Political Power in Medieval Borderlands

An honors thesis for the Department of History

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Medieval Borderlands: An Introduction

The political status of marginal spaces in early medieval Europe remained largely ambiguous, often influenced by multiple bordering realms, but completely subject to no one of them. By virtue of geography, these regions often escaped the domination of monarchs from Europe's most powerful dynastic institutions, giving rise to a set of political and cultural conditions that frequently prevailed between the gaps of medieval statehood. These politically elusive regions are best understood as borderlands: substantial expanses of territory occupying the gaps in the political geography of early medieval dynasties. These border regions may have existed as part of an established kingdom or between two kingdoms, but in either case, they remained largely independent throughout their existence, often frustrating attempts by dynastic forces to bring them into the fold. The most important factor contributing to this tendency towards intractability is that borders in medieval Europe were generally indeterminate, less lines than they were gradations of influence and power, determined largely by geography and momentary conditions of power. Even after the widespread adoption of feudalism in Western Europe, borders continued to remain nebulous, as peripheral landholders could often hold multiple fiefs from different lords, making their loyalties ambiguous. Moreover, military conflicts could briefly extend the influence of one or another realm, rendering any definite conception of a border between states meaningless in the long term.

In feudal and pre-feudal Europe, the exercise of political power was profoundly spatial: authority was bound up in the ability to control wealth and rule people, both of which required direct control over land.[1] Landholdings were necessary to create food, which also functioned as an important form of transferable wealth, and to raise armies that could enforce political authority. For this reason,

1 Ganshof, Francois Louis. *Feudalism*, xv; 43-46.

kingdoms, especially early on, were centered around families that controlled specific lands, which constituted the political center of the kingdom. In this way, the exercise of power was intimately tied, not just to a particular person, king, or dynasty, but to the particular place or places from which their power derived.[2] The only substantial alteration to this framework occurred as particularly successful dynasties slowly expanded their landholdings to other regions through conquest or through the strategic application of law. This happened most visibly in England after the Norman Conquest, as the Kings slowly sought territory throughout Britain, conquering at times, and at others, simply reverting lands to the Crown when no immediate heir could be found. Those individuals and families that were successful at acquiring land and wielding the power it brought were able to leverage their authority over other landholders, demanding that those with less concede certain privileges to them. Thinking about the politics of medieval Europe in this way is advantageous because it exposes the mechanics whereby shifting political hierarchies were articulated: for example, the early history of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms can be bewildering as one kingdom gained overlordship over another only for the relationship to be reversed a decade later. These interactions make sense only if they are understood in light of competing institutions leveraging the power they derive from their lands to dominate other landholders. In one moment, a given landholder may be more powerful than another because of a particularly abundant harvest or a fruitful marriage alliance, only to be weaker than the other a couple years later for the same reasons. No one landholder could directly control enough land to subjugate the others, so successful magnates were required to maintain a network of lesser landholders in order to exercise power across large regions, and any individual person's or family's position in that hierarchy was subject to change based on the political conditions prevalent at any moment. Those individuals and families at the top of this pyramid formed the nucleus of early kingdoms and their power radiated

2 Ibid., 82; Wickham, Chris. "Topographies of Power: Introduction" in *Topographies of Power*, 1.

outward from a political center, formed around their lands and those of their closest, more permanent vassals, outwards to landholders who accepted or only partially accepted the domination of the center. If these centers represent the peaks of medieval power, borderlands constitute the valleys in between, the regions most geographically and politically distant from the centers of dynastic authority.

The geographical similarities between borderlands gave rise to a number of common features that can be described as characteristics of a borderland culture. Because they were located between two or more political centers, borderlands were very frequently battlegrounds for competing dynasties. The particularly incessant warfare in these regions meant that, even more than the rest of the aristocracy, border lords were required to focus attention on military affairs. The high degree of martiality in these regions and the conflicting interests of rival political centers made vendetta practices common in many borderlands, as well as other features which mark these as honor cultures. The high degree of militarization among the local magnates and the presence of conflicting dynastic powers gave these regions tremendous ability to resist the advances of the dynastic centers. If one dynast was able to apply pressure to any local landholder in order to try and force concessions, that landholder could usually be sure of support from another monarch, eager to stymie the influence of a rival. This sort of multipolar environment made the borderlands very difficult to control from the outside, while also imbuing them with a unique ability to resist external influence.

In many cases, medieval borderlands correspond roughly with ethno-linguistic divides. In these cases, the border regions were also places of intercultural contact and communication. Political power, however, did not break down across ethnic, religious, or linguistic lines, and in these regions it could be quite common for alliances or vassalage arrangements to cross these cultural barriers. The frequent presence of two or more ethnic groups in the borderlands stimulated art and culture, a process which was often catalyzed by extensive patronage from different kingdoms trying to gain traction in the

region. For the same reasons, borderlands tend to preserve long-distance trade more effectively than much of Europe during the same periods.[3]

I shall argue that, while borderlands are, by definition, geographically removed from the primary seats of dynastic authority, they possessed a unique, often de-centered power that allowed the occupants of these regions to effectively resist the incursions of political centers. In some cases, multiple petty states formed in the borderlands, either as independent entities or as special vassals to a central power. Even in the later case, however, the fiefdoms retained an unusually high degree of independence from the center. In this way, the landholders within the borderlands largely retained their independence from dynastic authority. Moreover, because the conditions in the borderland were generally shaped by longstanding facts of geography (both human, e.g. the existence of smaller populations, and physical, e.g. mountain ranges), they remained constant over the long-term. That is, the salient facts about the relationship of medieval borderlands to the political centers often remained essentially unchanged for several centuries at a time. It is possible, however, for a medieval borderland to develop after some time into its own dynastic center, either by filling a power vacuum or by swallowing one or more other kingdoms. In these cases, power is essentially re-centered into the borderland, which emerges as an independent and sovereign state. This re-centering process is usually the outcome of this distinctive borderland culture, which formed and was maintained in the border region for centuries.

This thesis is organized into three chapters, each charting the development of a different medieval borderland. Each chapter is divided into two parts. One portion will deal with the early history, culture, and political development of the borderland, while the other will concern itself

3 For instance, the expansive trade-networks of the low countries between East and West Frankia, the North-South trade routes through Burgundy and Champagne, and the maritime trade of Catalonia along the Western Mediterranean all represent active medieval trade networks located in medieval borderlands.

primarily with later developments. Because each borderland develops differently, there is no overarching periodization, but the distinction between the early and late sections will be justified based on the specific internal history of a given borderland. This structure is intended to illuminate the process by which power could be re-centered in medieval borderlands and to illustrate the fundamental continuity of political relationships over long spans of time. Each chapter is essentially self-contained and analytical comparisons between the three borderlands will be drawn only in the concluding section. The first chapter will cover the borderland between England and the Welsh kingdoms, the second chapter will cover the borderland between Northumbria and the Pictish Kingdom of Fortriu in modern Scotland, and the third chapter will trace the development of the Spanish March, and the County of Barcelona.

Chapter One: Between the Britons and the English

The borderland between the Welsh kingdoms and the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of medieval Britain was marked by long term continuity with regards to its political relationship with the center of English power. While momentary political arrangements fluctuated from decade to decade, or century to century, the significance of the region as a powerful and lucrative collection of territories loosely dominated by English kings persevered for five hundred years. This arrangement is most clearly visible during the period immediately after the Norman Conquest, but finds its origins in the seventh-century advance of the Anglo-Saxons westward through Britain. It is the contention here that the Anglo-Brythonic borderland was possessed with a high degree of autonomy and power since its development during the sixth century and that this unique independence continued to characterize the region for several hundred years. Along with this degree of political independence, the borderland between England and Wales possessed certain characteristics shaped by political geography, which remained largely constant between 650 and 1100. Because evidence is so much more abundant after 1066, I shall first illustrate the existence of these unique borderland features for the post-Norman March of Wales and then attempt to demonstrate that they were the product of longstanding historical and geographical continuity.

