

Frontiers and the Writing of History, 1500–1850

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Wehrhahn Verlag

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The Historiography of the Triplex Confinium: Conflict and Community on a Triple Frontier, 16th–18th centuries

The term 'Triplex confinium' refers in its narrowest sense to the point at which the borders of the Habsburg Monarchy, the Venetian Republic and the Ottoman Empire met, as laid down in the negotiations following the 1699 Peace Treaty of Karlowitz. The international commission charged with establishing the precise course of the borders agreed that the spot should be marked with a special tumulus 'better, finer and higher than the others', and identified with signposts pointing out the boundaries between the three states.¹ This point retained its international significance until the fall of the Venetian Republic in 1797, when that particular boundary ceased to exist.

The term 'Triplex confinium' is also useful in a more general sense to refer to a wider frontier region in the Northern Croatian-Dalmatian-Bosnian hinterland. With the Ottoman conquests of Croatian territory and increasing threats to the Venetian Adriatic and Dalmatian hinterland, and with the Habsburg election to the Croatian throne in 1527 (with promises to organize frontier defences against the 'Turk'), a three-way frontier emerged in the sixteenth century, defined by the territories – and military systems – of the three imperial states. Raids from Ottoman territory and the turbulent circumstances of Ottoman conquest led to the flight of the population from the frontier zone. Their lands were settled in further migrations from the hinterland, sporadic at first but increasing very substantially from the end of the sixteenth century. The Long Turkish War (1592–1606) marked the beginnings of the influx of new settlers onto Habsburg territory in Croatia and Slavonia which would reach its peak in the eighteenth century; while in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the Candian (1645–1669) and Morean (1684–1699; 1714–1718) wars saw a wave of emigration of Ottoman subjects into Venetian Dalmatia. These frontier populations, known as Vlachs (or Morlachs in Venetian territory), were settled on state- or noble-owned lands, and were granted various

¹ Ešref Kovačević, *Granice Bosanskog pašaluka prema Austriji i Mletačkoj republici po odredbama Karlovačkog mira*, Sarajevo 1973, 267.

concessions in return for military service, replicating their status as stock-herders and frontier raiders under the Ottomans. They formed a privileged social group of free frontiersmen, distinct from the original peasantry, all along the Triplex confinium. These Vlach settlers also differed from the original inhabitants with respect to religion (from the 1590s they were largely Orthodox), and in terms of ethnicity (though in exactly what ways is debated). On all sides of the frontier, the frontier system developed incrementally as a patchwork of agreements, concessions and jurisdictions; attempts at comprehensive reform and regulation were left to centralizing governments in the eighteenth century.

The active military significance of this triple frontier can be delimited fairly precisely in temporal terms: from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, changing its character as a site of continuous *Kleinkrieg* with the end of the Ottoman wars, and particularly with the Treaty of Karlowitz, which marked official Ottoman acceptance of a demarcated frontier (though even afterwards a frontier mentality persisted, and the Habsburg Military Frontier – the *Militär-grenze* – continued to serve as a source of troops for Habsburg wars elsewhere in Europe). Apart from the tumult marking the three-way boundary point, it is not easy to define the wider triple frontier with any precision in terms of territory. Nonetheless, each state did develop military systems which were comparable in character. The Habsburg Military Frontier in Croatia is probably the best known in Western historiography though Military Frontier districts stretched from the Adriatic to the Carpathians, but similar military institutions also existed on Ottoman frontier territory, and along the Venetian frontier in Dalmatia.² The terms most often used to characterize the area and its military character at the time (*granica* or *Grenze*, *krajina*, *serhad*, *confinium*) carry the sense of a frontier zone, as well as a boundary line, and in practice were often used to denote the shared world of the hinterland marches just as much as

² There is an extensive bibliography of works on the Habsburg Military Frontier in K. Wessley and G. Živković, *Bibliographie zur Geschichte der k.k. Militärgrenze*, in: *Die k.k. Militärgrenze: Beiträge zu ihrer Geschichte*, Vienna 1975; the main studies on the Venetian frontier are cited in Šime Perić, *Vojna Krajina u Dalmaciji*, in *Vojna krajina: povijesni pregled, historiografija, naprave*, ed. by Dragutin Pavličević, Zagreb 1984, 199–204; for the Ottoman frontier system (much less comprehensively analysed) see the articles in *Vojne krajine u jugoslavenskim zemljama u novom veku do Karlovačkog mira 1699.*, ed. by Vasa Čubrilović, Belgrade 1989. There is also a useful study of German and Austrian historiography on the Military Frontier by Wolfgang Kessler, *Njemačka i austrijska historiografija o Vojnoj krajini*, in: *Vojna krajina*, 101–117.

the separate military administrative units.³ The wider Triplex confinium can be understood, therefore, not just in terms of the military insinuations of each separate state, but also in terms of a common set of military, social and economic patterns and relationships, at the same time cut across by political, religious and cultural differences; a frontier zone characterized by alternating state military campaigns and perennial guerrilla warfare, carried out by a privileged frontier population with a recognized military role, living partly on plunder or military pay but also from pastoralism, trade and some agriculture.

