," and from whom "no information that required prompt delivery ever came slowly."[645]

Couriers, *frumentarii*, and *agentes-in-rebus* regularly appear as bearers of information, although it remains uncertain how much of their actual reports would have classified as "news." They were generally special agents of the emperor, and at times it is said they were even hated by the general populace who gave them names such as *curiosi* on account of their ostensible nosiness.[646] With such a reputation and the importance of the speed of their missions, it is doubtful that couriers mingled with the public much or announced news from the frontier. However, the isolation should not be overstressed. No doubt their very presence would have aroused curiosity and rumor as a visual medium. Seeing men on "flying camels" rushing through town would give rise to speculation, especially in civic centers.

Officially, only persons with a warrant (*evictio*) for official government business issued by the governor or emperor were permitted to use the facilities of the *cursus publicus*, although the road itself could not be so restricted.[647] However, during the later Empire, wealthy persons and those with connections to officials readily received *evictiones* for private travel without much trouble.[648] The repeated prohibitions of personal travel on the *cursus* suggest that the rule was broken continually, and that private persons

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[645]*Oratio* 14.13.

[646]See W. Sinnigen, "The Roman Secret Service," in CJ 57 (1961): 65-72, and Austin and Rankov, *Exploratio, passim* for references to strategic intelligence gleaned through a variety of functionaries and officials.

[647]The restricted facilities included lodging houses and changes of horses.

[648]See Symmachus, *epp.* 1.21; 4.7; 7.48, 105-6; 9.22; A.H.M. Jones, *op. cit.* 1346.

continued to use it.[649] Bishops, as well, were permitted to use the post to attend councils or for other ecclesiastical business.[650] The pilgrim Melania the younger was allowed to use the *cursus publicus*, as well, on her trip eastward in 436.[651] It appears that she was able to get a pass on the road because of a connection with her uncle, summoned to Constantinople.[652] Even when *evictiones* could not be given, travelers could still wait in line, so to speak, behind official travelers for lodging and for animals.[653]

Markets and Fairs

The importance of markets, fairs, and festivals as points of communication is as certain for the ancient world as for the contemporary age.[654] Here, people from diverse and dispersed communities would gather, trade, mingle, and share news.[655] These gatherings consisted of a few different types —

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[649]*Codex Theodosianus* 8.5.44, 54, 35.

[650]Amm. Marc. 21.16.18. Also Gregory of Nyssa, *Epistula* 2.12.

[651]*Vita Melaniae Junioris.*

[652]At one point the life does record some reluctance on the part of officials to furnish her entire company with horses.

[653]See E.D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire, AD 312-460,* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 57-58 for a description of the process with pilgrims. For the routes for private individuals, the various *itineraria* in my bibliography give clear reference to routes and stops, especially for the east.

[654]Studied for the modern period in P. Bohannan and G. Dalton eds., *Markets in Africa,* (Northwestern University, 1962), 15-16 — "undoubtedly one of the most important points for the dissemination of information is the market-place." On this important function of fairs and markets, see also Lee, *Information* 176-77; Lee quotes the passage above.

annual events and occasional or periodical.[656] A study of modern fairs in

pre-industrial societies notes that possibly the most important non-economic

function of fairs is communication:

> the assemblage of such relatively large groupings of population make
> the market-place one of the most important nodes in the
> communication network of a peasant society. . . The presence of
> professional traders traveling constantly from market to market in a
> circuit of market towns bring the latest information to each of the
> market-places.[657]

Generally, our knowledge of the ancient fairs comes from literary sources

only, since fairs were periodical events which did not leave permanent

structures. But Mitchell proposes that circulation patterns of civic bronze

coins might also show market patterns.[658] Often they could attract people

from far distances, giving news a chance to enter local communities.

Menander Rhetor, in a late third century treatise on epideictic oratory,

"judges a festival on the number and status of visitors, as well as distances

traveled by them."[659] Theodoret of Cyrrhus writes c. 440 of a fair in a town of

Cilicia (Aegae) which attracts "a large number of merchants from the

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[655]See, in particular, L. de Ligt, *Fairs and Markets in the Roman Empire: Economic and Social Aspects of Periodic Trade in a Pre-Industrial Society*, (Amsterdam, 1993). This is the most thorough treatment to date in any language.

[656]I leave aside weekly markets which would have been very local, attracting only people from the surrounding communities.

[657]W.G. Lockwood, "The Market-Place as a Social Mechanism in Peasant Society," *Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers* 32 (1965): 45-67, at 52-3. Quoted in Lee, *Information*, 175-76. See 175-78 for an overview of the fair in Roman information networks.

[658]Mitchell I, 242.

[659]Menander Rhetor c. 366, ed. and transl. D.A. Russell and N.G. Wilson (Oxford, 1981). Quoted in De Ligt, *Fairs and Markets*, 229.

West."[660] At this same site, a pilgrim's guidebook from the sixth century records a period of "tax-free trade for forty days."[661] Such long-distance trade was part of the human structures by which news and information circulated about the empire.

The importance of fairs for disseminating frontier information is suggested by the number of fairs located in or near Roman frontier regions. The description of Nisibis and Edessa in the *Expositio Totius Mundi* singles out Roman/Persian trade as their most distinguished characteristic.[662] Fairs were held at these locations. The purpose of these fairs was to facilitate trade with foreign merchants. But in the process, Romans from more central regions, such as the traders mentioned above from Western provinces, would have been exposed to frontier life and peoples. But the information function was a double-edged sword. These fairs long were seen as potential points for passage of sensitive information between the Romans and their adversaries as well. The suspicion of merchants as spies is something of a commonplace in the sources. Procopius continues a long tradition when he records that merchants were seen as potential spies, guides, and envoys.[663] After Galerius'

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[660]*Epistula* 70. For an analysis of the importance of this fair as proof of the continuity between the late-Roman and early Byantine periods, see de Ligt, *Fairs and Markets* 69-70.

[661]Theodosius, *De Situ Terrae Sanctae*, c.32 in *Itineraria et Alia Geographica*, CC 175, Turnhout 1965. This passage is cited with this connection in de Ligt, 69. On the importance of Cilicia as region from which frontier news could circulate westward, see Libanius *Oration*. 15.45-50; "First one story, then another, came from Cilicia. At the rumour of his recovery they grew pale: the receipt of news to the contrary caused rejoicing, and their nods and smiles revealed to one another the pleasure they felt."

[662]22.

[663]2.2.3.

defeat of the Persians in 298, one of the treaty stipulations was that all trade became restricted to Nisibis as an obligatory "trading post."[664] But to what was this restriction responding?[665] Legislation from a century later gives perhaps some hints. It seems that a another tense situation along the eastern frontier caused the tightening of control on traveling merchants, on the grounds that they could sometimes pass along too much news. In 408/9, legislation was passed for controlling sensitive information near the frontier zone:

> Merchants who are subject to our authority or that of the King of Persia's could not hold fairs (*nundinas exercere*) outside those places which were agreed upon . . . lest the secrets of another kingdom be scrutinized contrary to agreement.[666]

The places "agreed upon" usually are interpreted as the fairs at the border towns of Nisibis, Callinicum, and Artaxata, established to facilitate trade

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[664]Terms recorded in Festus, *Breviarum* 25; Amm. Marc. 25.7.9, but most fully at Petros Patrikios, fr. 14 (*FHG* 4.189); See J. Eadie, "The Transformation of the Eastern Frontier," in Mathisen and Sivan, 75. Eadie cites A. Lewin, "Dall'Eufrate al Mar Rosso: Diocletian, l'esercito e i confini tardoantichi," *Athenaeum* 68 (1990), 141-165, at 147. See also S. Gregory, *Roman Militay Architecture on the Eastern Frontier, A.D. 200-600*, (Amsterdam, 1995), 216; and R.C. Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy: Formation and Conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius* (Leeds, 1992), 5-7; E.H. Winter, "On the Regulation of the Eastern Frontier of the Roman Empire in 298," in French and Lightfoot, 555ff.

[665]Lee, *Information*, 63, doubts that this stipulation should be taken at face value, citing evidence that trade did take place elsewhere along the eastern frontier. His doubt seems well-founded; most recent writers just link the two laws, over a half century apart. None of this, it seems, challenges the idea that the terms were relaxed before the mid-fourth century.

[666]*CJ* 4.63.4. CJ 4.63.6 seems to be a reiteration of this law in 422, a testimony to short memory or disobedient merchants. Even the 408/9 law seems to have been a repeat of earlier enactments. See Andreotti, *Politica di sicurezza*, 249.

between Roman and Persian merchants.[667] Although the actual meaning of the passage has been debated, it does underscore the potential of information gathering and dissemination concurrent with trading -- and, all would agree, the fair provided an excellent context for that.

The most important of these centers was Nisibis, which explains the restriction of all trade to this city in 298; it remained an important channel of trade and information until its inglorious delivery into Persian hands in 363. After 363, Nisibis continued to be a potential trading center, as we see from the statutes of the school of Nisibis. These forbade inhabitants from going into Roman territory to buy or sell.[668]

Other trade centers included Batnae, very close to the Euphrates, which Ammianus describes as trading in products in great abundance even from as far away as India and China.[669] At its yearly festival in September, "a great crowd of every condition gathers for the fair." These fairs had a strong military presence to keep the peace and to keep an eye on a place of intense

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[667]Although Lee, *Information*, 64, claims that "there is no ambiguity about the law of 408/409" a recent work, in fact, has challenged traditional explantations. French and Lightfoot, 3, as well as S.N.C. Lieu, "Captives, Refugees, and Exiles: A Study of Cross-Frontier Civilian Movements and Contacts between Rome and Persia from Valerian to Jovian," in Freeman and Kennedy eds., 1986, 475-505 at 491, interpreted this law as a ban on "frontier fairs" in any place except these three areas. The interpretation often follows from analysis of the treaty of 298 and the importance of controlling the movements of merchants as potential spies. De Ligt, *op. cit.* 53-54, on the other hand, sees it as a prohibition against exercising any business transaction (*nundinas exercere*) outside of these areas -- and not as a specific reference to fairs at all. From either interpretation, however, the importance of keeping a close watch on merchants is clear, as is their role as diffusers of information near the frontiers.

[668]Recorded at Lee, *Information*, 64.

[669]14.3.3

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information exchange and the ubiquitous possibility of espionage. The Amida fair, near the Tigris river, was also a site of exchange of goods and news. We catch a glimpse of this fair because of an incidental reference in Ammianus. The annual fair was being held here at the time of a Persian attack, and so Ammianus mentions it. Ammianus tells us that there was a "throng of country folk in addition to the foreign traders here at the time.[670] Procopius describes another frontier market near Erzerum and located right on the Roman/Persian frontier. Locals traded here and even crossed the frontiers to help in each others' fields, Roman and non-Roman.[671]

The importance of fairs as "nodal points" of communication also can be seen in some North African evidence. In the late fourth century an anti-Donatist writes how Donatists were using the medium of fairs to spread their message -- they were sending "criers (*praecones*) to all nearby places and to the markets (*nundinae*)."[672] In North Africa, as in the East, fairs provided a context for spreading information widely, quickly and effectively in a way not possible just within local communities. Other references point to how the rural markets of southern Numidia served as an effective site from which to rally support for various religious causes as well.[673] In North Africa, the information diffusion function was specifically a method whereby rural areas were brought into contact with the rest of the Roman world.[674] Lacking

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[670]18.8.13.

[671]*De aedificiis* 3.3.9-11. Cited in Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 78.

[672]Optatus Milevitanus. *Contra Parm. Donat. 3.4* in *CSEL* 26; see de Ligt, op. cit., 120.

[673]De Ligt, *op. cit.* 121.

[674]For an analysis of rural markets in Roman North Africa, see "Rural Markets in North Africa and the Political Economy of the Roman Empire," in

frontier cities as such, rural Romans and confederated non-Romans relied on these fairs for news of the outside world.

The *Tabula Peutingeriana* also refers to a frontier fair. Near an indication of what some consider the eastern frontier of the Empire (*fines Romanorum*), and *fines exercitus Syriaticae*, the words *commercium barbarorum* appear, suggesting a frontier fair here between Romans and Persians. It also shows the map-maker's knowledge of such a fair. We also know of a customs officers nearby at Zeugma.[675] Such customs post are also noted in North Africa.[676]

Urbanization

M. Kearney, in his many recent studies of world-view, notes that mental conceptions of geographic space and the cosmos are shaped by such tangible factors as settlement patterns, mobility, and means of communication.[677] As a human structure, demographics shaped the rate and speed of news flow. Urbanization as a phenomenon in Late Antiquity has been getting increased attention lately, especially with the expansion of the archaeological record for this period. To the extent that demographics are human creations,

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B. Shaw, *Rulers, Nomads, and Christians in Roman North Africa*, (Aldershot: Variorum, 1995), I, 37-83.

[675]Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii*. 1.20. Described in Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 68-69. Whittaker uses the presence of this market, somehow, as proof that the Peutinger Table is not depicting a linear frontier. But the presence of other fairs at the frontiers only further underscores the possibility of it actually being so. Whittaker is eager to dismiss here the notion that ideology can be a guide to the "reality of frontiers," 69.

[676]*CIL* 4.4508.

[677]See his *World View*. (Novato, Calif.: Chandler and Sharp, 1984), and "Worldview" in *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, ed. D. Levinson and M. Ember, vol. 4 (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 1380-1383.

urbanization forms part of the context of news travel from and to the frontier. Like roads, as Lee has pointed out, the presence of cities in a region likewise facilitated their "imageability" in the Roman mind.[678] Part of this imageability was related to the fact that cities also allowed for wider and quicker diffusion of news. Like roads, cities were thus essential to the workings of Empire. The cities on the eastern frontier, especially through the increased diffusion of information from and about them, enhanced the imageability of the Eastern frontier in a way not possible with the North African.

Lee further analyzes the relationship between dynamic news flow and settlement density with reference to a disease model, which appears to work fairly well. In the work *Germs and Ideas: Routes of Epidemics and Ideologies,* A. Siegfried argues that germs need urban centers to spread, just as ideas do.[679] Just as the spread of disease generally assumes some type of human contact, and the more intense the contact in cities, the more widespread the disease will be, so can it be said about the spread of news. The more urbanized a region, the more profound would be the news flow, the more rural, the less so.

Such broad generalizations demand, at this point, some explanation. The terms urban and rural are not easy to pin down, nor are they static. And generalizations about the urbanness or rurality of certain areas usually can be challenged on a variety of fronts. An overview of what is meant by urban for the Republic and earlier Roman Empire, for instance, would simply not do for the later Empire. And it is very difficult not to impose modern

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[678]Lee, *Information*, 89.

[679]Tr. J. Henderson and M. Claraso (Edinburgh and London, 1965), 39 etc. See Lee, *Information*, 151-52.

assumptions about rurality and urbanity onto the ancient world.[680] To begin with, urban and rural were never completely separate entities, especially for the later Roman Empire. The later Empire was, in general, more rural than the earlier. For all stages of the Empire, however, our choice of terms and perspectives is often all that separates the city from the countryside.

From an economic perspective, for instance, the city usually cannot be separated from the countryside. As A.H.M. Jones put it in his monumental work on the period: "the great majority of the cities were, however, essentially rural. They drew the greater part of their wealth from agriculture, and their urban centres were of minor economic importance."[681] Likewise, the countryside could depend on the city and its markets for a livelihood.

Socially, demographically, and administratively, however, there could be vast distances, and even gulfs, between a city and a countryside.[682] Certain types of buildings, landscapes, and administrative statuses were the distinctives of cities and towns, and defined a specific type of "civic culture,"

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[680]See the excellent discussion by Bryan Ward-Perkins, "Urban Continuity?" in N. Christie and S.T. Lotheby eds., *Towns in Transition: Urban Evolution in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, (Scholar Press, 1996), 4-17 at 4-6, for some crucial definitions. See also C.E. Stancliffe, "From Town to Country: The Christianization of the Tourraine, 360-600," In D. Baker, ed. *The Church in Town and Countryside*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), 43-59 at 45 for a discussion of gradations of urbanity and rurality (*oppida, vicus, pagus* etc).

[681]Jones, *LRE*, 714. See also K. Green, *Archaeology of the Roman Economy*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 67-97.

[682]Norman Pounds cautions against an overemphasis on numbers in deciding rural vs. urban. For instance, literary sources recognize as cities some areas with, presumably, no more than 500 inhabitants. See his "Urbanization of the Classical World," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 59 (1969): 135-152. Some of the Eastern frontier cities I have personally observed, although they loom large in the sources -- Amida, Nisibis, Edessa etc. -- are not very large sites.

whereas their absence designated countrysides.[683] The countrysides, most beginning just outside of a city, contained over 80% of the population at the height of the Empire, working in agricultural settings. For the later periods the percentage gets even higher.[684]

If the presence of cities does indeed facilitate the "imageability" of regions, then the Eastern frontier would have been much easier to imagine than the North African. The mythological descriptions of the African frontier and its peoples are a testimony to the lack of news coming from there, and the lack of imageability.[685] The cities of the East "on our frontier" and "facing the barbarians" were seen as forming a bulwark against the Persians as well as marking the boundary of empire itself in some places.[686] The defense of these cities, Libanius writes, is of utmost importance in guarding the east.[687] In another passage, Julian orders his men to take 20 days' rations with them, "that being the distance to the fine city [Bezabde] that marks the boundary of the Roman Empire."[688] Libanius writes how these frontier cities were seen as crucial to the "fabric of the world" itself and that their wasting is a disgrace: "news of a city not retaken would make our people despondent and paralyze them." News from such areas was crucial to Romans.

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[683]Based in part on Bryan Ward-Perkins, "Urban Continuity?," in N. Christie and S.T. Lotheby eds., 4-6.

[684]Mitchell I, Introduction.

[685]See *supra* 157.

[686]*Oration* 67.20.

[687]*Oration* 12.71.

[688]*Oration* 18.264.

North Africa did not have these kind of cities occupying strategic sites on the frontier which could act as major communication nodes. There, the key to controlling surrounding territory were series of fortlets.[689] Since probably only military personnel would have frequented these fortlets near the edges of the Sahara, little if any news would have proliferated from and about these areas. The relative absence of references to the North African frontier in Late Roman sources can be understood in the context of this lack of news flow and lack of urbanization.

Ecclesiastical Contexts

During the fourth and fifth centuries, monasteries, church complexes, and holy sites began to spring up with more frequency. These complexes could take on the appearance of "small towns" and served to facilitate the contact of peoples from all around them, especially at major church festivals where they could attract crowds of pilgrims from far and wide.[690] In some cases, they provided something of a framework for the spread of information in a way never provided, for example, in rural eastern areas. And they especially complemented the communication network of cities which did exist along the eastern frontier.[691]

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[689]A. Rushworth, "North African Deserts and Mountains: Comparison and Insights," in Kennedy, *Army*, 297-320, at 301.

[690]Mitchell II, 116.

[691]They also began to challenge or "outshine" centers of cultural focus even as some gave the impression of being cities with their walled sanctuaries and internal buildings. See Mitchell II, 117.

Their importance in an ancient context is underscored by the fact that "in all accounts of ancient travel religion is accorded the largest role as a motive for travel, even among the poor."[692] Christianity did not add pilgrimage to the ancient landscape, but it did focus it on points east. With the growth in eastern pilgrimage during the fourth century, the role of monasteries as lodging-houses became that much more important.[693] Drawn primarily by the associations of charismatic power, the number of pilgrims expanded enormously during the fourth century.[694] Often, monasteries sprang up near roads so that they could supply travelers, thus also serving as an excellent context for news exchange.[695] The monasteries on or near the eastern frontier tended to be located on or near the East -West roads, specifically for the purpose of provisioning and servicing travelers in these regions.[696] The ones located near the frontiers became centers of refuge during border conflicts.[697]

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[692]Lewis, *News and Society*, 39.

[693]On the context of eastern pilgrimage, see E.D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage*. For travel and lodging to and from pilgrimage sites, see L. Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 300-329.

[694]On motives, see Mitchell II, 116, etc.

[695]On the attraction and function of eastern Christian centers, see Mitchell II, 116.

[696]A. Palmer, *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier: The Early History of the Tur'Abdin*, (Cambridge, 1990), 112. See also S. Mitchell, *Regional Epigraphic Catalogues of Asia Minor* II: *The Inscriptions of North Galatia*, (BAR int. ser. 35, 1982), 258-59 for churches on main military roads.

[697] John of Ephesus (507-589) records many examples of such shelter in *Lives of Eastern Saints;* see also S.N.C. Lieu, "Captives, Refugees and Exiles: A Study of Cross-Frontier Civilian Movements and Contacts between Rome and

The *Itineraria* of Egeria presents some of these characteristics of

monasteries. Throughout her journey she records how she was the

beneficiary of the hospitality of monks in monasteries or church complexes.

In these venues she hears about current situations along the eastern frontier.

Although she also stays at the *mansiones* (6, 8, 23, 7, etc) and inns as well, she

often mentions staying in monastic houses. And although her interest is

more in the biblical geography of the regions she travels to, she also records

enough contemporary circumstances to suggest that she is sharing news with

the locals and with the monks, and vice versa. Having heard of the holy

reputation of the monks of Mesopotamia, for example, "long before she got

there" she is eager to mingle with those monks.[698] She happens to arrive at

Carrhae on a feast day in which the monks have gathered from far and wide.

