Borderlands.
Life on the Habsburg-Ottoman Frontier, 1521-1881

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For over 350 years, the Military Frontier between the Habsburg and Ottoman empires served as the first site of engagement in the long struggle to define and defend European territory. This defence frontier system against the Ottoman Empire comprised of military and civilian outposts along an ever-changing frontline stretching from the Adriatic to Transylvania. A Militärgrenze and Cordon sanitaire, the frontier began as a buffer against an expansive Ottoman empire in 1521, when archduke Ferdinand I of Austria began to financially and defensively support the creation of a permanent, structural fence against forces moving north and westward from the Balkans. Over time, this defensive device would become a ‘bulwark of Christianity’ against the Ottoman lands and would, by the nineteenth century, develop into a separate crownland (from 1849) and, in effect, a separate state within the Austro-Hungarian empire. And so it remained until the borderland state was dissolved in 1881.

Within and along this imperial borderland, Christian refugees, both Catholic and Orthodox, settled. At other times, the borderland served as a quarantine zone, with lazaretos stopping the spread of plague and other diseases; and it was served as an economic frontier to protect trade within the Habsburg lands and between the empire and the Ottoman. Over time, it grew into a military bulwark populated with soldiers, some retired and discharged, living together with civilians often expelled to the frontier for moral and civil transgressions. By the early 1700s, the lands along the military frontier were home to a wide-range of non-Muslim residents of every Christian denomination, of soldiers and ex-soldiers and their families, or colonists seeking a new start in life, and of waifs, strays and outcasts who now lived in close community with Ottoman subjects across the line. These frontier lands had particular rights and liberties; serfdom was forbidden and it was a land ‘without lords and masters’, governed under military jurisdiction. By the time of its dissolution in 1881, this crown land comprised some 33,422 square kilometers with over 1.2 million inhabitants, stretching over 1,900 kms as a narrow strip of land from near Fiume to Transylvania.

This paper will have the borderland that was the ‘Military Frontier’ as its main subject, exploring in depth the development of a Grenzer (frontier) mentality and identity. The lands of Central Europe (and especially of the Habsburg monarchy) which bordered the frontier are crucial, too. Thus we will also investigate, when relevant, events in the Austrian lands, in Hungary, Transylvania, Croatia, Serbia, etc. Moreover, while this paper will of course examine the military history of the frontier, it will pay greater attention to its political, social, cultural, and historiographical aspects. Throughout we will be mindful of conceptual issues surrounding the study of borderlands -- definitions, processes, borderland typologies and comparative frameworks that might illuminate the study of places with multiple and contending political and legal traditions.

In concluding, we will look to recent events in helping to re-evaluate the place of the Habsburg-Ottoman borderlands in European history, and the place of its historiography in broader European historiography. The Habsburg borderlands of the Military Frontier, today stretching along six countries, encapsulate many of the difficulties historians encounter when they step beyond the nation state. In the spring of 1991, during the
breakup of Yugoslavia, the local population of the former military frontier declared their independence as the Republic of Krajina ('Frontier'), appealing to a shared history and a shared historical memory of frontier life.

In addition to introductory and revision lectures, this Specified paper will be taught mainly in weekly 2-hour classes; each student will also receive 5 supervisions. This paper will be capped at a maximum of 14 students.

Below, a list of weekly topics with an outline description and reading list. A selection of additional primary-source texts in translation (obviously, there is a rich literature on this subject in German, Hungarian, Croatian, etc., but students will not be disadvantaged reading English sources).

Start date October 2020

Teachers Dr William O'Reilly (wto21), with Dr Emma Spary (Medicine and Science), Dr Helen Pfeifer (Ottoman History), and others

Examination
• Three-hour unseen; answer 3 questions; undivided paper
• There will always be a question set on each of the class topics

Faculty norms for Specified papers
• Teaching hours: 28-34 hours, with 5 supervisions; students will be supervised in pairs.
• Reading list: 100-150 items
• Exam paper: 18-22 questions (with one or two either/ors)

