

The Appearance of the Frontier Concept in the Iberian Peninsula: at the Crossroads of Local, National and Pontifical Strategies (11 th -13 th Centuries)

Pascal Buresi

▶ **To cite this version:**

Pascal Buresi. The Appearance of the Frontier Concept in the Iberian Peninsula: at the Crossroads of Local, National and Pontifical Strategies (11 th -13 th Centuries). Quaestiones Medii Aevi Novae, 2011, 16, pp.81-99. halshs-00804456

HAL Id: halshs-00804456
https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00804456

Submitted on 20 Oct 2016

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

The Appearance of the Frontier Concept in the Iberian Peninsula: at the Crossroads of Local, National and Pontifical Strategies (11th-13th Centuries)*

Pascal Buresi
CNRS CIHAM UMR 5648
EHESS

Pascal Buresi, « The Appearance of the Frontier Concept in the Iberian Peninsula: at the Crossroads of Local, National and Pontifical Strategies (Eleventh-Thirteenth Centuries) », *Quaestiones Medii Aevi Novae*, 16, 2011, p. 81-99

The twelfth-century Iberian Peninsula represents an excellent opportunity for studying the frontier phenomenon because of the presence of two different social and economic systems with their own specific ways of controlling people and lands. These two large ensembles were politically divided into smaller polities: a number of Christian kingdoms to the north, while in Muslim al-Andalus recurring episodes of territorial fragmentation had led to independent principalities centered on large cities. The frontier's unstable character itself led to permanent readjustments during a time of renewal for political thought in the Latin West, and the Iberian Peninsula was at the forefront in these changes. The Peninsula was a place of social and institutional innovations that answered the numerous problems arising from a context of fervent competition between Christian polities, almost permanent conflict (except during truces) with al-Andalus, demographic growth and efforts to colonize new lands. The Iberian Christian kingdoms in general and those along the frontier in particular were privileged destinations for many clerics and peasant farmers from France. This demographic growth led to a densification of existing settlements through urban growth or rural colonization, as well as the conquest of new territories at the expense of neighbors both Muslim and Christian.

A number of major events concerning the frontier occurred between the end of the 11th and middle of the 13th centuries. The emergence in sources, chronicles or official acts of the Latin neologism *frontera* coincided with the emergence or disappearance of kingdoms or polities. It was also at this time that the Iberian Peninsula's political and administrative configuration enduringly set, almost to the present day, though not without resistance. New players emerged linked to the specific needs of the frontier, replacing traditional actors. This article will attempt to show how the actions of these various protagonists led to a growing definition of frontiers in the Iberian Peninsula during this period.

* This article summarizes in part my doctoral dissertation published in 2004: P. Buresi, *Une frontière entre chrétienté et Islam: la péninsule Ibérique (XIe-XIIIe siècle)*, Paris, 366 pp. English translation by T. Bruce, grant number CNRS, ERC StG 263361.

The emergence of the neologism frontera[1]

Philippe Sénac studied this question a number of years ago for Aragon, where the term appears for the first time in 1059, while I examined its appearance in Castile in a previous article[2]. I will thus here only briefly outline the characteristics of the term's appearance in period documents. The term is thus documented in Aragon as early as 1059 in the testament of King Ramirez I[3]. The term appears three more times over the next few years, always concerning the frontier with Islam. Sénac argues on the one hand that this new expression did not necessarily designate a linear frontier, and on the other that geography could have played a role in the term's appearance, this since around 1060 "the territorial limits of Aragonese lands now coincided with the ridges of a chain of mountains reaching more than 2,000 meters and it is probable that this concordance played a decisive role in the emergence of this term"[4]. There was thus a certain linearity, though perhaps momentary, of the frontier that favored the term's appearance. In the rest of the Peninsula, the term appears much later. Other terms were used, such as *fines*, *extremum*, *extremitas*, *confines*, which more often designate more a territory than its limits, with the exception of *limites*[5]. Most of the time, however, recurring expressions evoke the juxtaposition of Muslim and Christian spaces: *tam in partibus Christianorum quam Sarracenorum*[6], *contra partes Maurorum*[7], *ex parte Maurorum*[8],

[1] The bibliography on the theme of *frontera* is long. Besides P. Gautier Dalché, *De la liste à la carte*, in: *Castrum IV, Frontière et peuplement dans le monde méditerranéen au Moyen Âge*, Rome-Madrid 1992, readers may also consult M. Zimmermann, *Le concept de Marca Hispanica et l'importance de la frontière dans la formation de la Catalogne*, Publications de la Casa de Velázquez, Série Archéologie, XV, Madrid 1991, pp. 29-49 and idem, *Le rôle de la frontière dans la formation de la Catalogne (IX^e^-XII^e^ siècles)*, in: *Las sociedades de frontera en la España medieval, Aragón en la Edad Media*, Zaragoza 1993, pp. 7-29 or E. Mitre Fernández, *Cristiandad medieval y formulaciones fronterizas*, in: *Fronteras y fronterizos en la Historia*, Valladolid 1997, pp. 9-62. In 1940, Victor R.B. Oelschaläger dated the appearance of the term *frontera* in the chronicles of the Iberian Peninsula from 1124 (idem, *A Medieval Spanish Word-List. A Preliminary Dated Vocabulary of First Appearances up to Berceo*, *s.v. frontera*, Madison 1940).

[2] P. Sénac, *Frontière et reconquête dans l'Aragon du XI^e^ siècle*, in: *Frontières et espaces pyrénéen au Moyen Âge*, ed. by idem, Perpignan 1992, pp. 47-60; P. Buresi, *Nommer, penser la frontière en Espagne aux XI^e^-XIII^e^ siècles*, in: *Identités et représentations de la frontière en Espagne (XI^E^-XIV^E^ siècle)*, ed. by C. de Ayala, P. Buresi, P. Josserand, Madrid 2001, pp. 51-74.