She finds that they all live on the outskirts of the cities of Mesopotamia. At

Carrhae itself she records that there were no Christians.[699] The feast day pulls

together all the monks from Mesopotamia, she assures us; even the far-

scattered ascetics, "the great monks," came to town on such days. Such

gatherings held much potential for intense news and information exchange,

and Egeria was cleary informed thereby.

The monastery of St. Theodore of Sykeon, located right near an Imperial

Post road, became a crucial stop-off point for eastern travelers.[700] Carrying on

something of a family tradition -- minus the pre-conversion prostitution by

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Persia from Valerian to Jovian," in Freeman and Kennedy eds., 1986, 475-505.
490.

[698]*Itineraria Egeriae* 20.

[699]The fact that she specifically singles out Carrhae like this suggests that it
was exceptional in having no Christians there.

[700]*Life of St. Theodore of Sykeon* 3.

his mother and sister -- St. Theodore welcomed pilgrims and others into his monastery.[701] The descriptions given in his *Life* gives a good sense of travel in Central Anatolia toward the end of antiquity.

As places of congregation and lodging, monasteries became ideal for the spread of information. Letters could be passed from monastery to monastery, as is readily seen in the letters of Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus. And monks passed from monastery to monastery or to churches, keeping up a lively information connection, albeit often centered on doctrinal controversies. Lodging areas could also spring up around holy men, as one did for Daniel the Stylite, whom the Emperor Leo (457-474),with some effort, persuaded to provide lodging for brothers and strangers.[702]

The potential for news spreading at such locales may be seen from a passage just before this one in which the Emperor, having heard of insurrections in the East, went to Daniel the Stylite for advice. The Emperor, the Life records, told Daniel of all the problems in the East; Daniel then gave much advice, as the source specifically records, in the presence of the Emperor and all who were with him.[703] The next book records how the Emperor, having heard of a Vandal plot to attack, also informed Daniel and sent for his advice.[704] All of these episodes show the potential of the Holy Man and the Holy site as a way to draw and diffuse news. Disaster news especially demanded the aid of a Holy Man.

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[701]Mitchell II, 124.

[702]*Life of St. Daniel the Stylite*, 57.

[703]*Ibid*, 55.

[704]*Ibid.*, 56.

The sites of some monasteries have been excavated, but too few yet to generalize about information networks. One of the difficulties of assessing the archaeological survey of eastern sites is distinguishing between forts and monasteries. Monasteries could be heavily fortified, as for example the basilical church near Seleucia connected with the cult of St. Thecla.[705] Egeria describes it thus:

> There are many cells all over the hill, and in the middle there is a large wall which encloses the church where the shrine is. It is a very beautiful shrine. The wall is set there to guard against the Isaurians, who are evil men, who frequently rob and who might try to do something against the monastery which is established there.[706]

Abandoned forts, especially near the eastern frontier, could be re-established as monasteries, as S. Gregory claims, because the internal architecture would be similar.[707] Such fort buildings would meet the two paradoxical criteria for many types of monasteries in the east. First, they were to be found "on the outskirts of the world," separated from the world, especially the civic world of the Empire. As St. Basil exults, "we have quietude on the outskirts of the world, so that we may speak with God himself who provided it for us."[708] Second, monasteries tended to be near roads and could be of service to travelers, especially traveling churchmen and women.[709] Forts and fortlets

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[705]Mitchell II, 117.

[706]23.4. On Isaurian raids in the second half of the fourth century, see Amm. Marc. 14.2.

[707]S. Gregory, *op. cit.*, 97.

[708]*Epistula* 9

[709]Such as Theodore of Sykeon's monastery near a major road. Gregory of Nazianzus also mentions monasteries near road stations. See *epistulae* 163 and 238. See Mitchell II, 116 for epigraphic evidence that monasteries tended to follow road networks. See *CIL* 6660 for an example of the amenities which

could meet both of these criteria. Archaeology has only unearthed a small number of these monasteries, so, as Mitchell warns, it is dangerous to generalize about them as a "system,"[710] but it is clear that they began to serve as an important network of communication.

With the change in culture concurrent with Christianity, the character of information, as well as the context for carrying it, underwent some significant changes. Networks of bishops and other church officials existed well before Constantine, but their role came to be much more important with the "Christianization" of the Empire. The change to a church-centered information network altered the content and character of information flow. And information about frontiers was to be put to new uses.

As early as St. Cyprian in North Africa we can identify important conduits of information along the channels set by church organization and hierarchy. Such growth is a remarkable accomplishment seeing that it occurred even before bishops were granted access to the *cursus publicus*. Cyprian's intelligence-gathering mechanism was superb, as can be seen in the types of information available to him -- and not just church related. At one point, for example, he appears to have known of Valerian's orders even before the provincial governor.[711] Valerian had issued his commands from the Danube frontier while campaigning against the Goths.

After Constantine, the already-established networks take on more official functions. The letters of church fathers demonstrate the importance of this system of communication. St. Basil the Great sheds much light on letter-

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could be provided at some forts near the eastern frontier, just the type of arrangement a monastery could use.

[710]Mitchell II, 116.

[711]*Epistula* 80.1.

carriers and networks among church officials -- he also gives valuable insight into the limitations of the system. Traveling clerics were expected to deliver news of church controversies, councils, as well as other human-interest events of the time. The number of times Basil refers to letter carriers is instructive, as are his references to the gaps in the system. In a letter to Amphilochius, bishop of Iconium -- "but it is impossible for me to write because of the lack of persons traveling from here to your country."[712] The exchange of information presumed the existence of pre-existing channels. And the number of extant letters suggests a vibrant and active exchange of information. For all of Basil's complaints about problems in the system, we can probably conclude that he at least had in his mind an efficient and well-working system. Basil thought that the clerics should be available to spread news, whether by word of mouth or otherwise. The fact that he complains that they are not fulfilling such duties suggests it was expected that the church should spread information.

III. Epilogue: The Late Roman Triumph of the Frontier

With the expansion and proliferation of news from the frontiers in the later Roman Empire, it is hardly surprising that the sources begin gradually to present a clearer picture of the late Roman view of their frontiers. Indeed, media suggest that there was something beyond Roman *limites*, foreign territory and not just peoples. The ideology of *imperium sine fine* continues in rhetorical texts, as expected. But by the fourth century, the very concept of frontiers had changed, due in part to the expanded proliferation of news in an

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[712]*Epistula* 231.

environment long provided by the Roman administrative machinery. The message received in part from that machinery, as often, was not necessarily exactly that sent out by the Roman propaganda machine. At times, it was more; at times, less.[713] Certainly "it was largely thanks to the Roman government that the vast majority of the Mediterranean world received information about their world" with "better quantity and quality than it ever had before, or would again before the dawn of the modern area."[714] But to square equally the intentionality of the Roman government with the news the Roman public received, essentially denies them any agency. Propaganda can be packaged and distributed; Rumor cannot.

"Romanization" has been defined as "the series of social, cultural and economic changes which drew together the centre and periphery of the empire."[715] If this definition succeeds -- and I think it does to the extent that modern concepts can encapsulate ancient conditions -- then news flow between center and periphery should certainly take its place as a social and cultural factor of Romanization. As Themistius makes clear, communication structures were crucial to holding the Empire together. Yet, in another sense, this definition of Romanization also fails in its ambiguity. It does not account

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[713]C. Ando, *Imperial Ideology,* presents all communication as complicit in the imperial propaganda machine. Under his assumption, how would one explain the news passed on by Egeria, or Augustine's continued reactions to the loss of Nisibis? More reports circulated about frontiers than the Roman government could ever have controlled. Furthermore, the reception of news always implies something about the expectations of an audience. If we want to imagine any agency among Romans at all, we cannot see them as shaped and created exclusively by official, Roman propaganda.

[714]*Ibid.,* 120.

[715]N. Pollard, "The Roman Army as 'Total Institution' in the Near East? Dura-Europos as a Case Study," in Kennedy, *Army,* 211-227 at 211.

for the difference between early imperial and late imperial conditions. Romanization for the early Empire was bringing center and periphery together by taking Rome to the peripheries -- on roads, by sea, by letter, by word, by symbols. By the later Roman Empire, the center was not so self-absorbed. Late Antique Romanization, if such it can now be called, is the taking of those peripheries back to the center.

The growing importance of the frontiers, highlighted and furthered by the steady flow of frontier information to centers, was one of many changes of Late Antiquity, and led to what I am calling here the triumph of the frontiers. This news flow shaped Late Roman frontier consciousness, a fact that has been implied before, albeit not in these terms. Wells speaks concerning the frontiers of the great "change from the early Empire to later, despite the continuity of the rhetoric used about barbarians, frontiers, and expansion."[716]

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[716]"*Profuit invitis te dominate capi*: Social and Economic Considerations on the Roman Frontiers," in *JRA* 9 (1996): 436-46, at 441. See also Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 200 -- "as barbarian and Roman became more alike, the dominant upper-class ideology became more shrill in its chauvinistic refusal to recognize the fact." Whittaker's argument here seems to mirror an argument about "mimicry" set forth by Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. F. Cooper and A.L. Stoler, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 152-60. Bhabha's argument is based in colonial cultures and analyzes what he calls the "almost but not quite / not white" phenomenon in which the Other is mimicking the dominant, but cannot ever be the same -- "the reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference." The Other that provokes the strongest yet most ambivalent response is the one who looks and acts the most like the colonizer. Whittaker's analysis works well for an ancient western European context, but I am not so sure about the other frontiers. Persians, for example, did not become more and more like Romans. Furthermore, neither they nor the African "Moors" carved out "sub-Roman" kindgoms after the fall of the Empire. In fact, we are told at one point that "crossing the Euphrates" made "a Roman resemble a Persian," suggesting a cultural difference in appearance (*13th Sibylline Oracle*). The frontiers I am exploring maintained that crucial difference. Therefore, the ideology of frontiers was not, as Whittaker

His comment gives no clear indication as to what the change might be or how one might go about exploring it. Whittaker has contended that the shift was not one within Romanization (call it "reverse Romanization"), as I am proposing, but rather one of "barbarization" -- frontiers collapsing and thus allowing the blurring of the ideological distinctions between Romans and barbarians. Taking the focus off of western Europe, as I have done here, allows for some decidedly different conclusions. For one, it frees us from focusing so strongly on the Germanic settlers who would soon violate Roman frontiers. We can read texts without reading into them our own expectations that the "barbarians are coming," and that they are going to stay. Related to this, I think it makes teleological readings of the Roman mind a bit less of a hazard.

Rather than frontiers decreasing in importance in the later Roman Empire, heightened news about them solidified them as a major topic of discussion and a major indicator of the coherance of the Empire. More news encouraged a more central role of frontiers in the world-view of late Romans. Even as political boundaries of the empire shifted or even collapsed, the frontier consciousness reached its zenith. Frontiers loomed large in the later Roman world-view as a result of the news which proliferated about them. Rumour can fly anytime; but, as the old adage goes, "The owl of Minerva flies only at dusk."

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contends, worked out between Romans and barbarians in Europe, but most likely along the Eastern frontier, in response to heightened news flow.

CHAPTER FIVE – PAGANS, CHRISTIANS, AND FRONTIERS

> For without altering the boundaries of the empire (*imperii finibus*),
> Jesus Christ has proved himself able to drive [Terminus, the god of
> boundaries, *et al.*] not only from their temples, but from the hearts of
> their worshippers.
>
> -- St. Augustine, *City of God* 4.29.

Such triumphalist language is typical of fourth- and early fifth-century

Christian writing. Christianity had defeated its foes, and revealed to pagan

and Christian alike the emptiness of classical pagan culture. To take Christian

sources at face value, the overthrow is complete. Even Terminus, the Roman

god of boundaries, has been driven from his position as establisher and

maintainer of Roman boundaries and frontiers.[717] In the context of speaking

about a shifting eastern frontier, Augustine further challenges his audience:

"It was thus signified, they say, that the people of Mars, that is the Roman

people, would never surrender to anyone a place which they held; also that

no one would disturb the Roman boundaries, on account of the god

Terminus."[718] As Augustine goes on to reveal that the eastern frontier in fact

had been altered on several occasion throughout Roman history, the

meaning of his polemic is clear. Terminus was not supposed to yield even to

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[717]Terminus protected all Roman boundary markers, including those
between private properties. Augustine, here, specifically connects him with
the *fines* of the empire, showing that his role extended very broadly.
Terminus and Iuventas, two aspects of Jupiter, showed both his military and
protector aspects. C.R. Whittaker connects these dual aspects, via Dumézil, to
polarities running deep in Indo-European culture. See Whittaker, *Frontiers*,
11. Whittaker writes: "This cult of Jupiter-Terminus which was specifically
linked to the 'prosperity' of the Roman state, signified Roman concern not
only for the maintenance of internal order but for the continuation of
expansion," 29. Thus the cult is linked at one level to the ideology of
imperium sine fine. See "Terminus" in *RE*.

[718]St. Augustine, *De civ. D.* 4.29.

Jupiter, and yet he had yielded, and not to the *gentes externae*, but, in effect, to

Hadrian and, more recently, to Julian and Jovian. The reversal of Terminus'

role in Augustine's rhetoric -- he should have only yielded to Persians or

Germans, not Roman emperors -- further underscores the foolhardiness of

the pagan Romans. Augustine's choice of the frontier as a site of the glorious

battle between Christ and the classical gods is one of many ways he portrays

the poverty of the pagan system.

The victory of Christianity complete, the classical world, "rustling with

divinity," is now "under new management," to borrow metaphors from P.

Brown.[719] The loss of the pagan gods, of course, did not make the Roman

world any less "Holy." The extent to which the loss challenged or altered

existing worldviews is a bit more difficult to discern. Augustine's rhetoric

aside, world-views are not so simple to dispose of, even as external religious

trappings might be. This interaction between pagan and Christian, two

thought worlds, is one of enduring interest.[720] Few historians now see

Christianization as a one-way triumph such as that which supposedly drove

Terminus from his sacred position. Explanations of what did happen when

pagan and Christian worldviews met tend now to be more complex.

Analyses of the interaction of paganism and Christianity have differed

considerably. It might help to visit, briefly, recent developments in order to

situate this project's treatment of the categories of "pagan" and "Christian" as

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[719]*Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[720]I use the term "thought-world" here in much the same way as "world-view." P. Brown, *Authority and the Sacred,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and R. MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), both use the term to summarize the Christian and pagan modes of thought.

well as the concept of Christianization. Until fairly recently, many historians have followed the enthusiasm of the Christian witnesses in imagining a "Grand Event" in which Christianity drove out all viable vestiges of paganism from the late Roman world. Such accounts essentially affirm the rhetoric expressed by Christian writers of the fourth century and beyond. They also place a particular emphasis on the growing corpus of anti-pagan legislation which proliferated from the late fourth century onward. But others have distorted a historical view by taking the message of pagans at face value as well. The historiographical distortions have been manifold because the opposite sides often agree in exaggerating the extent of Christianity's victory. Pagans can just as well overstate the victory in their morose dejection -- they conveyed only scarce and weak bits of paganism clinging stalwartly to classical institutions after the Christian onslaught.[721]

Such pagans often presented themselves as a dying breed, nostalgically contemplating the "good old days" when they could have encountered living, breathing pagans. One of many such pagans, a North African senator and correspondent of Augustine, sees his late fourth-century world as devoid of coreligionists. Volusianus looks back wistfully at the days of yore when he could have dined and discoursed with pagan friends; now he encounters them only in books.[722] The motives behind both of these ancient picture are,

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[721]P. Chuvin, *Chronicle of the Last Pagans*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), gives full references.

[722]See *PLRE* on the distinguished career of Volusianus. P. Brown initially took Volusianus' musings literally, and placed him in a "post-pagan world," a description which assumes a clear distinction between the two thought-worlds. See *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 300. Brown's later works revise this picture, arrived at in his younger days. See, now, his updated new edition of *Augustine of Hippo* and epilogue, pub. 2000.

in retrospect, fairly obvious -- Christians exaggerating their victory, and pagans exaggerating their woes.

Recent writers have tried to see through the imagined drastic and distinct boundary separating the two. Their work has highlighted the accommodations of these two "thought-worlds" (or worldviews). R. MacMullen, for example, recently extended his long-term quest to explain Christianization by arguing that Christianity gradually embraced paganism and incorporated it. The battle metaphor of constant conflict presented by both pagan and Christian writers conceals, in MacMullen's view, a long-term accommodation behind the scenes, as one thought-system achieved its final conquest by gradually incorporating the other.[723] But how did this accommodation play out at the peripheries, the frontiers of the empire? Was there anything to the "defeat" of Terminus except a rhetorical trope concocted by a converted rhetorician?

I see Christianity as a vital intellectual and cultural force which did play a significant part in the changing thought world of Late Antiquity. This is not to say that all intellectual and cultural changes of Late Antiquity must be traced to Christianization. One of the key arguments of this chapter, in fact, is that a general "popularization" of belief shaped the way pagans and Christians alike imagined their frontiers. But Christianity approached perennial classical questions with some decidedly new, if multi-faceted or even contradictory, answers. Christians, intentionally or not, answered these question using established, classical methods. But, at the same time, they

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[723]*Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries.* See also his *Christianizing the Roman Empire, AD 100-400,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), and *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

proposed a new textual authority for intellectual culture, a new soteriological and eschatological meaning to life and history, a modified cosmology, and even new perspectives on geography and topography. In each of these ways, Christianity would reconstruct old structures, albeit on classical foundations.

And all of these structures, as explored throughout this study, contributed to Roman thinking on frontiers.[724] To the specific point of this chapter, two of the major "media" of Late Antiquity that are presented in this chapter, prophecy and panegyric, have long classical histories in terms of form and content. However, in a Christian context, the old forms are imbued with new content and meaning. The resulting configurations would have been, at some levels, foreign to the pagan mind. The question of belief in the world-view of the ancients is, of course, crucial to what I have called late Roman frontier consciousness. This chapter examines how Christianity and paganism, comparatively, related to that consciousness. Did Christianization, however construed, cause a change in the way the Romans viewed or imagined their imperial frontiers?

I have chosen a few variables with which to test this question, all of which give hints to both change and continuity in Roman frontier consciousness. First, I examine this question in the context of pagan and Christian prophecies and divination involving frontiers. Prophecy and related divination, in their attempts to make sense of the present moment *vis á vis* a divine plan, and to relay that sense to others, provide a crucial window into Roman worldviews. As media of mass communication, prophecy and divination provide news which is open to interpretation, often limited by historical factors surrounding its proliferation. At times, the placement or stability of frontiers

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[724]See *supra*,Ch. 2, for a more extended treatment of these structures.

served as the historical and tangible indicators of the stability of the empire, if not the cosmos itself.

Second, I explore how pagans and Christians imagined direct divine protection of frontiers. Pagan and Christian alike saw the hand of God (or gods) actively engaged at their frontiers. The formats for communicating divine activity reveal much about frontier consciousness because they demonstrate that military might was hardly imagined as alone in protecting and maintaining the frontiers.

Finally, I explore the ideology of a universal Empire and how it influenced and/or reflected Roman thinking about frontiers. Constantine himself was well aware of fellow Christians beyond his frontiers, even as he championed the ideology of a Universal Empire. How did the ideology of a universal Christian Empire, beginning with Constantine, relate to the age-old ideology of world mastery, *imperium sine fine*?

I. Prophecy and Divination

> "When have oracles ceased and become void of meaning, among the Greeks and everywhere, except since the Savior has revealed himself on Earth."
>
> — Athanasius, *De Incarnatione* 8.46.

Working within long-standing Near Eastern and Mediterranean thought structures, the Romans relied on prophecy or related phenomena such as oracles, portents, and later, apocalypses, particularly at times of intense threat or instability.[725] By means of these phenomena, Romans were able to

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[725]See A. Bouche-Leclerq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquite* (Paris, 1880), 549-76; H.W. Parke, *Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity*, (London, 1988); D. Potter, *Prophets and Emperors: Human and Divine Authority from Augustus to Theodosius*, (Harvard, 1994); P.J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition* (Berkeley, 1985); Hellholm

interpret their present moment or period of crisis, often reading the will or mind of divinity into history. In Late Antiquity, making sense of the past by means of the future became increasingly prevalent.[726] As D. Potter has put it "prophecies could describe and validate current conditions -- current state of affairs as part of a divine plan."[727]

The relationship between prophetic elements and the frontiers is fairly clear in available sources, giving us clues of the frontier consciousness of Romans. Prophecies, portents, etc. often dealt with the violation of frontier zones or the disastrous price of doing so. Historical circumstances served as indicators of problems or of the will or anger of deity. In effect, the frontier became a tangible site for prophetic speculation.[728]

Pagans and Christians alike relied on prophecy as they each sought to understand their world and their place in it during the later Empire. Moments of prophetic insight thus give clues to generally-held beliefs. As such prophecy is useful for understanding Roman thought even outside of the context of crisis. It can make explicit what Romans held implicitly.