Between 1067 and 1074, William I enfeoffed three of his most power vassals along the border between England and Wales. These three earldoms, at Chester, Hereford, and Shrewsbury mark the beginning of what many have termed the March of Wales.[1] Concisely defined, "[t]he March consisted of the foreign-held lordships in Wales and the compact honors directly adjoining Welsh territory."[2] The

1 Lieberman, *Medieval March of Wales, 4-5.*
2 Lieberman, *Medieval March of Wales, 4-5.*

foreign land holders referred to here are not the English but the Normans (and later the Angevins), who came to dominate Wales during the centuries after the Battle of Hastings. Scholarship abounds concerning the history of the borderland, but largely for the period after the establishment of these Norman-held lordships and often to the exclusion of earlier centuries.[3] The reason for this bias is simple: the March of Wales is far better represented in the historical record after the Norman Conquest than before. The abundance of evidence, for obvious reasons, makes studying the history of the borderland during this period easier and perhaps more fulfilling. This reason more so than others may explain the relatively generous attention that the late eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries have received compared to earlier phases in history. Indeed, this is unsurprising considering that the territories that would later make up the March are notoriously under-documented during the early Middle Ages.[4] This absence of evidence for Wales in the early Middle Ages makes any inquiry into the early history of the border difficult and more dependent on speculation than one might wish. Nevertheless, a careful reading of the available evidence suggests that much less changed after the Norman conquest than might be expected.

One of the defining elements of this era is the further incursion upon Welsh territory by the Anglo-Normans. This process was not, by and large, a coordinated invasion but was accomplished in a "piecemeal fashion."[5] The driving forces behind these conquests were the regional magnates, starting as soon as 1072.[6] Specifically, the earls of Chester, Shrewsbury, and Hereford were authorized to raid across the border, and they did so frequently.[7] The impetus for this encroachment is not as simple as one might imagine. While plunder was certainly a factor, there was no guarantee of financial success:

3 See R. Davies, Brock Holden, Max Lieberman and others.
4 Snyder, *The Britons, 76*; Tyler, "Early Mercia and the Britains," 91; Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms, 100.*
5 Darby, "March of Wales in 1086," 259.
6 Lieberman, *The March of Wales*, 21.
7 Lieberman, *The March of Wales*, 21.

as R. R. Davies put it "[Conquest] assured the conquerer no more than a fragile military superiority and the uncertain fruits of that superiority."[8] Another factor that led to Norman aggression was the perception of Wales as a threat by several generations of Anglo-Norman and Angevin Kings.[9] This notion may seem strange in hindsight, but it was not unfounded: the Welsh indeed posed a serious problem for the Anglo-Norman establishment.[10] So long as the Welsh were divided they presented an annoyance, particularly along the border, but a united Wales could pose a serious problem even for the English crown as demonstrated by Llywelyn the Great in the thirteenth century and by the rising of the Welsh in 1096.[11] By 1200, the Normans had successfully penetrated deep into Wales, exerting direct control over most of the Eastern border and sporadic control over much of southwest and central Wales.[12]

One aspect of the violence associated with Norman conquest was political assassination. The Normans were unashamed to kill Welsh princes. The Normans felt the Welsh were inferior, and accordingly, they denied them the sort of treatment customarily given to persons of high rank.[13] These murders could provoke long lasting and bloody feuds, already a longstanding element of Welsh political culture, and posed a personal threat to Marcher lords.[14]

But the threat of Welsh raiding, too, is only part of a greater picture. Norman incursion in the March was also motivated by political and financial careerism. The military authority granted to Norman lords in the March made it a place where ambitious noblemen would wish to settle. Even those landholders who held large estates outside of the March often chose to reside on their Marcher lands

8 Davies, *Lordship and Society*, 86.
9 Davies, *Lordship and Society*, 67; Lieberman, *Medieval March of Wales,* 58, 77.
10 Campbell, *Anglo-Saxon State*, 51.
11 Lieberman, *The March of Wales*, 22-3.
12 Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence, and Change*, Map 3, 38.
13 ; Davies, *Welsh Military Institutions*, 3, 234.
14 Davies, *Welsh Military Institutions*, 236-7, 239.

because of the political opportunities to be had in the region.[15] Evidence from place names suggests that large numbers of foreigners settled in the March during this period.[16] Spoils were certainly an important, if tenuous part of the impetus behind Norman settlement.

A more concrete advantage could be gained from the type of fiefs granted within the March. In particular, liberties were granted more frequently in this area than in other parts of the British Isles.[17] These fiefs were exempt from many kinds of royal interference, including England's legal system, royal dominance, and taxation. The lords of these fiefs held within those fiefs certain special legal powers usually reserved for the king.[18] All of these factors made possessing land in the March particularly advantageous. Moreover, territory could be acquired rather quickly. Throughout the period in question, the March of Wales was used as a tool to quickly boost ones personal power, especially through the acquisition of new territory.[19] For these reasons, Norman adventurers, taking their cues from William I and William II, attempted to carve out fiefs for themselves in Wales, with some success.[20] Chief among these rising aristocrats was Bernard of Neufmarché. Bernard was enfeoffed with a series of neighboring estates near the Wye River between 1086 and 1088. From these, he was able to carve out a substantial lordship by destabilizing and conquering the Welsh kingdom of Brycheiniog.[21]

Another reason many Normans flocked to the March was that Marcher lordships tended to be quite consolidated as opposed to fiefs elsewhere in England.[22] As such they were more easily managed both fiscally and militarily. The fighting itself was, oddly enough, a draw for the Normans. The military class may well have felt and even been motivated by a cultural need for combat. Young knights

15 Lieberman, *Medieval March of Wales*, 74.
16 Lieberman, *The March of Wales*, 45.
17 Stringer, "States, Liberties, and Communities," 7.
18 Stringer, "States, Liberties, and Communities," 11-12, 31.
19 Holden, "King John, the Braoses, and the Celtic Fringe," 17.
20 Lieberman, *The March of Wales*, 22-3.
21 Nelson, *The Normans in South Wales,* chap. 5, doc. 87.
22 Holden, "King John, the Braoses, and the Celtic Fringe," 10.

especially would need experience in war to become accepted by their peers as adults. As a professional fighting force, the Norman knights might have been motivated by a desire to win fame and glory in battle or, as R. R. Davies put it, for "sheer kicks."[23]

Lastly, the Welsh Marches were characterized by a propensity to rebel. The Norman magnates of the March were at the center of most of the rebellions enacted during the late eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries against the English Kings. The Marches rose against William I in 1075 and opposed the succession of William Rufus in 1087-8 and then rebelled again in 1095. The involvement played by the Marcher lords in the Rebellion of 1088 is particularly telling: many of the Marcher lords sided with Robert Curthose against the King.[24] During the Rebellion, Marcher lords, having already developed diplomatic connections with many of the Welsh kings, caused much of Wales to side against William Rufus.[25] Nor was this problem merely an issue of the twelfth century. Indeed, the Marcher barons proved to be a continuing source of difficulty for the Crown. In the mid-twelfth century, the rebellion of the Marcher lords against Stephen of Blois, and specifically the desertion of Miles of Gloucester in 1139, played an important role in securing Angevin authority.[26]