[3] A. Ubieto Arteta, *Cartulario de San* Juan *de la Peña*, II, Valencia 1963, doc. 150, p. 178: *et ad castros de fronteras de mauros que sunt pro facere* and doc. 159: *in castellos de fronteras de mauros que sunt per fare unde prodesit de Christianis totum*.

[4] P. Sénac, op.cit., pp. 47-60, espec. pp. 48-50.

[5] *In infra limites regni*: treaty of Medina de Rioseco (21 III 1181): J. González, *El reino de Castilla en la época de Alfonso VIII*, I-III, Madrid 1960 (hencreaforth: González, Alfonso VIII)], II, doc. 362, pp. 614-623, and idem, *Regesta de Ferdinand II*, Madrid 1943 (henceforth: González, Ferdinand II), doc. 40, pp. 299-304.

[6] Archivo Histórico Nacional (Madrid), Órdenes militares, Calatrava, carpeta 417, no 13, avril 1155.

[7] This expression appears on January 30, 1142 in a donation by Alfonso VII to the Church of Toledo: J.A. García Luján, *Privilegios Reales de la Catedral de Toledo (1086-1462)*, II, Toledo 1982, no 14, pp. 48-51.

[8] Donation by Alfonso VII of the *villa*, castle, territory and inhabitants of Aragosa to the Church of Sigüenza in 1143: A. Pareja Serrada, *Diplomática Arriacense*, Guadalajara 1921, p. 67. There is not always the idea of opposition between Muslim and Christian territories as in the examples cited; sometimes an equivalence is presented, as in: Archivo Histórico Nacional (Madrid), Órdenes militares, Uclés, carpeta 217, no 1 (privilege of Alfonso VII from 1142), carpeta 368, no 1 (idem, 1151), no 2 (idem, 1153) and codex 1349, folio 26 (29 IX 1152): *pro bono et fideli seruitio quod mihi semper fecistis et facitis tam in terra Sarracenorum quam in terra Christianorum*.

terminos contra Sarracenos[9]. The frontier was born in fact from this juxtaposition: *hos inquam terminus / et ultra terminus*[10].

Definite use of the term *frontera* did not spread throughout the Peninsula until the beginning of the 13th century[11]. Indeed, for a number of years it did not appear in the documents of the Christian kingdoms, with the notable exception of Aragon which was in continuous relation, more or less conflictual, with the *taifa*[12] of Zaragoza[13], then with the Almoravids and Almohads. The term next appears in 1171 in a donation by Fernando II to the Order of Santiago[14], in 1181, in the expression *habitatores villarum et oppidorum de frontaria*, used by the Pope Lucius III, and in 1181 in Castile by King Alfonso VIII[15]. The frontiers thus designated are those of kingdoms, and the expressions *ad defensionem et utilitatem regni mei* […] *in Sarracenorum frontaria*, or *in frontaria regnorum*, even *ad defensionem frontarie regni mei adversus mauros* multiply over the course of the 13th century[16]. They designate a space of a certain depth settled by *gentes de frontaria*, from whence it is possible to attack regions under Muslim control, but which are also vulnerable to attacks by troops from those same regions.

There are thus numerous differences for how the term *frontera* appears between Aragon and Castile-Leon. Later in the central region of the Iberian Peninsula, the neologism concerns military orders and contacts between their properties and Islam. The borders between the numerous different military Order lordships are never called *frontera*, only those in contact with al-Andalus. It is true that the military Orders, especially in Castile, had for their purpose

---

[9] Donation from November 23, 1167 in Benavento by Ferdinand II of the *villa* of Alcántara to Armengol VII of Urgel: J.L.M. Rodríguez, *Orígenes de la Orden Militar de Santiago (1170-1195)*, Barcelona 1974, doc. 36, pp. 208-209.

[10] Alfonso VIII allotting territories in Calatrava: González, Alfonso VIII, II, doc. 534 (22 IX 1189, Toledo), pp. 915-917. The term *Hispania* is sometimes used for al-Andalus, in opposition to the *fines Christianitatis*.

[11] The etymology of *frontier* refers to the idea of "facing" or "facing off". The Castilian version of Alfonso VIII's donation of the castle of Consuegra to the Hospitaller Order in 1183 (González, Alfonso VIII, II, doc. 409 [6 VIII 1183, Palencia], pp. 709-710) thus translates the term *fronteria* in the original Latin with *a la frente de los moros*: C. de Ayala Martínez, *Libro de privilegios de la Orden de San Juan de Jerusalén en Castilla y León (siglos XII-XV)*, Madrid 1995, no 144, pp. 322-324: *Dono itaque vobis et concedo castellum quod dicitur Consogra, in fronteria maurorum prope Toletum situm* [...].

[12] From the Arabic *tâ'ifa*, "party, faction". These independent principalities appeared in al-Andalus after the caliphal crisis at the beginning of the 11th century, once again in the middle of the 12th century during the collapse of the Almoravids and before the arrival of the Almohads, and finally in the 13th century beginning in 1228, when the last Almohad caliph to reign over al-Andalus, al-Ma'mûn, left the Iberian Peninsula for Marrakesh.

[13] The term reappears in the Ebro Valley over the course of the 12th century: J.M. Lacarra, *Documentos para el estudio de la Reconquista y repoblación del valle del Duero*, I, Zaragoza 1982, no 22, pp. 36-37, and no 103 (dated from 1124), pp. 115-116, cited by P. Sénac, op.cit., p. 50. The term refers here to a previous period, *quanto ibi tenebamus frontera* ou *quando ibi tenebamus fronteram*, and thus seems to refer to the period when the term first appeared.