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ed. *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East. Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala,* (Tübingen, 1983); and, most recently but rather thinly, *Divination and Portents in the Roman World,* ed. R.L. Wildfang and J. Isager, (Denmark: Odense University Press, 2000).

[726]See the brief but helpful description of this theme in A. Cameron, "Remaking the Past," in *LA,* 1-20 at 4-5,

[727]*Prophets,* 2.

[728]I contrast this view with that of N. Lenski, who claims that "despair and breakdown of communication caused people to look to divine intervention," in his "*Initium mali Romano imperio*: Contemporary Reactions to the Battle of Adrianople," *Transactions of the American Philolological Association* 127 (1997): 129-68, at 163. Rather, it seems that Romans of the later empire were not looking to divination as a concession, but as a rule.

Prophecy can also show us Romans responding to news about problems, both by the format of the communication and in interpretation. A chief virtue of prophecy is its very flexibility in interpretation, changing along with changing historical circumstances. Nearly all Roman historians include material on oracles and prophecy; few completely reject common methods of divination outright, and most use them as legitimate historical proof, within certain limits.[729]

One of the key elements of prophecy is cosmological. Prophecy served to connect the present moment with an eternal plan which encompassed the whole of the universe. As Potter puts it, "prophecy of all sorts enabled people to understand their relationship with the immanent powers of the universe."[730] The glimpse it gives is the perspective of deity, but records of it can give insight into tacit dimensions of worldview. Divination becomes much more pronounced and probably more central to the worldview of Romans of the Late Empire. Historians writing during the Late Empire consistently give examples of prophetic utterances and / or divination; and they do so even more approvingly than their early imperial predecessors.[731]

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[729]Although, as will be seen, there were some crucial shifts in presentation of divine and superstitious elements in histories. See R. MacMullen *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* for an argument about the proliferation of "supersition" (*superstitio*) prior to and concurrent with Diocletian's reign (284-305). MacMullen juxtaposes the more "scientific" observers of the earlier empire -- Pliny, Plotinus, Plutarch -- with more superstitious types who came into positions of political and cultural "power" in the Later Roman Empire. The abundant references to Ammianus which follow could be taken by MacMullen -- although he does not say so -- as proof of the massive proliferation of such superstitions at the level of the elite in a way not before seen in the Roman empire. See also A. Momigliano, "Popular Religious Beliefs and the Late Roman Historian," *Popular Belief and Practice* ed. G.J. Cuming and D. Baker, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 1-18.

[730]Potter, *Prophets*, 213.

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Momigliano notes that the intervention of gods, as such, was once confined in Roman historiography to "digressions and excursuses," the upshot being that they were not central to the historian's real business. Earlier Roman historians, like their modern counterparts, consistently distanced themselves objectively from the miraculous as much as possible. Writers of the later empire, however, began to put religious beliefs and practices at the center of their historiography. The change is apparent both in pagan historians and the newly-emerging Christian historians

The trend was thus to locate divination in a more central place in historical writing. It must be stressed, then, that if prophecy and divination formed a crucial part of Late Roman historiography, it was not at the fringes of learned discourse, pagan or Christian.[732] To ultimately understand the meaning and significance of history to the late antique person, one could not ignore the role of the gods in historical causation. The trend was part of what A. Momigliano and R. MacMullen call a "popularization of belief."[733] Prophecy thus becomes a convenient tool for reading worldview at a time of marked change.

Another key factors in understanding prophecy is to appreciate the assumptions it makes about nature, or Nature. To the late Roman mind,

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[731]Examples abound in *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, Ammianus Marcellinus, Eunapius, Zosimus, Photius, Olympiodoros, Philostorgius, Socrates Scholasticus, etc. See A. Momigliano, "Popular Religious Beliefs."

[732]See A. Momigliano, "Popular Religious Beliefs."

[733]See *idem*, and R. MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries*. Not all recent historians have accepted this notion. See, in particular, Potter, *Prophets*. Although he sees more continuity between historiography of the earlier and the later Empire than do MacMullen and Momigliano, Potter does acknowledge that Ammianus was thoroughly convinced of divination, 52.

nature was intrinsically related to divinity. Earlier in the Empire, many studious, elite Romans sought to study nature in a way hardly, or at least only distantly, connected to divinity. Pliny, for example, could pursue his naturalism with a view that the gods were on the outer fringes of earth, and generally unconnected with or disinterested in human affairs.[734] He could, in fact, mock popular beliefs which, rather than try to find more "rational" modes of explanation, strove to see divinity behind all natural occurrences.[735] Earthquakes and volcanoes (one of which he explored to his own demise) could be understood as phenomenon of nature rather than the deliberate actions of the gods. This was not so for the educated elite in the later empire. "Habits of mind discoverable in the empire's elite of Pliny's day, even of Plotinus', were thus overwhelmed and lost among others quite different, more 'popular.' The spectrum of belief lost its sceptical and empirical-thinking extreme."[736]

This tendency away from empirical thinking is announced clearly in Ammianus -- prophecy and divination are connected to observable reality.

> There is an essence of life present within all the elements which, surely because they are eternal bodies, is always in motion between them and everywhere strong in its capacity to indicate future events. When we bring knowledge from various sources to the task of analyzing these elements, this spirit shares with us the gifts of divination. And the powers of natural substances, when men please them with various rituals, bear prophetic words as if along ever flowing streams. The divine being which presides over these powers is called Themis, for she publishes beforehand those decrees fixed by the law of Fate.[737]

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[734]See M. Beagon, *Roman Nature: The Thought of Pliny the Elder*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 85-87.

[735]See R. MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries*, 74-102.

[736]*Ibid.*, 83.

There is much to glean from this passage.

It reveals, first of all, that the function of prophecy was news communication -- in this case, news from divinity.[738] The gods pull together the "eternal elements" while "dispersing a network of communication."[739] They reveal this news through the natural elements. Thus, when Ammianus describes portents, as will be shown below, he is giving insight into this divine world, a world which communicates to humans through nature.

This is a foundational element of his world-view, and one no doubt shared by many of this fellow Romans. Ammianus goes on to describe how only "silly commoners" (vanities plebeia) can possibly doubt, in their ignorance, that the gods are actively revealing themselves through prophetic signs in nature. In a sense, learned culture has reversed its early imperial stance here. At one time, the vanities plebeia would have been those who religiously looked for rational explanations for everything. It must be remembered, furthermore, that Ammianus was a career military man, and no "ivory tower" philosopher.

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[737]21.1.8 — Elementorum omnium spiritus utpote perennium corporum praesentiendi motu semper et ubique vigens ex his, quae per disciplinas varias affectamus, participat nobiscum munera divinandi et substantiales potestates ritu diverso placatae velut ex perpetuis fontium venis vaticina mortalitati suppeditant verba, quibus numen praeesse Themidis, quam ex eo, quod fixa fatali lege decreta praescire facit in posterum. Translation in R.L. Rike, Apex Omnium: Religion in the Res Gestae of Ammianus, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 13-14.

[738]An expectation, incidentally, reflected in Muhammed as the "messanger of God."

[739]R.L. Rike, op. cit.,, 13-14; J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, "Ammianus, Julian, and Divination," in W. Wissemann ed., Roma Rescens. Festschrift I. Opelt, (Frankfurt am Main, 1988): 198-213, is helpful as well.

He defends his views against skeptics, as well. Against accusations that prophecies have been wrong in the past, Ammianus appeals to the "exception which proves the rule" argument: grammarians sometimes speak ungrammatically and even musicians sometimes play out or tune.[740] He then quotes Cicero to show that incorrectness comes from faults in interpretation rather than faults with the gods. He points to the pronouncement of the Sibyls as "the means of knowing the future; and courses of action, what will happen."[741] Such sibylline pronouncements, as already mentioned, extended to keeping emperors within their own frontiers.[742]

St. Augustine likewise presents a connection of nature to divinity, and he does so, importantly, through an example involving frontiers. In spite of polarized polemical language, he reveals a worldview similar to that of Ammianus. Augustine claims that the "more intelligent and responsible Romans" saw the weakness of Terminus, and especially the vain "augur" when he yielded to Roman emperors. Augustine rebukes those, even Christians, who, unable to resist the customs of the day, still offered up their worship to Nature.

Augustine's account here assumes that Romans saw a strong connection between divinity and nature in his own day. But Nature, he implies, now lies instead under the rule and governance of the one true God. The *termini* of the empire were related to nature -- and the crucial mistake of Julian and his ilk is that they had developed nature worship as a religion rather than

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[740]21.1.13

[741]21.1.8-

[742]21.1.8.

submitting to the one true God. In this polemic, Augustine assumed that a connection of frontiers to Nature and Nature to divinity "was in the very order of things." He expressed his polemic in terms of a predominant world-view. It is this connection that makes frontiers relevant to prophecy and all types of divination.[743]

Such analyses of prophecy have been made for other historical contexts. In a study of prophecy in Renaissance Italy, O. Niccoli argues that prophecy constituted a "unifying sign" connecting nature to religion and religion to politics.[744] A key point in her argument is that prophecy can connect the natural order and even geography to the religious and political orders. Particularly, as her account argues, prophecy can be linked to political stability in very specific times of perceived crisis. Furthermore, prophecy links a divinely-controlled nature, however construed, to the events of the day. Prophecy reveals the ways in which people viewed the integral connection between their own world and nature itself. "Boundariness" was a part of the natural order, and so related to the control of divinity over the cosmos.

Late Roman prophecy, to borrow Niccoli's terminology, did in fact connect nature to religion. The Roman frontiers were part of the natural world and a part of the cosmological order. To disturb, violate, or even cross frontiers at the wrong moment was to disturb that order.

In a study of a medieval prophecy, R. Lerner traces mentalities revealed by prophecies.[745] Unlike Niccoli, who studies the moment of a novel prophecy

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[743]See *supra* 142, for an argument that both Julian and St. Basil agree in connecting natural frontiers, through terminology, not only to the distant past, but to the order of the cosmos itself.

[744]Niccoli, *Prophecy*.

as a reflection of contemporary concerns, Lerner looks at persistencies expressed in one prophecy as it underwent transformations over time. From Lerner, I glean the possibilities of prophecies as a rich source of information in that they do reveal some "deeply imprinted mental patterns."[746]

Prophetic material did not just serve as "divine media," so to speak, relaying messages from the god. It also served as a human medium, connecting individuals with information. As such, it was one of the important media in the late Roman world. It had the advantage of being able to report on sensitive political events in a less direct, and thus less incriminating and dangerous way. It could relay news which might not have seen the light of day otherwise. Potter has noted in his studies of the phenomenon of prophecy that the importance of oracular books "stems from the fact that they provided a format for the communication of difficult, interesting, and, at times, dangerous ideas in such a way that people who lived in a world where the constant intervention of divine powers was taken as a fact of life could relate to them."[747] Thus, prophetic books and commentaries served a significant and sometimes vital task of communicating news as well as providing a consistent format for the interpretation of present events within larger patterns or schemes. [748] At other times, they could be used to interpret current events with reference to long-term perceived realities. Prophecy could refer to events or historical

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[745]*Powers of Prophecy: The Cedars of Lebanon Vision from the Mongol Onslaught to the Dawn of the Enlightenment.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983)

[746]8.

[747]D. Potter, *Prophets,* 97.

[748]*Ibid.*

arrangements long anticipated or assumed, in an effort to ground a certain piece of news in the historical consciousness of the receptors.[749] As sociologist D. McQuail has argued, a key element of effective media is that it corresponds to, rather than challenges the realities of a given society.[750]

As media, prophecy was caught up in the general shift in modes and methods of communication in Late Antiquity described in Chapter Four. Political, cultural, and intellectual changes, from the mid third century onward, put prophecy to the fore as a mode of communication. Prophecy had a long-standing history, but in the later empire, a more "popular" media format came to predominate across the board. Part of this shift was due to the rise in status of a non-senatorial military elite over the traditional landed aristocracy, a shift which affected even ways of communicating. "Modes of popular communication replaced at every level the more literary, philosophical debates about freedom and political rights which, within a much narrow milieu, had characterized these relations in the early empire."[751] Military news, and news about frontiers, assumed a new format, appearing more often in prophetic texts of a popular nature, or referring to prophetic texts in getting their messages across.

The question of the audience for the prophecies is an intriguing one as well. Who was actually reading or hearing these prophecies? At best, probably no more than 10% of the Roman population could read, by recent estimations.[752] And yet, we must avoid a simplistic picture which would

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[749]See Matthews, *Ammianus*, 118-122, for a helpful introduction to the context of oracles in Ammianus.

[750]McQuail, *Media*.

[751]J. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, 249.

leave the majority of the inhabitants of the empire completely untouched by the elite circle of the literate. Harris and others see much in the 10% they estimate as literate -- i.e. the influence of this 10% was very powerful. The Roman Empire was an "empire of the written word," and the weight of that written word was felt far outside of the ranks of the literate.[753] Furthermore, with the intellectual distinctions between the elite modes of communication and others being eroded with the aforementioned popularizing of belief, the notion that prophecies mattered only to a small circle is untenable and unlikely.[754]

Sibyls and Oracles

Oracles had long played a critical role of self-definition and reassurance among the Romans, as among the Greeks. By the late Empire, they were more prevalent among the Greek-speaking areas of the Empire, a testimony to a strong continuity of a "native" Greek tradition among Greeks of the later

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[752]Harris, *Literacy*, 329.

[753]*Prophets*, 94-5. For the ancient world in general, see Harris, *Ancient Literacy*; and A.K. Bowman and G. Woolf, *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) -- chs. 11 and 12 address Late Antiquity. Literacy in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages has been well explored by A. Petrucci, *Writers and Readers in Medieval Italy: Studies in the History of Written Culture*, C. Radding ed., (Yale, 1995); and R. McKitterick, ed., *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe*, (Cambridge, 1990).

[754]On the question of audience and readership of the Sibylline Oracles, see Potter, *Prophecy*, 114-125.

Empire.[755] By the third century a veritable "industry grew up in oracles."[756] The emperor Julian, in the mid fourth century, even directly connected the existence and action of the sibyls to the formation of the empire itself.[757] The sibylline shrines (the exact number and place varied over time in the Roman world) seem to have been consulted in some instances as late as Constantine. It appears that the last sibyl shrine was officially and permanently closed after Constantine's defeat of Licinius in 324. Official Sibylline books continued to be consulted well after Constantine, however.[758] Ammianus records that the books were consulted in 363 at the order of Julian. They revealed, incidentally, that "the emperor must not that year leave his frontiers,"[759] suggesting the fate of one who would violate frontier zones. A loose

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[755]On the issue of continuity, see J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, "Ammianus, Julian and Divination," in M. Wissemann, "Roma Renascens: Beiträge sur Spätantike und Rezeptionsgeschichte, (Frankfurt: Lang, 1988), 198-213; and J. Matthews, Ammianus, 226.

[756]A. Cameron, "Remaking the Past," in LA, 1-20, at 4.

[757]Oration 4.152 -- Helios and Apollo have "set up oracles in every part of the earth, and given to men inspired wisdom, and regulated their cities by means of religious and political ordinances . . . he has civilized the greater part of the world by means of Greek colonies, and so made it easier for the world to be governed by the Romans." This view provides an interesting contrast to that of the quotation of Athanasius recorded supra 249.

[758]See D.S. Potter, "Oracles," in Oxford Classical Dictionary, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1071-72. The books were deposited from the early days of the Republic in the temple of Capitoline Jupiter and later in the temple of Palatine Apollo, and retained under a special body of priests, the duoviri sacris faciundis. The number, and thus the designation of this group changed over time. See also H.W. Parke, Sibyls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity, (London: Routledge,1988), 190-215.

[759]23.1.7 -- imperatorem eo anno discedere a limitibus suis.. Rutilius Namatianus, de reditu suo 2.52, records that the books were ultimately destroyed by Stilicho, but Procopius records that they were consulted in Latin as late as 536/7 (Goth. 1.24).

collection of the Sibylline pronouncements, of which there were 14, played a crucial role in interpreting and disseminating information at moments of crisis, when news was craved.

The long history of copying out, modifying, and inventing things Sibylline continues well into the "Christian Empire," under the auspices of Christians and Jews. Pagans, such as the emperor Julian, knew that the Sibylline books were still around and where to find them, but Christians were working with them as well, albeit in a different way. A series of them was revised by Christian and/or Jewish writers to take account of history as it unfolded, specifically in relation to Biblical prophecy. Current events were read into biblical texts and presented in a sibylline format.

The interaction between pagan and Christian thought on the oracles provides a fascinating window into Late Antique thought. Although opinion was divided, many Christian writers were eager to use pagan oracles to "prove" the truth and superiority of Christianity.[760] Especially with the development of the apologetic tradition, the sibylline oracles, even those not edited by Jewish or Christian thinkers, became a ready repository of polemical material. The Church Fathers often defended their use, so long as they established the truth of Christianity.[761] Lactantius, probably the strongest of the Christian polemicists, puts this type of defense succinctly:

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[760]*The Shephard of Hermas* and various analyses of Vergil's *Fourth Eclogue* among them.

[761]On the complex question of the Church Fathers and the Sibylls, see B. Thompson, "Patristic Use of the Sibylline Oracles," *Review of Religion* 16 (1952): 115-136; J.J. Collins, "The Development of the Sibylline Tradition," *ANRW* Band 20 Teil. 2 (1987): 422-459; H.W. Parke, *Sibylls and Sibylline Prophecy in Classical Antiquity*, (Routledge, London, 1988); D. Potter, "Sibylls in the Greek and Roman World" (Review of Parke) *JRA* 3 (1990):471-483.

Since all these things are true and certain, foretold by the harmonious prediction of the prophets, since Trismegistus, Hystaspes and the Sibyl all uttered the same things, it is impossible to doubt that hope of all life and salvation resides in the one religion of God.[762]

St. Augustine even defends the Erythraen Sibyl who "wrote some things concerning Christ which are quite manifest." She actually speaks, he claims, against the worship of false gods such that "we might even think she ought to be reckoned among those who belong to the city of God."[763] Other collections of prophetic pronouncements proliferated as well, suggesting a strong and unbroken continuity of prophetic thought into Late Antiquity and beyond.[764]

The defense of the sibyls, however, was voiced most strongly in late antiquity by pagans. Zosimus, a stalwart pagan, gives stories of divination throughout his history -- so much so that most recent evaluations of him as an historian have been somewhat unjustly negative.[765] Our modern

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[762]*Epitome Institutionum*, 68 (73), quoted in J.J. Collins "The Development of the Sibylline Tradition,"*ANRW* Band 20 Teil. 2 (1987): 422-459. Other Christian writers who view them favorably include Theophilus, Clement of Alexandria, Lactantius, Justine Martyr, Eusebius, Hippolytus, Tertullian, St. Augustine. These all pointed to prophecies of the sibylls to buttress the faith of new Christian believers who maintained a level of trust in the pronouncements of the sibylls

[763]*De civ. D.* 18.23.

[764]For prophecy in the Middle Ages see R. Lerner, *The Powers of Prophecy: The Cedars of Lebanon Vision from the Mongol Onslaught to the Dawn of the Enlightenment*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), and A.R. Anderson, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog and the Inclosed Nations* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1932), an important yet often-ignored older work on the topic.

[765]See W.A. Goffart, "Zosimus, the First Historian of Rome's Fall, " *American Historical Review* 76 (1971): 412-441, repr. in his *Rome's Fall and After* (London and Ronceverte, W.V., 1989), 81-110. See also S. Mazzarino, *The End of the Ancient World*,(New York: Knopf, 1966); and W. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Decline of Rome*, (Princeton, 1968).

propensity to downplay religious aspects is a crucial omission in earlier analyses of Zosimus (and an impediment, it might be noted, to a full study of the later Roman Empire and its historians). Divine intervention was alive and well as a belief in Zosimus' own day, although the intensity of stories had died down, "because our generation has rejected belief in any divine benevolence."[766] In one reference to the Sibylline oracle, Zosimus gives a decidedly pagan view of a failing empire. He quotes the Sibyl to prove that as long as Rome maintained a certain pagan ceremony, "the Roman Empire was safe and Rome remained in control of virtually all of the inhabited world."[767]

Pagans, as well as many Christians would continue to link a stable relationship with deity the solvency of the Roman world. Fourth-century Christian writers in particular made this connection explicit, Eusebius foremost among them. The culmination of Eusebius' thought on this occurs in Book 10 of his *Ecclesiastical History*. The last chapter, a crescendo, as it were, proclaims how Constantine's rule has brought an abundance of blessings to the Roman Empire. St. Augustine challenges these notions throughout his *City of God* as simplistic, but nonetheless sees a great deal of significance in weakened frontiers.

Especially in the context of the later Roman Empire, the connection of divinity and imperial stability was, moreover, directly related to the Roman frontiers. In one of his more famous passages, Zosimus links together the specific frontier policy of Constantine, the desecrator of "his ancestral

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[766]1.57. Zosimus makes this statement after telling a story about the Palmyrenes consulting an oracle about whether they would win the eastern empire.