In the early years of the thirteenth century, the King of England was again forced to confront the realities of Marcher politics. After a brief period of increased royal control, the Marcher barons reasserted themselves after the death of Henry II. Perhaps, in part, to secure Plantagenet interests in the Marches, Richard I gave his brother John substantial lands in the March, which John himself increased by marriage. John was now himself a lord of the March.[27] After becoming King, John's conflict with the Braoses was in part motivated by a fear of Marcher rebellion.[28] John recognized that the possibility

23 Davies, *Domination and Conquest*, 28-9.
24 Holden, "King John, the Braoses, and the Celtic Fringe," 10.
25 Lieberman, *Medieval March of Wales*, 67-8.
26 Holden, "King John, the Braoses, and the Celtic Fringe," 10.
27 Holden, "King John, the Braoses, and the Celtic Fringe," 3.
28 Holden, "King John, the Braoses, and the Celtic Fringe," 6.

of rebellion was a very serious threat to his authority and that the threat would be most serious if it emerged from the March.[29] And, as John predicted, the Marcher lords played an important part in the eventual uprising against John in 1214.[30] This propensity to rebel constitutes one of the most important elements of the Marcher political dynamic, especially with regards to their relationship with the rest of the English kingdom.

The March, then, can be described as a place defined by war both against the Welsh and against the power of the English throne. The proliferation of liberties and other specially exempt fiefs, the incentives of war, the need for constant military vigilance, and the opportunity to carve a personal power base drew the Normans to the March in great numbers. The threat of Welsh raiding, the Norman incursions into Welsh territory, vendetta feuds between English and Welsh aristocrats, economic and political opportunities, and Marcher rebellion against the throne comprise the most important facets of the political situation within the Welsh Marches during the High Middle Ages. What emerges is a picture of the March as supporting a highly regionalized power structure, where local lords wielded comparatively higher levels of authority than other regions of England.

I will argue that these features are not unique to the borderland after the Norman conquest, but are, in fact, merely a continuation of longstanding border realities dating back as far as the seventh and eighth centuries. It shall be shown that, like the Norman March, the Anglo-Saxon borderland was characterized by border domains with a high degree of independence; the threat of the Britons and continuous attempts on the part of the English at conquest; violence by the English that often took the form of political violence against individual princes; and that the borderland was used as a tool for personal power, often in an illegal or rebellious capacity.

The ancient antecedents of the great Marcher earldoms are to be found in the borderland client

29 Holden, "King John, the Braoses, and the Celtic Fringe," 9.
30 Rowlands, "King John and Wales," 284-5.

kingdoms of western Mercia. Several such kingdoms existed, including the *Pecsaete, Wreoconsaete*, *Magonsaete*, and the *Hwicce*, all of which were semi-independent entities still extant when Mercia finally came under the purview of West Saxon authority during the ninth century.[31] Interestingly, many of them retained the formal trappings of sovereign status even as the leaders of comparable political subdivisions were reduced to the status of ealdorman in Mercia. This state of affairs persisted until Mercia was conquered by Wessex in the tenth century. These early client states in Mercia formed in precisely the same territory that would come to be the Welsh March.[32] Of these early border realms, the most intensively studied and the one for which the most evidence survives is the Kingdom of the Hwicce, and for this reason alone it shall serve as a case study. Even by this early date, dynastic families from the English political center found it to their advantage to involve themselves directly in the borderland: the family of King Offa of Mercia owned land and patronized a significant monastery in the Hwicce over the course of several successive generations.[33] As in the Welsh March, the creation of royal holdings in the borderland was likely intended to curb the influence of powerful border lords, a project which the Kings of Mercia were able to execute with some effect.[34] Unlike the eleventh-century fiefdoms, however, these kingdoms were not brought into being by royal writ, but rather, were subsumed by Mercia as it expanded. In the case of Hwicce, Mercian overlordship was firmly established during the reign of Penda, in the mid-seventh century.[35] Accordingly, they were likely allowed to retain independence because they served an important military function by sheltering the Mercian heartland from frequent Brythonic raiding.

The aggressive character of the Britons in Wales is well documented during the early Middle

31 Williams, Ann. "England in the Eleventh Century" in *A Companion to the Anglo-Norman World*, 3.
32 Williams, Ann. *The World Before Domesday*, 3; *The Medieval March of Wales*, Lieberman, *Medieval March of Wales*, 24.
33 John Hines. *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century*, 188.
34 Hines, 359-60.
35 Hines, 357.

Ages. Indeed, since Roman times, there had been nearly continuous attempts to secure the borderland in that region through fortification. Specifically, the presence of the Roman fortress of *Isca Augusta* at Caerleon indicates the very real need for defense.[36] The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* report the defeat of a Welsh "raiding army" in border regions as early as 605 or 606, though it is now generally believed that the battle occurred closer to 616. It is reported that "Aethelfrith led his army to Chester and there killed a countless number of Welsh[;... t]here were also killed 200 priests who had come there in order to pray for the Welsh raiding-army."[37] The incident is also recorded by Bede who suggests (erroneously, no doubt) that the death figure among the priests was closer to 1,200.[38] During the seventh and early eighth centuries, the Britons of Gwynnedd and Powys may have made substantial attempts to win back the plains that made up western Mercia and to take back much of the territory taken from the Welsh in Powys. These raids may have motivated the construction of Wat's Dyke by Aethelbald of Mercia, and they are likely connected with a report found in the Welsh Annals indicating that fighting in 722 led to a significant victory by the Welsh.[39] The *Brut y Tywysogion* indicates that the English were again on the defensive in 760 when the Britons crossed the border, resulting in a significant battle near Hereford.[40] During the eighth century, the Mercian King Offa built a large dyke in the region, one of many Anglo-Saxon and early medieval dykes built along the Welsh border.[41] While there is some debate over the extent to which Offa's and Wat's dykes served a military purpose, archaeological and historical evidence indicates that military defense was at least a very important part of the role envisioned for these large ramparts.[42] Barbara Yorke explains that "[a]ttacks from the Welsh became an increasing

36 Campbell, *Anglo-Saxon State*, 51.
37 Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, 22-3. See note 2, p. 23.
38 Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, ii, 2.
39 Snyder, *The Britons, 178;* Sawyer, *From Roman Britain to Norman England*, 108.
40 "Brut y Tywysogion," 7.
41 "A Research Framework for the Archaeology of Wales," The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, accessed January 28, 2011, http://www.cpat.org.uk/research/seemed.htm.
42 Wormald, "Offa's Dyke", 120-1.

problem in the eighth century and the solution seems to have been to establish a patrolled frontier along the 150-mile western border of Mercia. The defenses included at least 80 miles of earthwork defenses with a rampart 24 feet high and a six foot ditch and associated forts."[43] The forts are attested, in part, from evidence gleaned by place names. The proliferation along the border of towns named "Burton," from Old English *burh*, meaning 'fortification,' indicate a substantial build up of fortified settlements throughout the Anglo-Welsh borderland.[44]