[14] We should note how early these appearances are in regards to the explosion of donations *in frontaria Sarracenorum* over the course of the 1220s. The 1171 donation came at a time when the alliance between Leon and the Almohads was on its last legs, and was one of the first monarchical donations to the military Order of Santiago, only recently constituted along the frontier with Islam.

[15] For example in the donation of the castle of Almofrag, *quod est in ripa Tagi in frontera Sarracenorum*: J.L.M. Rodríguez, *Derechos eclesiásticos de la Orden de Santiago y distribución de los beneficios económicos (1170-1224)*, „Anuario de Estudios Medievales" XI (1981), pp. 247-275, espec. no 1 (23 X 1181), pp. 260-261 and C. de Ayala Martínez, *Libro de privilegios...*, no 144, pp. 322-324. The donation of the castle of Monfragüe to the recently created Order of Santiago, coinciding with the broken truce with the Almohads, confirms the frontier and anti-Muslim vocation of the military orders. The 1181 bull recalls a quarrel between Santiago and the bishopric over the collection of taxes. Lucius III enjoins the Spanish bishops and the archbishop of Toledo to respect the Order's privileges in regards to exemptions and immunities for churches built by the Order in unpopulated areas. The 1183 donation resembles the first in its structure, since it documents the donation of the castle of Consuegra to the Hospitaller Order north of Campo de Calatrava.

[16] Diverse examples in: González, Alfonso VIII, III, doc. 1009 (8 I 1217, Maqueda), pp. 736-738; J. González, *Alfonso IX*, I-II, Madrid 1944, II, no 354 (25 I 1218, Ponferrada, León), pp. 463-464 and no 350 (26 XI 1217), pp. 458-459.

the defense of the kingdom's borders. The contrast between the term's use in monarchical or pontifical chancelleries and its total absence from private documents of the military orders speaks to the strong ties between monarchical territorial definitions and occurrences of the word *frontera*. Private acts, hundreds of them in the Spanish national archives, from the military Orders of Calatrava and Santiago, often document the limits of property in donations, sales, exchanges, dispute settlements between the Orders or with private persons or lordships, but never use the term *frontera*.

The political reconfiguration of the Iberian Peninsula in the 12th century and changes in influential players

The seigniorial system in the Latin West framed how frontier lands were managed. Nevertheless, two principal types of protagonists are notable: the traditional actors of medieval society, the nobility and the Church, and specifically borderland actors, the *concejos* of the frontier and the military orders. Power over borderlands was not equally divided between these different lords, neither geographically nor chronologically.

Traditional actors: The Church and nobility

The great nobility received numerous properties from lands recently conquered by Alfonso VI and Alfonso VII until the middle of the 12th century, but their role diminished with the Iberian arrival of the Almohads in 1147. On the other hand, the Church maintained its importance throughout the period in question. For Castile-Leon, the archbishopric of Toledo's political, religious and ideological role was fundamental in the development of the Gothic myth of the *Reconquista*, but frontier sees such as Cuenca were likewise important[17]. Spanish bishops and archbishops intervened through the collection of tithes, the Church's monopoly of which was strongly contested by the other lords, in the ecclesiastical organization of territories – with the recurring question of Toledo's primacy and the redrawing of Iberian dioceses, no longer in east to west bands as in Roman times, but longitudinally to follow the Christian expansion into al-Andalus – and also military activities, since clerics, despite the Peace of God and Truce of God movements, often took up arms against the "infidels".

Specifically frontier players: the townsmen, or *concejos*, and military orders

Though townsmen were certainly present in other regions of the Peninsula, and, in a different form, through the Latin West, the *concejos* of Transierra or the Douro valley received municipal charters, *fueros*, that gave them exceptional rights and privileges specifically tied to their place on the frontier, especially when compared with settlement and privilege charters issued elsewhere in the medieval West. The frontier townsmen's exceptional nature can be seen first of all in military activities, with the establishment for a time of a "popular" cavalry, and the organization of annual incursions into al-Andalus. Their rights were specifically adapted to the precarious conditions of the frontier, while legal and institutional innovations led to their presence there. Finally, a desire to survival united the inhabitants of the *concejo*, independent of other imperatives (political or religious). The

[17] P. Linehan, *The History and the Historians of Medieval Spain*, Oxford 1993.

frontier *concejos* were an original institution with a fundamental role in the birth of the Castile-Leon state, alongside the Church and military orders. The *concejo* model of development, however, was not adopted south of the Tagus River, reflecting changes after the 12th century, when the possibilities for urban creations were limited by the intensity of confrontations and rougher geographic conditions between the Tagus and Sierra Morena. This explains why the Castile-Leon monarchs called on other forces to guard the borders of their kingdom.

The military Orders, along with the frontier *concejos*, constitute the other major type of specifically frontier protagonists. The first examples are the Templar and Hospital of Saint John Orders. While the Templars accepted to combat the Andalusi Muslims towards 1140 in exchange for a series of castles and a share of future conquests, the Knights Hospitaller gained only minor concessions. These "international" orders thus settled in the Peninsula before involving themselves in the conquest, which explains in large part the creation of "territorial" military orders, destined to combat within the Peninsula and not the Holy Land[18]. Indeed, the Knights Templar and Hospitaller used the Iberian Peninsula as a recruiting and financing base for operations in Palestine. It is for this reason that the Hispanic orders were created to explicitly fight against the Muslims and to defend the frontiers. This includes the orders of Calatrava, founded in 1158 by the king of Castile, of Santiago, recognized in 1170 by the king of Leon, and those of Alcántara and Avis.