While the significance of the Triplex confinium as a shared frontier zone altered with the end of the Ottoman wars in the eighteenth century, the border itself only ceased to function as a line of demarcation between states over the course of the nineteenth century. The area was gradually incorporated as a whole into Habsburg territories, and then into what would become Yugoslavia. With the end of French rule in the short-lived Illyrian provinces in 1813, Dalmatia was brought under Austrian rule; the Ottoman frontier zone was *de facto* absorbed with the Austrian occupation of Bosnia in 1878; the Croatian Military Frontier was united with 'civil' Croatia in 1881. On the unification of the South Slav territories of Austria-Hungary with the lands of Serbia and Montenegro after the First World War, the triple frontier was absorbed into the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia), though internal administrative divisions within the new state (and subsequently in socialist Yugoslavia) continued to reflect boundaries that had been established in the course of the Ottoman wars.

Although the triple frontier itself disappeared, it persisted as an important site of historical debate. This was not solely because the period of the Ottoman wars had been a long and dramatic episode in itself, nor because the struggle against alien conquest and rule on the frontier was seen as one of the foundation narratives in all the national historiographies of the region. Even under new political circumstances the area continued to mark points of conflict and claims to legitimacy. Migration, settlement, and state policy had created a patchwork of ethnic, religious and jurisdictional differences across the whole territory of the Triplex confinium. These took on a new significance with the rise of nationalism as a political ideology. But political boundaries did not – and indeed, could not – march neatly along with emerging and contested national differences. Arguments over the apportionment and rule of the ter-

³ Drago Rokсандić, *Triplex Confinium ili o granicama i regijama hrvatske povijesti 1500–1800*, Zagreb 2003, 25–50.

ritories were perennial, even once the frontier had been absorbed into a single state (major conflicts focused on the relationship of the *Militärgrenze* to the Croatian *Sabor* [Parliament]; the status of Bosnia in Austria-Hungary and in both Yugoslavias; irredentist claims to Dalmatian territories from Italy; the status of the Serb populations in Croatia and Bosnia, and particularly in the so-called *Krajinje*). What constituted legitimate claims, however, varied, depending on the context. The main alternatives were historically-constituted legal rights or self-determination by the population. Both were contested, and both inevitably pressed historiography into service. Arguments over the historical rights of the various political entities (whether dynasties, states or other bodies), and over the origins and experiences of the population (particularly the Serbs in Croatia and the Muslims in Bosnia) gave frontier historiography a lasting political character.

The amount of historical writing on the Triplex confinium is, accordingly, vast – even for the period before the Peace of Karlowitz. Rather than trace the development of frontier historiography in any detail, this essay briefly surveys the changing conceptual context within which it developed (largely with reference to historiography produced in Yugoslavia) and sketches one of its main themes – the ways frontier divisions have been characterized – to explore some of the complex interactions of the political and the disciplinary in the production of frontier history.

There have been a number of ways of framing the history of the Triplex confinium. Important approaches might be loosely identified as the imperial, local, national and social-historical. ‘Imperial’ accounts look out from the centre. In these histories the Triplex confinium itself tends to appear as a periphery where narratives originating elsewhere were played out: wars and treaty negotiations; the military strategies and institutional projects of rulers and their commanders; power struggles among rival factions; or reform programmes dictated from the courts. An older imperial historiographical tradition produced accounts of frontier warfare with the attention focused on battles, commanders and rulers. This grand-scale ‘kings-and-battles’ history lost some of its power in the twentieth century, as the empires whose history such writings glorified faded from the scene, and the historical profession widened the accepted subject of history beyond wars and diplomatic relations. Studies of frontier warfare from an imperial perspective have concentrated more recently on the economic and institutional basis of warfare. Gunther Rothenberg’s two-part history of the Croatian Military Frontier is an excellent example of this approach, tracing the development of the military and

administrative infrastructure of the Habsburg *Militärgrenze* largely in terms of measures imposed from the centre.⁴ At the other end of the historiographical spectrum lie small-scale, local accounts, focusing on a single region, fortress, incident or individual. This has been an important strand in Triplex confinium historiography from the earliest times, with local studies asserting the glory of a particular region in terms of its contribution to warfare and defence, as the title of Valvasor’s *Die Ehre des Herzogthums Krain* (1689) suggests (the text is an *apologia* for Carniola’s role in the defence of Europe against the Ottoman threat).⁵ The local and the individual account can overlap substantially with the national approach, where the place or person discussed is made to stand as an embodiment of the nation as a whole, and as an example ‘to stimulate and inspire their contemporary descendants to virtuous deeds, of benefit to the whole nation’ as one nineteenth-century Croatian study of two frontier heroes put it.⁶ On the other hand, such local or individual studies can be made to serve as a critique of accounts framed on a wider basis, tracing and testing their assumptions and generalizations in a specific setting.