But the Welsh were not merely a problem for the Mercians: there are a variety of entries in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* which indicate that Wessex was engaged in substantial border violence with the Welsh. Indeed, Offa's contemporary in Wessex, Cynewulf, is said to have "often fought great battles against the Britons."[45] There is reason to believe that these battles were largely the result of Welsh aggression. For the most part, when the English were the invaders, the chroniclers stated explicitly that the English led an army into Wales, that they devastated the Welsh or subjected a prince, etc. In the absence of such language, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the chronicler believed that the violence was not predominately a consequence of English aggression. Moreover, there is no mention of Cynewulf in the Welsh Chronicles during this period at all, much less one that might indicate any sort of invasion. This is unusual considering that the *Brut y Tywysogion* tends to be explicit in naming the leaders of English raiding armies. Further, the Welsh chronicles report fighting near Hereford in 760, which corroborates the existence of a Welsh offensive in the South during this time.[46]

Attacks by the Welsh were not limited to the eighth century. By the early ninth century, King Coenwulf of Mercia was compelled to invest energies in defending the Welsh border.[47] The ninth and

43 Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 117.
44 Williams, *Kingship and Government*, 68.
45 Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, 47.
46 Annales Cambriae, 760; Brut y Tywysogion, 7.
47 Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 121.

tenth centuries saw both the Britons and the English struggling against the Norse. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* and the *Brut y Tywysogion* both indicate that Britain was repeatedly ravaged by the invaders.[48] This, more than anything, is likely responsible for the substantial decline in Welsh border raiding during this period. The raiding resumed in the mid-eleventh century: the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* indicate a substantial increase in borderland raiding by the Welsh between 1050 and 1070. The first indication of this rising violence was a raid near Gloucester in 1053.[49] It seems that this raid was accompanied by unusual levels of violence, as it is noted that "the Welsh men killed a great part of the English people" near the targeted settlements. This raid was followed by another in 1065. On this occasion, the raid targeted land in Wales that had been taken by Harold Godwinson. Like the earlier raiding, the attack was attended by a massacre. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* report that the Welsh "killed almost all the people who built there, and seized the goods which were gathered there."[50] One last major event illustrates the willingness of the Welsh to raid against the Anglo-Saxons during the eleventh century. This is the raiding of Bleddan ap Cynfyn and Riwallon in conjunction with Eadric the Wild's rebellion against Norman rule. The Welsh, along with Eadric, raided Herefordshire in 1067 and laid siege to the castle at Shrewsbury in 1069.[51] Despite the fact that these events were instigated by an Englishman, the Welsh princes were more than willing to exploit the political instability after the Norman conquest for their own profit. These events should, then, be understood in the context of Welsh raiding, even if they were undertaken in conjunction with Anglo-Saxon lords.

While the threat of Welsh raiding was nearly a constant between the seventh and eleventh centuries, far and away a greater constant was English raiding and conquest in Wales. As there is

48 Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, 55, 62-4, 77, 101-4; Brut y Tywysogion, 13, 15, 23, 31, 33; Annales Cambriae, 47-8. This is by no means a comprehensive list.
49 Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, 184.
50 Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, 190.
51 Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, 200; Florence of Worcester, 171; Orderic Vitalis, Vol. 2, p. 26.

extensive evidence for Anglo-Saxon encroachment on Welsh territory, only a few of the most interesting textual references shall be mentioned here. Some of the earliest clear signs of renewed aggression by the Angles come from the mid-eighth century when King Offa campaigned in Wales consistently for several years. The *Brut y Tywysogion* indicates that Offa attacked the South of Wales in 776 and then again in 784.[52] While little evidence survives to corroborate these reports, it does seem likely, considering that Offa invested considerably in defending that frontier. Offensive raiding across the border would likely have been another part of the overall strategy. The next important act of Anglo-Saxon aggression in Wales comes during the 820s. Two sources independently attest to substantial Anglo-Saxon military activity. The *Brut y Tywsogion* relates that in 817 "the Saxons ravaged the mountains of Eryri, and took the kingdom of Rhuvoniog." And, in 823 the *Brut* again reports violence in Northern Wales; on this occasion "the castle of Dyganwy was destroyed by the Saxons[, a]nd then the Saxons took the kingdom of Powys into their possession."[53] For the year 828, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* notes that "King Egbert led the army among the Welsh, and he reduced them to humble submission."[54] While dates are unreliable in sources this early and should not be given much weight, the convergence of these three accounts within one decade of one another strongly suggests a substantial Anglo-Saxon victory in Northern or west central Wales sometime within a decade of 825, resulting in Mercian or West Saxon hegemony over part of Wales. By the late ninth century, Alfred the Great had forced much of Wales to recognize his overlordship, in part as an attempt to counter the presence of the Norse in Britain. One of the results of this *imperium* in Wales was the presence of Asser, a Welsh monk and scholar at the royal court of Wessex.[55]

The *Brut y Tywysogion* reports major English offensive activity during the mid-tenth century.

52 Brut y Tywysogion, 7, 9.
53 Brut y Tywysogion, 11.
54 Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, 62.
55 Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 151.

Entries dated 965 and 982 relate two expeditions by an Englishman named Alfred first into Gwynedd and then into Brecheiniog.[56] Unlike earlier references, no mention is made of conquest, but, instead, the chronicler emphasizes that the armies "ravaged" and "devastated," which suggests that the primary purpose of these endeavors was booty and not the securement of any formal submission or hegemony. Entries dated 1056 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* report that Earl Harold and Earl Leofric, both border lords, undertook substantial campaigning in Wales, culminating in Gruffudd ap Llywelyn swearing oaths acknowledging King Edward as his overlord.[57] The last example of pre-Norman conquest in Wales comes in 1063, when, according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles,* Harold Godwinson, at this time Earl of Hereford and Wessex, and Tostig Godwinson again attacked Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, this time at his court in Rhuddlan (in western Gwynedd).[58] The attack, conducted jointly by land and by sea, resulted in the death of King Gruffudd and the fragmentation of Wales. Another consequence of the attack was that Earl Harold briefly held land in east Wales until it was re-conquered in 1065. What emerges is a picture of border relations in which the pre-Conquest English frequently raid in Wales, force submission from Welsh rulers, and occasionally seize Welsh lands.

As in the post-Norman March, this violence often involved assassination and vendetta between aristocrats. Most of the evidence for this violence comes from Welsh sources, as vendetta was a common and important practice among the Welsh princes.[59] The first explicit mention of regicide on the part of the English is dated 798, for which year the *Brut y Tywysogion* reports that "the Saxons killed Caradog, the king of Gwynedd."[60] A more interesting and illustrative example is recorded for the year 877, where the *Brut y Tywysogion* gives an account of the death of two aristocratic brothers (in

56 Bruy y Tywysogion, 25, 29.
57 Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, 186.
58 Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, 190-1.
59 Lieberman, *The March of Wales*, 65.
60 Brut y Tywysogion, 9.

some manuscripts father and son), Rhodri and Gwriad, who were killed by the English.[61] Three years later, in 880, the *Brut* details the vengeance that these sorts of murders could elicit. The entry reads: "Eight hundred and eighty was the year of Christ, when the action of Conwy took place, for God to avenge Rhodri."[62] For the tenth century, the *Brut* records royal murders for the years 941 and 948.[63] The last event of interest has already been touched upon. Earl Harold's assault on Rhuddlan in 1063 led to the death of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn at the hands of his own men. In 1065, the Welsh retook the territories seized by Earl Harold during the attack and, according to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles,* the massacre and raiding that accompanied that expedition was led by Caradog ap Gruffudd.[64] It is, then, reasonable to assume that the high level of violence associated with this incident can be explained as part of Caradog's vengeance for Gruffudd's death. The practice of regicide and vendetta during the Norman years was, then, only a continuation of a much older tactic going back at least as far as the eighth century.