The monarchical recomposition: birth and disappearance of Iberian kingdoms

Contrary to what happened in the 10th century in the Latin West, with the privatization of kingly rights (*ost*, money, taxes, justice) and the fragmentation of the royal domain to the benefit of territorial princes, the colonial powers that emerged in the Iberian Peninsula beginning in the 11th century remained largely under the sovereigns. Those rulers delegated to the frontier seigneuries (individual or collective) only the right to build castles in the frontier regions and to conduct the *ost* against Muslim territories, while reserving for themselves the rights to mint coins and conduct justice. The 11th to 13th centuries were thus not a context of weakening monarchical power in Christian Iberia, but saw growing control for the rulers over men and lands with an internal competition that led during the 12th century to the instability of existing borders. The county of Portugal thus became a new kingdom after the battle of Ourique in 1139, while the small kingdom of Navarra, far to the North and far from the Islamic frontier, was barely surviving, despite the extraordinary riches it gained from its place along the Compostela pilgrimage route. Those riches, in fact, drew the envy of Navarra's Castilian and Aragonese neighbors, as well as their recurring intervention, so that the small kingdom disappeared a number of times and was only able to survive through a lasting alliance with the Muslim rulers of al-Andalus. The shared frontier with the Muslim polities was thus at this time an asset for the monarchical powers in their effort to control their territories and subjects, and, inversely, the absence of a common border with al-Andalus was a handicap for the small kingdom of Navarra, despite its extreme wealth.

[18] I am using here Carlos de Ayala's distinction between the orders of Santiago, Calatrava and Alcántara, which he qualifies as "territorial" in opposition to the Templars and Hospitallers, defined as "universal" and to later orders designated as "national": C. de Ayala, *Las Órdenes militares en la Edad Media*, Madrid 1998, pp. 8-16.

The comparison of Arabic and Latin terminologies reveals the need for the West to create a new concept, *frontera*, and thus a modification of representations of self and the Other which accompanied the evolution of the term *Christianitas*. Heretofore, *Christianitas* had designated the Christian people. However, the notion was progressively territorialized to take on the sense of Christendom and designated those territories given by God to His people. This evolution took place in the social and ideological laboratory of the Iberian Peninsula, and was tied to the converging interests of the different protagonists of Mediterranean history.

The Pope

The Pope had an indirect role in the Christian Iberian kingdoms. Since his spiritual authority extended over the territories held by Christians, his frontiers were those of Christendom, to be extended at the expense of the Infidels. Within Christendom, not only did he recognize the monarchical authorities who accepted his spiritual authority, but he was also the guarantor of internal borders, for which he sought to promote Christian peace. This led him in 1211 to obtain the participation of Navarra in the preparations for the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa against the Almohads. That battle, which took place in 1212, saw the alliance of three kings (Castile, Aragon, Navarra) that had heretofore opposed each other. The Pope obtained Navarra's participation by guaranteeing its neighbors and competitors, Castile and Aragon, would thereafter respect its borders. He conceded legitimacy to those powers who respected these rules and condemned or excommunicated those who resisted, such as the king of Leon, allied to the Almohads since the 1170s.

In addition, the Pope supported international institutions, such as the military or monastic Orders, that contributed to emergence of the territorial idea of *Christianitas* by developing solidarities that transcended the borders of Christian kingdoms. The at least spiritual support offered to these military Orders, presented in pontifical documents, tended to make these institutions an instrument in the hands of the Popes. Though in the end this attempt failed, it still spread a unifying discourse within the Christian monarchies in regards to the alterity of Islam. The presence of papal delegates, the nomination of legates *a latere*, and the dispatch of recommending or condemning letters participated in this will to interfere in peninsular affairs. The pontificate of Honorius III stands out in this process[19]. Innocent III's confirmation of the treaty of 1216 between the kings of Castile and Leon, even though the nobles of the two kingdoms had stood as guarantors, is another example of the Pope's means of intervention[20].

The Pope thus imposed himself as mediator and guarantor between the Peninsula's Christian powers. He progressively became a protagonist in his own right, as shown by a letter from June 1250 in which the Almohad caliph, al-Murtaḍá addressed Pope Innocent IV as "ruler of the kings of Christendom, respected by the nobles of the *rūmiyya*[21] community,

[19] D. Mansilla, *La documentación pontificia hasta Honorius III (965-1216)*, Madrid-Rome 1955 (henceforth: Mansilla, Honorio III). The following documents refer to his interventions in the Peninsula: no 155 (31 I 1218, Lateran), p. 124; no 39 (27 II 1217, Lateran), p. 34; no 32 (10 II 1217, Lateran), pp. 27-28; no 15 (23 XI 1216, Saint Peters of Rome), p. 12; no 155 (31 I 1218, Lateran), p. 124; no 419 (22 XI 1222, Lateran), pp. 309-310; *Bullarium Ordinis militiae de Calatrava*, Barcelona 1981, script. 14, p. 57, publ. in: Mansilla, Honorio III, no 338, pp. 250-251.

[20] González, Alfonso VIII, III, doc. 1005-1006 (12 VIII 1216, Toro), pp. 730-733, confirmed at Lateran November 10th by Honorius III (publ. Mansilla, Honorio III, no 15 [23 XI 1216], p. 12).