As suggested above, national narratives take the nation as the taken-for-granted model and measure of frontier history. ‘Our people’ (defined according to a variety of criteria) are the key political actors, and the beneficiaries or victims of changing historical circumstance. The triple frontier is not necessarily closer to the focus of attention in the national mode (in Austrian, German and Italian historiography it is still a periphery, though one with important consequences for national development), but this essay focuses on those historiographies where the Triplex confinium plays a central role (Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, Yugoslav). In contrast to, and in many ways as a critique of national (and national) historiography, social-historical approaches to the Triplex confinium have looked to a variety of social structures and patterns in interpreting frontier history, whether calling more or less explicitly on Marxist social theory (particularly in socialist Yugoslavia) or adopting a more eclectic selection of tools to pursue a *histoire totale* on the Annales model.

⁴ Gunther Rothenberg, *The Austrian Military Border in Croatia, 1522–1747*, Urbana, Ill. 1960; *The Military Border in Croatia, 1740–1881*, Chicago 1966. Fikret Adanir and Surajya Faroqi survey recent ‘imperial’ treatments of Ottoman warfare on the frontiers in the introduction to *The Ottomans and the Balkans: A Discussion of Historiography*, Leiden 2002, pp. 14–16.

⁵ Wessley and Živković, *Bibliographie zur Geschichte der k.k. Militärgrenze*: op. cit. list a selection of such local histories but many more exist.

⁶ R. Lopašić, *Dva hrvaška junaka: Marko Mesić i Luka Ibršimović*, Zagreb 1888, 10.

Choices as to the most appropriate topics in frontier history (and perhaps also assumptions about the true object of history) have had something to do with the ways frontier historiography was framed. So have the institutional context and political environment within which this history has been written – and this explains a good deal about the way that the history of the Triplex confinium has evolved. The foundations of a national approach to historiography were laid well before the rise of modern nationalisms, particularly in the Habsburg context, where political nations, including the Croats, drew on history to assert their rights and privileges against the imperial centre – in particular with reference to conflict over the frontier. Given the way that modern nation-building in South-East Europe proceeded to a large extent 'from above', historiography played an important role in creating a national polity and a national lineage. Thus Croatian history could look to the Frontier for evidence of its role as an *antemurale Christianitatis* and for its centuries-long struggle to preserve its state rights against Hungarian and Habsburg encroachment; Serbian frontier history could demonstrate national military virtues and the continuity of resistance to foreign oppression; Bosnian Muslim historiography could emphasize the special character of the Bosnian military elite (and the distinctiveness of a Bosnian Muslim nation). In addition to these separate national histories, a distinct 'Yugoslav' model of history posited the common experience of the South Slav peoples of Yugoslavia, with an emphasis on their shared character and experiences – and also looked to the frontier for evidence that what these people shared outweighed the factors that divided them.

Frontier historiography could also be pressed into use to legitimate current politics and vindicate current conflicts, as well as underpinning attempts to use history to understand the present. One example will suffice here: the link between the debates over the fate of the Military Frontier in the Croatian Sabor in the 1860s, which broached for the first time the issue of the national profile and origins of the frontier population, and the appearance of the first Croatian scholarly accounts of the origins and history of the Frontier.⁷ Nor was the Yugoslav Marxist approach to frontier history without an ideological role, given its official status in Titoist Yugoslavia, though research on sixteenth to eighteenth-century history did not bear the same burden of legitimating

revolution and building socialism as did twentieth-century historiography.⁸ Accusations of nationalism (whether taking the form of 'Great-Serbism' or an obsession with Croatian state and historical right), and of a lack of Marxist consciousness, would emerge in polemics over issues in frontier historiography in 1980s Yugoslavia.⁹ At the same time, asserting a distance from 'national prejudice' has been a regular rhetorical stance taken by authors writing on triple frontier topics outside the Yugoslav context (partly as a way of claiming added authority), but it should also be recognized that the body of existing scholarship and the historiographical tradition inevitably shapes the questions that are asked and the materials used to answer them.¹⁰ It is difficult to write entirely outside this tradition, even from a geographical distance.

It is generally taken for granted that the Triplex confinium is constituted by the fault-lines that run across it – state, religious, national, or socio-cultural – and that it is conflict – whether in the form of military campaigns, petty raiding, jurisdictional controversies or rebellion against authority – that makes up the very stuff of frontier history. The choice here is not between conflict or cohesion as defining the character of the triple frontier, but between specific forms of conflict and the divisions they reveal. While the Triplex confinium was created as a consequence of imperial expansion and war, the triple frontier was not only the site of conflict between empires, but was also a matter of contention within the composite states. The rights of existing and former land-holders in the frontier territories, as well as those of newly settled frontiersmen; the obligations of rulers, of those required to defend the borders, of those whose taxes paid for war; the jurisdictional claims of local political bodies, ecclesiastical authorities, and military commanders; the ways of life, loyalties and interests

⁸ Nevertheless, see the comments by Academician Vasa Čubrilović introducing the collection *Vojne krajine u jugoslovenskim zemljama*, in which he traces the 'self-sacrifice, persistence and heroism' of the WWII National Liberation Struggle to the experience of frontier warfare against the Ottoman Empire, 6.