[767]Zosimus 2.6-7. See also Eunapius, *Vitae Sophistarum* 6.19.17 and 7.3.5 for examples of the neglect of pagan rites and the stress on oracles.

religion," with the weakening and eventual collapse of the Roman frontiers.[768]

> And Constantine did something else which gave the barbarians unhindered access to the Roman empire. By the forethought of Diocletian, the frontiers of the empire everywhere were covered, as I have stated, with cities, garrisons and fortifications which housed the whole army. Consequently it was impossible for the barbarians to cross the frontier because they were confronted at every point by forces capable of resisting their attacks. Constantine destroyed this security by removing most of the troops from the frontiers and stationing them in cities which did not need assistance, thus both stripping of protection those being molested by the barbarians and subjecting the cities left alone by them to the outrages of the soldiers, so that thenceforth most have become deserted. Moreover, he enervated the troops by allowing them to devote themselves to shows and luxuries. In plain terms, Constantine was the origin and beginning of the present destruction of the empire.[769]

I quote this passage at length, not to enter the familiar and heated debates over Constantine's versus Diocletian's frontier policies, but rather to highlight that, in Zosimus' mind anyway, the outcome of political and military decisions was strongly connected to the will of the gods, who had foretold the doom specifically through Sibylline prophecy.

Many readings of this passage, forgetting Zosimus' overt historical theory, present him here as a modern military rationalist. Constantine's "failure" as a military strategists, according to the whole of Zosimus' account, cannot be separated from the prophesied wrath of the gods, who played out their fated anger at his crucial frontier zones, yet Constantine's "frontier policies" were part of the god's vengeance. The statement that Constantine's frontier

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[768]This passage has been made most famous with the "defense-in-depth" proposed by E.N. Luttwak in *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, (Baltimore, 1976). For subsequent debate see J.C. Mann, "Power, Force, and the Frontiers of the Roman Empire," *JRS* 69 (1979): 175-83; Isaac, *Limits*, chapter 9; Whittaker, *Frontiers*, chapter 3.

[769]Zosimus, 2.34.

policies were "the origin of the destruction of the empire" may be read in light of the Sibyll's proclamation -- a specific indication of divine wrath. The solvency of the empire, especially its crucial frontiers, is here strongly connected to pagan ceremony. To miss this aspect is to miss a valuable connection between frontiers and divinity. By his conversion to Christianity, Constantine, to Zosimus' mind, destroyed the pagan ceremony which put the gods in favor of the Roman project. His "frontier policies," and their subsequent failures, were a tangible way of enacting and/or making concrete sense of, his violation of the will of the gods, clearly revealed through prophecy.

Thus, problems at the frontiers became the means by which the gods would visit the Roman world with calamities and destruction. Zosimus, furthermore, is imparting news to his audience; the news of what the gods were doing with the frontiers and the Empire. It is, of course, debatable to what extent Zosimus can be used to show a general Roman frontier consciousness. But if we are to accept Momigliano's, MacMullen's, and Matthew's notions of the popularizing of belief in the later Roman Empire, then it would be difficult to separate Zosimus out as a completely liminal figure. Ammianus, likewise, connects the Roman frontier and the divine will in his history, as will be seen more explicitly below. Through portents and prodigies, the gods also respond to and forecast the shifting of the Eastern frontier.

Portents and Prodigies

Portents and prodigies are common elements in many writings from the ancient world, and are a conspicuous feature in the writings of Ammianus,

Zosimus, and Libanius, as well as in Christian writers. They are more specifically an indigenous "Roman" tradition, as opposed to sibyls and oracles, which tended to be more Greek. Ammianus writes as a Roman here, showing much more propensity toward portents and prodigies than toward oracles.[770] Like other types of divination, these also reveal a connection between nature and divinity.[771] Through physical occurrences or events, particularly those which go against the normal patterns or cycles of nature, one could read divine judgment. Often, portents were visible signs which indicated the future. Although often interchangeable with portent (*portentium*), a more ambivalent concept, the term prodigy (*prodigium*), specifically indicates divine wrath.

At one time in Roman historical writing, portents were more often than not confined to "digressions and excursuses," beyond the "real business" of historians.[772] They appear almost as curiosity pieces, far from the central concern of early and high imperial historians. Often they are included as literary or stylistic elements, set apart from substantial historical issues.[773] This is not to deny that Tacitus, Suetonius, and Plutarch were religiously minded, but rather to affirm that they imagined practical limits in their observations of things historical.

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[770]See, again, J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, "Ammianus, Julian and Divination."

[771]For their use in the late republic and early empire, see F.B. Krause, *An Interpretation of the Omens, Portents, and Prodigies Recorded by Livy, Suetonius and Tacitus*, (Philadelphia, 1931).

[772]See A. Momigliano, "Popular Religious Beliefs." Early imperial historians are more "objective" in their presentation when it comes to divination.

[773]*Contra* this common notion, see R. Scott, *Religion and Philosophy in the Histories of Tacitus*, (Rome, 1968).

There is a distinct change in Late Roman writings, allowing subtle glimpses of a late Roman world-view which would otherwise be lost. Historians like Ammianus were more reluctant to "draw a sharp distinction between religion and superstition," *religio* and *superstitio*.[774] At one time, more skeptical historians would have imagined a rather clear demarcation between these two. Ammianus has already been shown to have put full stock in miraculous and portentous elements, even those of a "popular" nature.[775] In one particular episode, he seems to reveal much about Roman frontier consciousness in a way which is completely missed if he is read as one would read Tacitus, for example. This particular episode is worth commenting on at length

In A.D. 363, Jovian was traveling back from his disastrous concession of Nisibis and other eastern frontier cities. As the newly-proclaimed emperor made his way toward Ancyra, Antioch witnessed a series of prodigies. Ammianus, not the only Roman to speak of divine signs following from this ill-fated campaign, records that, "for successive days" these prodigies seemed

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[774]A. Momigliano, "Popular Religious Beliefs," 8. On developments in Roman attitudes toward *superstitio* see R. MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 74-102.

[775]See also 21.1.17, 21.14.3-5, For a discussion of these elements in Ammianus' historical writing, see W. Enßlin, *Zur Geschichtschreibung und Weltanschauung des Ammianus Marcellinus*, (Leipzig, 1923), 83-96. See also R.L. Rike, *Apex Omnium*, 8-36; R. Blockley, *Ammianus Marcellinus: A Study of His Historiography and Political Thought*, (Brussels, 1979), 174; J.H.W.G. Liebeschuetz, "Ammianus, Julian, and Divination," in W. Wissemann ed., *Roma Renascens. Festschrift I. Opelt*, (Frankfurt am Main, 1988): 198-213; and, most recently, T. Harrison, "*Templum Mundi Totius*: Ammianus and a Religious Ideal of Rome," in J.W. Drijvers and D. Hunt, *The Late Roman World and its Historian: Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus*, (London: Routledge, 1999), 178-90.

to indicate "the wrath of divinity."[776] Among generic signs such as creaking

beams in a council hall and comets "in broad daylight," one stands out for its

specificity: "The statue of the Caesar Maximianus [i.e. Galerius], which is

located in the vestibule of the palace, suddenly lost the brazen ball, in the

form of a sphere of heaven it was holding."[777] All these prodigies seem to

have followed, in Ammianus' presentation, from Jovian's abandonment of

"the barrier [murus] of the provinces whose bulwarks had remained

unharmed even from earliest times."[778] The statue prodigy in particular

holds potential insight into Late Antique frontier consciousness.[779] In this

brief communication, then, Ammianus reveals a late Roman worldview,

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[776]25.10.1 — ... *ubi per continuos dies, velut offenso numine multa visebantur et dira, quorum eventus fore luctificos, gnari rerum prodigalium praecinebant.* Libanius records that earthquakes were sent to prove that fate now disfavors the Empire. See his *Orations* 27 and 28.

[777]25.10.2 — *Nam et Maximiani statua Caesaris, quae locata est in vestibulo regiae, amisit repente sphaeram aeream formatam in speciem poli, quam gestebat, et cum horrendo stridore sonuerunt in consistorio trabes, et visa sunt interdiu sidera cometatum, super quorum natura ratiocinantes physici variant.* An alternate view is given in Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.28. Here "the victory of the cross was extolled" at Julian's death. and the "imposture of the oracles was ridiculed, not only in the churches and in the assembly of the martyrs, but also in the theaters.

[778]25.9.3 — *provinciarum muro cessisse, cuius obices iam inde a vetustate innoxiae permanserunt.* Recall, however, Ammianus' faulty knowledge of the past here; his emphasis on the frontiers is instructive, but his knowledge of 2nd and 3rd century events seems skewed. The Eastern frontier was long a site of negotiation between the Roman and Persian Empires.

[779]The connection of statues to prodigies and divination occurs elsewhere. See Herodian, *History* 2.9.4 for a connection of prodigies and a statue of Severus. Portents preceeding his rise to power are recorded on his statues. On "animated" statues which delivered oracles see Matthews, *Ammianus*, 118; H.A. Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic, and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire*, (Oxford, 1972), 495-96; and R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christian*, 133-35; Potter, *Prophets*, 121. For a connection of silver statues directly to the defense of the frontiers, see *infra* 294.

gives hints of a prevalent Roman cosmology, and imparts news about the importance of frontiers from any perspective, even that of the great beyond.

Ammianus is, moreover, communicating news to his audience, news relating to a shifting eastern frontier.[780] The relaying of such portents points again to the ways in which the whole of the cosmos was seen as interrelated, the natural visible world as well as the invisible.[781] His narration of the Nisibis episode gives subtle hints of this "cosmic" and celestial dimension to Roman frontiers. Ammianus implies that even as the bronze sphere, symbolic of a stable cosmos and universal dominion, fell from Galerius' steady hand, so the order which he had established during his campaign of 298 on the Eastern frontier was now overturned. Jovian's withdrawal from frontier cities such as Nisibis was upsetting an order once established through the Caesar Galerius -- a political order, yet inextricable from a cosmic order, as the globe prodigy suggests.[782]

It is also crucial to Ammianus' prodigy passage that the statue is of Galerius. Sprinkled throughout Ammianus' narrative of the disastrous Persian campaign of 363 are references to the successful campaigns of Galerius beyond Rome's eastern frontier, 65 years earlier. Many of these references conrast Galerius' successful campaign and the disastrous one now facing the

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[780]For a fascinating presentation of history writing as media, see D. Mendels. *The Media Revolution of Early Christianity: An Essay on Eusebius's* Ecclesiastical History, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 1999. Chapter One, "Media Studies and Historiography" is particularly helpful.

[781]J. Matthews distinguishes Ammianus' account of Julian's eastern campaign by its emphasis, specifically, on divine elements. See Matthews, *Ammianus*, 126-7.

[782]See *supra* 64- for discussion of the globe in Roman and Late Antique cosmology.

Romans.[783] References to Galerius throughout his *Res Gestae* and elsewhere support this contention. Galerius was the one who, according to Ammianus and others, defended against the attack of the Persian king Narses, the "first" to make an "inroad into Armenia, a country under Roman jurisdiction."[784] This was the same Persian king who, in invading Armenia, "forgot that destruction was portended to the one who invades another's dominions."[785] In many other passages, Galerius is further directly connected to frontier maintenance, defense, or expansion.[786] He was responsible for the re-establishment of the Roman *limes* beyond the Tigris and the creation of the five *gentes* across the Tigris.[787]

Galerius thus officially had established the Roman frontier at the Tigris. The importance of his action is reflected in the fact that his treaty "defined

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[783]Examples of such connections include: the story of an old soldier left, ill, among the Persians by Galerius, when his "beard was just beginning to grow," who now joyfully greets the Persian expedition of 363 at a ripe old age (24.10.1); negotiations after Julian's death where the Persian king specifically and obstinately demands the lands which "were his and had been taken long ago by Maximianus [i.e. Galerius]" (25.7.9 — the specific land demanded was "five provinces on the far side of the Tigris: Arzanena, Moxoëna, and Zabdicena, as well as Rehimena and Corduena with fifteen fortresses, besides Nisibis, Singara and Castra Maurorum, a very important stronghold); negotiations over prodigies before the campaign in which philosophers claim that the prodigies did not doom Galerius' campaign, therefore they should not trouble Julian's (23.5.11).

[784]23.5.11. D&L 128. Again note Ammianus' view of the past, which seems to have forgotten most of the third century.

[785]*Ibid.*

[786]For other references to this episode, see Aurelius Victor, *liber de Caesaribus* 39, 33-6; Festus, *Breviarium* 14, 25, Eutropius, 9.24-5, 1; Jerome, *Chronicon* s.a. 302 and s.a. 304; SHA Car. 9.3; Orosius *adversos paganos* 7.25, 9-11.; *Chronicon Paschale* p. 512, 513, Jordanes, *Getica* 21 (110); Malalas 13; Theophanes, *Chronicon*; Eutychius, *Annales*; Zonoras, XII.

[787]Festus, *Breviarium* 14.

Roman-Persian relations fo the next 60 years."[788] Galerius is praised in this

vein in panegyric for "trampling the bows and quivers of the Persians

beneath your feet."[789] He is, incidentally, the ruler who is praised in the

famous panegyric passage mentioning a map of the world. The orator praises

him, presumably pointing to a map of some sort: "now, now at last it is a

delight to see a picture of the world, since we see nothing in it which is not

ours."[790] Such a world-wide order, evoking images of a large map on a wall

to which the orator could point, had now been overturned by the death of

Julian and the surrender of eastern frontier cities by Jovian. The overturning

of that order in the cosmic sense can be seen in the loss of the sphere from

Galerius' statue.[791]

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[788]J.W. Eadie, "The Transformation of the Eastern Frontier, 260-305," in Mathisen and Sivan, 72-82, at 74.

[789]*Panegyrici* N&R, 9. 21. 1-3.

[790]*Panegyrici* N&R, 9.21.3

[791]Although this statue of Galerius presumably no longer exists, there is a parallel which still does. The famous colossal bronze statue standing before the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Barletta features a late Roman emperor holding a sphere in his left hand. The identity of the statue is disputed, although many point to Valentinian I (364-75). It is variously identified as definitely Valentinian (A. Ferrill, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: The Military Explanation*) and Loeb Library Ammianus, vol. 3 frontpiece, possibly Valentian (P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*), Heraclius (S. Vryonis, *Byzantium and Europe,* and "unknown late antique emperor" (Sabine MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*). Using parallels from Ammianus, it may be possible to identify this statue more affirmatively. For Ammianus also describes Valentinian as crucial to restoring and maintaining the frontiers of the Empire -- hence, he also helped to stabilize the cosmos, in effect, and thus he could be presented as holding it in his own control. His work of restoring the Rhine frontier makes him worthy to bear the sphere as cosmos in hand. Valentinian was perhaps the best emperor-general of the late fourth century and largely was responsible for restoring the Rhine frontier. The parallel, then, seems natural.

Ammianus, in the same context, records a set of prodigies which not only further connect the campaigns of Galerius and Julian, but again demonstrate the cosmic dimension of Roman frontiers. He reveals that the series of calamities to follow had been foreshadowed by omens and portents. For example, as Julian was on his way to Dura, a frontier town (deserted at this time, Ammianus tells us), he met a troop of soldiers who presented him with a "lion of immense size."[792] The soldiers related how they had killed the lion when it attacked their line. Julian interpreted the omen to mean that he would kill the Persian king -- "for the death of a king was foretold." Making a direct comparison to the famous Delphic oracle which told Croesus that he "would overthrow a mighty kingdom," Ammianus tells how Julian misread the prodigy; for, in fact, Julian was the lion who was pierced with arrows.

In another instance, in spite of the direct and persistent warnings of Etruscan diviners to call off the campaign to avoid "invading another's territory," the campaign continued. Others, meanwhile, provided Julian with a different interpretation of the prodigy, arguing that in the earlier campaign, Galerius was just about to attack Narses when a lion and a large boar were delivered to him in the same manner as Julian had received the lion. They argued that Galerius had come back safely, and had, in fact "made an inroad into Persian territory." A group of "philosophers," Ammianus records, denied that, in Julian's case "the portent threatened destruction to the invader of another's territory." Here one may detect in Ammianus' tone a dislike for these types, who were opposed to popular divination. A further lightning prodigy was also misinterpreted and ignored, and the campaign continued.

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[792]23.5.7.

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Such presentation precludes the view that the ancients were pragmatic rationalists when it came to defending or defining their frontiers. Libanius, an Antiochene rhetorician and perhaps even the teacher of Ammianus, likewise records prodigies surrounding the eastern campaign. He connects events surrounding the death of Julian and the subsequent re-drawing of the eastern frontier -- Earth (Terra) sent earthquakes and the like to show that Fate had begun afflicting the Roman Empire.[793] Even before the death of Julian, the famous earthquakes of 363 were portents of the disaster of Julian's death, according to Libanius.[794]

Another form of portent is misshapen humans or animals, born at critical moments. This was an enduring method by which the gods indicated problems ahead.[795] Ammianus records one such prodigy, from a few years before Julian's expedition:

> At that same time in Daphne, that charming and magnificent suburb of Antioch, a portent was born, horrible to see and to report: an infant, namely, with two heads, two sets of teeth, a beard, four eyes and two very small ears; and this misshapen birth foretold that the state was turning into a deformed condition. Portents of this kind often see the light, as indicators of the outcome of various affairs; but as they are not expiated by public rites, as they were in the time of our forefathers, they pass by unheard of and unknown.[796]

It is difficult to interpret such a revelations as pure metaphor -- for the shape of the empire was changing, and in Ammianus' and other's minds, for the worse. There is a strong connection between the misshapen infant and the

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[793]*Oration* 18.297.

[794]*Oration* 27.30.

[795]The connection of deformed humans or animals to divine wrath was also pronounced during the Renaissance and Reformation eras. See Niccoli, *Prophecy*.

[796]19.12.19-20.

shrinking state. Ammianus assures his readers that such portents happen all the time but that their importance now is generally missed due to the disruption of the state. To Ammianus anyway, Christianity had brought about a change in the culture of portents. Perhaps he overstates. Portents did continue to be observed, but Ammianus' statement does line up with a reduction of their number in available sources.

The Christian take on portents could differ little from the pagan in substance although perhaps it differed in form. References to portents decrease somewhat with Christian writings, and yet when they do appear, they exhibit some of the same characteristics. Toward the end of antiquity in Anatolia, the *vita* of St. Theodore of Sykeon records an episode in which a procession became troubled by portentous signs.

> While the folk of the towns and villages round about went in procession singing their litanies the little crosses that they carried in the procession began to jump about and make a rattle; it was a terrible and piteous sight to see.

When immediately asked for an explanation, Theodore responds: "Pray, my children, since great afflictions and disasters are threatening the world."[797] When begged later by the local Patriarch what those might be, Theodore blends in his explanation apostasy from the faith, inroads of barbarians, captivity, the destruction of churches, "the fall and perturbation of the Empire and perplexity and critical times for the State," and even the "coming of the Adversary."[798] The threat to frontiers, just as much as the desecration of churches, was tantamount to a threat to the cosmic order in this view. Again, nature, natural order, religion, and the divine order of the cosmos are all

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[797]"The Life of St. Theodore of Sykeon," in E. Dawes and N. Baynes, trans. *Three Byzantine Saints*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1948), 127.

[798]*Ibid.*, 134.

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viewed *together* -- *it is the portent itself which constitutes, in Niccoli's words,
"a unifying sign" connecting nature to religion, and religion to politics.*[799]

With the decline in references to portents in Christian writings, there
appears to be a definite shift in focus and energies for communicating news
through divine channels. I would argue that there was not a real transition
in frontier consciousness here so much as a shift in format of communicating
news. Much of the energy of interpreting Christian portents, it seems, went
into apocalypticism, a format initially foreign to the classical Roman mind.

Biblical Prophecies

In a Christian context, another prevalent way of making sense of the
present moment was to connect Biblical prophecies to current circumstances.
Many writers used current news and information, especially from the
peripheries, to make sense of Biblical prophecies, and vice versa. The Hebrew
and Christian Scriptures gradually came to be seen as a ready repository of
prophecies to be mined for answers to current problems or outstanding
questions. The transition from a "pagan" to a Christian basis for interpreting
the various types of prophecies is a fascinating one. And the threats to
frontiers from the third century onward provided just the type of current
problem to inspire age-old prophetic imaginings, but now imbued with
eschatological meaning.[800]

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[799]Niccoli, *Prophecy,*

[800]Incidentally, such search for meaning through eschatology is not just a
thing of the past. Certain elements of our own "modern" (or "post-modern")
world show a tendency to search for meaning in similar ways. One current
example is the extreme popularity of the "Left Behind" series (over 23 million
copies sold). This should show us the potential popularity of attempts to read

One long-term favorite was the reference to Gog and Magog in *Ezekiel* 38:14-15. Ezekiel had prophesied that "Gog" would come out of the north "riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army." The Third Century crisis and invasions (coupled with a bit of folk etymology) clearly demonstrated to some Romans, anyway, that the Goths, who consistently challenged frontier zones in the north and east, were, in fact, "Gog."[801] Connecting Gog -- as Goth -- with other prophecies in *Ezekiel* and *Daniel* in a long mystical poem, Commodianus, probably in the late third century, predicted the complete annihilation of the Empire in the seventh year of the emperors Valerian and Gallienus.[802] Roman Imperialism was waning, and with its passing was coming the predicted "abomination of desolations spoken of by Daniel the Prophet." And the frontiers were an indicator, ready at hand, for reading the dissolution of the cosmos.