[21] This term is preferable to "Roman" used by Tisserant and Wiet in their translation, since the *bilâd al-Rûm* originally designated Byzantium, then extensively the countries of Europe peopled by Christians.

head of Christian doctrine, the religious direction of which he has inherited, Pope Innocent"[22]. It is difficult to measure the influence of pontifical interventions on the constitution of an image of the Other, and thus the representation of the separating frontier. We can only note that the entire pontifical epistolary production insists on the community of the faithful[23] and the Otherness of the *Sarracenorum*[24]. We can measure the influence of pontifical orders on political decisions in the Peninsula at one specific moment. Honorius III's bull of November 4 1220 was addressed to all the Christian Hispanic kings so that they would employ coreligionists, and not Jews, as ambassadors to "Miramamolin", the Prince of the Believers (*amīr al-mu'minīn*)[25]. Honorius III's advice stemmed from the principal that a Christian was less apt to betray than a Jew and seems to come from a desire to impose religious cohesion, the strongest possible, on the Peninsular monarchies, at least among the ruling classes[26]. Nevertheless, the North African chronicler Ibn 'Idhârî writes that in 1221-1222, when the truce signed in 1215-1216 between Castile and the Almohads was renewed, the ambassador sent by the Castilian king Ferdinand III was Jewish. Thus, a year after the pontifical letter, the ruler of Castile had kept the same ambassador and afforded him the same confidence[27]. We should note though that the papal letter contained no menace of excommunication in case of non-obedience.

The monarchs of the Iberian Peninsula

The expansion of territorial control by the Christian polities of the North and the process of "political differentiation" of the five kingdoms (Aragon, Castile, Leon, Navarra, Portugal) over the course of the 12th century posed the crucial problem of delimitating "internal" borders. The failure of the eleventh-century Leonese imperial dream for unity is richly informative for this subject[28]. It established first of all the strength and identity of each of the peninsular kingdoms, especially Portugal. Secondly, Alfonso VI was able to claim an empire including not only Christian territories (counties or kingdoms), but also Muslim polities (through *parias*). Certain Arabic sources even call him *Imbiratûr dhû-l-millatayn*, "Emperor of the two religions"[29]. This would have been inconceivable for the 13th century, and Alfonso X turned towards the Germanic Holy Roman Empire for inspiration[30]. This

[22] E. Tisserant et G. Wiet, *Une lettre de l'almohade Murtadâ au pape Innocent IV*, „Hespéris" VI (1926) 1, pp. 27-53.

[23] Paul Rousset notes the term *Christianitas* was frequently used in the chronicles of the First Crusade, while it is practically absent from other contemporary sources: idem, *La notion de Chrétienté aux XIe et XIIe siècles*, "Le Moyen Âge" LXIX (1963), pp. 191-203 and R. Folz, *L'idée d'Empire en Occident du Ve au XIVe siècle*, Paris 1953.

[24] For example, in a bull by Celestin II from October 31, 1196, the Pope recalls what a Christian king should do: *Christianis quibus viriliter suum prestare debuerat auxilium et favorem*, in opposition to the actual actions of the excommunicated Leonese king and his alliance with the Muslims: *multipliciter infert molestiam et gravamen*...

[25] Mansilla, Honorio III, no 333 (Lateran), pp. 246-247.

[26] This measure coincides with decisions taken at the Fourth Lateran Council concerning Jewish and Muslim minorities, in particular those living near the frontier. Decisive measures were taken under the pontificate of Innocent III, 1198-1216, according to J.M. Powell, *The Papacy and the Muslim Frontier*, in: *Muslims under latin rule 1100-1300*, ed. by J.M. Powell, Princeton 1990, pp. 175-203, p. 192.

[27] Peter Linehan defends the same thesis in his *History and the Historians of Medieval Spain*, Oxford 1993, that pontifical influence was weak over the Peninsular Church, which was more loyal to the monarch to which it was attached than to Rome. This thesis is also developed in his *The synod of Segovia (1166)*, „Bulletin of Medieval Canon Law", New Series, X (1980), pp. 31-40, and in: *The Spanish Church and the Papacy in the Thirteenth Century*, Cambridge 1971, pp. 1-5.

[28] On the concept of *Hispania* and the stages in the development of the imperial ideal in the medieval Iberian Peninsula see J.A. Maravall Casesnoves, *El concepto de España en la Edad Media*, Madrid 1997[4], pp. 437-462 and R. Menéndez Pidal, *El Imperio hispánico y los cinco reinos*, Madrid 1950, cap. 8.

[29] M. Benaboud, A. MacKay, *Yet again Alfonso VI, 'the Emperor Lord of (the Adherents of) the Two Faiths, the Most Excellent Rule': A rejoinder to Norman Roth*, „Bulletin of Hispanic Studies" LXI (1984), pp. 171-181.

[30] Even though his claims remain more intra-peninsular than really Germanic, as shown by C. de Ayala, *Directrices fundamentals de la política peninsular de Alfonso X*, Madrid 1986, p. 156.

failure consecrates and confirms the appearance of frontiers within Hispanic Christendom. The rulers of these emerging kingdoms likewise sought to expand their borders at the expense of their weaker neighbors (especially through matrimonial alliances). During periods of weakness in al-Andalus, they spread to the south. The 1157 Treaty of Sahagún between Castile and Leon is emblematic of later treaties of the same type, such as the Treaty of Tordesillas signed in 1494 between Spain and Portugal dividing lands to be discovered in the Atlantic Ocean. These treaties fixed borders between kingdoms, established them lastingly and guaranteed them in exchange for an agreement on the division of future riches from al-Andalus. The direct consequence of these treaties was a competition for the conquest of Muslim territories and the emergence of the southern borders of Portugal, Leon, Castile, and Aragon. For kingdoms without an "extensible" border, with no opening onto al-Andalus, like Navarre, the adopted solution was a rear alliance with the Almohads, then, thanks to pontifical mediation, the obtaining of strongholds and fortified relays in Aragon in exchange for the stability of its borders and an option on future gains from al-Andalus through booty. The last element in the monarchs' strategy to secure and so stabilize their borders resides in the distribution of frontier lands to institutions that we can anachronistically call "transnational", the military orders. These institutions were generally endowed on one side and the other of the internal frontiers of Christendom (to ensure non-aggression).

