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The Archaeology of Medieval Islamic Frontiers

An Introduction

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In the last decade, archaeologists have increasingly focused their attention on the frontiers of the Islamic world, partly as a response to the political conflicts in central Middle Eastern lands. In response to this trend, a session on "Islamic Frontiers and Borders in the Near East and Mediterranean" was held at the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) Annual Meetings, from 2011 through 2013. The main goal of this session was to initiate comparative and interpretive dialogues between archaeologists who work on different regions and time periods. A second goal was to bring to the foreground the importance of approaching the theoretical concept of the frontier, constructed or deconstructed, as it applies in an archaeological context. Third, the session examined closely both similar and dissonant processes within Islamic frontiers.

As the session progressed over the years, what was intended as a series of conceptual frontier types became organized by key geographic borders of Islamic territories with non-Islamic lands. This volume, based on three consecutive years of talks, is constructed similarly. The chapters all use historically assumed political and religious boundaries as starting points: the western frontier (Mediterranean and Maghrib) from ASOR 2011, the northeastern frontier (Caucasus) in 2012, and the southern frontier (Egypt and Nubia) in 2013 (figure 1.1).[1] These frontiers, according to an article by Haug, can all be considered the minor frontiers, the major ones being the northern Byzantine frontier, Iberian

FIGURE 1.1. *Map of places discussed in this volume (courtesy of Anthony Lauricella, CAMEL, University of Chicago).*

Andalusī frontier, and Central Asian/east Iranian frontier.[2] These minor frontiers feature less frequently in contemporary primary-source texts, in part as they were not characterized strongly as zones of conquest or annual campaigning. Furthermore, for these minor frontiers there is no established opposing power of comparable status to the Islamic Caliphate or even sub-caliphates and dynasties. So too, much work has been done and is currently being conducted on the major frontiers and so these minor frontiers are also minor in terms of modern scholarship. As such, their focus here is deliberate. Several key questions emerged from the panel discussions: how did Islamic political or religious ideology play a role in delimiting real or imagined spaces in the shaping of frontiers? What other forces were integral in characterizing Islamic frontiers? How were these frontiers manifest through archaeological evidence, and how was their development affected over time?

Despite the shift in focus within Islamic archaeology, there are significant gaps in scholarship. Frontiers and borders, once seen as divided and contested landscapes delimiting not only political space but ethnicities and religious

groups, have become a category of inquiry by many Western medieval scholars, who see these spaces as varied, complex, and dynamic transitional zones of cultural interaction and ambiguity that can show processes of assimilation, acculturation, or ethnogenesis (the creation of new societies).[3] The study of frontiers in the medieval Islamic world is slight; few important recent titles are text based.[4] The study of the archaeology of these same frontiers is almost nonexistent. This volume brings the Islamic world into the ongoing dialogue on medieval frontiers. Since most work on medieval Islamic frontiers (generally termed *al-thughūr*) has been text based, its focus on archaeological methods gives voice primarily to perspectives that are non-mainstream, non-urban, and non-orthodox.[5] Archaeological research on the frontiers provides evidence for the presence of heterogeneous Islamic and non-Islamic societies and the complexity of their engagement with one another and with a more central ruling or orthodox authority. Even if the frontiers are not obvious (whether through textual mention or geographic location), archaeology can reveal or test internal frontiers within Islamic society that have not been well understood before. Moreover, the inclusion of archaeology fosters examination of frontiers in terms of those who live within them, and as social spaces and processes.[6] The discursive theoretical framework of frontiers to locate analysis provides a way for scholars to explore more precisely the points of interaction/disconnection and conflict/community that more accurately comprised the periods of Islamic rule following the seventh century.

CORE-PERIPHERY

The standard work on Islamic frontiers is that of Brauer, who established, using mainly the works of medieval Islamic geographers, that there is no concept of the frontier in cartography, no political boundaries in legal texts, and no agreement on what is the *thughūr* by the geographers; the frontier is a zone rather than a sharply defined border.[7] The *thughūr* often had mixed populations and an active trading economy, with or without military engagement and religious motivation. This premise has been accepted widely, and is reflected, for example, in early work on the Islamic-Byzantine frontier, Mamlūk-Mongol frontier, and early Ottoman frontier.[8] However, Brauer concludes that the frontier is best represented by a core-periphery model, which establishes that inhabitants of core areas (urban polities, populated homelands) have a hierarchical and structural relationship to inhabitants on the periphery. In most cases, peripheral communities are colonies or outposts of core populations. The periphery provides economical (resources, labor, raw materials, and

basic goods) and territorial (boundary maintenance) support for the core in an unequal exchange; those on the periphery are typically exploited, weak, and poor populations lacking in technological advances, cultural production, and other forms of agency.[9] Corollary to this relationship, the core exerts a dominant social, religious, and cultural ideology over its periphery.

The core-periphery model has been challenged by scholars from many disciplines as top-down, colonialist, and flawed.[10] In studies on frontiers using Islamic geographical literature, the division between core and periphery was not universally fixed. The capital was only given prominence and value through the ideologies and myths created by the ruler (or his propagandists) as specific situations and challenges arose.[11] This was created when political sovereignty frequently assumed a prior existence or claim to the land by rewriting history, retroactively imposing new boundaries on the past, or perpetuating old boundaries in the present, while at the same time using the concept of a border to contain, uplift, and thereby necessitate their own civilization.[12] In Islamic geographies and *fadā'il* literature (books in praise of certain cities), cities assume primacy as powerful homelands that elicited longing and a sense of ownership, and are described in detail with names, locations, and associated narratives of foundation or conquest.[13] Maps showed cities first and foremost, perhaps fueling the often assumed urbanity of Islamic culture and religion. Medieval Islamic maps, following the Persian tradition of organizing the world by climes or regions (the *kishvar* system), always depicted the central clime, the caliph's own heartlands as the best and most temperate. Thus, in these literary imaginings of the world, anything beyond the city and its own immediate hinterlands was a place where authority did not extend; that is, it was the frontier. Despite how place was articulated, connectivity and boundedness without religious or political overtones are suggested in the same medieval maps that frequently label the edges with regional names, thus showing how they connect to other maps and a wider world.[14] Thus the frontier as peripheral is created by the central state, and is accordingly a matter of perspective.

