Borders and Frontiers in the Classical and Medieval Mediterranean World

**HIS 589**, Thursdays, 3:30 – 6

Spring 2011

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**Description:**

The world today is a sharply divided and sharply contested landscape of borders and frontiers, delimiting not only nations and political space but ethnicities and religions, languages and cultures. However, current events have equally shown us that these borders and frontiers can often impose arbitrary division where none has existed before (such as Kurdistan) or contribute to the creation of new identities and societies (such as Islamic Spain). We will analyze the concept of the frontier and frontier societies focusing on its development in scholarship, how it has been characterized, and how frontier theory contributes to new understandings of world history. We will introduce the frontier from its beginnings in academic discourse with the seminal work of Frederick Jackson Turner and his ‘frontier as wilderness’ model as well as other theories of frontiers as borderlines. We will progressively examine the various ways in which frontiers have been characterized subsequently, as zones of periphery, zones of contact and exchange, and frontiers of language, religion, and ethnicity between two or more groups. Recent works will be evaluated that add complexity to the idea of frontiers and frontier societies including topics of assimilation, acculturation, cross-cultural contact, cultural ambiguity, and ethnogenesis (or the creation of new societies). Geographically, we will focus on the tumultuous world of shifting states and empires in classical and medieval Mediterranean and Europe from the Roman Empire to the Ottoman Empire. Since the idea of frontiers is interdisciplinary we will incorporate historical, archaeological, ethnohistorical, environmental, and anthropological research. Contrary to the assumption that the central place typifies culture, it is perhaps the frontier which visibly manifests interconnectedness of societies and the process of social change.
Student Learning Objectives:

- Students will acquire knowledge of the theoretical development of frontier studies with specific regards to classical and medieval Mediterranean history.
- Students will become familiar with reading, interpreting, and critiquing secondary scholarship.
- Students will also learn how to utilize interdisciplinary approaches (such as archaeology) in gathering evidence.
- Students will also construct persuasive written arguments with the use of primary source materials (including texts and material culture from archaeological reports) as supporting evidence, learning to locate, read, and critique primary sources and analyze and synthesize the writings of modern scholars (as historiography).
- Finally, students will produce a 10-15 page research paper, learn the stages of researching (including library work, note-taking, and source criticism) and critique the written work of their peers in constructive ways.
- Graduate students will acquire or perfect research skills appropriate to the production of a 20-30 page research paper.

Requirements:

There will be one 3 hour class per week. Please read the assigned materials during the week assigned and come to classes prepared with questions and observations. Attendance is required, as lectures will frequently include material not covered in the assigned readings, for which you will also be responsible.

No prerequisite is required to take this course.

Readings:

Readings for each week are given on the attached syllabus. Readings listed under the lecture mean you will have read those in advance for that lecture day. Weekly assignments consist of readings from selected works. Please come prepared and able to comment on the readings in class. For group readings, please turn in a short outline of the article and two discussion questions to raise in class on Blackboard by the Wednesday before class, midnight.

Individual Readings. On certain days you will be responsible to present on specific readings and lead discussion. You will do this twice during the semester. You can select which ones based on interest related to your research paper or general interest. For your individual reading you will post a short outline of the article and two discussion questions to raise in class as well.
Study aids, though not a requirement for the course, might be useful in preparing for exams, researching the group assignment, and providing useful basic reference information for Islamic history and civilization. They include:


Bosworth, C. E., *The Islamic Dynasties*. Jackson Library stacks Tower 8 D199.3.I8 No. 5

Assignments:

**Short Paper 1**: You will write a 3-5 page paper providing a concise history of the Mediterranean from the Roman period (ca. 50 B.C.E.) to the height of the Ottoman period (ca. end of the 16th century). You must use at least one *non-internet* source and cite properly. This short paper is designed to 1) introduce you to a brief history of the time periods which we will discuss in depth during the semester and 2) allow me to get a glimpse of how you research and write. You have one week to do this.