⁹ See, for example, the exchanges between Vasilije Krestić and Mirko Valentić in Časopis za suvremenu povijest, 3, 1983.

¹⁰ For example, Michael Hickok, *Ottoman Military Administration in Eighteenth-Century Bosnia*, Leiden 1997, sets his own arguments against a particularly black-and-white assessment of the perspectives of Yugoslav (and particularly Bosnian) historiography on the frontier; Nenad Močanić's review, 'Exposing existing fallacies regarding the captaincies in the Bosnian frontier area between the 16th–18th centuries, effectively demolishes a simple dichotomy between 'enlightened' internationalists and 'narrow-minded' local historians (in Drago Roksančić and Nataša Štefanec, *Constructing Border Societies on the Triplex Confinium*, Budapest 2000, 75–89).

⁷ See Jaroslav Šidak, 'O značenju Vojne krajine u hrvatskoj povijesti', in: *Vojne krajine*, 9–10 for a discussion of the Sabor debates of 1861 and Military Frontier historiography.

of the local populations – all of these could and did clash dramatically. Which conflicts, which ways of defining differences, and which communities are treated as definitive in understanding the triple frontier? Historians' choices over which of these should bear the burden of interpretation provide a revealing way of surveying changing approaches to frontier history in the region.

The first and most basic division has usually been taken to be that of faith. The understanding of the triple frontier as defined in terms of a religious clash between Cross and Crescent was underpinned by the ways combatants on the frontier not only justified warfare in religious terms, but also pictured themselves as the embodiments of the imperatives of faith. Representing the frontier as the *antemurale christianitatis* or the battleground of *gaza* (holy war) had obvious advantages, and not just for the frontier states. Claims to be acting in the service of a war for the faith (and not in narrow, personal interests) could be used by all the frontier communities to justify their own practices on the frontier; and to lend glory to their actions when they came to recount their histories.¹¹ However, accepting this division as fundamental, over-riding all others, makes some issues in Triplex confinium history explicable only in terms of treason or apostasy. The phenomenon of Christians in Ottoman military service, conflicts between the Christian states on the frontier, or raids affecting co-religionists are all topics which have posed problems for an approach to frontier historiography which understands 'holy war' as the sole factor in determining frontier loyalties and motives.¹²

Confessional identities have also been taken as fundamental to frontier conflict and community, not just in terms of warfare between the frontier states, but also with reference to tensions within the frontier societies. A substantial body of research has been devoted to problems of religious and confessional change (or resistance) on the frontier – Bosnian Christian conversions to Islam;

¹¹ Ottomanists querying the primacy of religious motivations in shaping early frontier warfare, in a critique of Wittek's 'gaza thesis', have at the same time suggested the importance of holy war in later Bosnian self-perceptions and claims to legitimacy, particularly in conflicts with the imperial centre (see particularly Colin Heywood, *Bosnia under Ottoman Rule, 1463–1800*, in: Mark Pinson (ed.), *The Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina*, Cambridge, MA, 1994, 22–53).

¹² On Christians in Ottoman military service, see M. Vasić, *Martolosi u jugoslovenskim zemljama pod turskom vladavinom*, Sarajevo 1967. My work on Senj (*The Uskoks of Senj: Piracy, Banditry and Holy War in the Sixteenth-Century Adriatic*, Ithaca 1992) attempts to trace the balance between religious ideology and other factors in a specific arena of frontier warfare.

Catholic conversions to Orthodoxy; and Orthodox Vlach resistance to union with the Catholic Church in the Habsburg and Venetian territories – as a way of tracing, first, the origins of the frontier populations and, second, the history of conflict (or, less frequently, coexistence) among frontier confessional (and national) communities.

Research into patterns of Islamization in Bosnia has not, for the most part, been directly focused on problems of the Triplex confinium, but it is, nonetheless, relevant to an understanding of frontier relationships.¹³ Conversion to Islam was not required for Christian landholders to retain their estates as *spahis*; similarly frontier irregulars enjoyed 'Vlach' privileges in return for military service while retaining their Christian faith.¹⁴ Given that forced conversion was not common in Ottoman Bosnia, it appears that the migrations that settled the whole Triplex confinium were driven less by religious pressure than by resistance to the erosion of 'Vlach' privileges – though the rhetoric used by the new settlers in justifying their flight both relied on and reinforced conventions of an unbridgeable Christian/Muslim opposition. That this opposition may not always have shaped the relations of everyday life is suggested by research into the slow processes of Islamization in Bosnia, which have emphasized the way that conversion was facilitated by syncretic popular religious practices; and the way that relations between Ottoman Christian subjects and Muslim converts were remarkably untroubled (Muslim converts continuing to retain ties with their Christian families, for example).¹⁵