The frontier was also a center, with its own agency and influence. Ellenblum has argued against any real division of lands between Crusader enclaves and the Islamic world, instead maintaining that the intersections were frontiers and centers in their own right, and spheres of influence that competed with one another.[15] Khurāsān, located on the northeastern Islamic frontier between Iran and Central Asia, was a frontier province populated with a mix of Arab soldiers, preexisting Persian families, and many other religious or ethnic groups (Manichaeans, Buddhists, Sogdians, Hephthalites). It was precisely the frontier-society blend of religious, ethnic, and linguistic groupings that

proved to be so strong so as to initiate powerful processes of change that rippled back to the heartlands throughout Islamic history.[16] It was in Khurāsān that the 'Abbāsid "Revolution" began, paving the way for their rise to power in 750. One hundred and fifty years later, Khurāsān was the epicenter of a series of breakaway provincial autonomies that eventually were responsible for undoing 'Abbāsid power. A third example is provided by the southeastern frontier with India. Originally seen as a one-way dominant Islamic cultural influence over its southeastern neighbor, this region has recently been recast as a place that was certainly influenced from central Islamic lands, but that generated new systems of meaning through rich cultural production that rippled back to Baghdād.[17] Ellenblum also shows how models of core-periphery were constantly being dynamic and deliberately being altered, for example, with the construction of new castles to shift not only administrative, political, and military power away from existing cities or other centers but also to break up economic holds on lands.[18] These new "cores," or centers, were often placed on an old center's periphery, thus engaging in a continuous reimagining of a core-periphery relationship. These arguments align with recent studies on borders and frontiers such as the group of studies edited by Zartman, which show that borders are constantly in flux diachronically and spatially, and are not fixed places. Further, core-periphery relationships are but one dynamic that can also encompass "relations between neighboring peripheries or by relations within the autonomous periphery."[19] In other words, frontiers can exert power that at various points can exceed that of a traditional "core." The rise of provincial autonomies in the tenth century on the 'Abbāsid Empire's eastern and northern frontiers are a case in point. Since the eighth century, raids past its borders were a projection of central power, a way to keep the enemy off balance, and a dynamic locus of economic ventures, but within a complicated interwoven series of processes—as 'Abbāsid central authority waned, local dynasties arose, enacting greater power and influence in the frontiers themselves.

These studies move our understanding of Islamic frontiers as imagined and ideological landscapes, not fixed but relatively located, and spaces that exert their own political, social, and cultural capital, changing over time. Yet, the implications of accepting a core-periphery model as defined primarily by a relationship of core dominance, unequal economic exchange, and lack of technological and cultural production on the periphery is best critiqued with physical evidence on the ground and material culture, a challenge well suited to archaeology. Of what little has been published, most archaeological studies of Islamic frontiers have been on the major ones: the Islamic-Byzantine/ Syro-Anatolian frontier and the Islamic-Christian/Iberian-Andalusī frontier.[20]

Among the earliest, Redford showed how communities in southeast Anatolia in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries carved out autonomous territories among these blended frontier societies through shifts in settlement patterns and localized production of material culture. These territories both contributed to and were a result of a less stable landscape and the decentralization of central ‘Abbāsid authority.[21] My own work on this same region, though chronologically earlier, shows that the Islamic-Byzantine frontier, or *thughūr* and *‘awāṣim* provinces, developed from the seventh to tenth centuries as an important agricultural and commercial region inhabited by coexisting diverse communities. This argument is supported by archaeological evidence, mainly recent, from surveys and excavations that provide evidence for non-urban settlement types, including rural sites and waystations and their land-use initiatives, urban settlement, and both locally produced and imported commodities. Further, this evidence gives insight into the life, interactions, and exchanges of mainly non-urban and less literate groups that inhabited the frontier. On the one hand, this was an external frontier between Islamic and Byzantine lands dictated by seasonal transhumance and competition for resources; on the other, it was an internal frontier between the central state and peripheral frontier societies containing a mix of heterodox Muslims, Christians, rebels, insurgents, and independent warlords. The frontier was also a religious one, appearing in the pages of manuals of jihād and apocalyptic narratives that created an imagined barrier. Inhabitants of these multivalent frontiers were agents of their own space, as frontier towns, villages, monasteries, and waystations interacted with one another economically and culturally. This zone transformed at its own pace, not directed by or synchronized with the fate of the central state.[22]

Using as a point of departure Brauer's core-periphery model of frontiers and the subsequent critiques it stimulated, this volume significantly advances our understanding of Islamic frontiers both by viewing them through the lens of archaeology and by expanding them geographically to include more frontiers. In nearly every case, the contributions in this volume on the "minor" frontiers of the Islamic world deconstruct historically assumed frontiers, focusing rather on the interaction between differently perceived religious and ethnic groups. Also in every case, there are no physical frontiers built in the Islamic period (such as walls). This is unlike the Sasanian Empire, where we actually have texts describing built frontiers and archaeological evidence of walls between the Sasanians and non-Persian/nomadic societies in the fifth and sixth centuries, such as the Gurgān Wall, the Darband Wall (Caspian Gates), and the fortifications of Ultan Qalasi and Ören Qala in the Mil Plain,

discussed by Alizadeh in chapter 7. Here, it seems that the Islamic rulers were opportunistic in the maintaining of these walls against ongoing Khazar incursions. However, were these walls defining the limits of empires or were they utilized as a display of imperial power that in actuality projected well past the wall?[23] For many of the frontiers in this study, a natural boundary is present, such as the Caucasus Mountains or Nafūsa Range, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Sudanese desert, but this is never an actual boundary for movement and settlement; rather it is secondary to the creation of a complicated frontier. What emerge as common themes of the archaeology of Islamic frontiers is perhaps not so distinct or surprising, but addresses and moves well beyond the unequal exchange posited by the core-periphery model. First, frontiers were never borders between two entities but were porous zones of interaction and exchange. Second, frontiers were never political arenas between two groups, but were sites of local expression, cultural production, and human agency. Before examining these two themes more closely as they relate to this volume, it is necessary to discuss the methodologies employed.