Many fourth-century writers continued to make this same connection, albeit with later disasters. St. Ambrose, responding to the Battle of Adrianople, quotes Ezekiel 38 in the midst of an exposition written in the winter of 378/9 -- "For Ezechiel already prophesied in that time both our

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prophecy in light of the present moment, at least from a crass marketing perspective. Current conservative religious efforts to shape media ("Today in Biblical Prophecy," with Jack Van Impe, for only one of many examples) also show the same tendency as the ancients. The parallels between modern fundamentalist media and late antique modes of though on this point is something which could benefit from further study.

[801]See the still useful analysis in A.R. Anderson, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Inclosed Nations*, p.9. He references Commodianus' *Carmen Apologeticum*803ff.

[802]*Carmen apologeticum.* The dates of Commodianus' life are in dispute, ranging from the third to the fifth century. His provenance also is uncertain, with North Africa and Syria being suggested. His language and tone suggest a work aimed at uneducated Christians. See J. Fontaine, *Naissance de la poésie dans l'occident chrétien: esquisse d'une histoire de la poésie latine chrétienne du IIIe au VIe siècle*, (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1981), 39-52.

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future destruction and the wars of the Goths . . . That wretched Gog is the Goth whom we now see to have come forth."[803] St. Augustine critiques such clear connections of history to Scriptural prophecy in his exposition on Gog and Magog in the *City of God*. He writes, "For these nations which he names Gog and Magog are not to be understood of some barbarous nations in some part of the world, whether the Getae (Goths) or the Massagetae, as some conclude from the initial letters, or some foreign nations not under the Roman government."[804] His reference here seems to suggest that such an identification was prevalent among Christians of his day.[805] St. Jerome likewise objected to such a specific eschatology, again suggesting that he was opposing a popular viewpoint.[806] That Augustine and Jerome were not ultimately successful in critiquing this connection is suggested by the ethnography of Isidore of Seville's "Historia Gothorum," which continues to

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[803]*De Fide 1.137-38-- namque et futuram nostri depopulationem et bella Gothorum Ezechiel illo iam tempore profetavit . . . Gog iste Gothus est, quem iam videmus exisse.* The text continues *"de quo promittitur nobis futura victoria, dicente Domino: 'Et depraedabuntur es qui depraedati eos fuerant, et despoliiabunt eos qui sibi spolia detraxerant, dicit Dominus. Eritque in die illa, dabo Gog (hoc est, Gothis) locum nominatum, monumentum Israel multorum virorum congestum, qui supervenerunt ad mare; et per circuitum struet os vallis, et obruet illic Gog et totam multitudinem eius, et vocabitur Ge Polyandrium Gog; et obruet eos domus Israel ut purgetur terra."* Quoted from Lenski, "Initium mali Romano imperio: Contemporary Reactions to the Battle of Adrianople," *Transactions of the American Philolological Association* 127 (1997): 129-68.

[804]St. Augustine, *De civ. D.* 20.11.

[806]*Commentaria in Ezechielem XI (PL 25.15-490),* he writes *in prophetia difficillima illud breviter admonebo, quod vir nostrae aetatis haud ignobilis, ad imperatorem scribens, super hac natione dixerit: Gog iste Gothus est, cui qua ratione possint omnia quae in ea scripta sunt coaptari, nonest meum sed eorum qui hoc putant dissere.*

pass it on.[807] The "fulfillment" of the Gog and Magog prophecy continued on into the following centuries as Huns, Alans, Khazars, Turks, Magyars, and Mongols all took their turn playing the prophesied part.[808]

Apocalypticism

Apocalyptic literature has an established tradition dating well before the Roman period, initially within the Near East. Although it is not certain how far back one can trace it, its major effect was in Judaic literature, especially of the diaspora and Hellenistic period.[809] Apocalyptic literature presents and explores God's dealings within history, particularly those meant to bring about the end or consummation of the age. As such it has had a decided impact on Christian historical thought. There are no Roman or Greek pagan

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[807]*MGH AA*, 11 — *Gothi a Magog filio Iaphet nominati putantur, de similtudine ultimae syllabae, quos veteres magis Getas quam Gothos vocaverunt.*

[808]For the medieval references see Andersen, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Inclosed Nations,* 12-14.

[809]For a wide-ranging look at apocalypticism in the ancient Near East, Egypt, Persia, India, and Syro-Palestine, see N. Cohn, *Cosmos, Chaos, and the World to Come: The Ancient Roots of Apocalyptic Faith,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). For discussions of Persian apocalypticism in particular (generally irrelevant to the arguments of this dissertation) see the following: G. Widengren, "Leitende Ideen und Quellen der iranischen Apokalyptic," in Hellholm ed. *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East. Proceedings of the Int. Colloq. on Apocalypticism, Uppsala.* (Tübingen, 1983), 77-162; A. Hultgård, "Das Judentum in der hellenistisch-römischen Zeit und die iranische Religion -- ein religionsgeschichtliche Problem," in W. Haase and H. Temporini, eds., *ANRW,* II.19.1 (1979): 512-590; A. Hultgård, "Persian Apocalypticism," in J.J. Collins, B. McGinn, and S. Stein, eds. *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism.* (New York: Continuum), forthcoming; and M. Boyce, "On the Antiquity of Zoroastrian Apocalyptic," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 47 (1984): 57-75.

parallels in form to apocalyptic, although the content and message can at times reflect age-old classical themes connecting deity to human history.[810] J.J. Collins, a leading scholar of apocalypticism, provides the following definition:

> a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.[811]

Common features of apocalyptic writing include:[812] a claim to be esoteric, with its substance revealed to a noteworthy person from the Jewish past, such as Enoch or Elijah; pseudonymity; use of Old Testament or, increasingly among Christian writers, New Testament prophetic literature as its base; and a concerned with the end or consummation of history.

Apocalyptic literature assumed a definite plan to history which would culminate in the ultimate *telos* -- the end or suspension of the present

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[810]Although most scholars accept the genre of apocalypse, D. Potter dismisses the idea that it is a category somehow distinct from or within prophecy. He likewise sees no distinction between prophecy and divination. See Potter, *Prophets* 3, 215. See also L. Hartman, "Survey of the Problem of Apocalyptic Genre," in Hellholm, *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World*, 329-43.

[811]J.J. Collins, ed. *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre (Semeia* 14: Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979. See also his *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

[812]On the Christian and Jewish apocalyptic genre in general, see P.J. Alexander, *The Byzantine Apocalyptic Tradition*, (Berkeley, 1985); P.J. Alexander, *The Oracle of Baalbek: The Tiburtine Sibyl in Greek Dress*, (Dumbarton Oaks, 1967) J.J. Collins, "Early Christian Apocalypses," in *Semeia* 14 (1979): 97ff; D.S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic*, (London, 1964).

cosmos and the establishment of the eternal kingdom of the Messiah.[813] It also presented its "prophecies" *ex eventu*, i.e. it would "predict" events which had already happened from the standpoint of one seeing visions of them before they actually occurred, often from a celestial or planetary vantage point. Classical pagan theories of history did not ascribe such an all-encompassing, realizable plan to the diverse will of the gods.[814]

Problems along the Eastern frontier during the third century aroused apocalyptic imaginations, or at least expressions. Real or perceived threats to imperial and community stability inspired Christians and Jews to make sense of them in terms of their own eschatological systems.[815] Apocalypticism thrives in times of perceived crisis because it offers a decided resolution. In the words of D.S. Russell, "apocalyptic is literature of despair . . . with equal appropriateness it can be described as a literature of hope. God would vindicate his people once and for all and bring to its consummation his purpose and plan for all the ages."[816] During the third century we clearly see detailed Christian views of political crisis. In response to political and social

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[813]For a very helpful overview of terminology, see C.V. Bostick, *The Antichrist and the Lollards: Apocalypticism in Late Medieval and Reformation England,* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1998), 1-18.

[814]On the question of pagan historical theory in the later Empire, see A. Momigliano, "Pagan and Christian Historiography in the Fourth Century A.D." in *idem. ed., The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century,* (Oxford, 1963) 79-99.

[815]I will leave aside, for the most part, the Jewish context here, but not the base. For a basic reference to Jewish apocalyptic literature with abundant further reference and extensive bibliography, see J.J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination.* See also D.S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic,* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964).

[816]D.S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Apocalyptic,* 18 – quoted in *The Oracle of Baalbek: The Tiburtine Sibyl in Greek Dress,* (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks), 1967, 127.

chaos, some Christians saw universal chaos and the impending suspension of the cosmos which many thought would precede the establishment of an eternal kingdom. This Christian response to disaster news was channeled in specific directions with apocalyptic literature. In substance and content, it could be argued, the Christian response differed little from the pagan, but in form, the message appeared very different.[817]

Much of these apocalyptic associations with the Roman Eastern frontier borrow images directly from *Revelation of St. John* (*The Apocalypse*), apocalyptic references in the gospels (especially *St. Matthew*), as well as the Old Testament books of *Daniel* and *Ezekiel* and intertestamental Jewish apocalyptic literature. They increase, not surprisingly, during the "infamous" third century, and reveal how Christian minds, heavily steeped in Judaic thought, encountered historical problems and disasters. Apocalypticism worked well in the cultural context of Late Antiquity because it helped make sense of times of change. In the context of perceived catastrophe, it captured the "spirit of the age" and helped express deeply entrenched worldviews. Thus it gives crucial insight into the Christian mind of the classical and late antique world. Its primary concern is with the end of history, the time when, ultimately, the righteous would be vindicated and the wicked judged. This

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[817]On the large and fascinating question of pagan vs. Christian reponse to crisis see, in particular, G. Alföldy, "The Crisis of the Third Century," 89-111. He writes: "there was no fundamental difference between pagan and Christian attitudes toward actual problems or even towards the fate of the Roman Empire. On the contrary, the symptoms of that crisis and its character as a general transformation and decay were regarded by pagan and Christian authors in a similar manner and sometimes expressed in astonishingly similar terminology; when explaining the causes they argued against each other, but partly with the same arguments, and in arguing they showed also similar conceptions of history; and their attitudes toward prospects for the future were not unlike," 110.

moment imparts meaning to the historical events it describes or explains. Meaning in history, then, comes from an understanding of the *telos* and the human's relationship to it. Although apocalyptic often reacts at some level to success or failure of the ubiquitous military campaigns, it points out, again, that the military/political world and the divine cosmos, past, present, and future are part of an inseparable continuum. Hippolytus of Rome (c. 170-236) is one of the first to directly relate the Roman Empire to visions in apocalyptic literature. He ties the Roman empire into one of the visions recorded in the Old Testament book of Daniel, attempting to explain the decline of the Empire.[818]

One of the earliest systems of Roman apocalyptic thought appears in the writings of St. Cyprian. Writing from Carthage, far from any frontiers endangered in his own day, he saw the challenge to and collapse of certain frontiers as a sign of apocalyptic catastrophe.[819] Much of his apocalyptic speculation is inspired by news coming from frontiers. Thanks to his surviving letters we know something of his news-gathering methods. For example, in the mid-third century, Cyprian had gathered news on Decius' defeat by the Goths on the northern frontier as well as some secret orders for persecution by the emperor Valerian -- the latter he knew about even before the provincial governor, he implies.[820] To Cyprian, the moment of Gothic

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[818]*In Danielem*. See Potter, *Prophets*, 106-07.

[819]*Ad Demetrianum* 3: *hoc etiam nobis tacentibus . . . mundus ipse iam loquitur et occasum sui rerum labentium probatione testatur.* See also G. Alföldy, "The Crisis of the Third Century as Seen by Contemporaries," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 15.1 (Spring 1974): 89-11, at 95 and 103.

[820]*Epistula* 80.1. On Cyprian's "intelligence service" see Chapter Four of this dissertation as well as G. Alföldy, "Der heilige Cyprian und die Krise des römischen Reiches," *Historia* 22 (1973): 479ff. Also see his "The Crisis of the

invasions in the north was a sure sign of catastrophe and cataclysm. News from distant frontiers could be apocalyptic indicators -- and apocalypse signaled the suspension of cosmos, a distinct element of world-view. Apocalyptic thought was behind both the reception and dissemination of disaster news. In his presentation, the world "has begun to fail," being "already in decline and at its end."[821] Current news demonstrated that conclusion all too clearly.

In one treatise to a Roman official he reflects that one does not even need to point to the "oft-repeated vengeances in behalf of the worshippers of God"; recent news shows the impending end of the world. News of a "recent event" is enough to reveal a host of problems, including a "decrease of forts."[822] The anger of God, in effect, was behind the problems which were ruining the state, even the decline of frontier defense. In a series of his letters he specifically ties together the defeat of Decius, a dying earth, famine, barren fields, a lack of rain, and the imminent end of the world. Although his letters

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Third Century as Seen by Contemporaries," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 15.1 (Spring 1974): 89-111, at 96.

[821]*Ad Demetrianum 4. Christianis inputas quod minuantur singula mundo senescente. Quid si et senes inputent christianis quod minus ualent in senectute, quod non perinde ut prius uigeant auditu aurium, cursu pedum, oculorum acie, uirium robore, suco uiscerum, mole membrorum, et cum olim ultra octingentos et nongentos annos uita hoimum longaeua procederet, uix nunc possit ad centenarium numerum peruenire. Canos videmus in pueris, capilli deficiunt antequem crescunt, nec aetas in senectutem desinit, sed incipit a senectute. Sic in ortu adhuc suo ad finem natiuitas properat, sic quodcumque nunc nascitur mundi ipsius senectute degenerat, ut nemo mirari debeat singula in mundi coepisse deficere, quando totus ipse iam mundus in defectione sit et in fine.*

[822]*Ad Demetrianum 17. Vt memorias taceamus antiquas et ultiones pro cultoribus Dei saepe repetitas nullo uocis praeconio reuoluamus, documentum recentis rei satis est quod sic celeriter quodque in tanta celeritate sic granditer nuper secuta defensio est ruinis reru, iacturis opum, dispendio, deminutione castrorum.*

include details of problems at the center and not just the peripheries, news of problems on distant Roman frontiers could portend, in part, the end of the Roman Empire, and with it the end of the world.

Cyprian's own eschatological views vacillated over his tenure as bishop of Carthage -- at times the *telos* was imminent and thus apocalyptic; at times it was far off and more gradual.[823] But the point is that he consistently interpreted news, ever changing, *vis á vis* his own view of the decaying or ending cosmos. He saw strong connections between the cosmos and the forces of disruption, with the crucial point of contact being the Roman frontier. To a Roman mind, this demarcated the civilized Roman from the uncivilized barbarian. A full-fledged Roman, Cyprian accepted *tout court* the classical perception of the "Other."

Later problems and disasters continued to provoke apocalyptic imaginations. One such key moment was the battle of Adrianople in 378. About a decade after the infamous battle, St. Ambrose read an apocalyptic passage in Luke (21:9 -- "But when ye shall hear of wars and commotions, be not terrified: for these things must first come to pass; but the end is not by and by") to suggest that not only was the end of the Roman Empire coming quickly, but so was the end of the world itself. His exposition also echoes apocalyptic passages in the gospels of Matthew (24:6) and Mark (13:7):

> None are witnesses to the heavenly words more than we, whom the end of the world has found. Indeed, how great the battles and what rumors of battles have we heard! The Huns rose against the Alans, the Alans against the Goths, the Goths against the Taifals and Sarmatians, and the exile of the Goths made us even in Illyricum exiles from our

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[823]See, in particular, G. Alföldy's analysis of Cyprian's altered views between 246 and 258 in response to news of changing historical circumstances -- "Der heilige Cyprian und die Krise des römischen Reiches," *Historia* 22 (1973), 479ff.

fatherland and there is not yet an end . . . Therefore, since we are at the end of the age, certain sicknesses of the world must go before us.[824]

Such language occurs elsewhere in Ambrose's writings as well. In another place, in reference to the same event, he notes that "with the whole world having fallen, it is the end of the universe."[825] The barbarian invasions across Roman frontiers are a sign of the coming end. Not all of Ambrose's contemporaries shared such apocalyptic readings of the invasions, but many did.[826]

The invasions of the early fifth century provoked similar reactions, and, again, probably uncover some world-views of long- and wide-standing. If we follow Lerner's notion that prophecy can reveal deeply-imprinted mentalities, much can be read in such passages. One of the many apocalyptic accounts referring to imperial frontiers is the *Chronicle* of Hydatius, a bishop from Gallaecia in northwestern Spain. This little-known provincial bishop, wrote his *Chronicle* to continue a history of the world begun by St. Jerome. Hydatius was not nearly as cautious as Jerome in his eschatology. His history is notable for its apocalyptical and eschatological language, which tends to highlight Roman frontiers. In short, the collapse of the earthly frontiers of the Roman Empire signalled not only the end of Roman imperial power but the *consummatio mundi*, the end of the present world itself, and the

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[824]*Ex. evan. Lucae* 10.10 (*CSEL* 32) —*verborum autem caelestium nulli magis quam nos testes sumus, quos mundi finis invenit. quanta enim proelia et quas opiniones accepimus proeliorum! Chuni in Halanos, Halani in Gothos, Gothi in Taifalos et Sarmatas insurrexerunt, nos quoque in Illyrico exules patriae Gothorum exilia fecerunt et nondum est finis . . . ergo quia in occcasu saeculi sumus, praecedunt quaedam aegritudines mundi.* trans. Lenski.

[825]*De excessu fratris* 1.30 — *totius orbis excidia, mundi finem.*

[826]See *supra* 277 on Jerome's and Augustine's objection to such specific eschatology as a case in point.

beginning of a new. Hydatius refers explicitly to the "frontiers of the narrowly-confined Roman Empire that are doomed to collapse."[827] He clearly sees the consummation of the age in the immediate future.

Like his Christian brothers of the third century, Hydatius mined the books of *Ezekiel* and *Daniel* as well as the *Revelation of St. John* for up-to-the-minute commentary on that collapse. He points, for example, to four plagues of his day as the fulfillment of *Ezekiel* 5:17, 14:21, and 33:27-9 and the first four seals in Revelation; the marriage of two prominent barbarian nobles as that of the King of the North and daughter of the South mentioned in *Revelation* 6:8; and the handing over of the churches to Arian barbarians as a fulfillment of *Daniel* 9:27, 11:31, and 12:11.[828] But all of these prophecies are contingent on the collapse and transgression of Roman frontier zones, which to Hydatius set a process in motion, a process which not only signaled the end of Roman Imperial Power, but, ultimately, the end of the present world.

Part of apocalypticism's place in the currency of Late Antique ideas can be seen in a series of apocalypses loosely based on Hellenistic and Roman oracles. Two of the most fascinating collections are the revised Sibylline Oracles and the Oracle of Baalbek. The Sibylline Oracles were "legitimized" in Christian discourse by the writing or re-writing of a series of books, 13 or 14 in number, which became known simply as the Sibylline Oracles. Written or re-written during the third century or later -- the textual tradition of the works is extremely tenuous -- some of these books are distinctively Christian and

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[827]*Chronicle of Hydatius*, trans. and ed. R.W. Burgess, (Oxford, 1993), 6.

[828]See R.W. Burgess, "Hydatius and the Final Frontier: The Fall of the Roman Empire and the End of the World," in R. W. Mathisen and H. S. eds., *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity: Papers from the First Interdisciplinary Conference*, (Hampshire: Variorum, 1995), 321-332.

present Christian viewpoints of the problems in the empire among other things. Books One and Two, for example, give a history of the world from Creation to the Last Judgment. Many provide eschatological explanations of the crisis of the third century and later.[829] The actual form of the Sibylline books is difficult if not impossible to ascertain today. They underwent heavy Christian and Jewish emendations and additions during the fourth and fifth centuries. As such they fit in well with the change in form of worldview, although still dealing with the same types of concerns.

These texts were pseudonymous and widely-circulating, composed from what Potter calls the perspective of the "person on the street."[830] As a format of communication the Sibylline Books were crucial. Potter sees them as a way of relaying information that was difficult, interesting, and dangerous "in such a way that people who lived in a world where the constant intervention of divine powers was taken as a fact of life could relate to them."[831] Their role as media and as vehicle of reporting on the frontiers give rare glimpses into the context of center/periphery information interchange in Late Antiquity.

Furthermore, some of them were written by inhabitants of frontier zones. The thirteenth Sibylline Oracle, for example, one of the crucial sources for third century history of the eastern Roman Empire, was written near and about the eastern Roman frontier. As such, it gives valuable insight into perceptions of the frontier from the periphery. The emphasis tends to be on the Eastern frontier.

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[829]See Potter, *Prophecy*.

[830]Potter, *Prophecy* For a description of each of the thirteen books, see Potter, *Prophecy*, 95-102.

[831]*Ibid.*, 97.