Conflict and community among adherents of the Christian confessions are also illuminated by research into religious change. Catholic conversion to Orthodoxy in Bosnia (and Catholic flight across the frontier) has been explained by the pressures caused by the three-way relationship between the Catholic Church (represented by the Franciscans in Bosnia); the Orthodox clergy, attempting to extend its jurisdiction (and right to collect tithes) over all Ottoman Christians, regardless of confession; and the Ottoman authorities, profoundly suspicious of the Catholics' allegiance to authorities outside the Empire and beyond Ottoman control, but recognizing the Orthodox Church as a part of the wider Ottoman state apparatus. However, here too popular attitudes, more

¹³ For a good survey of the wider issues and references to literature on Islamization in Bosnia, see Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, London 1994, 51–69.

¹⁴ V. Cubrilović, *Poreklo muslimanskog plemstva u Bosni i Hercegovini, Jugoslovenski istorijski časopis* 1, 1935, 368–403.

¹⁵ M. Hadžijahić, *Porijeklo bosanskih Muslimana*, Sarajevo 1990; see also Malcolm, *Bosnia*, 58–59.

tolerant of confessional difference than the ecclesiastical rivalries would suggest, seem to have contributed to conversion, with evidence of the weakness of a Catholic confessional identity (particularly due to the lack of Catholic clergy), as well as such issues as resistance to the introduction of the new calendar among Catholics, or the problems caused by mixed marriages and by divorce. Catholic flight to the Habsburg frontier (and to the Venetian territories) seems to have been connected above all with specific military campaigns, especially in the seventeenth century, and the fear of reprisal.¹⁶

The role of the Orthodox Church in shaping Vlach identities, and the question of Orthodox union with the Catholic Church, have also illuminated the ways confessional division, ecclesiastical and state interests, and popular identity interacted on the Triplex confinium. The military colonists who settled in Habsburg and Venetian territories in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were largely Orthodox, but they found themselves in lands strongly affected by the Catholic Reformation. Both Habsburg and Venetian authorities were anxious to secure the colonists' services on the frontier by extending them privileges and land, but both states were also wary of any rival authority over the frontiersmen, particularly that of an Orthodox ecclesiastical hierarchy which had its centre within the Ottoman Empire. Both on the Habsburg and the Venetian frontiers, there were strong pressures for union with the Catholic Church, and support for those Orthodox churchmen who acknowledged the authority of Rome. On the Habsburg frontier, matters were further complicated by the fact that the lands where the colonists were settled were in fact the property of secular and ecclesiastical landlords, under the jurisdiction of the Croatian *Sabor*, though the settlers' use of the land – and their freedom from feudal dues – was guaranteed by the Habsburg military authorities. The insistence by the land-holders and the *Sabor* that the new settlers acknowledge Catholic jurisdiction was a matter of their defence of property rights as well as a defence of the Catholic faith.

Recent research has stressed a variety of reasons for the limited success of pressures for union among the Orthodox frontiersmen in both the Venetian territories and in the Habsburg lands, especially the influence of the Peć Patriarchate over the Orthodox clergy, and the model of union with (or more

¹⁶ K. Draganović, *Massenübertritte von Katholiken zur 'Orthodoxie' im kroatischen Sprachgebiet zur Zeit der Türkenherrschaft*, Rome 1937; Pavao Živković, *Ernička i vjenska povijest Bosne, Slavonije i Srijema do konca XVII. stoljeća*, Sarajevo 1996; S. Džaja, *Konfessionalnost i nacionalnost Bosne i Hercegovine*, Sarajevo 1992.

accurately, submission to) Rome advanced by the Catholic bishops.¹⁷ The 'Vlach' bishops in the Habsburg territories (with their seat in Marča) had to profess union to be confirmed in their position as suffragans of the Bishop of Zagreb – but they also had a powerful incentive to retain links with the Patriarchate of Peć, not least to retain the support of a flock at odds with Catholic landlords.¹⁸ The 'great migration' to the Habsburg lands from Ottoman territory in 1690 and the privileges granted to Patriarch Arsenije Crnojević by Leopold I put the position of the Orthodox frontiersmen in the Croatian Military Frontier on a new basis, and union quickly lost most of its purchase.