Archaeological methods are well suited to reveal economic interconnections or lack thereof through trade and distribution. However, on the ground, were frontiers prime zones for economic exchange and were they truly dictated by these processes, or is this examination rather tautological in nature? Reframing the question, is the economic frontier synonymous with the archaeological frontier, because of the inherent value of material objects? As these studies show, frontiers were multivalent spaces where many forms of interaction played out. Despite the inherent archaeological bias, economic exchange was undeniably one of the most influential of these. The studies included here show evidence of economic exchange on all levels: not only movement of money and goods, but the building of waystations and caravanserais, the presence of individual merchants, texts detailing exchange, and treaties concerned with the legality of all these exchanges.

METHODOLOGIES

The eight studies in this volume investigate three frontier areas. In the western frontier of the Mediterranean Sea and the Maghrib (part I), Renata Holod and Tarek Kahlaoui (chapter 3) present a diachronic archaeology of the small island of Jerba off the Tunisian coast, based on survey evidence from the eighth to eighteenth centuries. Ian Randall in chapter 4 delves into the experience of living on and traveling between Mediterranean islands, complicated spaces floating somewhere between Byzantine and Islamic territories in

the seventh to tenth centuries. Anthony Lauricella examines the Jabal Nafūsa Range in Libya in chapter 2, which differs from the previous studies as it presents an internal frontier within Islamic lands and not with the Mediterranean. As such it has some connection to Egypt, but nevertheless, it is included in the section on the western frontier as it relates strongly with the study of Jerba and heterodox Islamic communities.

In the southern frontier (part II), Giovanni Ruffini (chapter 5) hypothesizes a specific model of monetary exchange between Islamic Egypt and Christian Nubia by the twelfth century. Jana Eger in chapter 6 reports on a survey of a monastery in Sudan, dating possibly from the sixth to eighth centuries, on the frontier of Christian Nubia and African kingdoms farther south, yet mentioned in an Islamic geographical text.

In the eastern frontier, the three chapters of part III focus on the Caucasus region. Karim Alizadeh (chapter 7) offers a theoretical perspective on the material evidence of borders, utilizing surviving physical Sasanian boundaries in the Islamic period. In chapter 8, Tasha Vorderstrasse reanalyzes the eighth/ninth-century remains of a burial with Chinese and Buddhist grave goods at the northwest Caucasus site of Moschevaja Balka. Finally, in chapter 9, Kathryn Franklin considers how Armenia was perceived as a frontier by looking at both textual and material evidence in the context of her excavations of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Arai-Bazarjuł caravanserai in Armenia.

The methodologies employed in these studies vary considerably, but all fit well within an archaeological study of frontiers. At the very core of such research is the problem of sources. As stated at the outset, archaeology of these periods is not robust; frontier archaeology is decidedly even less conspicuous. As such, material evidence needs to be balanced by the textual sources. In some cases, excavations produce texts that are also artifacts. For instance, Ruffini's study on the monetization of the Egyptian-Nubian frontier is not well-enough supported by extant evidence of coins excavated. It is precisely the open economy of wide distribution of money into Nubia from Islamic lands, he argues, that caused coins to quickly scatter and be absorbed into a wide system of exchange. This is why coin hoards are not found in key excavated sites. He analyzes texts excavated at the twelfth-century site of Qaṣr Ibrim to fill out the picture. Likewise, Vorderstrasse analyzes a preserved fragment of Buddhist text in a grave in the context of a site on the Islamic frontier (with other artifacts bearing Arabic inscriptions). These chapters show how the relationship between artifacts and texts to either or both of the built environment and landscape and the imagined environment is an important methodology for Islamic archaeology.

Inclusion of textual analysis in many of these studies reflects an attempt to begin with a historically assumed frontier as a problem, and to reconcile texts with material evidence. Non-artifact textual sources often provide only a perception of the frontier from one point of view that is typically retroactive and, in almost every case, stems from the Islamic side of the frontier. Toggling between text and artifact, as studies such as Randall's, Franklin's, and Alizadeh's do, also maintains the importance of considering that the frontier is as much about perception as it is about reality on the ground. The physical evidence is only one side to what a frontier was or how it may have been perceived or felt.

While all the studies utilize texts to varying degrees, the archaeological method is varied. Lauricella employs an analysis of place and placement of settlement rather than material culture, augmented by GIS studies and viewshed analysis to articulate the relationships between settlements. Jana Eger undertook an excavation of the church/monastery, relied on remote sensing to establish its connectivity and relative isolation, and used Islamic texts to aid in identifying the site and situating it in a wider context. Holod and Kahlaoui conducted surveys on Jerba and augment their interpretation, particularly of later historical periods, with textual accounts. Vorderstrasse uses "legacy" archaeological data, reanalyzing the site of Moschevaja Balka of the northwest Caucasus in Russia.