As media of news, the sibylline oracles also give valuable insight. They were continually revised and circulated in response to changing historical circumstances. Thus in them one can see how new developments shaped the presentation of older historical material. Their textual emendations reflected both changing historical circumstances and audience demand. "Audience reaction and expectation are therefore points of central importance for evaluating the information given by the oracles about historical events."[832]

The content of the oracles was almost limitless, shaped by the events of the times. Potter claims that "the only control on the content of the oracles was the learning of the reading public, and this varied greatly depending on geographic proximity to the location of events, and the chronological relationship of the compilers and the extant texts to the material they included."[833] The occurrences recorded in them thus give clues to the ways that inhabitants of the "Greek world interpreted the messages they were receiving from the central government."[834] This, to Potter anyway, is the "person on the street" aspect of the sibylline oracles.[835]

The Oracle of Baalbek was written near the frontier zone, at Hierapolis in Euphratensis, initially about a century after the 13th Sibylline Oracle. Hierapolis was a crucial frontier city during the Persian Wars of the fourth century and beyond.[836] Located about 15 miles west of the Euphrates, it

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[832]*Prophecy*, 102.

[833]*Prophets*, 138.

[834]*Ibid.*, 140.

[835]Potter bases this contention on the fact that the work was written by a provincial with no obvious connection with the government. See Potter, *Prophecy*, vi.

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served as a gathering point for Roman troops.[837] The oracle's perspective and view is that of an inhabitant of the eastern frontier zone, and a particularly active sector at that. Its chief textual scholar, P. Alexander, dates the autograph (not extant) between 378 and 390. Alexander claims that it was translated into Latin (from Greek) before 390. Later the text was heavily emended, but most agree that there was a fourth century text underlying it.[838] As with the Sibylline Books, its content was rewritten or re-interpreted in light of news of changing historical circumstances.[839]

The author of the Oracle focuses on "Romania" and particularly on the "pars Orientis." He appears very familiar with Ἀνατολή which he defines as western and central Asia Minor.[840] As background material the author uses a variety of apocalyptic literature including the *Apocalypse of Elijah, the Apocalypse of John, and the Seventh Vision of Daniel*. The oracle gives a rare glimpse of information flow both from Anatolia and points further eastward along the Euphrates. Focusing on Anatolia it predicts the coming of the Antichrist, along with a host of other problems.

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[836]That this city itself was viewed as a frontier city can be demonstrated in an exchange of letters between Julian and Libanius. Libanius, *or.* 1.132-34, claims that Julian had written him a letter from the frontier of the Empire. The letter he refers to, Julian, *ep.*, 98, was written at Heliopolis.

[837]See V. Chapot, *La Frontiere de l'Euphrate de Pompee a la conquete arabe* (Paris, 1907, repr. Rome, 1967), 338. See also P. Alexander, *The Oracle of Baalbek: The Tiburtine Sibyl in Greek Dress*. (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967), 338.

[838]*The Oracle of Baalbek: The Tiburtine Sibyl in Greek Dress*. (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967), 48-; 65-

[839]See P. Alexander, *The Oracle of Baalbek: The Tiburtine Sibyl in Greek Dress*. (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967), 129-135, for an example of how the sixth century texts revised the fourth century text to better fit prophecy with present historical circumstances.

[840]*Ibid.* 141-42.

In the Oracle of Baalbek's explanations of the invasions from the East, apocalyptic language and borrowing predominates. For example, echoing concepts from the *Revelation of St. John* 14:19-20, ("And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles"), he presents blood as reaching to a certain height on a horse as cities are despoiled: "And there will be much shedding of blood, so that the blood will reach the chest of horses . . . and they will capture and set on fire the cities and despoil the east."[841]

Some of this material could well have been borrowed from the *Revelation of St. John* via other writings as well. The Third Sibylline Oracle, for example, records blood reaching a certain height on a horse during such a siege. Other Jewish apocalyptic writings contain comparable images.[842] Also, the Baalbek formula "Woe to women with child and to those who suckle (their babes) in those days!" is borrowed from Apocalyptic language of the *Gospel of St. Matthew* (24:19) to show the problems of the times when the "cities of the East will become deserts."[843]

Apocalyptic language links discrete historical circumstances such as ruined eastern cities with the ordered cosmos -- which the apocalypse would suspend or end. In attempting to interpret current circumstances with venerated texts, it reveals much about the thought of the people writing, reading, and hearing these "prophecies." The emphasis on the Eastern frontier cities is highlighted here by the way that Scriptural passages are decontextualized. The city spoiled

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[841]*Ibid., ll* 183-85.

[842]*I Enoch* 100:1-3 records blood reaching the breasts of horses; *II Esdras* 15:35-36 records blood as high as a horse's belly.

[843]*Oracle of Baalbek.*

in most of the biblical passages is explicitly identified by the biblical writers as Jerusalem. But readers of the third century and beyond freely read into such passages any frontier city for which they had news of problems and which seemed to fit at the moment.

The theme of civic desecration is important here, as Eastern cities, to a large degree, held together, or were seen as holding together, the Roman frontier zone shared with Persia. Recent historians such B. Isaac, challenging views that the *limes* roads functioned as the frontier, see these networks of cities as the real setting of the eastern frontier.[844] The *topos* of civic destruction in the East is almost exclusively linked to the destruction of important frontier cities. One of the apocalyptic signs comes after the destruction of the East when the people are left asking "Was there ever a city here?" At this point in the oracle, Enoch and Elijah, familiar figures in Jewish apocalyptic literature because they are recorded as never tasting death, return to herald the coming end.[845] Along with a host of problems, "The Persians will overturn the cities of the East together with the multitude of the soldiers of the Roman Empire."[846]

The focus of apocalyptic speculation in the East contrasts interestingly with that in North Africa. In the east, cities were the basis of defense and communication as well as perceived order near the eastern frontier. Certain

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[844]Isaac, *Limits*. On the cities of the East making up the network which formed the eastern frontier, see Isaac, *Limits*, as well as his "The Meaning of *limes* and *limitanei*," *JRS* 78 (1988): 125-47.

[845]*Baalbek, ll* 215-.

[846]*Baalbek,* 27-28. The Sibyl (Baalbek) predicted that in the reigns of Valens, Valentinian I and Jovian, "the barbarians will not harm the cities of the Roman Empire," 98. It takes a real stretch of the imagination to hold that Jovian did, in fact, secure peace on the eastern frontier. See Zosimus 5.41 for decline of cities and aid of cities by divinity.

strategic cities were seen as making up the frontier zone, their loss being etched deeply into Roman memory. The control of them was key to holding the territory on the frontier zone. It thus comes as little surprise that the predominant apocalyptic image one near this frontier zone is the overthrow or destruction of cities. Their loss, as presented also in the writings of Augustine, Cyprian, and others far away from the site of action, was tantamount to disaster at the frontier. And that could signal apocalypse or at least reactions in apocalyptic language which imagined the end of the *saeculum* and/or cosmos. In North Africa, as suggested in the writings of Cyprian, a crucial indicator of apocalypse was a decrease in the number of forts. Such a view seems to be specifically North African, and appears to fit in well with the archaeological situation in North African. There, forts and fortlets, rather than cities, made up the frontier.[847] The communication format in each area fits in well with its particular archaeological situation, and suggests one way in which the human topography could inform both world-view and news.

II. Divine Protection of Frontiers

"The protection of martyrs secures this postern gate
The martyrs Clement and Vicentius guard this entrance"
--Inscription from North Africa (CIL 8.5352)

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[847]A. Rushworth, "North African Deserts and Mountains: Comparisons and Insights," in Kennedy, *Army*, 297-320, at 300-301. There is, of course, a great deal of difficulty in analyzing North African frontiers. For a recent overview of debates about where and how to locate North Africa frontiers see D. Cherry, *Frontier and Society in Roman North Africa.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 28-35 and *passim*. See C. Daniels, "The Frontiers: Africa," in J.S. Wacher, ed., *The Roman World*, (London, 1987), 223-265 for the suggestion that roads and forts formed the North African *limes*.

Romans had long imagined that their frontiers were held by supernatural forces. Like the Greeks before them, Romans had ascribed to various gods the protection of their city walls as well as of their people as a whole. A world-view that attributes the maintenance of boundaries and frontiers is unmistakable in available sources. The protection and solvency of the world was basic to the cosmology of Late Antique peoples. The emperor Julian would write, in glowing panegyric prose, how the "divine and wholly beautiful cosmos, from the highest vault of heaven to the lowest limit of the earth (μέχρι γῆς ἐσχάτης), is held together by the continued providence of the gods."[848] He takes a philosophical approach to the issue, but presumably expresses some widely-held pagan beliefs.

The cosmologic continuity, at least in this regard, from the pagan past into the Christian era is pronounced. Theodoret would imagine that God could withdraw His protection from pagans, underscoring that it was now God who was guarding the frontiers if He so chose. He writes:

> No sooner had the Persians heard of the death of Constantius than they took heart, proclaimed war, and marched over the frontiers of the empire. Julian, therefore determined to muster his forces, though there was a force without a God to guard them.[849]

Many Christian Romans of the late Empire, especially during the fifth century, began to imagine that God, along with a host of martyrs, defended cities at center and periphery alike.

Especially as these divine forces are recorded as defending frontier cities, we see a powerful analogy between the gods' protection of cities and God's protection of the *murus* of the empire, the frontier imagined as a wall around

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[848]*Oration* 4.132c; see also 137c, d.

[849]*Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.21; D&L 271.

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it, especially at the Eastern frontier where there was no such wall.

Traditionally, Terminus had held the position of guardian of the frontiers,
although, as argued in chapter 3, various river gods could function in much
the same way. But with gods protecting frontiers and frontier cities, the
analogy could be extended. The continuity of such divine protection into Late
Antiquity was fairly direct.

An episode recorded by Olympiodorus gives hints to a method of divine
protection of frontiers as imagined by a pagan. During the reign of
Constantius III (early 5th C), a treasure was unearthed in Thrace. When the
governor of Thrace, a certain Valerius, visited the area, he learned from the
locals that it was a sacred site and that it contained statues consecrated by "an
ancient rite."[850] After reporting to the emperor that the area contained
"silver statues which had been consecrated to ward off barbarians,"
Constantius gave this Valerius permission to excavate the statues. He found
three solid silver statues, in the form of bound barbarians, inclining toward
the North,

> that is toward the land of the barbarians. As soon as the statues were
> removed, a few days later the whole Gothic nation poured over Thrace
> and shortly afterwards the Huns and the Sarmatians were to invade
> Illyricum and Thrace also. For the site of the consecration lay between
> Thrace and Illyricum and to judge from the number of statues, they
> had been consecrated against the whole of barbary.[851]

This brief episode is instructive in a variety of ways. For one, it shows
persistence of memory, if not practice, of a pagan version of divine protection
of the frontier. The locals were well aware of the presence of statues there
and that the site was sacred. Whether or not they knew that the sacred site

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[850]Olympiodorus, *frag.* 27, in Blockley, *Fragmentary*.

[851]*Ibid.*

was dedicated to warding off of the barbarians is not clear from the passage, but the interpretation of the objects and subsequent historical analysis of Olympiodorus makes this much clear once they were removed from the ground: they were placed in a liminal place as a way of warding off barbarians at the frontier. Olympiodorus imagines here the proverbial line separating Roman from barbarian, against which barbarians were constantly pressing.

The placement of the statues is crucial -- between Thrace and Illyricum. The ceremony was carried out at the "frontier" between two provinces or regions of the Roman world. And yet, as Olympiodorus makes clear, their power was to solidify the frontier between the Roman Empire and *barbaricum*. The analogy between liminal sites is clear in the passage, again suggesting a persistence in the belief in the cosmic dimension of frontiers. The power of the sacred objects was not confined to any one frontier either, but was a general talisman against all barbarians. The type of ceremony described here parallels the Terminus cult, in which a hole would be filled with offerings to the gods. The site of the hole, once filled in, would then serve as the *terminus*, generally between pieces of property. Such practices clearly were not forgotten in the Late Empire.

Certainly Olympiodorus, himself a Neo-Platonist pagan, was attuned to this type of story. Yet we can also measure his belief in the sacred power focused on these images. He clearly believed that the removal of the statues was the reason that the barbarians were allowed, by the gods, to pour into Roman territory. This fits in well with a picture which sees a late Roman proliferation of popular belief, *superstitio*. Olympiodorus is not reporting this supernatural role in Tacitean fashion (i.e. "some people believe that ..."), but rather as real historical causation. There is no barrier between his beliefs in divine causation and real historical causation. Olympiodorus is relating

near-contemporary history in this passage, for he heard the story himself from Valerius, the governor of Thrace, the excavator himself. As with other historians of the later Empire, he is relaying news to his audience. He evidently still saw the power of pagan deities as maintaining Roman frontiers, and so would have some in his audience. At least, his audience would have identified with this type of historical explanation. The transitions to explicitly Christian language in explaining the divine defense of frontiers need not distract us from the fact that Christians were very similar to pagans in the way they connected deity with the frontiers of empire.

Pagan notions of divine defense of cities continued into the Christian era as well. As late as 396, four years after Theodosius' famous anti-pagan legislation, the traditional gods are invoked for protection. When Alaric and the Goths descended on Athens, the traditional deities Athena and Achilles are called upon to save the city from destruction, at least according to the pagan Zosimus.[852] Gradually the role of protector of cities would be transferred to martyrs and saints. Of particular note will be their special defense of frontier cities or fortresses, a vital function of defense that extended beyond just the city itself to the whole of the frontier.[853] Libanius speaks of the need to restore frontier cities in strong language: it is more glorious than having "The fabric (σῶμα) of the *oikoumene* . . . increased.[854]

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[852]6.

[853]Of crucial significance here is the case set forth by Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*. Her account, part of which argues that "we cannot afford to project onto our evidence a separation of religious belief and military or political action," explores the cult of saints as part of the context of the eastern frontier.

[854]*Or.* 12.51.

Mental images of Byzantine emperors parading icons of Christ and the saints from the wall of besieged Constantinople have been well painted for us in the abundant literary material from later Byzantium -- as well as in multiple visual renditions of the sieges by Venetians and then Turks. The fact that Christ and the saints were invoked to guard cities is well already established in Late Antiquity. Paulinus of Nola, for example, records how the translation of relics to Constantinople was a critical part of its defense.[855] Fortresses with saint's names were also fairly common in the eastern part of the empire.[856] Theodoret of Cyrrhus, writing in the early fifth century, gives a clear picture of the role of these saints and martyrs in defense:

> The noble souls of the victorious traverse the heavens and join in the dance of the immaterial beings. Their bodies are not hidden away each in its single grave, but the cities and villages that have divided them among themselves call them saviors of souls and bodies and doctors and honor them as protectors of cities and guardians and treat them as ambassadors before the master of the universe and through them receive divine gifts.[857]

Divine defense was a real and important part of the defense of the frontier, especially but not exclusively the eastern one. Many passages could be brought forward to show that the Christian God and a host of saints and martyrs were seen as protecting Roman frontiers during the later empire, and especially the cities located on them. Nisibis, for example, was considered to have been saved from the Persian armies at one point by the prayer of its

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[855]*Carmina* 19:329-42; See the dispute over these relics in Walsh, *Byzantinsche Zeitschrift* 83 (1990): 53, and Mango, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 83 (1990): 434. Cf. Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 46.

[856]See Procopius *Aed.* 4.4, 5.7, 4.11. For cults of military saints see Orselli, *Santità Militare e culto dei santi nell'impero dei Romani (secoli vi-x)*. See also Fowden, *Barbarian Plain* 4.

[857]*Graec. aff. cur.* , 8, p.335. Quoted in Fowden, *Barbarian Plain* 46.

bishop.[858] The growth and proliferation of martyr and saint cults, and the subsequent protection it afforded, has been well traced now for parts of the Eastern frontier. Although often explored for cities, the question of how Christ and the saints were perceived as guarding and defending imperial frontiers is a topic which strangely has received little attention until very recently. E. Fowden, in a recent book on the topic, traces the role of the saints and martyrs in protecting the Eastern Roman frontier. Her exploration of the role of divinity along the Eastern frontiers reveals very clearly that "divine defense went hand in hand with arms and walls, a fact often overlooked."[859] To what extent this notion of "divine defense" was altered, in substance and form, by the Christianization of the Roman Empire, or at least its visible Imperial manifestations, is often difficult to assess. But analysis of it is crucial to a holistic picture of Late Roman attitudes to frontiers and frontier defense. Some continuity may be seen in a widespread pagan cult centered at important Eastern cities such as Heliopolis, not far from the Euphrates.

Zosimus, as mentioned earlier, likewise, believed that Constantine's failed frontier policy resulted from the anger of the gods. In placing the blame for the "present destruction of the empire" squarely on the shoulders of Constantine, Zosimus connects failed frontier policy to divine wrath. That anger encouraged the gods to weaken the frontier zones to allow for punishment of the Christian Romans who now controlled the empire and had forgotten the gods who had made it strong.[860]

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[858]Theodoret. *Hist. Relig.* 1.1 (*PG* 82.1304D).

[859]Fowden, *Barbarian Plain.*

[860]See Zosimus, 2.6-7 and 2.34.

A Christian parallel to some of Zosimus' most basic images may be found

in the writings of Orosius, a student of, and dissenter from, St. Augustine,

who took up residence in North Africa in the early fifth century. Orosius sees

God's will in the placement and defense of the frontiers and also in the clear

punishment of the Roman Empire in his own recent lifetime. God protected

the frontiers, but he also removed that protection for his own divine

purposes. He describes, in language strangely reminiscent of Zosimus' and

Olympiodorus', the violation of Roman frontiers during the reign of Valens:

> Suddenly, from all sides by the will of God, the peoples located on the
> boundaries of the Empire and left there for this purpose are loosed and,
> with the reins relaxed, rushed into the territory of the Romans."[861]

Orosius was writing near contemporary history in this passage, and his

account was, like Ammianus', a medium for relaying news, although his was

in the format of a polemic.[862] Orosius is reporting on the situation to

Christians, who were struggling to find answers to the question of how God

could allow such calamities, and to pagans who knew the blame belonged to

the Christians who had thrown out the gods who once had made Rome

strong. To Romans, pagan and Christian alike, the gods or God were in

control of the placement and maintenance of frontiers.

Orosius' language here clearly presents the image of a definite frontier

beyond which the hordes of barbarians were waiting. His language also

recalls images from Olympiodorus -- without divine protection of

boundaries, the barbarians rather suddenly "pour" in. Much recent research

on the barbarian invasions has dispelled the long-held myth which imagines

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[861]*Historiarum adversus paganos libri* VII.7.22 — *soluuntur repente undique permissu Dei ad hoc circumpositae relictaeque gentes, laxatisque habenis in omnes Romanorum fines invehuntur.* trans., F. of C.

[862]See *supra* 164 on historical writing as media.

hairy barbarians as always pushing on the frontiers, waiting for their chance
to defeat Roman border armies and rush in to the empire. As helpful and
necessary as their revision of a picture fed as much by Roman stereotypes as
by Romantic images of *Völkerwanderung* has been, it is important not to
forget to ask how Romans of the time viewed these incursions. Their lives
were structured by their beliefs and by their basic worldview. News about
frontiers, recorded in historical and other writings of the times, was what they
had to go on. They were concerned with what happened at their frontiers,
although, again, the vast majority of even the *literati* had never been in a
frontier zone.

Christians at the peripheries in Late Antiquity became acutely aware, or at
least more expressive, about the role of frontier cities in the defense of the
empire. Especially through the martyr literature and other ecclesiastical
writings from the eastern frontier, we get a clear picture of their felt need for
divine protection. James of Edessa, for example, records how the "festival of
the holy martyrs is the joy and pleasure of all churches, a strong wall for all
the inhabited earth, and the victory of kings, and the glory of priests."[863]
Coming from Edessa, a crucial site for communication and transportation at
the eastern frontier, James clearly would have been aware of the need for
divine protection there. Like Ammianus and others, he uses the metaphor of
a wall to communicate his perceived reality of frontiers in the East.
Theodoret of Cyrrhus would write that feasts to saints, some of them frontier
saints, had replaced the old festivals in frontier areas.[864] Mayperqat, near the

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[863]James of Edessa, "Hymns of Severus of Antioch" 216, in *Patrologia
Orientalis*, ed. R. Graffin, F. Neu et al. (Paris, 1907-) 75.676. See *supra* 150- for a
discussion on the wall metaphor.

[864]*Graec. aff. curr.* 8, p.335. See Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 96.

Tigris River, would become filled with relics and renamed Martyroplis, as the cult of frontier saints became more pronounced there.[865] And Resafa, an important eastern monitoring station near the Euphrates, saw the growth of martyr cult, focused on divine defense.[866]

Theodoret of Cyrrhus, comparing in the fifth century the pagan past to the new Christian era, "proclaimed that the old festivals had been superseded by feasts in honor of Peter, Paul, and a company of Syrian martyrs, Thomas of Edessa, Sergius of Resafa, Marcellinus, Antoninus, Mauricius of Apamea, Leontius of Tripoli."[867] Dara, near Nisibis, was fortified both with walls and with the relics of St. Bartholemew.[868] During fortification of this city in the fifth century, S. Bartholemew had come to the emperor Anastasius in a dream, "offering to protect the city." His relics were deposited in a church there and were thought to protect the frontier city.[869] John Lydus would write of this protection of Dara as divine -- "[U]nless God by the former's [Anastasius's] hand had heavily fortified it at the throats of the Persians, long ago the Persians would have seized the domains of the Romans inasmuch as these are adjacent to them."[870] On another section of the Eastern frontier, martyr cult was centered on the shrines of Sts. Sergius and Bacchus. These

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[865]Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 55.