The Orthodox Church and an Orthodox confessional identity became increasingly important to the military colonists in the Habsburg lands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, because of the ways religious rights were so closely entwined with the defence of their privileged 'Vlach' status. But how far should the relations between the Orthodox population and their clergy, on the one hand, and the state military authorities and the Catholic bishops, on the other, be seen as a struggle for Serbian national identity and autonomy, with the Church as the representative of the Serbian nation and its interests? This was the approach of an older historiography, but has also had more recent adherents.¹⁹ It might be more accurate to see the Orthodox church as the instrument by which an ethnically more amorphous Orthodox community on the Triplex confinium came to identify itself as Serbian, a process that would increase in intensity after the recognition of the Serbian Church on Habsburg territory after 1690. The choice of emphasis is part of a larger issue in defining communities – and conflicts – on the frontier. Should they be seen as confessional, or as national? Confession became one of the key markers of modern nationhood in the region (with Catholics identified as Croats and Orthodox as Serbs); understandably, the equation between faith and nation is often also read back into the pre-modern period. As a result the three-way religious division on the frontier between Catholic, Orthodox and Muslim is often interpreted

¹⁷ Mile Bogović, *Katolička Crkva i pravoslavlje u Dalmaciji za mletačke vladavine*, Zagreb 1982; S. Džaja, *Konfessionalnost i nacionalnost Bosne i Hercegovine*, Sarajevo 1992; Dušan Kašić, *Srpska naselja i crkve u sjevernoj Hrvatskoj i Slavoniji*, Zagreb 1988; J. Uhač, Marčanska biskupija, Zagreb 1996.

¹⁸ See on this Fedor Močanin, *Vojna krajina do kantonskog uređenja 1787*, in: *Vojna knjizina*, 41–42.

¹⁹ See for example Slavko Gavrilović, *Iz istorije Srba u Hrvatskoj, Slavoniji i Ugarskoj (XV–XIX vek)*, Belgrade 1993.

(with varying degrees of anachronism, teleology and tendentiousness) as meaning Croat, Serb and Bosnian (or, more often, 'Turk'). At the same time, these identities are assumed to be – more or less inevitably – at loggerheads.

The research cited above on religious change suggests how difficult it is to apply this easy equation on the Triplex confinium, at least before the late seventeenth century, and suggests a much less stark popular understanding of differences of faith, confession and identity. So do accounts of 'heroes' on the frontier contracting ties of ritual kinship across the boundaries of faith, sending each other emblems of bravery to wear on the battlefield, or corresponding in 'our language' to mitigate frontier violence.²⁰ From this perspective, it was the centralizing state and the confessionalized church that imposed divisions between faiths, between subjects of different states, between military and civilian populations, on a much more tolerant and pluralist social reality. (And it is worth noting that models of history that stressed common 'Yugoslav' ties among the South Slavs, in opposition to the separate national historiographies, promoted such interpretations.) But conflict on the Triplex confinium was not just a matter of Habsburg, Venetian and Ottoman campaigns, nor the jurisdictional conflicts of the ecclesiastical hierarchies. On all sides of the frontier, when we look at the petty warfare that was the day-to-day reality of frontier life, what we see is 'Vlach' fighting 'Vlach'.

It is difficult to explain this complex reality solely in terms of national and confessional divisions. However, assumptions about the primacy of such identities have meant that 'the Vlach question' has regularly been phrased as: 'who are the Vlachs?' and answers have been sought in an ethno-national key. One problem is that the term was used in the sixteenth and seventeenth-century sources in a great variety of ways, depending on the context. In some cases it does appear to suggest an ethnic attribution (in cases where 'Vlach' is equated with Romanic language or origins, and is distinguished from Serb, for example; or where it is equated with Serb and is distinguished from Croat or Slavonian). In other cases it is a synonym for 'Orthodox' (but this could cut across ethnic categories). In yet others it refers to a way of life (stockherding, military service) and the privileges that accrue to this ('Vlach rights') – but this in turn could cut across both ethnic and religious divisions. So could the use of the cognate term 'Morlachi', used in sixteenth-century Venetian sources for the whole subject

population of the Ottoman hinterland.²¹ Some historians have claimed the Vlachs of the triple frontier in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as Serbs (usually equating Orthodoxy with Serbdom, and simply 'translating' the earlier usage of Vlach as Serb).²² Others, in contrast, have emphasized the evidence of Vlach Romanic origins, sometimes as a way of denying the Serbian origins of the modern Serbian population of Croatia and Bosnia; sometimes seeking an explanation for their particular way of life in their ethnic origins.²³ Both approaches tend to ignore the very varied usages of the term in the period in question, as well as evidence that suggests individuals and groups could acquire or lose a Vlach identity (especially by gaining 'Vlach rights'). The ethnic answer to the 'Vlach question' betrays an essentialist model of nationhood that projects current categories into the past. More to the point in this inquiry into the triple frontier, it does little to illuminate the problem of conflict and division among the frontier populations.

Petar Skok's linguistic study of the term 'Vlach', with its stress on the notion of 'difference' (variously articulated), offers a suggestive possibility for further research into the place of the Vlachs in the complex ethnic development of the Western Balkan populations.²⁴ But as far as the Triplex confinium goes, a rather different approach to issues of social divisions and conflicts was suggested by phrasing the problem in a different way: not 'who are the Vlachs?', but rather 'what were the frontiersmen?' This was the title of a 1952 article polemicizing over a characterization of frontier revolts in Croatia as 'peasant uprisings'.²⁵ This discussion typified a move away from both a national approach and an 'imperial' military-history perspective on the triple frontier to one that focused instead on socio-economic analysis, in line with Yugoslav Marxist historiography. 'Vlach rights' rather than Vlach origins were at the centre of this line of research.²⁶ (One suggestion that eventually emerged was that the term should be cited as 'vlach', with the lower case intended to imply a predominantly social rather

²¹ See Larry Wolff, *Venice and the Slavs: The Discovery of Dalmatia in the Age of Enlightenment*, Stanford 2001, for eighteenth-century Venetian constructions of a 'Morlach nation'.