Teaching regime for this paper
In addition to introductory and revision lectures, this Specified paper will be taught mainly in weekly 2-hour classes:
• Michaelmas: 7 x 120-min classes
• Lent: 7 x 120-min classes
• Easter: 2 x 120-min classes
• Supervisions, 5-6 per student; in either term
• Total contact hours: 32
• Supervision topics are the same as the class topics

Reading List
• All articles and PhD dissertations referenced below will be made available to students as pdfs (some articles and chapters are not readily available in the Seeley or University Library).
• Where there is a larger recommended reading list for a given weekly topic, the class will be divided into groups, each taking a number of readings and presenting to the full class on their reading.
• The Reading List follows the schedule of lectures and supervision topics
• However, many books cover several topics, so you need to read around, and need to make regular use of items in the opening section, ‘Introductions’
• Students should read on every topic and not just those selected for supervision essays. Some sections do have ‘Additional Reading’ sections, to aid in supervision essay preparation.

General Introductory Reading List for the subject:

This list serves as a source for regular reference and will be regularly referred to throughout the course. These are all broad surveys; although they are not listed again below, their individual chapters are also relevant for topics covered in the weekly classes:

• Sugar, Peter F. Nationality and Society in Habsburg and Ottoman Europe. Brookfield, Vt: Variorum, 1997
• Manoliu-Manea, Maria, ed. The Tragic Plight of a Border Area: Bessarabia and Bucovina. Los
Angeles, Calif.: Humboldt State University Press, 1983.

For accounts, in English, of travel writers accounts of journeys to the Habsburg and Ottoman lands, the most comprehensive collections are:


For Borderlands in a non–Europe settling, the literature is vast, but by way of possible comparison the following are offered:

- Pekka Hamalainen, *The Comanche Empire* (Yale University Press, 2008)
**Michaelmas Term**

**Week 1. Introduction: Borderlands and Frontiers: identity, culture and politics**


**Week 2. Ottoman and Habsburg Empires: Constructing imperial borderlands**

(i) The Ottoman Presence


Özgür Kolçak, “…And yet fell all the forts to the infidels…”: Disinformation, Propaganda and Political Power in the Ottoman-Habsburg War of 1663-1664*, Osmanli arastirmalari*, 43, 2014, pp. 165-192.


**Week 3. Ottoman and Habsburg Empires: Constructing imperial borderlands**

**(ii) The Habsburg Presence**


**Week 4. Mapping the Borderlands**

• Pınar Emiralioglu, *Geographical Knowledge and Imperial Culture in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire*, Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014, esp. Chapter 1, ‘Negotiating Space and Imperial Ideology in the Sixteenth-Century Ottoman Empire’.

**Additional Readings**

and Property in a Serf-Owning Society) and Chapter 4 ("The Souls of the Righteous in a Bright Place": Landscape and Orthodoxy in Seventeenth-Century Russian Maps).

- Pinar Emiralioglu, Geographical Knowledge and Imperial Culture in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014), esp. Chapter 3 (Charting the Mediterranean: The Ottoman Grand Strategy).

**Week 5. Fiscal-Military States and Imperial Surveys: Civilizing the Borderland**

- Madalina Valeria Veres, “Unravelling a Trans-Imperial Career: Michel Angelo de Blasco’s Mapmaking Abilities in the Service of Vienna and Lisbon,” Itinerario, International
**Week 6. Reading Week**

**Week 7. Protecting the Borderland: War, military and violence**


**Week 8. The ‘Frontier Body’ and Vampirism**


Additional Reading:

Lent Term

Week 1. Medicine, Quarantine, Science and the Circulation of Knowledge

• Teodora Daniela Sechel (ed.), Medicine Within and Between the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires, 18th-19th Centuries, Bochum: Winkler Verlag, 2011, esp. Section II.
• Nükhet Varlik, Plague and empire in the early modern Mediterranean world: the Ottoman experience, 1347-1600, New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015, esp. Part


- Alberto Fortis, *Travels into Dalmatia containing general observations on the natural history of that country…*, J. Robson, London, 1778 [1774].

**Additional Reading:**


- Steven J. Harris, ‘Confession-Building, Long-distance Networks, and the Organisation


- Ian MacLean, ‘Evidence, logic, the rule and the exception in Renaissance law and medicine’, *Early Science and Medicine*, vol. 5 (3), 2000, pp. 227-257.