FRONTIERS AS ECONOMIC ZONES

From a textual perspective, frontiers were frequently spaces created to reflect an administrative division of space—that is, a separate province or district. This was the case in the southern frontiers of Egypt with the three regions of Nubia, Makuria, and Alwa. The Islamic-Byzantine *thughūr*/*ʿawāṣim* division, established in the early ʿAbbāsid period, also shows the same administrative redistricting on the part of the central state. Yet, in reality, these sub-frontiers were likely not perceived on the ground. Confusion also is evident from sources, as not all authors acknowledge the division or establish clearly which settlement or place name belongs where. In all likelihood, frontiers were divided for taxation and other economic purposes. While disguising economic frontiers as territorial ones is plausible administratively, it is precisely archaeological analysis that reveals a much more complicated economic reality.

Furthermore, "international" trade between regions was rarely hampered even when those regions were in conflict. Concerning the same infamous Islamic-Byzantine frontier, which by 1200 CE had become an arena of constant and

complex shifting wars and alliances between different Crusader factions, different Muslim dynasties, Armenians, and Byzantines, merchants seemed to carry out business as usual. The traveler Ibn Jubayr (1145–1216) in his *Rihla*, captures this dynamic, albeit by simplifying the players: "one of the astonishing things that is talked of, is that though the fires of discord burn between the two parties, Muslim and Christian, two armies of them may meet and disperse themselves in battle array, and yet Muslim and Christian travelers (*rifāq*) will come and go between them without interferences."[24] Indeed, his own caravan, moving through Muslim and Crusader lands, is a testament to this fact.

In this volume, the southern frontiers with Nubia best show a frontier of economy, namely trade and business between these Islamic and Christian lands. It is this process of exchange that actually changes the nature of the frontier. Ruffini advances this complicated frontier further with analysis of texts and goods in twelfth-century Qasr Ibrim. He shows how the Nubians were active agents in aligning their monetary system with the more dominant one of Islamic Egypt to the north. Nubians, in seeking to attain status and prestige at the border, help create an open-flow system in which gold and silver coming from Fatimid Egypt was not held but distributed to the countryside, and was returned as materials, namely wine, slaves, and exotica from Africa, like ivory. Goods from Islamic lands not mentioned in texts—such as the glazed wares (often the silent markers of trade that go unnoticed in texts) that spread wide in Nubia—show a richer trade and consumption of taste. All this points to a non-physical frontier between Muslims and Christians that was quite interconnected and permeable. So much so, in fact, that evidence points to exchange and travel between Nubia and the Mediterranean world, including Italy.[25] Southern Christian Nubia's involvement in international trade essentially explodes the frontier outward with wider economic implications. These frontiers connect with one another. Thus, McCormick's seminal *Origins of the European Economy*, which shows a Mediterranean crisscrossed with people (pilgrims, slaves, pirates, travelers, merchants) and goods (for trade and for worship, as in the case of relics) is part of an even wider stage.[26]

Jerba and the other Mediterranean islands in Holod and Kahlaoui's and Randall's studies are at the center of this density of Mediterranean traffic. Jerba, for example, frequently appears in itineraries for grain shipments to Sicily, nearly 600 km away. Vorderstrasse's study shows more evidence than just local or regional economic exchange in the eastern part of the Islamic world. Goods arrived to the Caucasus from China and Central Asia as well as Byzantine and Islamic lands. Darband, as Alizadeh writes, often described as a fortress with a long-fortified Sasanian wall between Islamic and Khazar lands, was

frequently conquered. However, its lower town became an increasingly important manufacturing and economic center. Perhaps these Sasanian walls, reused in the Islamic period, were used to traffic the movement of goods and people and control nomadic and sedentary interactions, much as has been argued for the Great Wall of China[27] Can one speak of an early medieval globalism or an interconnected world with numerous points of contact and departure? Certainly, such evidence would be presumed on the Silk Road and can be extrapolated to other such routes, including the Gold Road in West Africa and the perhaps less noble Slave Road in West and East Africa. Yet putting aside assumptions about larger premodern economic systems, the actual physical evidence of such long-distance international trade must not be ignored. This is not least because of what these goods suggest. The physical evidence stands as a marker in place of human presence and interaction. It is important to remember that people moved these goods around: local tribes (like the Banū Kanz) that facilitated exchange, merchants (like Muslim traders in Nubian cities from tombstones and the Chinese merchant buried in the Caucasus) that traversed distances, and elites that distributed money and goods locally.

CULTURAL EXCHANGES

The frontier was not, of course, neatly balanced between both sides *ad infinitum* but was a dynamic space of interaction between groups, which transformed over time. Ruffini argues that the process of monetary exchange and mutual partnership led to a power differential, as Islamic Egypt became more prosperous than Nubia and Islam spread southward as a byproduct (as the late arrival of mosques may suggest). In Jana Eger's study, Ṭarī', between Nubia and African lands farther south, was a border region and contact zone. Although not a border with Islam, it is mentioned in Islamic guidebooks by its distance from Cairo (al-Qāhirah). One interpretation for the isolated church/monastery was its economic role in controlling nomads and facilitating tolls and customs, perhaps as an outpost for Egyptian caravans.

Though far from the Nile, Jana Eger's excavations of graves show burial practices similar to those of the Nile valley and Nubia, providing evidence for sociocultural links among inhabitants of the site. Franklin's analysis of her own excavated caravanserai in Armenia provides little ambiguity for these structures as standing evidence for economic frontiers, at once connected to the world and reflective of a mixing of international style in art and architecture. Vorderstrasse's study reassessing a Chinese burial in the Caucasus also shows sociocultural links on several levels. The discovery of Buddhist texts speaks to

a tangible evidence for an archaeology of ideas on the border. Religious ideas spread regardless of borders, and the infiltration of non-Islamic thought into Islamic lands can be considered as equally as the spread of Islam into "infidel" lands. Further, the Buddhist text parallels several narratives in Persian literature, reinforcing a more complex cultural mixing that resulted from the flow of ideas beyond religious propaganda or the physical movement of the objects of religious use themselves. These economic processes are powerful, inextricably linked to the passing of social, cultural, and religious information. They point to varying forms of contact across the frontier, and ultimately demonstrate the fluidity of frontiers and their relativity to one another.