The 1158 Treaty of Sahagún between Sancho III of Castile and Ferdinand II of Leon foresaw in detail the sharing of the *terra Sarracenorum*[31], but a clause also provided that any acquisitions from Portugal would be shared equally through common accord[32]. The basis for fixing borders was thus far from being exclusively religious. In addition, in the 1177 treaty signed at the siege of Cuenca between Castile and Aragon, the two kings agreed to help each other against Christians and Saracens, except against King Ferdinand II[33]. There does seem to have been a tendency towards solidarity between the Christian kingdoms, but exceptions were numerous. Nevertheless, there does seem to be a certain evolution in the exceptional clauses. Indeed, in a peace treaty signed at the beginning of the thirteenth century between Alfonso IX of Leon and Ferdinand III, a clause stipulated that, concerning the *mauros*, the help agreed on against *omnes hominess de mundo* would be subordinated to the expiration of truces Castile might have had with them. At the end of the foreseen period, Castile could help, as provided, Leon against the lands of Islam. The clause concerning previously signed agreements with Islam was frequent in these alliances, but in the present example it was stipulated, and this is the innovation, that those *homines regis Castelle* who so wished, despite the truce, to aid the king of Leon, could do so provided they sought their king's approval[34]. The idea of transversal solidarities between the Christian kingdoms thus emerged in parallel with the political reinforcement of the Christian monarchical borders and the entrenchment of territorial frontiers.

The military orders

The military orders, as professionals of war, sought revenue through a variety of means. Some, like the Order of Santiago, specialized in the redemption of captives, while others were granted lands in the hinterland of the kingdoms, far from Muslim incursions, where they collected seigniorial dues common in the Christian West. On the other hand, Orders could likewise seek to generate revenue through booty and domains acquired at the expense of the Muslims. It is difficult to know if at first the Order of Santiago was not established by Leon to

[31] On the divisional treaties prior to conquest, in particular the treaties of Tudellén, Cazola, and Almizra, see P. Guichard, *Avant Tordesillas: la délimitation des terres de reconquête dans l'Espagne des XII^e et XIII^e siècles*, in: M. Balard, A. Ducellier, *Le partage du monde. Échanges et colonisation dans la Méditerranée médiévale*, Paris 1998, pp. 453-460.

[32] González, Alfonso VIII, II, doc. 44 (23 V 1158, Sahagún), pp. 79-82.

[33] Ibidem, doc. 288, pp. 473-474.

[34] J. González, *Alfonso IX*, II, no 352, pp. 460-462.

protect its borders with the Christian kingdoms of Portugal and Castile[35]. What is sure, though, is that the struggle along the Muslim frontier quickly became the principal vocation for these institutions. Endowed with frontier territories in the different kingdoms, they were the guarantors of the borders between the Christian kingdoms and participated in the emergence of the notion of Christendom and the fixation of borders between kingdoms. The fact that these institutions had interests spread throughout the different Christian kingdoms ranked them among the first to become the guarantors of the borders between them[36]. This was the case in 1181, for example, with the treaty of Medina de Rioseco between Ferdinand II of Leon and Alfonso VIII of Castile. A number of frontier castles thus fell to the head of the Order of Santiago, Pedro Fernández, and the prior of the Knights Hospitaller, Pedro de Areis, *pro tenenda et obseruanda pace inter nos et filios nostros et filias in perpetuum*[37].

The townsmen

Unlike the deterritorialized military orders, the townsmen had a base around which their municipal territory was organized. Jurisdictional disputes were numerous between townsmen and neighboring lords for the collection of dues. As long as they bordered al-Andalus, these townsmen kept mobile borders to the south. But with the conquest of Toledo in 1085, al-Andalus became simply a source of booty, whence the frequent incursions they carried out, of which some ended very badly. At the same time, these *concejos*, such as Ávila, Segovia, Salamanca, Coria, Talavera etc., intensified the territorial control of their *alfoz*, an Arabic term (*al-hawzh*), with the installation of villages, the *aldeas* (from the Arabic *al-day'a*) that led to the lasting entrenchment of their municipal borders.

These municipal institutions initially developed over the course of the 11th century in demographically depressed regions that were gradually settled by groups from the North, during a time of peace tied to the political crisis in al-Andalus – this was the time of the *taifas* (1031-1090), when the Cordovan Umayyad Caliphate fragmented into autonomous and rival polities. The local rights that developed thanks to monarchical action in the form of *fueros* spread, contributing to the diffusion throughout the kingdom of written laws that could be granted or confirmed by any lord, secular or ecclesiastical, be they bishop, abbey, king or count. Specialists do not agree on the origin of the *fueros*. Some historians insist on a royal origin for the *fueros*, others on a more regional origin for the municipal laws in the twelfth-century Iberian kingdoms of Castile, Aragon, Leon, and Portugal[38]. The important distinction between the two means that either monarchical space was undergoing a process of undeniably centralizing organization, or it was an autonomous process of development in the context of permanent danger resulting from the presence of Muslim armies. These *fueros* simply confirmed an existing ensemble of practices and customs, making clear reference to the character of the inhabitants already in place and establishing contractual norms between them and the king. These charters thus did not create townsmen, but they did codify the link they maintained with the king. There in fact seems to have been a conjunction between the two

---

[35] J.L.M. Rodríguez, *Orígenes de la Orden militar de Santiago (1170-1195*), Barcelona 1974, pp. 7-10 and A. Forey, *The Military Orders from the Twelfth to the Early Fourteenth Centuries*, London 1992, p. 29. We should note, however, that the 1171 charter granted by Ferdinand II, though it does not completely contradict the thesis of these authors, does explicitly tie one of these very first donations to the Order of Santiago to the *frontera Sarracenorum*.