**Week 2. The Practice of Religion**


- Felicita Tramontana, ‘Contested conversions to Islam: narratives of religious change in the early modern Ottoman Empire’, *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 2013, Vol.28(1), pp.82-86.

The Ottoman Empire
The millet structure of the Ottoman Empire; religious and ethnic identities and their interplay in Rum-millet (i.e. Christian lands). Co-existence of Christians, Muslims and Jews under the Ottoman Rule. Christians: quasi-state role of the Orthodox Church.

Readings:


**The Habsburg Empire**

Structure and composition of the multinational Empire. Enlightenment - idea and policy of secularization. Political activities of the Catholic Church along the Frontier: the Franciscans in Bosnia, Greek-Catholics in Transylvania. The church-school autonomy of the Orthodox Serbs and Romanians in Southern Hungary. Political and confessional loyalties of the rulers and peoples.

**Readings:**


**Islam**

**Readings:**


**Week 3. Voluntary and Penal Settlement on the Borderland**


• William O’Reilly, *Selling Souls. The Traffic in German Migrants: Europe and America, 1648-1780*, manuscript in print, chapters 3 and 5 on colonisation and settlement.

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**Week 4: Trade and Commerce, Law and Order**


• Huri İslamoğlu-İnan, ‘State and peasants in the Ottoman Empire: a study of peasant economy in north-central Anatolia during the sixteenth century’, In Huri İslamoğlu-
Week 5: Reading Week

Week 6: The Challenge of Nationalism


Week 7: Dissolution and Legacy

• Robert A. Kann, A History of the Habsburg Empire, 1526-1918, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, esp. Ch. 7, ‘Cultural Trends from Late Enlightenment to Liberalism (from mid-eighteenth century to the 1860s)’.

Week 8: Exoticising the Borderlands. Conclusions, Historiography and the Legacy of the Military Frontier

• Frontiers, Boundaries, Borderlands: A Terminological Maze or Distinct Categories?
• Frontiers, Borderlands, Contested Zones and “The System of Continental Empires:” A New Approach to Empire Studies?

Easter Term
Week 1: Revision class

Week 2: Revision class

Sample Exam Questions

Answer three questions

How, and to what extent, is ‘borderlands’ historiography useful in understanding the history of early modern Habsburg and/or Ottoman history?

EITHER: Why did Vienna support the maintenance of the Military Frontier, 1521-1881?
OR: Why did Istanbul tolerate the maintenance of the Military Frontier, 1683-1881?

Assess the role of cartography in the creation of the ‘Military Frontier’.

How important were surveyors, military engineers and travellers’ accounts in creating a ‘frontier identity’? Discuss with reference to AT LEAST THREE accounts.

How, and to what extent, were Grenzer ‘fighting for a living’?

Account for the ‘Vampire obsession’ along the Habsburg-Ottoman borderland in the 18th century.

To what extend was the Military Frontier an Austrian penal colony?

In what ways, and to what extend, was the Habsburg-Ottoman borderland an ‘experiment in colonial government’?

Account for the reluctance of Roman Catholics to settle the Habsburg-Ottoman borderland in the eighteenth century.

How, and to what extent, was the Ottoman-Habsburg frontier a ‘zone of toleration’ in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? Discuss with reference to Serbian Orthodox and Uniate Christians.

Account for and outline the emergence of particular rights and liberties for women moving to and living in the borderland.

Consider the role of borderland quarantine practices (*cordon sanitaire*) in the emergence and development of Habsburg and/or Ottoman medicine.

How, and to what extent, was Ottoman-Habsburg trade and commerce facilitated, rather than inhibited, by the military frontier?

Assess the role of conversion to Islam in the development of Habsburg administrative attitudes towards the frontier, c.1600-1800.
EITHER: How, and to what extent, did the Habsburg-Ottoman borderland challenge more metropolitan views of Hungarian and/or Slavic nationalism, in the nineteenth century?
OR: How, and to what extent, were residents of the Habsburg-Ottoman borderland ‘beyond nationalism’ [Istvan Deak]?

Why was the Military Frontier crownland dissolved?