[866]Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 76.

[867]Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 96. Cf. *graec. aff. cur. 8.*, p.335.

[868]Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*. Fowden claims that the fortification of Dara was an "answer to Jovian's disastrous cession of Nisibis a century and a half earlier," 64. Recall that Ammianus had recorded Jovian going to a deserted Dara.

[869]Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 65.

[870]Joh. Diakrin, fr. 2.558, p. 157; *de mag. pop. rom.* 47. Quoted in Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*

two Roman soldiers had been sent as punishment for conversion to Christianity to the empire's edge, "in the frontier zones near where the race of the Saracen dwells."[871] Their martyrdom, at the peripheries of the empire during the Great Persecution, gave rise to a martyr cult which became connected to frontier protection, a natural enough extension considering the frontier context.

The Eastern frontier provides a range of information about saintly protection. One particular reference comes from North Africa from the period of Byzantine occupation there. On an inscription from Calama the work of humans, saintly and secular, in defense of the city is commemorated.

> Twelve and one towers altogether rose up in a row;
> It seems a work of wonder, constructed so swiftly.
> The postern gate behind the baths is fastened with iron.
> No enemy could raise a hand against it.
> No one could take by storm the work of Patricius Solomon.
> The protection of martyrs secures this postern gate.
> The martyrs Clement and Vincentius guard this entrance.[872]

The Solomon mentioned is Belisarius's commander, "a fortifier of North African cities against the desert tribes." His efforts to secure this North African stronghold were bolstered by the martyrs who thereby imparted saintly and divine power to the establishment of frontiers. Here, as elsewhere, the saints work as God's agents in protecting frontiers. Examples might be more sparse from the North African frontier, but it would not follow that we should assume that the saints and martyrs were any less featured in the world-view of the Romans who lived there.

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[871]*pass. gr.* 13 "ἐν τοῖς λιμίτοις πλησιοχώροις οὖσι τῷ τῶν Σαρακηνῶν ἔθνει".; *pass. syr.* 298-99 describes the area as "limiton, a desert place." Both of these are quoted in Fowden, *Barbarian Plain* 9-10

[872]CIL 8.5352 and Fowden, *Barbarian Plain*, 47

III. A Universal Empire?

"There is no vestal altar, no capitoline stone, but the one true God.
'He does set no limit of time or space
But gives there an empire, world without end'"

--St. Augustine and Vergil[873]

Here, amidst still another indictment of the pagan gods, Augustine

encourages his fellow Romans to "lay hold now on the celestial country,

which is easily won, and in which you will reign truly and forever."[874] His

message is clear -- replace your longing for a universal "earthly" empire,

imperium sine fine, for citizenship in the City of God, *imperium sine fine*.

Such calls are fairly clear in church writers after Augustine, and struck a

chord among the civic-minded Romans.[875] They likewise struck mercilessly

at an ideology which lay at the heart of Roman expansion and subsequent

identity throughout the Roman world. But alongside these calls to search for

a "city beyond" there remained the undying ideology for the Christian

Roman Empire to realize its eternal victory in the here and now. There was a

constant move toward laying claim on the "sacred space" of the Roman

Empire. In fact, some have argued that this dream, as it were, lay behind the

dynamic of Late Antiquity as well as rulership in the Medieval and Byzantine

worlds. [876]

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[873]Quoted from Augustine, *De civ. D.* 2.29, who is quoting from Vergil, *Aeneid* 1.278-9

[874]*De civ. D.* 2.29.

[875]For an overview of the connection of the City of God idea to Roman civic-mindedness, see L.S. Mazzolani, *The Idea of the City in Roman Thought: From Walled Community to Spiritual Commonwealth*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1970.

[876]McCormick, *Eternal Victory*.

What was the effect of Christianization on official frontier ideology and with it frontier consciousness? Or, to put it another way, could a Universal Christian Empire really have frontiers? In a fascinating book on the development of the ideology of Universal Empire, G. Fowden argues that *the defining characteristic of Late Antiquity is the conviction that the knowledge of One God both justified the exercise of imperial power and made it more effective.* The monotheisms of Christianity and Islam both were used by monarchies and empires in support of their aspirations to world empire. Monotheism, in effect, became a way to meet the need of a universal empire, although the strivings of the major players of Late Antiquity were necessarily hindered by the Achilles' heel of monotheism -- the insistence on doctrinal rigidity, and the consistent separation of heresy and orthodoxy. Such separations, he claims, broke down the dream of Universal Empire into the reality of commonwealths during and after Late Antiquity. If there was a constant striving for universal empire, an "ideology of world mastery," then did frontiers become irrelevant in imperial ideology? The question is difficult, but essential to an exploration of pagan and Christian frontier consciousness in Late Antiquity.

The dream of "Eternal Victory," tied to the ideology of world mastery, had a long history in the Roman world. It has, in fact, been well termed "the most potent of Roman myths,"[877] considering its long-term influence on the subsequent history of medieval Europe. Rome's rather swift rise to power had engendered this ideology, powerfully presented in Vergil's *Aeneid*. The

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[877]Ibid. This fascinating and important book seems to have not received the readership and attention it merits. See also F. Paschoud, *Roma aeterna: Études sur le patriotisme romain dans l"Occident latin á l'epoque des grandes invasions*, (Roma: Bibliotheca helvetica romana 7), 1967.

Roman Empire's rule was, at one level, one of *aeternitas*, with no spatial or temporal limits.

This dream did not go away with the Christianization of the Empire. Rather, it seemingly became an intrinsic element of civic and Christian religious ceremony, especially as the two blended inextricably in Late Antiquity. It became couched in sermons, liturgy, and ecclesiastical art and architecture as well as games, imperial ceremonies, panegyric, and even legal depositions.[878] If Christianity justified the dream of Empire, then it follows that it also became attached at some level to this age-old and potent myth, as noted above with Cyprian.

One of the chief difficulties of assessing the ideology of world mastery is another theme in tension with it. This is the theme of *senectus mundi*, or the idea that the earth, and with it the Roman Empire, was growing old and so decaying. Some words must be said about this ideology in order to balance the more pronounced notion that the empire would expand and rule everywhere, forever.

Ammianus, although he most consistently defends the ideology of *aeternitas*, occasionally seems to explain some major problems in the Empire in terms of the language of *senectus mundi*. In a passage which presents these tensions repeatedly, Ammianus writes:

> "At the time when Rome first began to rise into a position of world-wide splendor, destined to live so long as men shall exist, in order that she might grow to a towering stature, Virtue and Fortune, ordinarily at variance, formed a pact of eternal peace; for if either one of them had failed her, Rome had not come to complete supremacy. Her people, from the very cradle to the end of their childhood a period of about 300 years, carried on wars about her walls. Then, entering upon adult life,

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[878]These are well explored in McCormick, *Eternal Victory.* and S. MacCormack, *Ceremony.*

after many toilsome wars, they crossed the Alps and the sea. Grown to youth and manhood, from every region which the vast globe includes, they brought back laurels and triumphs. And now, declining into old age, and often owing victory to its name alone, it has come to a quieter period of life."[879]

Ammianus read many of the problems in his own era in light of this model. Glory in his time was in name only, not in deeds. Rome would "live as long as men shall exist," and yet the empire was in decline. Had he, in fact, forgotten the ideology of world mastery when he wrote such passages? Matthews reads this passage as showing that Ammianus truly believed in the eternity of Rome.[880] The *senectus mundi* theme was a topological reference to be understood more metaphorically.

The *topos* that the world and/or empire was growing old also had an established history in Roman imperial thought. Often, the imagery is idiosyncratic to the author. Florus, for example, in the early to mid 2nd century B.C. saw the Roman empire "grown old and losing its potency," at a time which most historians consider the height of the Empire.[881] Some historians have argued that such references in the earlier empire were mere commonplaces.[882] In the Later Empire, however, such references become more prevalent and significant as many are beginning to imagine the end.[883]

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[879]Amm. Marc. 14.6.3-4. (see Florus *Introd.*, 4ff) Some have argued that this passage was derived from Florus.

[880]J. Matthews, "Ammianus and the Eternity of Rome," in C. Holdsworth and T.P. Wiseman, eds., *The Inheritance of Historiography, 350-900.* (Exeter, 1986), 17-29.

[881]Florus, *Epitome bellorum omnium annorum DCC.* 1 pr. 4ff. See also R. MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966.), 335.

[882]See. R. MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 335.

Zosimus and pagans before him, even as early as the third century, put the blame for this decline on the Christians. This was the very type of accusation which Cyprian had claimed inspired "oft-repeated vengeances in behalf of the worshippers of God.[884] Under accusations that Christians had disturbed the relationship of the gods to the cosmos, Christians had more incentive to "rediscover" the ideology of a senile earth – Cyprian could write "the world grows old, it rests not on the same strength as of yore nor has it the same robustness with which it once prevailed."[885] Augustine would likewise write on the aging earth, assuming that he lived in the Sixth and last Age of the World.[886]

The idea that the history of the world unfolded in a series of biological stages, although an old one, was given a new lease on life by Christian writers, and a face-lift. One of the more popular images is that the history of the world unfolded as a series of Kingdoms, usually four or five.[887]

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[883]See, for example, Amm. Marc. 14.6.4 (quoted above); Augustine, *Sermo* 81.8; *Asclepius* 25; and Libanius, *Oratione* 18.281 – τὴν οἰκουμένη ὥσπερ λειποψυχοῦσαν ἔρρωσεν. However, here Julian had restored the world to proper health again, so the decline was not automatic. MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order*, 335, and *idem., Corruption and the Decline of Rome.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

[884]*Ad Demetrianum,* 3ff. .

[885]*Ad Demetrianum* 3ff. Quoted by MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order,* 161.

[886]St. Augustine, *De civ. D.* 20.7.1; *De diversis questionibus octoginta tribus* 83.58.2; *ep.* 199.1.1. See P. Brown, *Augustine of Hippo.* 296. See also A. Luneau, *L'histoire du Salut chez les Pères de l'Église: la doctrine des âges du monde;* and K.H. Schwarte, *Die Vorgeschichte der augustinischen Weltalterlehre.* See R.O. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine of Hippo,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

[887]On the Kingdoms *topos,* see D. Mendels, "The Five Empires: a Note on a Propagandistic *topos, American Journal of Philology* 102.3(1981): 330-339; J.W.

Identification of the final kingdom could reveal the coming end. The imagery here often blends, as with Cyprian, apocalypticism and *senectus mundi*, which, at one level, seem opposed to each other. Much of this thought was based on speculation over the meaning of the Four Kingdoms in the Apocalyptic work ascribed to Daniel.

Assumptions of an organic model of the Roman Empire were prevalent among many writers of the later Roman Empire, pagan and Christian alike. If a vibrant empire assumed strong frontiers, then an old and feeble empire should entail weak frontiers. Yet, often it is difficult to distinguish imagery of an aging empire from that of an aging world. The ideology of world mastery often caused the two entities to blend inextricably. It also could lead to seeming contradictions -- for in spite of what Ammianus says about the feebleness of the Empire, other passages suggest that Ammianus strongly believed in the *aeternitas* of the Roman empire.[888] Some have even suggested that he intended his more "depressing" passages as a corrective, to promote Roman recovery after losses like Adrianople rather than to present affairs as he really saw them.[889] Therefore, he was borrowing images with which to inspire a return to the "good old days" — i.e. his political

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Swain, "The Theory of the Four Monarchies Opposition History Under the Roman Empire," *Classical Philology* 35 (1940), 1-21; S.K. Eddy, *The King is Dead*, (Lincoln, 1961); D. Flusser, "The Four Empires in the Fourth Sibyl and in the Book of Daniel," *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972): 148-75.

[888]See, in particular, A. Demandt, *Zeitkritik und Geschichtsbild im Werk Ammianus*, (Bonn, 1965).

[889]N. Lenski, "*Initium mali Romano imperio*: Contemporary Reactions to the Battle of Adrianople," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 127 (1997): 129-168, at 163. Cf. J. Matthews, "Ammianus and the Eternity of Rome," *The Inheritance of Historiography, 350-900*, ed. C. Holdsworth and T.P. Wiseman, (Exeter, 1986).

commentary was a cover for a social agenda. Such images were ready for the borrowing.

The Later Empire also saw the emergence of a new *topos*, that of restoration or restitution of the world. Such a theme, common from the middle of the third century onward, was a commonplace on coinage from the later third century onward.[890] The historical context of the third century crisis was behind the proliferation of this theme. Even if the effects of the third century crisis have been exaggerated, its part in giving rise to an ideology of the restoration of the world in official media is unmistakable. But authors were not in any particular agreement as to how the process would work out or whether it was irresistibly fated. Behind such an ideology is the notion that Rome should be in control of the entire world, and if she is not, then she needs to be restored to her rightful position so that peace and harmony may predominate once again. Imperial pronouncements as well as abundant numismatic evidence attest clearly to the claims of emperors to have restored the Roman world to the glories which abounded in days of yore, essentially before the tumultuous third century. Historians used Trajan, for example, as a model in order to encourage emperors to restore the Roman world to its furthest limits.[891]

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[890]For listings of all known references to third century emperors designated as *restitutor, restitutor orbis, restitutor saeculi, restitutor patriae, restitutor orbis totius, restitutor orientis, restitutor gentis, restitutor publicaae securitatis ac libertatis conserevator,* and *restitutor sacrorum et libertatis,* see M. Peachin, *Roman Imperial Titulature and Chronology, A.D. 235-284,* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben), 1990.

[891]See C. Lightfoot, "Trajan's Parthian War and the Fourth-Century Perspective," *JRS* 80 (1990): 115-26. Lightfoot argues convincingly that Festus and Eutropius were using Trajan as just such a model as a prod to Valens. See T.D. Barnes, "Constantine and the Christians of Persian," *JRS* 75 (1985): 126-36, at 132. The specific reference here is to Constantine.

Amidst the praise of these restorations one can see the manifold expressions of frontier ideologies, shaped subsequently, no doubt, by Christianization and its claims to universal empire. Emperors who restored or pushed forward frontiers were particularly singled out for the title of "restorer of the world," thus again pointing out the connection of frontiers to overall stability.

Our key sources on the question of imperial and frontier ideology from the late third century onward are, once again, the surviving panegyrics from Late Antiquity. Panegyric gives insight into the mind of Romans at many levels, but it does so by considering the past, *res gestae*, as opposed to the presentistic, or sometimes futuristic, emphasis of prophecy.[892] Like prophecy, panegyric was a widely-circulating medium, touching not only an immediate listening audience but potentially the whole of the public as well. But unlike prophecy, in which the present moment often is revealed as the worst of all in the history of the empire if not the world itself, the present moment of panegyric is seen as superior to all others. Hence, prophecy, as presented in the earlier part of this chapter, and panegyric together present something of a balance to a historical view. Both perspectives are equally teleological, but together they can complement and correct each other. As might be expected, the imagery referring to the solidification, defense, and, or eternal extension of the frontiers plays a major role in the rhetoric of pagan and Christian emperors -- there seems to be no difference in usage. As in prophetic texts and commentary so in panegyric, the frontiers could serve as a site of speculation for pagan and Christian, writer and receptor. The theme of indefinite expansion continues in this and subsequent panegyrics as

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[892]See *supra* 86- for the various ways in which panegyric presents frontiers.

emperors, pagan and Christian alike, are praised for extending or defending the frontiers.

After the so-called "Christianization" of the imperial structures, such presentations begin to fuse with the language of the Universal Christian Empire, championed by Constantine and many of his fellow Romans.[893] He and later emperors such as Theodosius have, according to panegyricists, "extended the realms of the East beyond the limits of things and the boundaries of Nature."[894] By the end of the fourth century references to frontiers fused with the rhetoric of a Universal Christian Empire -- an empire in which, at least on one ideological level, frontiers were meaningless.[895] Pagan writers such as Ammianus and Zosimus are more likely to refer to frontiers in the traditional sense. And at one time, Tertullian, the self-proclaimed Christian "citizen of the cosmos," could rejoice that there were places "inaccessible to the Romans but subject to Christ"; i.e. outside of the Empire. But this was in the early third century, at a time when Roman imperial ideology had not yet melded with Christian imagery.[896]

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[893]In analyzing the *adventus* ceremony, a procession of arriving at and entering a city, S. MacCormack is able to show how figures on Late Antique art were "able to integrate contemporary events not only into Biblical history, but also into the ordering and creation of the universe in Old Testament terms. That is, while the action of the pagan ceremony of *adventus* survived, the tradition in which these actions had been formulated did not," S. MacCormack, *Ceremony*, 87 In much the same way, imperial imagery could survive into a Christian empire even as connected traditions did not.

[894]*Panegyrici* N&R 2.23.1 -- *dum ultra terminos rerum metasque Naturae regna Orientis extendis"*; 4.2.6. For a discussion of the importance of Nature to frontiers in Late Antiquity, see *supra* 141-.

[895]On the rhetoric of Universal Empire, see in particular A. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse*, (Berkeley, 1991); and Fowden, *Commonwealth*

Another indication of the nature of the Roman gaze beyond their own frontiers in Late Antiquity is afforded by references in the church fathers to Constantine's status as "bishop of those outside."[897] Along the Eastern frontiers, Christians were aware of coreligionists beyond the borders. Persian bishops had appeared at the Council of Nicaea, and Constantine even had declared himself "bishop of the Christians of Persia."[898] Considering himself "a divinely ordained protector of Christians everywhere, with a duty to convert pagans to the truth," Constantine presented himself as connected to the Christians of Persia, a group which had been growing since the second century, even though they were beyond his own imperial frontiers.[899] Their presence was known there, and thus Romans knew that even if the frontier was the ultimate "line of demarcation" it did not cut religious ties.[900]

This knowledge of Christians beyond Roman imperial frontiers did have some influence on the way that Constantine, at least, shaped "frontier policy" and perhaps even on the way that Christians would view frontiers. Constantine appealed to this group of Christians during his warfare with Shapur of Persia. To Barnes, this move was in tune with Constantine's earlier efforts to appeal to the Christians under Maxentius in 312 and Licinius

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[896]*Adversus Iudaeorum 7 — inaccessa Romanis loca, Christo vero subdita.*

[897]Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 4.24. See Decker and Dupois-Masay, L'épiscopat de l'empereur Constantin," *Byzantion* 50 (1980): 118-57 for debate over the meaning of this phrase.

[898]On this, see T.D. Barnes, "Constantine and the Christians of Persian," JRS 75 (1985): 126-36.

[899]*Ibid.* See also Fowden, *Commonwealth*, 93.

[900]On the ostensible free movement of Christians across the eastern frontier, see Lee, *Information*, 55. Lee gives an unconvincing case for why Egeria could not move freely into Persian territory here, but is otherwise very helpful.

in 324.[901] But as with basically everything else Constantine did, his motives

are far from clear to us. A passage records approximately Constantine's own

words:

> on one occasion, when entertaining bishops to dinner, he [Constantine]
> let slip the remark that he was perhaps himself a bishop too, using
> some such words as these in our hearing: "You are bishops of those
> within the Church, but I am perhaps a bishop appointed by God over
> those outside.[902]

Although the title "bishop of those outside" itself is a subject of much

controversy, some have argued that Constantine saw it as his license to

"spread Christianity beyond as well as within his own frontiers -- an entirely

new understanding of the Roman Emperor's role."[903] Constantine's

expansion beyond his frontiers was thus to be through piety as well as

conquest; as Rufinus put it, "the more he subjected himself to God, the more

God subjected to him the whole world (universa)."[904]

In his famous letter to Shapur II, Constantine references these Christians

across the frontier, exhorting Shapur at the letter's closing:

> With this class of persons -- I mean of course the Christians, my whole
> concern being for them -- how pleasing it is for me to hear that the
> most important parts of Persia too are richly adorned! May the very

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[901]Barnes, op. cit., 136.

[902]4.24 Life of Constantine: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary, A. Cameron and S.G. Hall, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999). The translation here preserves the conviction of the authors that Constantine is not speaking about anyone beyond imperial frontiers.

[903]Fowden, Commonwealth, 91-93. A. Cameron takes direct issue with Fowden's interpretation of the title, claiming that it refers only to those outside the church with no reference to those beyond Roman frontiers. See her translation, Life of Constantine, p. 320.

[904]Historia Ecclesiastica 10.8. See Fowden, Commonwealth, 91-3. Fowden sees "nothing inherently implausible" about Constantine's role in this process as building a Universal Christian Empire by invading Persia, 96.

best come to you therefore, and at the same time the best for them, since they also are yours. For so you will keep the sovereign Lord of the Universe kind, merciful, and benevolent. These therefore, since you are so great, I entrust to you, putting their very persons in your hands, because you too are renowned for piety. Love them in accordance with your own humanity. For you will give enormous satisfaction both to yourself and to us by keeping faith."[905]

Constantine is clearly designating Shapur to look out for the Christians, over whom he himself feels an obvious charge and responsibility.