[36] The transversal character of the military Orders appears in the fact that there was not a perfect coincidence between their internal hierarchical organization and the political divisions of the Peninsula. García Larragueta notes that from the second half of the 12th century and until the 13th, there was a "castellan de Amposta" with jurisdiction in Catalonia, a "prior" of the Navarra-Aragonese territories and another "prior" with jurisdiction in Castile, Leon, and Portugal: S. García Larragueta, *La Orden de San Juan en la crisis del imperio hispánico*, "Hispania" XII (1952) 49, pp. 483-524.

[37] González, Alfonso VIII, II, doc. 362, pp. 614-623, and González, Ferdinand II, doc. 40 (21 III 1181), pp. 299-304.

[38] J.F. Powers, *The Creative Interaction between Portuguese and Leonese Municipal Military Law, 1055 to 1279*, "Speculum" LXII (1987) 1, pp. 53-80.

phenomena, a conjunction that would explain the success of the development of the *fueros* and *concejos*[39].

The Church

Ecclesiastical structures in the lives of frontier townsmen complicate any interpretation we might have of the *fueros*. After an 11th century in which Christian expansion was marked by the phenomenon of municipal freedoms, the second quarter of the 12th century, beginning with the personal reign of Alfonso VII (1127-1157), inaugurated a process of progressive limitation of freedoms granted, of reaffirmation for monarchical power, and, simultaneously, a reinforcement of the cohesion and dynamism for the *concejos*. Indeed, on townsmen's territories institutions with privileges, exemptions and diverse rights developed. These institutions directly rivaled the municipal monopoly. The arrival of new dioceses, for example, of a foreign frontier clergy composed essentially of Francs, and the collection of tithes in the *alfoz* (municipal territory) churches all reduced the margin of autonomy for the urban knights.

In fact, after an initial resistance, the reinforcement of the Episcopal figure and the guarantee of his autonomy by election by the cathedral college accompanied the autonomy of the knights developed by the *concejiles* communities and gave him even more importance[40]. The territorial structures that developed in this way were very coherent, and ecclesiastical and military hierarchies united in defending them against the expansionist tendencies of other *concejos*, secular lordships and ecclesiastical neighbors.

These hierarchies which were parallel and interdependent, secular and ecclesiastical, found in the institution of the annual raids against Muslim al-Andalus the foundations of their functional, economic and social distinction. In conjunction, we should note the increasingly important role played by the ecclesiastical authorities in the preparation of expeditions and ceremonies celebrating the victorious return of troops, including the *Te Deum* and diverse processions symbolically bringing together the battlefield and praises for the Lord, warriors and clerics, booty and the glory of God.

Clearly establishing episcopal limits was thus very important at this time. Rivalries between neighboring dioceses for the definition of respective limits expressed themselves through disputes over collecting tithes. Thus, at the same time new territories were being conquered from Islam, an ensemble of maneuverings sought to assure the financial independence and wealth of the new "restored" centers. The different strategies advanced sought to recall the dioceses during late antiquity. In fact, the liberties taken in regards to those ancient lines was such that the claims made led less to a real "restoration" of the classical dioceses, some of which disappeared or were replaced by others, than to the emergence of what Peter Linehan has called the "Gothic myth", and more generally the ideology of the *Reconquista*, the "legitimate" recuperation of territories temporarily and brutally captured by the Muslim infidels. The archbishop of Toledo, aspiring to the leadership of the peninsular bishops because of his primatial title, was one of the principal beneficiaries of this strategy for restoring the Visigothic-era episcopal structures.

---

[39] On the localism of juridical norms, which do not really pertain to our study, see J.F. Powers, *Frontier Competition and Legal Creativity: A Castilian-Aragonese Case. Study Based on Twelfth-Century Municipal Military Law*, „Speculum" LII (1977), pp. 465-487. Powers demonstrates that the regulation of military service in the charts of Castile and Aragon in the 12th century were similar, despite the political frontier between the two states. In addition, the same *fuero* could be granted to more than one locality. On May 25 1222, for example, Ferdinand III granted Madrid the *fuero* he had granted that same month to Uceda, Ávila, and Peñafiel for services the *concejo* had rendered his grandfather, Alfonso, his great-uncle (*auunculo*), Henry, and himself: J. González, *Reinado y diplomas de Fernando III*, II, Cordova 1980, no 169, pp. 207-208.

[40] L.M. Villar García, *La Extremadura castellanoleonesa. Guerreros, clérigos y campesinos (7111252)*, Valladolid 1986, p. 187.

The Resistance of the Nobles

Lastly, we should note certain specific forms of independence that emerged in the border regions. This was essentially a Christian phenomenon, the product of nobles in open conflict with their rulers. Examples include the Cid, at the end of the 11th century in Valencia, on the border between Castile and Aragon, or, in the second half of the 12th century, Giraldo Sempavor, the "Portuguese Cid", between Leon and Portugal, Pedro Fernández de Castro, between Leon and Castile, or the Azagra Navarrese family who founded an independent polity between Castile and Aragon in the area around Albarracín. In fact, these nobles created, in the interstices of the expanding Christian kingdoms, on the frontiers separating kingdoms competing for the Muslim territories of al-Andalus, independent territories, even if it meant allying with Muslim rulers to maintain their independence against the growing monarchical power of the Iberian kingdoms[41].