While the Norman Marcher lords rebelled against the authority of the English crown, the analogous phenomenon among the Anglo-Saxons was less direct. In part, this is because for much of the period in question there was no central authority, only a hierarchy of regional kings who might choose or be forced to subordinate themselves to higher kings. Unlike the feudal bonds of the Normans, however, these bonds were far less stable over time. The ancestral form of the Norman Marcher rebellion is two fold. Firstly, during the early medieval period, English border-lords found ways of exploiting the borderland for their own domestic political gain. Secondly, Anglo-Saxon border kings cultivated alliances with Welsh Kings against other English kings. This second practice is attested at a very early date. Indeed, prior to his wars with Powys, Penda allied himself with Welsh princes,

61 Annales Cambriae, 48.
62 Brut y Tywysogion, 17.
63 Bruty y Tywysogion, 21, 23.
64 Anglo-Saxons Chronicles, 190-1.

especially Cadwallon ap Cadfan of Gwynedd against the Northumbrians.[65] This alliance played a key role in Penda's early triumphs over his northern neighbors and, in a certain sense, opened the door for the Mercian hegemony. The example of Penda illustrates that, as early as the seventh century, English lords around the borderland had learned ways to use the Britons to advance their own position in England.

A second important example from this time also involves Penda. The entry in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* for the year 658 relates an incident in which a King exiled by Penda fought against the Welsh in the borderland near Somerset: "Cenwalh fought at Penselwood against the Welsh... This was fought after... Penda had driven him out and deprived him of his kingdom."[66] The *Chronicle* is unclear as to whether or not Cenwalh had been reinstated at the time of the battle. What is interesting is that in this incident, the war is against the Britons but the goal may well be domestic: it seems likely that Cenwalh hoped to use the war against the Britons to secure his own authority in Wessex.

During the ninth century, Alfred the Great developed a series of important alliances that he used to his advantage against the Mercians and the Norse. Asser seems to indicate that many of the Welsh princes were driven to ally themselves with Alfred for protection against a faction in Wales that had ties with the Northumbrians.[67] By the eleventh century, it was not uncommon for Anglo-Saxon border lords to seek aid from the Welsh. The foremost example is that of Aelfgar. During the 1050s, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* report that Aelfgar was outlawed "without any fault." [68] Having been outlawed, Aelfgar was legally deprived of his authority as Earl. As a border-lord, Aelfgar seems likely to have had some contact with the Britons and Irish: the *Chronicles* make clear that he was able, with the help of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, to quickly raise an army of Welsh and Irishmen. In response, he marched on

65 Yorke, *Kings and Kingdoms*, 104.
66 Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, 32.
67 Asser, 72.
68 Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, 184-8.

Hereford, easily drove off the defenders, and proceeded to ransack the town: in the process, he caused "a great slaughter."[69] After the raiding "had done most harm," it seems Aelfgar was quickly reinstated to his Earldom.

Lastly, it remains to account for the rebellion of Eadric the Wild. As has already been seen, Eadric was an ealdorman in Mercia at the time of the Norman Conquest. Eadric was likely one of a number of borderland thegns who took to the woods and marshes in order to fight a guerilla war against the Normans.[70] As documented by Florence of Worcester, Orderic Vitalis, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, Eadric allied himself with the Welsh in 1067 and 1069 and launched substantial raids into the border regions of England, specifically targeting Hereford and Shrewsbury.[71] Although he was ultimately unsuccessful, the cooperation with the Welsh indicates that Anglo-Saxon border-lords were more than willing to use the Welsh to strengthen their position in English politics. It is also important to note that, even three years after Hastings, the Normans had failed to entirely subdue the border region. For this reason, Eadric's actions can be understood as part of the Anglo-Saxon era within the borderland and not a product of the Norman March.

While, out of necessity, the focus here has been on the English side of the border, it is important to remember that Welsh princes were willing to invite the English to intervene on their behalf in Welsh politics as well. As my focus is on the continuity of the Anglo-Saxon and Norman borderland, only two illustrative cases will be used. The first example comes from Asser's report about the state of Wales in which he notes that many Welsh princes sought Alfred for protection from another Welsh faction.[72] While Asser's bias in favor of Alfred colors this account, it is not at all unreasonable: Welsh principalities generally had no issue conceding overlordship to English kings in return for political

69 Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, 186.
70 Reynolds, "Eadric Silvaticus," 103.
71 See citations at p. 9.
72 Asser, 72.

protection; indeed, it was quite common.[73] The protection of an English lord could play quite an important part in Welsh politics, if only to secure them from the threat of other Anglo-Saxon border lords. The second instance is Gruffudd ap Llywelyn's astute use of the borderland: he allied himself with powerful English nobles, notably Swein Godwinson and the previously mentioned Earl Aelfgar.[74] Swein Godwinson was a powerful earl along the Southern borderland who aided Gruffudd in defeating his major rival in Welsh politics, Gruffudd ap Rhydderch of Deheubarth. According to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (C) entry for 1046, "Earl Swein went into Wales, and Gruffudd, the northern king, together with him, and he was granted hostages."[75] That is, Swein assisted Gruffudd ap Llywelyn in subjugating the kingdom of Deheubarth. After Swein's exile, Gruffudd allied with Aelfgar and, as has been mentioned above, raided Herefordshire with his help. After Aelfgar's death, Gruffudd, lacking the protection of an Anglo-Saxon ally, was defeated by the forces of Harold and Tostig Godwinson.

The borderland between England and Wales during the early Middle Ages exhibits a high degree of continuity with the March of Wales during the later Middle Ages. Insofar as borderland independence, Welsh raiding, English conquest, political violence against lords, and cross-border political influence characterized both the early and later periods, there seems to be a much higher degree of continuity than the presently accepted periodization would indicate. Why, then, ought the usage of the term 'the March of Wales' be connected to the establishment of Norman lordships? It might be argued that the term ought be used because of its usage by medieval contemporaries. Yet, the terms *Marchia Wallie* and *barones Marchie* only became widespread during the latter part of the twelfth century and so can not be said to coincide with the usage of the term today.[76] Moreover, early variants are attested twice in Domesday Book, indicating that the concept may well have had some Anglo-

73 Davies, *Domination and Conquest*, 5.
74 Snyder, *The Britons*, 183.
75 Anglo-Saxon Chronicles, 164.
76 Lieberman, *Medieval March of Wales*, 6, 100.

Saxon precedent.[77] Indeed, it seems likely that the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia ultimately derived its name from its role as an early border-kingdom.[78] Contemporary usage, then, is irregular and likely non-unique to the period of Norman occupation.

The progression from the Anglo-Saxon to the Norman March begs the question as to why the Normans were more successful at conquering Welsh lands than the English had been. The answer is twofold. First, the Normans had significant military advantages that the Anglo-Saxons did not. The Anglo-Saxons had, for much of their history, to contend with the frequent presence in Britain of large numbers of Norse who diverted much of the energies of the Anglo-Saxon military. Moreover, the Normans benefited from better agricultural practices in the eleventh century and a corresponding growth in population. Furthermore, Norman battle tactics simply outclassed the Anglo-Saxons. For evidence of Norman military superiority, one need look no farther than Hastings and its aftermath. Secondly, the Anglo-Saxon paradigm was not the same as that of the Normans, who sought to establish direct feudal control over Wales. After the English and the Britons reached a military stalemate, the Anglo-Saxons were satisfied by overlordship, or what Bede termed *imperium.* Campbell contends that "[h]istorians are apt to take refuge in expressions such as 'vague overlordship'... What they are actually telling us is that they are, necessarily, vague about it."[79] But, if historians are vague then it is only because the participants themselves were vague, perhaps deliberately so. A 'vague overlordship' may have proved to be a more useful political tool for both the English and the Welsh than a more well defined relationship like French-style vassalage. In any event, the Anglo-Saxons rarely pursued direct control over Welsh territory and seemed to satisfy themselves with pledges of allegiance and recognition of subordinate status, such as Edward received from Gruffudd ap Llywelyn in 1056.