Eusebius expands on this letter as an example of Constantine's world mastery. His language gives hints to the attitude behind Constantine's letter to Shapur:

Thus finally, all nations of the world being steered by a single pilot and welcoming government by the Servant of God, with none any longer obstructing Roman rule, all men passed their life in undisturbed tranquility."[906]

Eusebius had no problem identifying the Roman Empire as God's kingdom, and, as he puts it elsewhere, such, "already united most of the various peoples, and is further destined to obtain all those not yet united, right up to the very limits of the inhabited world."[907] This aspect of Eusebian thought has been well explored, as well as similar notions in the writing of such churchmen as Lactantius, Jerome, Ambrose, and Orosius.[908] The variety of Christian analyses of the phenomenon of Christianization, however, need

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[905]For the complete text of the letter see *Eusebius: The Life of Constantine* 4.8-13. On the question of Persian Christians see, in particular, M.-L. Chaumont, *La christianisation de l'empire iranien des origines auz grandes persécutions du IVe siécle,* (Louvain, 1988).

[906]*Eusebius: The Life of Constantine* 4.14.1. Compare also the wording of 4.49-50, showing a universal empire with Constantine even ruling over India.

[907]Eusebius, *In Praise of Constantine.* 16.6 (tr. H.A. Drake).

[908]The view has been particularly well explored in contrast to the Augustinian view which emerges before and after the sack of Rome in 410.

not distract us from the fact that all share some basic imperial ideologies highlighting frontiers, as symbols, if not literal *eschata*, held in place by God himself. Through Christianity and the Christian God, therefore, the frontiers of the Roman Empire could be pushed forward indefinitely.

In North Africa, the situation was different, and led, in some cases, to a more stringent attitude of inherent difference toward those on the other side of the frontier. St. Augustine, for example, assures us that Christianity had never crossed Africa's southern frontier. In one letter, written concerning "the end of the world" (*de fine saeculi*) we get a glimpse of such frontier consciousness. He tells his reader that he gets daily "information" from the North African frontier. When arguing for the absence of any Christians beyond North Africa's frontiers in his own day he writes of the evidence he gets from seeing actual captives from there regularly.[909] In this way, Augustine is able to disseminate information about a frontier to the outside world.

Interestingly, he does so in a letter answering questions about the end of the world. In the process he tells us that there were no Christians beyond North Africa's frontier. But, Augustine writes, this does not mean that "the promise of God does not extend to them." One of the chief indicators of the end would be that all the world had heard the gospel.[910] However, there

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[909]*Epistula* 199.46. For full text, see *supra* 179-81.

[910]*Ep*. 199.47 -- "The Lord did not promise the Romans but all nations to the seed of Abraham . . . Some nations, not held under Roman power, have recieved the gospel and have been joined to the Church." Augustine specifically notes that such was not the case for those beyond the North African frontiers. In passages such as these, Augustine distances himself from the Kingdom of God = Roman Empire model so prevalent in Christian writings from Eusebius onward. His stress here may be read in a way to suggest that he is fighting an uphill battle against this particular Christian ideology.

were no organized missionary endeavers to reach beyond the frontiers of North Africa. Thus, the Roman imperial frontier also served as a frontier of Christianity there. North Africans, then did not experience the tensions of knowing that coreligionists were beyond their frontiers. Perhaps Constantine and others had no ulterior motives for that would cause them to claim "subjects" beyond North African frontiers. Perhaps this also shows the limits of universalism -- did Romans really care to put desert tribes under their authority?

The further expansion of Christianity, particularly in Western Europe, might hold some additional clues to an ideology of universalism. The famous mission of Ulfila, the "bishop of the Christians in Getic lands" might well have been initiated during Constantine's own lifetime, as well, or at least following imperial ideologies which may be traced to Constantine's Christian universalism. Whether such a move was a political move to co-opt the Goths, or a sincere desire to spread the Christian faith, will probably be debated as long as is the conversion of Constantine himself.

Looking back from a medieval perspective J.M. Wallace-Hadrill writes about the Western barbarian conversions:

> The conversion of the Germanic peoples bordering the Frankish world is something that could never have happened in Antiquity. The concept of a barbarian hinterland, so essential to the thinking of the Later Empire, was gone; and in its place was born the conviction that those outside should be inside. The Christian world should be one, its frontiers bounded only by the reach of missionaries."[911]

Perhaps what medievalists like Wallace-Hadrill fail to realize is that these ideologies were born in a Christian Roman Empire, not the Frankish. A

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[911]Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1983), 143.
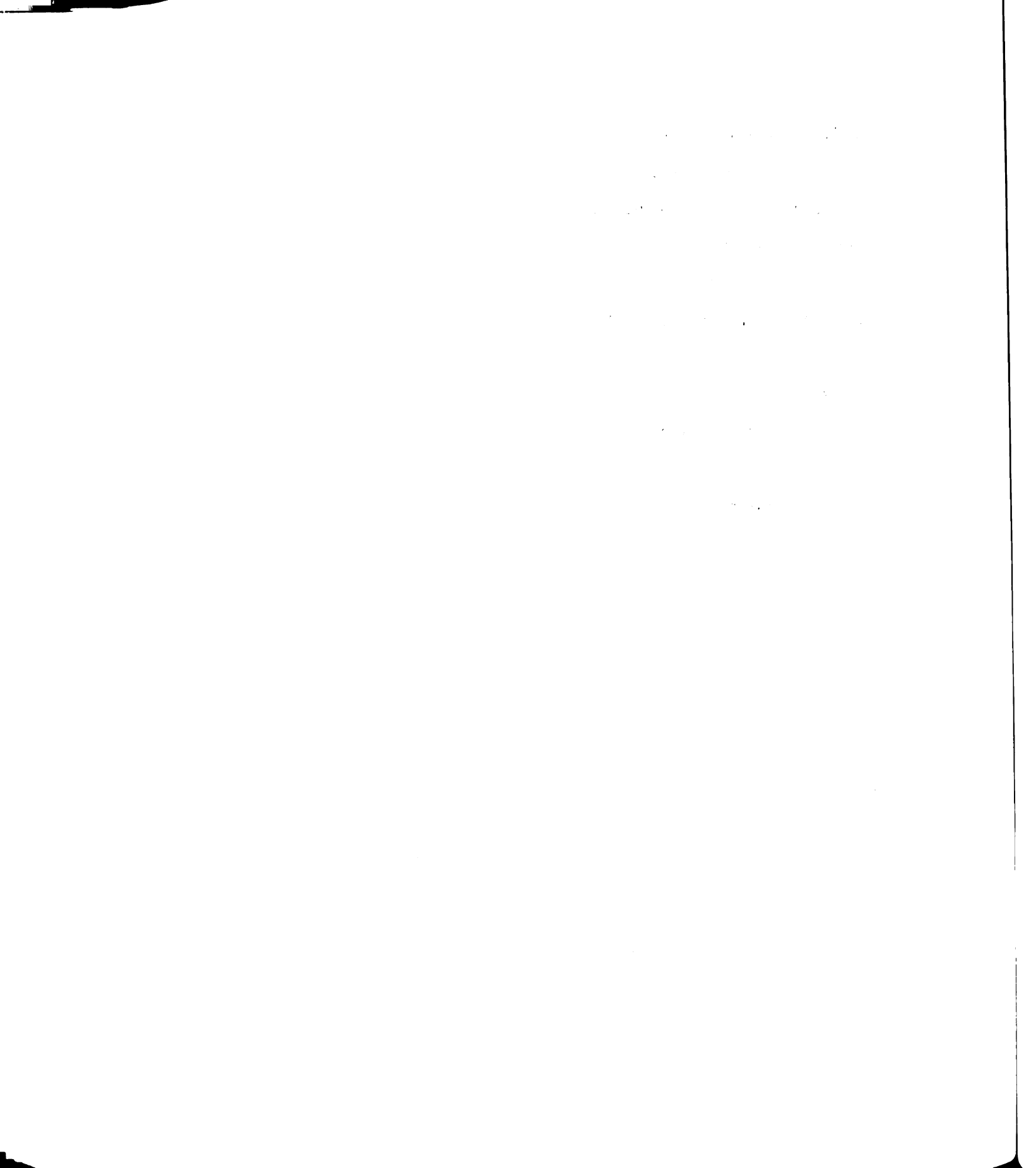
universal Christian Empire had already begun to imagine that those outside, or at least some of them, should, in fact, be inside, and united under one ruler.

Dreams of political hegemony died soon in the West. Although ideas and images of eternal victory certainly persisted, Roman power did meet its *finis* in a certain sense. A power vacuum was filled by multiple "barbarian aristocracies" as well as by Christian bishops. The collapse of power probably really surprised few -- Romans, at least those in tune to the discourse reflected by prophecy and apocalypticism, had been well prepared. In the end, the medium of prophecy had won out. Its use of frontier information struck a chord among Romans, who saw their frontiers and their imperial power transgressed into oblivion. But inhabitants of what was once the Western Roman Empire were not left hopeless -- their prophets had unwittingly prepared them for their new world, a "Catholic" or Universal world, lacking a frontier even with heaven itself. In a strange way, Roman imperial ideology had come nearly full circle. It began with *imperium sine fine* and ended with *mundus sine fine*, "World without end."

CONCLUSION

This study has proposed that there was a distinct frontier consciousness in the Later Roman Empire, and that it must be understood with reference to the heightened proliferation between the third and fifth centuries of news from and about the peripheries . I have argued this basic point on a variety of fronts. Underlying the argument throughout has been a call to view the Roman frontiers, as much as possible, on Roman terms, with all cultural and intellectual baggage intact. Undoubtedly, I have failed to demonstrate my argument conclusively, and have read much into the evidence. But trying to comprehend a foreign world-view risks such a situation. The problem, incidentally, does not go away when we adopt a positivistic approach either; in fact, it probably gets worse. Such approaches invariably either denigrate the thought-world of the Romans or elevate one's own perceptions to an imagined unassailable level.

Both of these results clearly can be seen in recent frontier studies. This study is an attempt at challenging recent visions and revisions, at times turning back the historiographical clock and at times proposing new perspectives and directions for frontier studies. The study of Roman frontiers is fraught with peril, both because of our own tendency to view them through the lens of nineteenth century imperialism, and because of a modern propensity to treat them as objects of scientific analysis.

The particular emphasis on news and frontiers proposed here has never before been attempted before. All approaches to date have dealt exclusively with foreign relations and/or propaganda. The simple fact that news proliferated from and about frontiers, thereby shaping perceptions, often, as in the ancient sources, simply has been taken for granted. Analysis of the

character and volume of that news is attempted here. Foreign relations were confined to policy-makers, and although these persons themselves shared assumptions about the world with many other Romans, they were not primarily concerned with interpreting news, as I have treated it here. Emperors themselves were loath to admit that they had lost territory. But writings about them are not so reticent. News of the loss of territory, certainly not propagandistic, proliferated widely, judging from hints in available sources. Such hints, furthermore, give clues to world-view.

One of the problems which needs much more attention, however, is how propaganda did function within the picture which I have proposed. Very late in the writing phase it struck me that by distancing myself from all studies to date I had cut myself off from a crucial element of the picture. Surely, propaganda deserves a section unto itself, particularly an exploration of how it shaped or reacted to more "popular" venues of news-flow. I have handled this issue peripherally in Chapter Four, but I am now convinced that I provide neither enough material nor enough analysis.

Part of my reaction against modern studies of frontiers can be seen in my highlighting of religion and belief, pagan and Christian, in the Later Roman Empire. Too often, the modern historian has projected his/her own belief onto the Roman past. The assumption that clear-thinking people, army generals for example, did not let religious beliefs or cosmological assumptions get in their way when defending a frontier is one which may be seen in most studies of Roman frontiers. Such views, I maintain, say much more about the modern historian than about the Roman experience.

A few recent exceptions, notably the studies by E. Fowden and, to some extent, C.R. Whittaker, have begun to revise this picture, but it is still deeply imprinted onto Roman frontier studies. The paradox, as noted in the

introduction, is that essentially all "post-Peter Brown" cultural and intellectual approaches to Late Antiquity revel in the spiritual aspects of that world, even if some appreciate the quaintness of sincere religious belief from at least an arm's length. Why late Roman frontier studies should ignore religious and cosmological elements altogether was a critical question which pushed me into this study. A variety of recent studies helped me formulate answers.

Three years ago, I set out to prove that perceptions of the frontiers differed in different regions of the Empire. Ultimately, I have failed. In fact, the study of news proliferation has convinced me of a certain level of intellectual and cultural unity to the Empire. But what I did find was that a focus off of Western Europe -- by far the emphasis of most frontier studies -- can help revise a general picture of the Roman Empire. Barbarian studies, for all they are worth, are not the same as frontier studies. A focus on North Africa and Anatolia eastward has convinced me that there was a general late Roman frontier consciousness.

I have noted throughout the slight differences between the two regions. Some of the differences, especially in presentation, may be included in normal East vs. West discussions. But these might well also be exaggerated by vast differences in volume and character of source material. Writers along the eastern frontier produced far more material about the frontier, partly because of more newsworthy events along them, and partly because of civic culture located near them. Firm comparisons are difficult, and pushing the evidence any more than I have attempted just might risk, in essence, comparing silence to eloquence. St. Augustine had something to say about frontiers, but he, in affect, said more about the distant Eastern frontier than about the one nearby. His presentation of the surrender of Nisibis, with

which I began, is but one of myriad, scattered, and subtle hints of a world-view he shared with millions throughout the Roman world. Theirs was not an *imperium sine fine;* these Romans lived in a world with limits.

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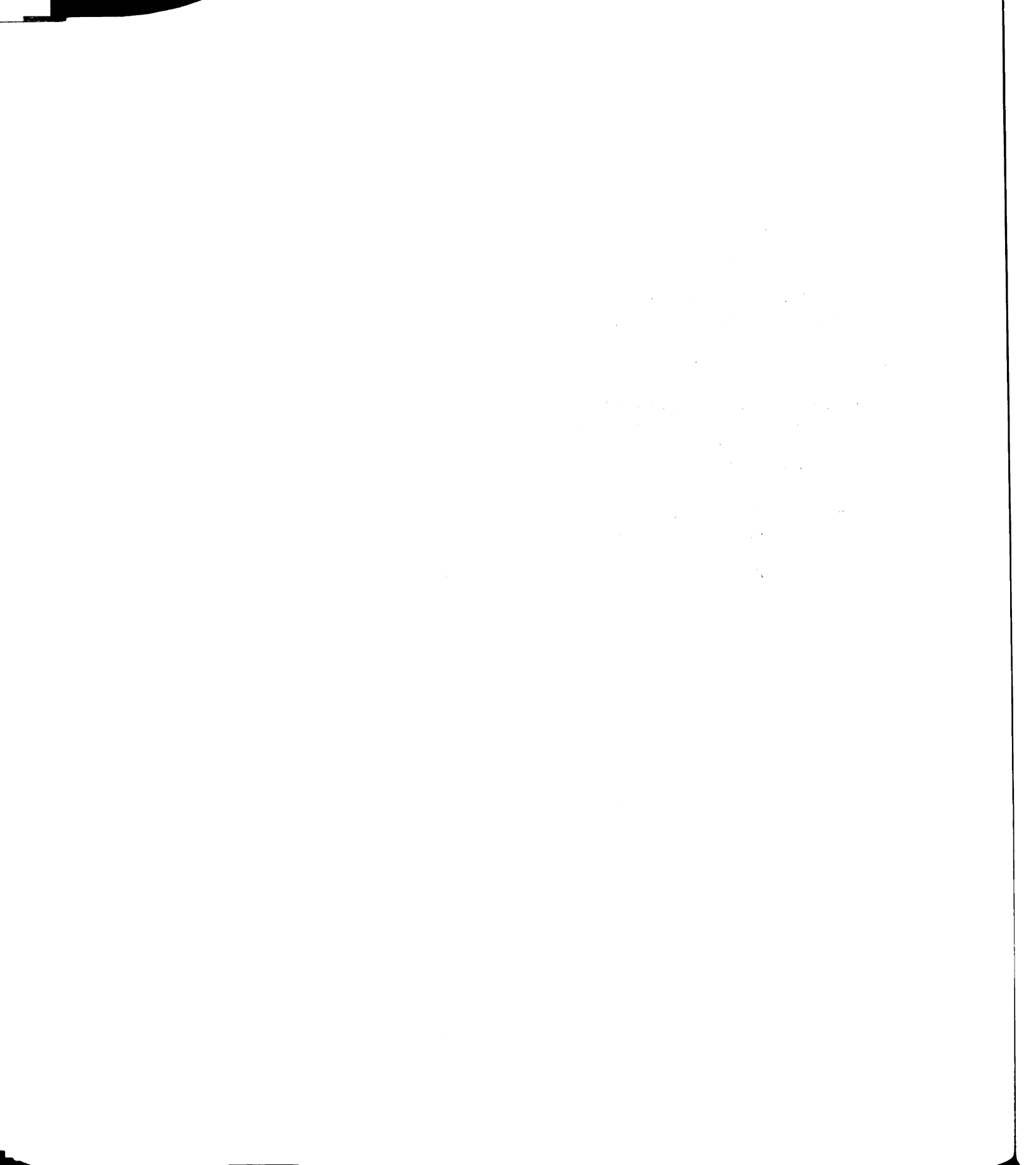
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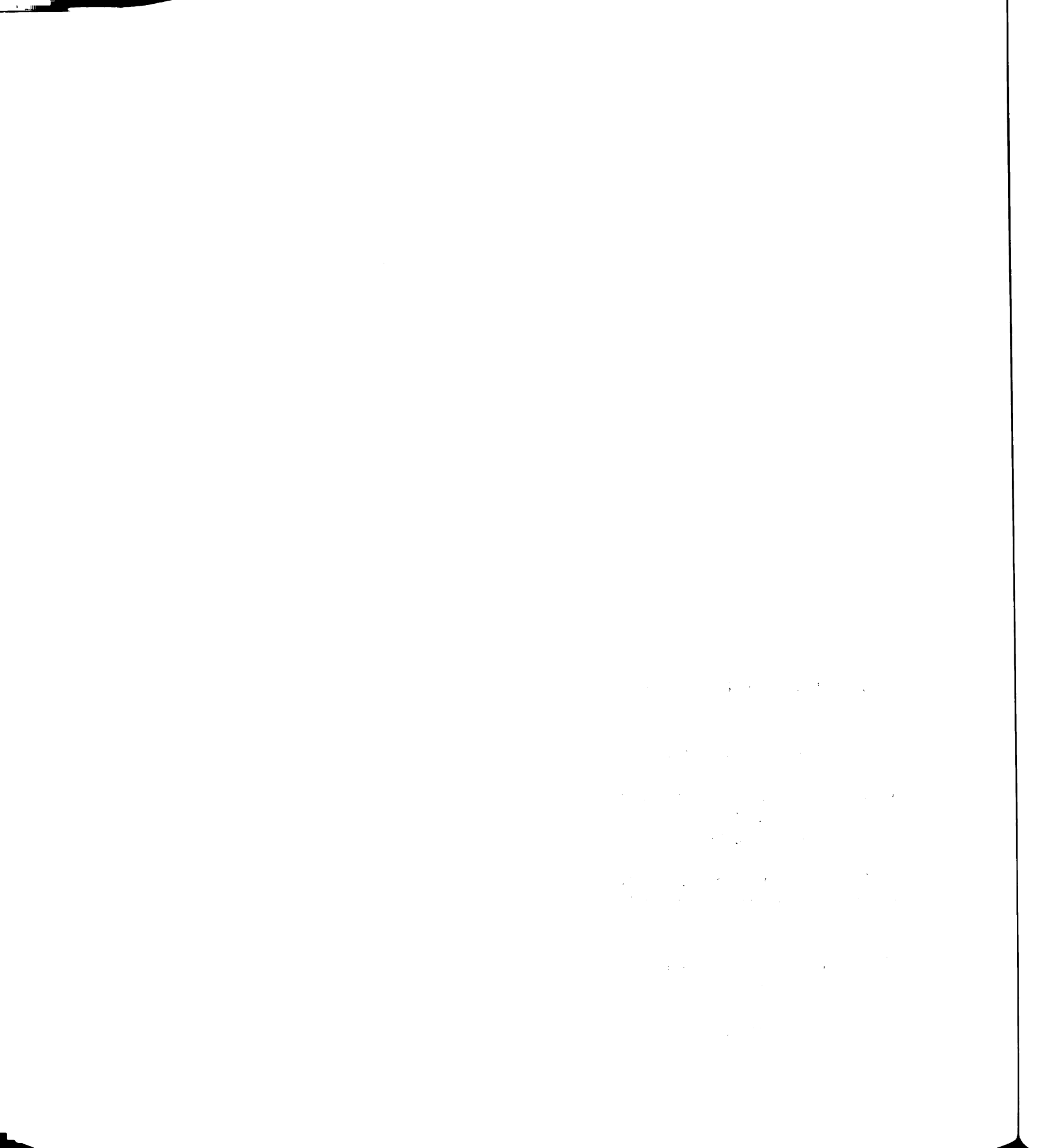
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