FRONTIERS AS INTERNAL MIRRORS

The frontiers presented in this volume are all necessarily frontiers of boundary with the outside world. All of them are located on peripheries: Jerba protrudes into the western Mediterranean as a mixed zone of interaction among groups vying for control, merchants traveling on trade routes and exchanging slaves, and pilgrims journeying to Jerusalem, Mecca, and Medina. Jerba also has been the site of literary or propagandistic venues for Christian-Islamic *jihād* based on conflict between the Christian kingdoms of Iberia and the Normans. Similarly, the Jabal Nafūsa, near the coast, was also at the edges of the Islamic world and embroiled in conflict, first as a site of Berber/Arab discord. The most salient characteristics of these case studies are not the traditional frontiers one assumes in negotiating space in the Islamic world, namely Islam's frontiers with its outside neighbors. Rather, the studies reveal the various internal workings of (and divisions within) the Islamic Empire, a plurality of frontiers, and more complicated processes of settlement and interaction.

Mullin has discussed how archaeology as a discipline is frequently concerned with ideas of boundedness, whether looking for discrete, spatially articulated units or measuring temporally and culturally defined units. The former makes an archaeological study of frontiers compelling and relevant. The latter raises the question of ethnicity. Both intersect on the subject of territoriality and control. Do archaeologists prefer one ethnic group over another in categorizing cultures? Or do they conflate large cultural groups with specific territories?[28] Stein argued that this concept of a monocultural "horizon," a concept often employed by archaeologists, is in reality a thin veneer covering regions with a variety of differing communities who shared some characteristics.[29] More useful is an examination of these regions as local manifestations that differed significantly from one another and were, according to Mullin, "free-flowing,

heterogeneous, and flexible."[30] This perspective has been extensively discussed for the Roman and Byzantine worlds.[31] Local ceramic traditions and artistic and architectural styles abounded throughout the Islamic world, as did linguistic and religious divergences. Scholarship in Islamic archaeology, a discipline well suited to examining local manifestations, is addressing these variances. Proceeding from this, how can archaeologists address local regionalism on Islamic frontiers, which are frequently characterized as a dichotomous relationship between two groups, as described in texts with an overarching Islamic political or religious dominant ideology? An examination of internal frontiers functions both as a process and heuristic tool—a mirror—that reveals types of frontier interaction within the Islamic world: heterodox religious communities, settlements in environmentally marginal areas, and rural landscapes far from urban centers. The focus on communities, settlements, and landscapes provides a tangible view from within frontier societies themselves.

Demographic Frontiers

One significant category of internal frontiers is based on population movement, whether deliberate or otherwise. There are certainly many instances of population movement as control and ethnic exclusion. Communities were resettled to the frontiers for a number of reasons: to move them away from central lands because they were perceived as threats; to prevent already present frontier societies from becoming too homogenized and resistant to centralized control; or to repopulate newly acquired territories with loyal subjects. Population movements on the Islamic-Byzantine *thughūr* show even more specific movements. The ‘Abbāsids settled loyal supporters, mainly Persians from Khūrāsān, on the frontier to weaken the Umayyads' last power base. Muslims from surrounding Islamic lands came frequently on their own (though aided with incentives and by propaganda) to volunteer in the seasonal raids against the Byzantines. Alizadeh strongly argues that such demographic manipulations, mainly state-directed deportations, were powerful tools for the creation of frontiers. What is mostly absent from these examples is any deliberate process of conversion.

Religious Frontiers

In the case studies on Jerba by Holod and Kahlaoui and the Jabal Nafūsa by Lauricella, we have physical manifestations of a religious frontier. We know heterodox religious communities existed within the Islamic world not even twenty years following the Prophet Muḥammad's death in 632 CE. The Khawārij split from mainstream Islamic groups after the Caliph ‘Alī's capitulation at the Battle

of Ṣiffīn in 657 CE and spread to the fringes of the Islamic world, practicing a militant form of Islam. The Ibāḍīs split around the same time, also spreading to the margins, yet adopting a more quietist approach to Islam. Subsequently, the supporters of ʿAlī, the Shīʿa, also settled widely, or in many instances were settled by the ʿAbbāsids when they came to power in 749 CE. They went to similar peripheries: North Africa, the southern Arabian Peninsula/Gulf region, and India. Aside from two main instances in Islamic history when Shīʿa groups rose to power on a grand scale (the Faṭimids in the tenth century and the Safavids in the fourteenth), we know very little of the nature of these groups. How does one look for archaeological signs of heterodoxy? Holod and Kahlaoui's and Lauricella's case studies take steps toward identifying Ibāḍīs regions and internal frontiers between Ibāḍīs and the rest of the Islamic world. The former study even shows subdivision between the two main Ibāḍī groups, the Wahbī and Nukkār on Jerba, through the appearance of discrete clusters of mosque/estate units and separate markets. For both the Jerba and Nafūsa regions, mosques reveal some shared signatures: they were rural, small scale with little ornament, and fitted only with slit windows. There were no central congregational mosques or madrasas, implying no hierarchy of space; they were built by and for each individual community. Further, the mosque often was associated with tower features for defense and communication. Was this a purely Ibāḍī mechanism or a local manifestation, or are the two inseparable? These structures also echo the North African *ribāṭ*, fortified enclosures built along the coasts in the ninth and tenth centuries, which were outfitted with mosques and towers. What is the relationship between Ibāḍī mosques and the *ribāṭ* in the same region and time period? On the scale of landscape, the Jabal Nafūsa, as an inaccessible and enclosed high space and hidden valley, and the island of Jerba both embody the closed, non-hierarchical aspect of Ibāḍī society. In Nafūsa, the mosques were on mountaintops, while in Jerba, the mosques could be underground; either served as a place for refuge/danger and water storage and as a good marker of life on the periphery, whether within Islam society or between Islam and Christianity. Comparison with surveyed or excavated settlements in Oman or in Morocco, such as Sijilmasa in the Tafialt Oasis—both regions known as centers of Ibāḍīsm—would be important for observing whether there is an overarching Ibāḍī architecture, or if trade and connectivity with the outside world or local regionalism are visible in the material culture, function, and aesthetic of these sites. Did the Khawārij, known for example to also have lived on Jerba, also have similarly identifiable communities? Or is our inability to easily locate the materiality of heterodoxy in itself significant? In the Islamic world, sectarianism or religious pluralism need not manifest solely as a religious landscape of