**Short Paper 2**: There will be one short paper summarizing points of view surrounding the debate over the Roman *limes*. The short paper is designed to have you 1) understand specific themes and stimulate your own ideas and reactions and 2) exercise your skills in writing. It is not designed to be a research paper but rather reactions to assigned readings and content from class. It should be up to 3 pages in length. The paper is in lieu of essay questions on exams and you will have one week to write it.

**Research Paper**: In addition, there will be one long paper (10-12 pages double spaced, 12 point font, 1” margins on all sides). The paper will call upon you to choose a frontier or frontier society keyed into a geographical and chronological moment (i.e. the Roman/Persian frontier or Christian and Islamic Spain) and research how it has been perceived, synthesizing the historical, archaeological, and anthropological data. This paper will require some research in addition to the required readings and will be due at the end of the course. As frontiers are interdisciplinary, it is encouraged to speak to other faculty members who are knowledgeable about the area. Your research paper will be broken down into a process of assignments. These are:

- Assignment 1: Research paper paragraph
- Assignment 2: Research proposal and preliminary bibliography
- Assignment 3: Historiography Paper/Lit Review
- Assignment 4: Rough Draft
Assignment 5: Peer Critique
Assignment 6: Final Paper

**GRADUATE STUDENTS:** Research paper will be 20-25 pages in length.

**Undergraduate Grading** will be as follows:

- *Presentation on Readings/Class Participation:* 20%
- *Short paper 1:* 10%
- *Short paper 2:* 10%
- *Assignments 1-5:* 20%
- *Research Paper:* 40%

**Graduate Grading** will be as follows

- *Presentation on Readings/Class Participation:* 20%
- *Short paper 1:* 10%
- *Short paper 2:* 10%
- *Assignments 1-5:* 10%
- *Research Paper:* 50%

Class participation is strongly encouraged and will be *essential* to your overall performance.

**Attendance** is mandatory, as the class only meets once per week and lectures will frequently include material not covered in the assigned readings, for which you will also be responsible. On several days, you will be presenting a reading or group of readings as part of the seminar discussion. *If you miss more than one class period for any reason, your final grade will be reduced by 2 points for each additional absence.*

**Class Rules:**

Please do not come late to class as it disrupts the class for both your fellow classmates and for me. Cellular phones *must* be silenced or turned off in the classroom. If you disrupt class by talking on the phone or text messaging, you will be asked to leave. Laptops may *not* be used in the classroom. Please note that plagiarism (this includes copying internet text for papers),
cheating, and other violations of academic integrity are serious offences and will not be tolerated in the class or anywhere else in the University.

The best way to contact me is by email. Please note that I will only check and respond to emails Monday through Friday during the work day; i.e. don’t expect me to respond to an email at 2 am on a Saturday.

**Academic Integrity Policy:**
Enrollment in this course and submission of each written assignment constitute students’ acceptance of UNCG’s Academic Integrity Policy. Make sure you read and understand the policy, which is available at: [http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu/complete/](http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu/complete/)

*If you have any questions about any aspect of this policy, including what constitutes plagiarism, please consult the professor.*

UNCG’s Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as “representing the words of another, as one’s own in any academic exercise” ([http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu/complete/](http://academicintegrity.uncg.edu/complete/)). Plagiarism includes both 1) failure to cite sources for ideas and words you use; and 2) submitting all of parts of someone else’s work as your own. Be sure to cite fully all material you use, whether you are paraphrasing or using a direct quote.

Please note that plagiarism (this includes copying internet text for papers), cheating, and other violations of academic integrity are serious offences and will not be tolerated in the class or anywhere else in the University.