²² Aleksa Ivčić, *Migracije Srba u Hrvatsku tokom 16., 17. i 18. stoljeća*, Subotica, 1923.

²³ E.g. Mirko Valentić, 'O etničkom korijenu hrvatskih i bosanskih Srba', in: *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 24/3, 1992, 1–21.

²⁴ 'Vlah', *Etimološki rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika*, Zagreb 1971–74.

²⁵ Branko Sučević, 'Šta su bili krajišnici?', in: *Historijski zbornik* 5, 1952, 427–52.

²⁶ Sučević's later article, 'Razvitak "vlaških prava" u Varaždinskom generalatu', in: *Historijski zbornik* 6, 1953, 33–70 was a programmatic statement for this approach, as well as a model study.

²⁰ See for example Wendy Bracewell, 'Frontier Blood-Brotherhood and the Triplex Confinium', in: Roksandić and Štefanec (eds.), *Constructing Border Societies on the Triplex Confinium*, 29–45.

than an ethnic attribution, though this was more appropriate for the period covered here than it would be in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the equation between Vlach and Serb had become much more usual.)

Subsequent studies, particularly those dealing with the economic basis of frontier life (landholding patterns; the relative importance of pastoralism, plunder, trade and agriculture; the variety of dues and services demanded of the frontiersmen) on the one hand, and frontier rebellions on the other, produced a nuanced assessment of the conflicting social and economic interests of the military colonists and their leaders (both the increasingly stratified military leadership and the Orthodox clergy); the Habsburg rulers in Vienna and Graz; the Inner Austrian estates; the Military Frontier officers; the Croatian noble land-holders and the political representatives of the Croatian estates; the peasantry and non-privileged rural population.²⁷ Studies of individual cases of frontier rebellion, in particular, made it possible to trace divisions through specific instances of conflict, illustrating the ways religious, ethnic and socio-economic antagonisms could cut across or reinforce one another in different circumstances. To take just one example, the notion of shared 'Vlach rights' could be made to transcend divisions of confession and origin. In response to a 1642 demand by the Bishop of Zagreb that Catholic settlers from Ottoman Slavonia (*predavci*) were not 'proper' Vlachs and should pay him feudal dues, he received the reply from the 'Vlach sons' of the Ivanić krajina that 'we are all brothers; they cannot live without us, nor we without them'.²⁸ In practice, most research on frontier conflict and the identities it reveals has, of necessity, paid most attention to the claims and manipulations of social elites – these are what appear in the sources. But this remark suggests the possibilities of a contrasting 'history from below', that might look more closely at the ways the frontier people defined (and manipulated claims about) their own sense of belonging. But as well as the problem of sources, a second hindrance to this has been the determinism of a socio-economic historical approach – in some ways as rigid and unhelpful as the determinism of the national approach. Even in studies of frontier revolts, individuals rarely appeared as more than the representatives of wider socio-economic interests and structural divisions. A more complete understanding of conflict and community demands an approach to history that

²⁷ Fedor Močanin, *Vojna krajina do kantonskog uredjenja 1787*, in: *Vojna krajina*, gives an excellent survey of the main issues and lines of argument from this perspective; J. Adamček, *Problem krajiških buna u historiografiji*, in: *Vojna krajina*, is a survey of the issues raised with reference to the study of frontier rebellions.

²⁸ Cited in Močanin, *Vojna krajina do kantonskog uredjenja 1787*, 37.

could bridge the gap between the various political, religious and social structures that shaped frontier life, and the ways the people of the triple frontier made their own choices, selecting the rhetoric most useful to the occasion, manipulating the rules or exploiting expectations about how they should behave – in their own interests and to their own advantage. It is only then that we will be able to understand which divisions mattered, and when.

Marxist social history may have been the official paradigm in Yugoslavia after 1945, and the goal of historiography that of 'stamping out nationalistic interpretations of the cultural achievements and legacy of the past' and producing a history that would be appropriate to socialist 'brotherhood and unity' (the task Tito put before historians in 1965). In practice, this was difficult to achieve. Just as it proved impossible to agree on a new, Marxist synthesis that would replace the separate 'bourgeois' histories of each of Yugoslavia's component nations, so too it proved difficult to produce a common approach to the Triplex confinium.²⁹ Nonetheless, new initiatives were made towards comparative study of the separate parts of the Triplex confinium in the 1980s. An initial volume drew attention, once again, to the shared features of the military and social systems on all sides of the Triplex confinium, and announced plans for large-scale collaborative projects.³⁰ But, although the published contributions did assemble in one place separate short studies devoted to the Habsburg, Venetian and Ottoman frontier systems, the inter-academy commissions and successive five-year plans for coordinated historical study of the frontier systems on the territories of Yugoslavia went the way of Yugoslavia itself.