"Islams" rather than Islam, to cite a popular phrase. Non-Muslims certainly lived under Islamic authority. Nafūsa was also a place for Christian minority groups, such as Donatists, while Jerba had a community of Karaite Jews. Non-Islamic evidence shows up on other frontiers as well, such as at Moschevaja Balka in the Caucasus, where Vorderstrasse analyzes Buddhist material culture from the burial of a Chinese merchant. Was the Buddhist monastic text, sutra, banner, and prayer flag at Moschevaja Balka for personal use, for distribution, or as a souvenir of exotic consumption? The church/monastery of Ṭarī' between the mid-sixth and mid-eighth centuries was an isolated Christian outpost in a nomadic desert world, yet Islamic texts suggest it was one of many monasteries. The frontier locates, even permits, non-orthodox Islamic and non-Islamic settlements. Even further, the interaction of these spaces with mainstream Islam suggests an exchange of religious ideas.

Environmental Frontiers

In some cases, the frontiers were in relatively isolated environments, such as the Jabal Nafūsa, the Mediterranean islands of Jerba, Crete, Cyprus, and the Aegean, or the desert of the land of Ṭarī', far from the Nile. Yet this isolation was never absolute and connections were always made with the outside world. Factors of environment and human agency controlled the degree to which this happened. Trade routes connected sites in the Nafūsa, which were all on the uplands, as well as in the Mediterranean, where many island coastal sites moved inland after the sixth and seventh centuries and even later.[32] Sites interacted with the outside world whenever a ship came in, regardless of its affiliation, which was often dictated as much by weather and season as by commercial intent. In Jerba, access was not simple; good anchorages were scarce for large ships. Interestingly, in Jerba, inhabitants at one point in its history cut the Roman causeway connecting it to the mainland, further isolating the island. In the Jabal al-'Ayn in the western Sudan, Jana Eger identified relic routes linking the desert site, rather indirectly (and perhaps intentionally so), to the Nile valley. The Jabal Nafūsa presents a case of highland–lowland interaction.[33] Yet the Nafūsa is not just an upland, but also served to shield outsiders from those who dwell in valleys. Natural resources were among the most important things that were protected: fortified granaries were key buildings of importance in Nafūsa and throughout North Africa and al-Andalūs. Water resources were protected in Jerba within walled mosque complexes.

Other examples can be seen in the Byzantine settlements of Cappadocia, where underground mosques had attendant granaries, as noted by Islamic geographers.[34] In North Africa, the famous fourteenth-century *ksar* in

Tripolitania and southern Tunisia were granaries that feature a number of rooms around a central courtyard and vaulted roof. The *aqrar* in northern Morocco and the *agadir* in southern Morocco were similar fortified granaries with units assigned to families. In al-Andalūs, the Cabezo de la Cobertera was a granary built on a steep mountain.[35] On the islands where fresh water was scarce, reservoirs were the treasured commodity.

Marginal areas within the Islamic world were frontiers of settlement and often the home of rebels, insurgents, or enemies of the state. Such was certainly the case for the island of Jerba—which functioned as a refuge or place of exile, and even housed a possible pirate base—as it was for Crete. The ʿAbbāsid slave revolt occurred in the swamp settlements of southern Iraq, and similar frontier wetlands can be seen near Antioch. Here, environmental frontiers also become sites of rebellion and conflict, homes to groups who wished to live literally outside the reaches of ruling or central authorities. One famous example in Islamic history is the Hashāshiyūn, the Nizarī Ismāʿīlī who in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries lived in the mountainous Alborz region in the nearly inaccessible fortification of Alamut.[36] Geography and religious frontiers converge and are intertwined in these processes.

Rural and Local Frontiers

A well-known and recognized trap, and one into which scholars still consistently fall, is the act of categorizing peoples on either side of the frontier into one or the other of two homogenous groups. In contrast, several of the studies in this volume highlight heterogeneity. The Alans and Khazars, in Vorderstrasse's study of the Caucasian frontier, were not a unified group. As Ruffini shows, the Nubians were not either, and their frontier was peppered with local tribes acting on their own, controlling trade south of ʿUswān, and intermarrying. The plurality of groups negates any notion of a dichotomous frontier. One exception may be in the Mediterranean islands, where Randall shows that circumstance and perceived isolation may have led "islanders" to self-identify as a distinct group. Social processes such as intermarriage made sharply divided identities difficult to parse out. The Ibāḍīs also represented a plurality within Islamic society. In the Mediterranean, Randall's study shows how Byzantine and Islamic shipping lanes were frequented by unaffiliated pirates and privateers negotiating interaction and exchange, much as did the Banū Kanz in Nubia. Whether pirates or nomads, the frontier was a complex landscape of many communities and individuals carving out space.