77 Darby, "March of Wales in 1086," 259.
78 Brooke, *The Saxon and Norman Kings*, 95.
79 Campbell, *Anglo-Saxon State*, 50.

Chapter One: Wales

The establishment of continuity between the March of Wales after the Conquest and the earlier Anglo-Saxon borderland raises another question. In both cases, regional lords dominated the borderland. But, in confronting the continuity within the borderland, it must also be asked whether this feature is unique to the borderland or if regional lords dominated the entire island. Certainly, England in the early Middle Ages, what is often termed the "heptarchy," was defined by sovereign kings who held sway over regional kingdoms. But by the time of, and certainly after, the Norman Conquest, central authority in England was at an all time high. This means that at some point the power-structure in the March diverged from the rest of England. It seems likely that this happened in a process whereby, as English power became more and more centralized between 650 and 1200, the autonomy of the border lords was preserved. It is easy to see how this might occur. The fact that the borderland was harder to pacify and the ability of border-lords to field large armies, sometimes augmented by the Welsh, meant that whereas other regions of Britain became increasingly subject to the central authority, the Welsh border-lords were able to retain their autonomy. During the Anglo-Saxon period, border-lords like Harold Godwinson and fiercely independent borderland thegns like Eadric the Wild characterized the greater autonomy of the border. The introduction of a more formal feudalism by the Normans meant that this greater autonomy was codified within the vassalage agreement, in the form of special privileges for Marcher lords and the proliferation of liberties and other specially exempt fiefdoms. Despite the feudal trappings, the Norman March effectively preserved what was essentially a seventh-century political arrangement.

Chapter Two: Northumbria, Fortriu, and the Kingdom of Alba

Medieval Scotland provides a nearly perfect case study for the political significance of borderlands, for here, the very notion of the Scottish kingdom emerged within the border regions established during and after the Anglo-Saxon conquests of the sixth century. Moreover, the border land between the Anglo-Saxons and the Picts is marked geographically: the Firth of Forth provided a natural boundary and the region around this fjord developed into a politically and culturally complex border region. After the collapse of Fortriu and the waning of Northumbria during the ninth century, the political landscape re-centered around this border region, which ultimately gave rise to the Kingdom of Alba during the tenth century.

During the early Middle Ages, Northern Britain was an ethnically diverse and politically remote region. Distant from the Anglo-Saxon centers in central Britain and from the Irish kingdoms of the Ui Neill, the area remained a frontier zone well into the tenth century. For this reason, the local populations, be they Picts, English, Britains or Gaels, were relatively free from outside influence. Political geography in Northern Britain was shaped by the regional elites, whose authority lasted here much longer than in other parts of the island. The Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Bernicia, which was subsumed into the Kingdom of Northumbria in the early seventh century, stretched south from the Firth of Forth. To the North of the Firth, the Picts ruled the Kingdom of Fortriu, which was centered around modern Inverness.[1] Early evidence suggests that, during the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries, borderland interactions around the Firth of Forth led to the development of a border-aristocracy.

The evidence for the earliest portion of Scottish history is notoriously sparse and what does

1 Woolfe, *From Pictland to Alba*, 4-8.

exist can be interpreted only with the utmost caution.[2] What historical evidence remains is often of somewhat later date or the product of a chronicler with some distance from the events discussed. The texts themselves are also subject to a unique set of insular literary conventions, which can complicate interpretation. The primary sources of evidence for the early period of Scotland can be divided into three groups. First, a significant amount of early poetry does survive dating from the mid-sixth century. The attested poetry is pertinent to a discussion of border politics: these poems tell stories of battles, wars, and feuds, which, although empty of substantial historicity, can tell an historian a great deal about the cultural norms and assumptions which underlay borderland political interactions. Second, are sources of history written outside the historical borders of the Kingdom of Scotland. These sources are the most substantial sources for Scottish history during the early period and are attested from an early date. These consist mostly of Irish material in the form of chronicles and saints' lives. While sparse, the Irish chroniclers provide the best evidence for political developments in the kingdoms of Dal Riada and Fortriu. Also included in this category are sources of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian origin, which pertain to the history of Scotland. These documents are also highly informative and may take the form either of chronicles or of historical sagas. Finally, prose sources from early Scotland do exist, but they are quite limited and often difficult to decipher. These include the monastic chronicles of the Iona Monastery in Dal Riada and the *Chronicle of the Scottish Kings*. These sources, while sparse and highly opaque, are highly significant, because they represent the only first-hand evidence (or reflex of first-hand evidence) of political developments within the region of Scotland.

The outlook for borderland evidence is even more bleak: the sources above are all written with a focus on dynastic politics and, as such, concentrate primarily on the dynastic centers of early Scotland. As such, these sources implicitly ignore the history of border regions, which by definition,

2 Woolfe, 2-3.

rarely figure in the dynastic narrative that these chronicles focus on. Whatever evidence of borderlands is to be found in the early chronicles is located in the margins of the greater narrative. Especially important are the accounts of interaction between the kingdoms which occupied contemporary Scotland. These accounts provide glimpses into the nature of the early medieval borderlands, because they deal with politics at the margins of these dynastic centers. Accordingly, looking at chronicle accounts of battles between kingdoms and the events leading up to those battles can indicate something about the nature of these borderlands and the greater significance they bore to emergent monarchic polities.

The history of the borderland between the Picts and the Angles of Bernicia is marked by warfare during the seventh through the tenth century. It is difficult to say whether this is simply a product of the annalistic evidence, which tends to record battles but not the absence of battles, or a longstanding fact about the region, which the annalists have simply noted where possible. Whether or not violence was sporadic or constant, the history of the borderland between the Picts and the Angles was not peaceful. The earliest attributed reference to warfare between the English and the Picts is a record for the year 597 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which notes that "Ceolwulf began to rule in Wessex, and he continually fought and strove either against the Angle race, or against the Welsh, or against the Picts, or against the Scots."[3] This entry is attested from a late-ninth century manuscript copied from an older, unattested original. The date itself is not particularly meaningful, nor is there any substantial historicity to the notion that the King of Wessex was waging wars against the distant Picts. Indeed, none of the Irish annals record any war between the Picts and the West Saxons. Rather, this listing of enemies is a rhetorical device, indicating that Ceolwulf fought against all the enemies of the Saxons. That the Picts are listed among these enemies demonstrates an important awareness of a border

3 ASC, 20.

region and border conflicts, already established by the ninth century, and extending back into the early history of the Anglian kingdoms in Northern Britain. The significance of this passage is in establishing that Anglo-Saxon historians remembered very early conflicts between Angles in Bernicia and the Picts and conceived of this in terms of ethnic conflict. While the notion that Ceolwulf personally fought the Picts is empty of any historicity, this passage does probably reflect historical violence during the early history of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms on Britain. A similar account is provided in Bede who notes that during the early years of English settlement, "[The Anglo-Saxons] made a temporary treaty with the Picts whom they had already driven far away and began to turn their weapons against their allies..."[4] While neither Bede's account nor the testimony in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is an eye-witness account of sixth century conflict, both demonstrate that Anglo-Saxon historians believed that early warfare between the Picts and the English had occurred. Certainly, neither of these accounts is Pictish in origin and the notion that the Anglo-Saxons drove the Picts "far away" is patently self-serving. It does, however, reflect an awareness that this conflict was profoundly spatial and it may reflect the English conquest of Bernicia, which likely subsumed or displaced many southerly Pictish settlements.