Nevertheless, at the same time, new directions were opening up for research on the history of the Triplex confinium. A new generation of historians working on aspects of frontier history emerged in 1980s Yugoslavia, with new questions and new theoretical approaches, informed by wider historiographical horizons. The French Annales school and Central European social and demographic approaches were particularly influential in encouraging attempts at a 'new social history', especially in historiography in Croatia; these seemed to offer wider perspectives on frontier history.³¹ While increased national antagonisms found

²⁹ An early effort, *Istorija naroda Jugoslavije*, vols. 1–2, Zagreb 1953, 1960, contained sketches of frontier issues, but on a piecemeal basis, incorporated within the separate national histories, making synthesis or even comparison impossible (much like the volumes as a whole).

³⁰ Vasa Čubrilović (ed.), *Vojne knjige u jugoslovenskim zemljama u novom veku do Karlovačkog mira 1699*, Belgrade 1989, 4–7.

³¹ See his manifestos for a 'new history' of the Military Frontier from 1982 and 1985, reprinted in Drago Rokсандić, *Srpska i hrvatska povijest i nova historija*, Zagreb 1991.

their reflection in historiography from the 1980s on, this was also paralleled by a reaction against history in the service of the nation, however tentative or marginal this reaction may have seemed at times. At the same time, there was an increased interest in issues related to Triplex confinium history from scholars working outside the Yugoslav context. Here, too, the Yugoslav wars may have provided one impetus; a desire to trace contemporary conflict and violence to their (ostensible) origins. But there were also other reasons, whether the historian was working in revisionist mode, reconsidering older interpretations of the frontier in 'imperial' – Austrian, Venetian or Ottoman – history in a new light; or whether because the circumstances of the Triplex confinium offered a vantage point for looking at familiar events – and theoretical propositions – from a different perspective. A large and complex international research group under the Triplex confinium title (headed by Drago Roksandić at the University of Zagreb) has provided an umbrella for a variety of such initiatives.³² The comparative aims of the project have been addressed through conferences and publications addressing specific themes (microhistories; state and society; tolerance and intolerance); but the wider value of the project has been the way that it has brought together researchers with very different concerns and disciplinary approaches in a common dialogue.³³ The very wide range of works on aspects of triple-frontier history published in the last few years are testimony to the potential of this subject.³⁴

³² See especially Drago Roksandić, *Triplex Confinium*, for a survey of the aims of the project and a list of conferences and publications.

³³ Drago Roksandić (ed.), *Microhistory of the Triplex Confinium*, Budapest 1998; Mirela Šukan, *Kartografski izvori za povijest Triplex Confiniuma*, Zagreb 1999; Roksandić and Štefanec (eds.), *Constructing Border Societies on the Triplex Confinium*, Budapest 2000; Drago Roksandić et al. (eds.), *Triplex Confinium (1500–1800): Ekohistorija*, Split/Zagreb, 2003.

³⁴ It is perhaps invidious to single out specific works, but for studies which give a sense of the range of approaches being taken, see Nenad Močani's local study of a frontier administrative unit, *Polžega i Požeština u sklopu Osmanlijskog carstva 1537–1691*, Jastrebarsko 1997; Nataša Štefanec's study of a single man, Juraj IV Zrinski, and his wider context, *Heretik Njegova Velikostna*, Zagreb 200; Zrinka Blažević's analysis of Vitezović's ideological discourses on Croatia, *Vitezovićeva Hrvatska između stvarnosti i utopije*, Zagreb 2002. See also works such as Karl Kaser, *Freier Bauer und Soldat: Die Militarisierung der agrarischen Gesellschaft an der kroatisch-slavonischen Militärgrenze (1535–1881)*, Vienna 1997; and most recently Filippo Maria Paladini, *Un caos che spaventa: Poteri, territori e religioni di frontiera nella Dalmazia della tarda età veneta*, Venice 2002, an inspiring attempt at combining top-down and bottom-up perspectives on the eighteenth-century frontier.

The Triplex confinium has always been a neuralgic point, one where powers and concepts have clashed. Changing political circumstances and shifting disciplinary fashions have influenced its development, but in many ways, approaches to its history have been remarkably consistent. One constant has been the way that the history of the triple frontier has been most often approached from within the context of a particular state or nation. It is as though historians have preferred to stand with their backs to the tumult marking the three-way meeting point of the borders, looking into a particular state, rather than climbing up the mound to survey the territory all around. There are a number of reasons for this: the nature of the sources, collated, categorized and constituted by separate states and institutions; the questions that can most easily be asked of such material; the ways that national historiographies and national academic systems give form and legitimacy to research problems. The view from the top of the tumult is harder to achieve, but it appears that it is becoming easier and more acceptable to scale the summit.