At the same time, these examples give us a view into rural societies within the Islamic world. This view is rare: Islamic studies typically have focused

on the monumental and urban, the elite and literate. Traditional excavations have focused on the central lands of the empires and on urban, monumental, artistic, and religious sites. Thus one frontier was between rural and urban space. Newer field projects in Islamic archaeology, as a consequence of political instabilities, have moved to the peripheries of urban landscapes, focusing on rural, military, and trading sites: the farmstead or village, the fortified outpost, or the khan (inn).[37] There were no cities on Jerba and Nafūsa; they were far removed from any large urban center. Before the Ottoman period, Jerba had no major military presence or significant fortifications. In Nubia, towns were fortified with walls,[38] but possessed no fortification as such (castle, etc.). In both Jerba and Nafūsa, the towns were laid out for protection and defense with an *ad hoc* system of warning built from local efforts. Satellite mosques and watchtowers perhaps played a strategic role, to maximize visibility as they communicated with one another. Fortified granaries may have also played a role. A similar interpretation might explain the satellite mosques in the semi-nomadic Negev settlements in the early Islamic period.[39] Efforts at defense and protection on the Mediterranean islands were also local and not a result of central or state initiatives. Islands largely ruled themselves as local and rural communities; indeed, they were often called "a landscape of villages." Left to their own devices, they instituted an internal warning system.[40] So, too, shipping became increasingly privatized. Franklin's study in Armenia shows how, besides its international influence in connecting to the outside world, the caravanserai was loaded with local authority and agency of patronage, with strong traditions of hospitality.

An important consequence of a rural frontier is the political, economic, and sociocultural interactions that occurred between the urban and the rural, or between a government and its hinterland. Walker's study on the Mamlūk frontier in Jordan, made use of archaeology, survey, and *waqf* textual records, to show precisely how rural inhabitants assumed local autonomy.[41] This agency was manifest when locals exhibited an avoidance of state control and implemented taxation through private or cooperative entrepreneurship. The archaeology of these rural local frontiers shows us the micro-interactions as streams that both derive from and contribute to larger historical processes of caliphal or dynastic rise and fall, the failings of the central state to pay the military or governors, the *ʿiqṭa* system of distributing lands in exchange for service, the failings of *ʿiqṭa*, and the inexorable rise in local power and expansion of privatization. The Mamlūk hinterland in Jordan, an internal frontier, developed only as a result of imperial decline. Future studies might reveal and address some limitations: what do communities look like with state backing as opposed to private backing? How

can we differentiate between private and cooperative field systems over time, and can these shift back and forth? And how can we consider dynamic fluctuation between sedentarists who shifted to a nomadic existence and vice versa? An archaeology of frontiers shows us not necessarily the ruptures and political and military successes or failures of ruling groups but continuities of local groups and traditions, building styles and crafts, within these regions.

These varied frontiers—economic, religious, environmental, rural, and local—are not easily mutually exclusive. Many of the studies here possess some or all of these attributes. A recent study by Mahoney perfectly encapsulates this multilayered space by showing an enclosed insular valley in highland Yemen, housing an Ibāḍī community with a history of rebellion against central Islamic lands, with its own local traditions of architecture and ceramics (utilizing its own clay source).[42]

Cognitive Frontiers

Beyond the tangible material-based realm of archaeology, frontiers are a metaphysical state of mind as imaginary places, feared or desired, and often political constructs. Several studies in this volume show the frontier *experience* was a cognitive one; as an imagined space, the frontier was relative to anywhere. In Randall's study, the inhabitants of the Mediterranean islands perceived themselves as isolated and disconnected from the major cities. For Franklin, the Caucasian frontier was as much a place of imagination and exoticism as it was wild and dangerous. The frontier featured prominently in the pages of Islamic geographies, which described routes and itineraries as well as the delicacies and unique products of each of town, thus increasing the exoticism of those living there. Yet, not too far away was the fantastical border of Gog and Magog, separating the uncivilized nomadic hordes from the lands of Islam by a very real wall, which Alizadeh discusses in his chapter. It was of Sasanian construction but continues into the early Islamic period, at least by its reference in the pages of Islamic historians.[43] While Randall's island inhabitants frequently complained of their situation, Franklin's embraced it. Jana Eger's monastery in Ṭarī" is far from the Egyptian-Nubian frontier, yet its placement in an anonymous Islamic geographical text, *Ḥudūd al-ʿĀlam min al-Mashriq ila-l-Maghrib*, "The Boundaries of the World from the East to the West," written in Persian in the late tenth century, connects it to Islamic lands in two ways: metaphysically as a location included within the pages of a text on frontiers, and situated at one edge of an imagined Islamic world. For this Persian traveler and for those for whom this book was written, whether administrative officials who used the text to delineate frontiers, or merchants

and pilgrims, this was a Christian border, remote but on some itinerary. All three frontiers intentionally connected to both local and international customs and styles. The exoticism of the frontier is turned around and for these frontier societies, it is the major cities inland, those of the Islamic world, that are distant and lofty, at the edges of imagination. Perhaps the thirteenth-century poet Amīr Khusraw, a Turk who wrote in Persian but lived in India, expressed it best in elevating his town of Delhi, at the edges of the Islamic world, over Mecca, its very heart:

> Excellent Delhi, the protector of religion and justice
> It is the Garden of Eden; may it flourish forever.
> It is like an earthly paradise in its qualities—
> May God guard it from all calamities! . . .
> If Mecca but heard of this garden
> It would circumambulate Hindustān
> The city of the Prophet takes oaths by *it*;
> The city of God became deafened from its fame.[44]

CONCLUSIONS

All of the studies in this volume suggest that the old core-periphery model be complicated and rethought. In its place, they offer the sense that the frontier, lying at "the edge of everywhere," is itself a center. It is here where interaction between people and goods, moving back and forth and following numerous trajectories, not unlike McCormick's Mediterranean Sea, is as frequent and relevant as that which takes place in the city or moves from the city to the frontier. Thus, these frontiers connect to the Islamic world and exhibit influence from it, but also show that the frontier is less singularly defined as "Islamic" culturally when viewed from the outside in. The study of frontiers, whether on the edges of settlements or empires, raises crucial questions for the field of Islamic studies, since it addresses interactions with other religious and ethnic groups and local variations within material culture and architecture. These new approaches have redefined outmoded traditional views of Islam and have certainly dismantled any notion of a monolithic Islam, whether defined through universally shared religious beliefs, cultural cohesion, or wide-reaching political authority. Whether these frontiers actually existed and/or whether we as scholars heighten their contours matters little. As an analytical tool, they allow us to view alternative histories, and interactions and processes that we might otherwise neglect, or worse, assume never changed and thus leave unchallenged.