**Lecture and Reading Schedule:**

**Week 1 (January 13) Introduction**

Organizational Meeting

Historical Overview of Boundaries and Frontiers

**Readings:**


Week 2 (January 20) Frederick Jackson Turner

Turner’s frontier as wilderness

Anti-Turnerian views

[short paper 1 concise history of the Mediterranean due]

Presentations on readings

Readings:


Individual Readings:


Bekker, K “Historical Patterns of Culture Contact in Southern Asia” In Beyond the Frontier, 71-86.
Week 3 (January 27) Spatial Frontiers

Frontiers viewed as borderlines, and zones, the “Middle Ground” theory

Perceptions of space in the Medieval world

Presentations on readings

Reading:


Individual Readings:


Week 4 (February 3) Case Study 1: Rome and the Eastern Limes

Imperial borders and military boundaries

Local organization and zones of contact

Presentations on readings

[Short Paper 2 due on Roman Limes debate]

Reading:


**Week 5 (February 10)** **Frontier Societies: Assimilation, Acculturation and Cultural Ambiguity**

Rome’s Relations with Germanic tribes

Early Medieval Frontiers

**Presentations on readings**

**Reading:**


**Individual Reading:**


**Week 6 (February 17) Political Ideologies**

Byzantine/Late Antique Frontiers

Seventh-Tenth Centuries

**Presentations on readings**

[Assignment 1 Research paper paragraph due]

**Reading:**


**Individual Readings:**


*Meet with me sometime before next class to discuss Research Paper topics*
Week 7 (February 24) Religious Ideologies

The Crusaders, Mamluks, and Mongols

The Ottomans

Presentations on readings

Readings:

Wittek, Paul. *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire* 1938

“Introduction” Mathisen and Sivan 1996.

Individual Readings:


Week 8 (March 3) Case Study 2: Early Islamic Desert Castles

Internal or External Frontiers? - “Desert Castles”

[Assignment 2 Research Proposals and Preliminary Bibliographies due]

Readings:


*Half class, TBA (Instructor away)*
Week 9 (March 10)
No Class

Week 10 (March 17) Frontier Settlements
Colonialism
Feudalism/Anti-feudalism – Fortified places and incastellemento

Library Seminar with Stephen Dew

Presentations on readings

[Assignment 3 Historiography Essay/Literature review due]

Reading:


Individual Readings:

Dietler, M. Consumption and colonial encounters in the Rhône Basin of France: a study of Early Iron Age political economy. 2005


Week 11 (March 24) Case Study 3: The Islamic Byzantine Frontier of Spain
Late Roman to Early Islamic period – irrigation systems

Medieval period – incastellemento

In class presentation on Research Paper writing, formatting, and style
Presentations on readings

Individual Readings:


Glick, T.F. “Tribal Landscapes of Islamic Spain: History and Archaeology.” Inventing Medieval Landscapes: Sense of Place in Western Europe. J. Howe and M. Wolfe, eds. (Gainesville, FL: 2002)

Glick, T.F. “Chapter 5 The Transition to Feudalism,” In From Muslim Fortress to Christian Castle: Social and Cultural Change in Medieval Spain. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 92-124

Week 12 (March 31) Case Study 4: The Islamic Byzantine Frontier of Anatolia, al-thughûr

Historical Problems and Religious Ideologies

Archaeology of the Frontier

[Assignment 4 Rough Drafts Due] Send an electronic copy of your draft to both me and the classmates who are critiquing your work by noon.

Readings:


Individual Readings:


**Week 13 (April 7) Environmental Frontiers and Frontier Societies**

Mountains and Pastoralists

Marshes and Marsh Dwellers

Film: *Grass: A Nation’s Battle for Life*

**Readings:**


**Individual Readings:**

Braudel, F. “Part One The Role of the Environment” including “Chapter 1 The Peninsulas: Mountains, Plateaux, and Plains.”, 22-102.


**Week 14 (April 14) Deconstructing Frontiers**

Internal Frontiers and Frontier Societies

Frontiers as Centers

**In-class, small-group critiques of rough drafts.**

[Assignment 5 Peer-critiques are due]

**Individual Readings:**


Week 15 (April 21)

Last Day of Class

Presentation of Final Projects

[Assignment 6 Final Papers due Monday, April 25th at noon]