Conclusion

The Iberian Christian communities developed empirically adapted and efficient responses, military, demographic or ideological, to the specific problems presented by the frontier. The military orders are a good example of the transversal solidarities that contributed to the emergence of a front against Islam. The use of existing orders (Templars and Hospitallers) and the creation of new orders, such as Calatrava, Santiago, Alcántara, etc., as guardians and spearheads of the frontier were the principal innovations of the 12th century. These greatly contributed to the emergence of *Christendom* as an entity that was politically and religiously opposed to demonized Islam. In addition, the emergence of a new conception of the frontier likewise seems to have owed much to the Papacy, and in particular to the Holy War mentality that developed at the same time as the Crusades. Through equivalencies that recognized the remission of sin for fighting against Islam on the Peninsula and in the Holy Land, the different pontiffs tended to bring together the eastern and western fronts in people's minds[42]. The enemy was the same, the frontier was Christendom's, and the combat *pro Christianorum finibus dilatandis*[43]. In multiplying indulgences for combat in the Holy Land and Iberian Peninsula alike, pontifical intervention tended to make the frontiers of

[41] P. Buresi, *Els 'senyors cristians de la frontera' a la Península Ibèrica (segona meitat del segle XII)*, "Recerques" XLIII (2001), pp. 33-46 and P. Buresi, *Frontière politique et appartenance religieuse dans la péninsule Ibérique: les communes frontalières et le phénomène des "Cid" (XIe-XIIe siècles)*, in: *Politique et Religion en Méditerranée. Moyen Âge et époque contemporaine*, ed. by H. Bresc, G. Dagher and C. Veauvy, Paris 2008, pp. 137-163.

[42] These indulgences had begun to be granted beginning with the Barbastro campaign in 1064. They were then regularly renewed. In his article *Réforme, reconquista, croisade. L'idée de reconquête dans la correspondance pontificale d'Alexandre II à Urbain II*, "Cahiers de civilisation médiévale" XL (1997), p. 317-335, Jean Flori contests the vision presented by Marcus Bull in his *Knightly Piety and the Lay Response to the First Crusade. The Limousin and Gascony (c. 970 - c. 1130)*, Oxford 1993: "Le but que poursuit Urbain II est à l'évidence de faire renoncer les Espagnols à leur vœu de croisade en Orient et à le commuer en combat contre les Sarrasins en Espagne. Il était donc nécessaire d'assimiler étroitement les deux théâtres d'opérations militaires et les récompenses que l'on pouvait y acquérir, comme le fait plus nettement encore Pascal II (*Epistolæ*, *PL*, 163, col. 45) quelques années plus tard en interdisant toute participation des Espagnols à la croisade pour les diriger vers le combat contre les Maures" (p. 333).

Christendom a sacred border that should be pushed as far as possible (*dilatatio Christianitatis*), and which should not be transgressed, not in one sense, nor in the other. The Infidel assimilated with evil that lives on the other side should obviously not come into Christian lands, nor should the Christian princes enter into pacts with the Devil. The sacralization of the borders with Islam had many consequences. It sheds light on the severity of the Frankish crusaders who participated in military operations on the Peninsula[44]. It also fed the chivalric imagination of the time, as well as the imaginations of chroniclers. Transgressing borders became a sin against God, a sin of vainglory[45]. After thus nearly two centuries, the frontier had involved into something sacred. The only way to make it disappear was first Crusade by all Christians, then the conversion of individuals[46], and especially of mosques[47] and fortresses[48].

[43] See Innocent III's 1206 bull exhorting the faithful to give alms to the Order of Calatrava to send knights to the Holy Land during the period when the Peninsular Christian rulers were at truce with the Almohads: Mansilla, Honorio III, no 151 (31 I 1218, Lateran), p. 122.

[44] 'Abd al-Wâhid al-Marrâkushî writes that after the rendition of Calatrava, some of the crusaders left the troops reaffirming their mission to conquer lands, but they were stopped from raiding and killing Muslims: *Kitâb al-mu'jib fî talkhîs akhbâr al-Maghrib*, ed. by R. Dozy, Leiden 1881 (re-ed. Amsterdam 1968), p. 236. Jiménez de Rada repeats this vision in: *Historia de rebus Hispanie sive historia gothica*, ed. by J. Fernández Valverde, Turnholt 1987, lib. VII.

[45] On this theme, see: M. Alvira Cabrer, *La concepción de la batalla como duelo y la propaganda de cruzada en Occidente a principios del siglo XIII. El desafío del Miramamolín a la Cristiandad antes de la batalla de Las Navas de Tolosa (16 de julio de 1212)*, „Heresis" XXVI-XXVII (1996), pp. 57-76 and eadem, *El desafío del Miramamolín antes de la batalla de las Navas de Tolosa (1212). Fuentes, datación y posibles orígenes*, „al-Qantara" XVIII (1997) 2, pp. 463-490, and *La imagen del miramamolín al-Nâsir (1199-1213) en las fuentes cristianas del siglo XIII*, „Anuario de Estudios medievales" XXVI (1996) 2, pp. 1003-1028.

[46] On the permanence of the Muslim population in the south of Valencia, see: J. Torró Abad, *El naixement d'una colònia. Dominació i resistència a la frontera valenciana (1238-1276)*, Valencia 1999 and J. Torró and P. Guichard, *Jérusalem ou Valence: la première colonie d'Occident*, „Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales" LV (2000) 5, pp. 983-1008.

[47] P. Buresi, *Les* conversions *d'églises et de mosquées en Espagne aux XI^e-XIII^e siècles*, in: *Religion et société urbaine au Moyen Âge*, ed. by P. Boucheron, J. Chiffoleau, Paris 2000, pp. 333-350.

[48] This "conversion" of Muslim fortifications happened most often through the construction of a stone tower, inside a *tapial* enclosure (cf. Baños de la Encina). This conception of the frontier can help explain the erection in 1213 of a castle as imposing as Calatrava la Nueva, on the northern slopes of the Sierra Morena following the Christian victory of Las Navas de Tolosa.