NOTES

1. All the chapters in this volume arose from those meetings and two were solicited to round out the discussion: Ian Randall's chapter (also presented at ASOR in 2013) and Karim Alizadeh's (published in an altered and earlier form in Persian in the *Journal of the Society of Iranian Archaeology* 2016).

2. Haug 2011, 635. What is missing is the West African frontier of the Sahara/Sahel; see Insoll 2003, which addresses the relationship of commerce and conversion (not part of the chapters in this volume), and Heddouchi 2012. Islamic merchant communties in West and East Africa, and Southeast Asia and China, are also important to consider.

3. Mullin 2011b. See Curta 2005; Abulafia and Berend 2002; Powers and Standen 1999; Bartlett and MacKay 1989.

4. Antrim 2012; Zadeh 2011.

5. Or archaeology of frontiers in general, for that matter, see Mullin 2011a, 1.

6. Eger 2015, 313; Zartman 2010, 1–2.

7. Brauer 1995, 1–73.

8. Although Kaegi views this as a fluid and porous frontier characterized as much by commercial activities and gift and prisoner exchanges as by military expeditions. He first published this before Brauer: Kaegi 1986; Kaegi 1996, 83–92. See also Amitai-Press 1999, 128–152; Heywood 1999, 228–250.

9. Lightfoot and Martinez 1995, 472–473; Wallerstein 1974.

10. Lightfood and Martinez 1995, 228ff.; Mullin 2011a, 5–6 for critiques; see also Stein 1999.

11. As such, Smith argues against any universalizing mythology in Islam but an opportunistic value assigned to space (1993, 289–310).

12. Rooke 2000. See also Eger 2015, 9–12; Zartman 2010, 13.

13. Antrim 2012, 33ff.

14. Ibid., 121.

15. Ellenblum 1999.

16. Luce 2009.

17. Bekker 1967, 71–86; Gabbay 2010.

18. Ellenblum 2007, 143–144.

19. Zartman 2010, 2–3.

20. For al-Andalūs, see Curta 2011; Fábregas and Sabaté 2015. New work is coming out of the frontier of Central Asia/northeast Iran; see Genequand and Northedge 2012; Frachetti 2016; Wordsworth 2016.

21. Redford 1998.

22. Eger 2015.

23. As suggested by the Roman *limes*; see Isaac 1990 and Ellenblum 2007, 122.

24. Ibn Jubayr 1907, 287; 300–301. See also Eger 2015, 275–276; Ellenblum 2007, 138.

25. In the fourteenth century, the search for the mythical wealthy king Prester John would also connect this region (and even more so, Ethiopia) with west European travelers, cartographers, and merchants.

26. McCormick 2002.

27. Di Cosmo 2006.

28. Mullin 2011a, 2–3, 5. Though the question of ethnicity is avoided in Mullin's volume.

29. Stein 2011.

30. Mullin 2011a, 3.

31. Among the many recent works, see, for example, Mattingly 2011; vanDommelen and Terrenato 2007.

32. Recent evidence at Naxos, largest of the Aegean islands, and Paros shows that in the eighth/ninth century, new churches were built inland, not on the coast and there were fewer settlements in general until the tenth century. This was also seen in other Cyclades Islands, such as Amorgos and Thira (Santorini). The main inland fortification on Naxos, at Kastro Apalirou, dating from the sixth/seventh to the ninth centuries, shows exactly this settlement shift. The fortification had likely functioned as a place of refuge and had cisterns, presses, and a threshing floor. See Ødegård et al. 2017.

33. The nature and process of this environmental frontier has begun to receive more scholarly attention recently in Near Eastern archaeology. See, for example, Gatz 2016.

34. Indeed, one name for this frontier was *al-Matāmīr*, "the granaries." See Eger 2015, 253.

35. De Meulemeester 2005, 609–615.

36. See also the twelfth-century Isma'ili Shrine of Nasir Khusraw in the mountainous hidden valley of Yumgan; Schadl 2009.

37. The number of excavations of such sites is rapidly growing and too many to enumerate. For a good recent example of work published in one volume, see McPhillips and Wordsworth 2016 and the following chapters within it: Macumber 2016; Bartl 2016; Jones 2016; Thomas and Gascoigne 2016. Of course, the volume itself and its focus on rural landscapes and environmental analysis is an essential new direction for the field.

38. By late antiquity, many of these towns had churches inside. Serra East was an Iron Age fortress that transformed into a fortified town. In the early Islamic period, it featured animal pens, workshops, and kilns. See Williams and Tsakos 2013.

39. Avni 1996.

40. The monasteries on Naxos follow a line from coast to center, toward Kastro Apalirou. Some of these were tower monasteries. It is possible that these also served as

a network of warning stations from coastal incursions or attacks on the harbor. For a discussion on the monasteries, see Sigala 2016. http://byz2016.rs/OkrugliStolovi/UTO RAK/03-RT_Byzantine%20Naxos.pdf.

41. Presented as part of the original ASOR frontier panels, see Walker 2011.

42. Mahoney 2016.

43. See also Jaritz and Kreem 2009.

44. As translated by Gabbay 2010, 111n61, from Amīr Khusraw, 1918, *Qirān al-saʿdayn*, Mawlavī Muḥammad Ismāʿīl Merathī, ed., 28–29, Aligarh, India: Maṭbaʿi Instītūt.

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