These early sources give way to chronicle accounts of greater historicity during the mid-seventh century. These chronicle entries provide an image of the borderland in a constant state of flux between Pictish and English domination. The English *Chronicle of Holyrood* provides this entry for the year 658:

> The seventh [Bretwalda] was Oswiu, [Oswald's] brother, who controlled the kingdom for some time... and for the most part subdued the nations also of the Picts and Scots, which hold the northern territories of Britain, and made them tributary.[5]

Chronicle evidence supports the notion that Oswiu may have achieved overlordship over Fortriu during

4 H.E., I, 15-16.
5 Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History*, 175.

this period. Bede notes that "Oswiu... overwhelmed and made tributary even the tribes of the Picts and Irish who inhabit the northern parts of Britain..."[6] The events attested in these chronicle entries mark the culmination of several decades of violence between the English and the Picts. The *Annals of Tigernach* provide this record for the year 627:

> The battle of Fid-eoin, in which Maelcaich, Scandal's son, king of the Picts, was the conqueror...
>
> And Osric, Aelfric's son, the crown-prince of England [fell], with very great slaughter of his men.[7]

This report of a large battle between the Picts on the one hand, and the Scots and English on the other, in which the Picts were the victors marks the beginning of a long series of engagements attested in the historical record, culminating in Oswiu's victory and overlordship over the Anglo-Saxons and Picts. Of course, this overlordship did not represent a fundamental shift in power, but rather a temporary relationship due to the momentary strength of Northumbria under Oswiu. Oswiu's overlordship is illustrative of the fluctuations in power, which shaped the relationships between early medieval kingdoms, and as a result, early medieval borderlands. The conquest of Lothian by the Bernicians and the hegemony of the Northumbrians under Oswiu established an English presence on the southern coast of Forth, which has never been broken. This demographic shift probably accompanied a recession northward in the pattern of Pictish settlements, as the amount of English settlement generally increased over time.

Warfare between the Picts and the English did not end with Oswiu's victory in 658: the *Annals of Ulster* note that a battle was fought in Pictland during 664, presumably with the Anglo-Saxons.[8]

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6 H.E. II, 5. 151
7 Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History*, 153.
8 Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History*, 179.

Matters seem to have become more violent after Oswiu's death in 670.[9] After Oswiu's death, Fortriu doubtless used the weakness of the Northumbrian Kingdom to escape the English yoke. Consequently, Ecgfirth, King of Northumbria, invaded Pictavia some years later, in part, one presumes to reaffirm Northumbrian hegemony over the Picts. The *Chronicle of Holyrood* records for the year 685 that:

> In the year 685 king Ecgfrith rashly led an army to waste the province of the Picts, although many of his friends opposed it... and through the enemy's feigning flight he was led on into the defiles of inaccessible mountains, and annihilated, with great part of the forces he had brought with him...[10]

Evidence in other chronicles confirms this event. Nennius reports that "Ecgfrith is he who made war against the Picts, and fell there." Similar accounts are found in the *Tigernach Annals* and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*: the Petersborough manuscript, for instance, notes that in 685 "King Ecgfrith was killed to the north of the sea on *20 May*, and a great raiding-army with him."[11] The Irish Annals bear a similar entry, except that they date this defeat to the year 686: "Ecgfrith son of Osuiu, king of the English, was *killed by Bruide son of Bile, king of Fortriu*..."[12] This Irish account is probably accurate with regards to the identity of the Pictish king, which corroborates the chronology in Nennius and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.* It seems that some years later, another Anglo-Saxon army was defeated in Pictland: the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* records that in 699 "the Picts killed Ealdorman Beorht", a man who had been in the service of Ecgfrith.[13] The historicity of this account is confirmed by similar accounts, notably in the Irish Annals and the *Tigernach Annals.*[14] The account in the *Annals of Ulster*, for example, notes that in 698 "a battle was fought between the English and the Picts in which fell the

9 Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History*, 181; ASC, 34-35.
10 Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History*, 195.
11 ASC, 39.
12 T. M. Charles-Edwards, *The Chroncicles of Ireland, Vol. 1*, 166.
13 ASC, 41.
14 Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History*, 206.

son of Bernith who is called Brectrid."[15] This Irish account certainly references the same event as the Anglo-Saxon account of 699, and has simply corrupted the name "Beorht". Lastly, in 711 the *Tigernach Annals* report "a slaughter of the Picts in the plain of Mano [was made] by the Saxons."[16] The entry is corroborated by the Irish chronicles, which note the location as "Mag Manonn", likely an Irish form of the same place-name.[17] This entry is useful because it provides a location for the battle itself: this "plain of Mano" likely corresponds to the areas surrounding and in between Clackmannanshire and Slamannan, along the shores of the Firth of Forth.[18] If this location is typical of the fighting, and there is good reason to believe it is, then these battles were often fought, not North as far as Fortriu, but in the border region abutting the Firth.

These chronicle entries demonstrate a pattern of warfare between the Picts and the English. The best interpretation of the chronicle evidence is that this violence occurred primarily in the borderlands surrounding the Firth of Forth. The evidence for this is two-fold: first, it makes sense that these battles were fought there based on the political geography of the area. The region lies roughly midway between the Pictish dynastic center of Fortriu and Bernicia and the firth creates a natural boundary around which armies had to march. Early medieval leaders were rarely willing to take armies far from home because of the logistical problems associated with supplying such an army and the political difficulties that could easily arise if a king and an army were too long absent from the political center. Second, the one chronicle entry from which one can reasonably derive a battle location places the combat squarely within this region. It is possible, then, to look at the chronicle evidence of battles as signifying interactions within the context of a borderland. The constantly shifting nature of borderland politics is plainly visible from the chronicle evidence. Nowhere is this more clear than during the

15 Charles-Edwards, *The Chroncicles of Ireland, Vol. 1*, 173-74.
16 Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History*, 213.
17 T. M. Charles-Edwards, *The Chroncicles of Ireland, Vol. 1*, 185.
18 Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History*, 213, note 3.

events of the mid-seventh century: in 627 an Anglo-Saxon army was destroyed by the Picts, by 658, Oswiu had established overlordship over Fortriu, and in 685, another English army was soundly defeated. All of these battles must have had important implications for borderland politics, as local elites shifted allegiances between Pictish and English overlords. Unfortunately, there is no evidence to indicate exactly who these local elites were and how these allegiances were structured. It is possible to surmise, however, that there were local military elites of Pictish and English ancestry who would align with one or another power, probably irrespective of their own ethnic makeup. As in the Welsh March, issues of local power and patronage may well have played out, with various local factions siding with either the English or the Picts in order to boost their own provincial agenda.

It is likely that Picts and Anglians formed alliances within the context of this border region: although this kind of borderland-cooperation is not directly attested, cooperation between ethnic groups is pervasive in medieval borderlands from Ireland to Outremer. Moreover, cooperation between the Picts and the English on the dynastic level is attested in the chronicle record. In addition to the treaty between the Angles and the Picts mentioned above, two additional accounts, both also from Bede, demonstrate the manner in which English and Pictish courts cooperated at times. First, Bede describes an alliance between the English and Fortriu against the Kingdom of Strathclyde, noting that "the Saxons and the Picts had joined forces and were making war upon the Britons..."[19] It is important to note that the Kingdom of Strathclyde, centered on Dumbarton Rock, shared the important borderland near the Firth of Forth with both the Angles and the Picts. As such, this alliance is explicitly germane to the borderland, and a mutual interest in weakening the influence of the Brythonic power in the border regions around and west of Forth was the likely motivation for this endeavor. This interaction represents one sort of mutually beneficial political interaction between Fortriu and Bernicia. As a

19 H.E. I, 20. 63

military alliance, the political element of the cooperation is self-evident: both kingdoms sought to win advantage in the borderland by destroying the power of Strathclyde. Undoubtedly, such an alliance would have had complicated effects on the borderland; unfortunately, there is no evidence in Bede or any of the available chronicles which might allow for even a partial glimpse at what those effects might have been.

Military alliances were not the only non-hostile interactions between the aristocratic establishments of Northumbria and Fortriu. Bede records that, in at least one instance, Anglo-Saxon nobility took refuge in Pictland during dynastic violence in the Northumbrian Kingdom. Bede notes that:

> After Edwin had been killed in battle, the kingdom of the Deiri, the cradle of his race and the foundation of his royal power, passed to a son of his uncle Aelfric whose name was Osric... But the Northumbrian race was originally divided into two portions, and the other kingdom, that of the Bernicians, went to a son of Aethelfrith named Eanfrith... During the whole of Edwin's reign the sons of King Aethelfrith his predecessor, together with many young nobles, were living in exile among the Irish or the Picts... On the death of their enemy King Edwin they were allowed to return to their own land, and the eldest of them... became king of the Bernicians.[20]

This account of a dynastic struggle illustrates the need for dynastic families to protect heirs from the threat posed by political rivals. In this case, Eanfrith was safe in Scotland while his dynastic rival Edwin sat on the Northumbrian throne. The Picts and the Scots were, presumably, more than willing to harbor Anglo-Saxon noblemen who could pose a dynastic threat to the Northumbrian monarch. Similar events are attested in Wales and it is likely that Pictish nobles occasionally crossed the border to Northumbria, Strathclyde, or Dal Riada in order to wait for the death of a dynastic opponent or build support in the relative safety of a foreign kingdom, if their political position was too weak back home. Exactly how these exchanges impacted the borderlands is obscure. One imagines that, as the first line

20 H.E. III, 1. 213

of contact between the kingdoms, borderland elites might play an important role in making arrangements like fosterage for young aristocrats or transportation and accommodation within the kingdom for foreign nobles, in exchange for money or political patronage. If this were the case, it may be that border elites developed connections with aristocratic families at the political centers, even if these were informal exchanges based on currency and political quid pro quo, rather than marital alliances or more formalized structures of patronage.

A last source for evidence of borderland allegiances between Anglo-Saxon and Pictish institutions is the presence of the names of three Pictish kings, Constantin, Onuist, and Wren, in the Cuthbertine *Liber Vitae*. Alex Woolf notes that "the Cuthbertine *familia* held the churches at Edinburgh and Abercorn on the Forth, close to, if not in, Pictish territory and good relations with the house of Wrguist were clearly worth maintaing."[21] The presence of these names in the *Liber Vitae* is direct evidence of a relationship between the dynastic family of Wrguist in Fortriu and an important Anglo-Saxon monastic institution with churches in the borderland. This demonstrates that cross-border interactions between the dynastic families and the institutions of the other kingdom happened more often than the chronicle record might lead one to believe. Indeed, it seems likely that these sorts of interactions were highly normal, and were not at all incongruous with the frequent bouts of borderland violence.

Unfortunately, the culture that existed in the borderland between Northumbria and Fortriu during the early Middle Ages is little clearer than it was before. It is possible, however, based on the above evidence, to make some modest claims about the region. First, the borderland was dominated by frequent conflicts between the Picts and the English. The harsh realities of constant violence must have left an indelible mark on the borderland culture, and the local elites who must have lived there. It seems

21 Woolf, 66-67.

likely that elite families vying for power in the borderland must have aligned themselves with one or another dynastic interests during these conflicts, with an eye towards strengthening their own local interests vis-a-vis their borderland rivals. Second, these families may have facilitated communication between the dynastic centers and aided in cooperative endeavors like the alliance described by Bede. These same avenues of communication may well have played an important role in the fostering of young nobles from one kingdom to another, or the escape of politically defeated aristocrats seeking harbor from a dynastic rival. Third, because the border region was so important to the geopolitics of northern Britain, dynastic families at the center deliberately established relationships with cultural institutions at the margin, such as the relationship between the House of Wrguist and the Cuthbertine monastic establishment. Importantly, there is no reason that these relationships, be they cultural or political, need be understood as reflecting any kind of national or ethno-linguistic delineation. It seems that relationships between the border elites and the dynastic centers were determined more by local politics than by notions of nationality or ethnicity, such as they were. Regrettably, there is insufficient evidence to make any more solid claims about the political nature of this borderland. It is only possible to offer a few suppositions. Because of the frequent violence, it seems likely that political authority crystalized at a highly local level around strong-men who were capable of communicating with the dynastic centers and providing in some manner for local defense. In part, this system is attested simply by the fact that no border-lords are mentioned in the chronicle evidence on either side of the border, as occurred in the Welsh borderlands during this same period. As a borderland, there was a great deal of local autonomy as neither kingdom was able to permanently exert control over the territory. What emerges is a picture of a region dominated by local magnates with relationships, perhaps close relationships, to dynastic families in one or both kingdoms, but without much in the way of material obligations to those kingdoms.

Chapter Two: Scotland

The region around the Firth of Forth continued to be politically significant after the power Fortriu and Northumbria collapsed during the ninth century. During the ninth and early tenth century, the Kingdom of Alba emerged as the dominant power in northern Britain. In the absence of powers to the north or south, this kingdom developed along the shores of Forth, at the heart of the old borderland. This process represents a re-centering of political authority from the early centers of power around Fortriu, Dal Riada, and Northumbria, into the border region, which emerged as the new power center for the Kingdom of Alba. The political significance of the old borderland during the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries is best evinced by the actions of the fledgling monarchy.

One of the most important and well attested ways in which the early Scottish kings imposed their authority on the old borderland was through the patronage of important ecclesiastical houses. Indeed, ecclesiastical institutions were closely tied to the royal family and often served as temporary residences for early Alban monarchs.[22] While the chief bishopric of Alba was located at St. Andrews along the northeastern coast of the Firth, the chronicle and charter evidence shows a clear and consistent pattern of royal patronage to churches and institutions along the southern and western shores. In particular, several early Scottish institutions are repeatedly attested in the chronicles and in the early charters: the Monks of Cuthbert at Durham, the Priory at Dunfermline, and the Keledei (Culdee) of Loch Leven. All of these important institutions were located within the old Anglo-Pictish borderland. I have chosen the Loch Leven priory as a case study, to illustrate the important relationship between the Alban kings and the ecclesiastical institutions of the former border region because the relationship between the Loch Leven Keledei and the Kings of Scotland is unusually well attested: a series of charters outlining a pattern of royal patronage is preserved at the Priory at St. Andrews. While the institution at Loch Leven enjoyed a special relationship with the monarchy, the documentation at

22 Broun, "Kingship" in OCSH.

St. Andrews shows a widespread and sustained pattern of ecclesiastical patronage throughout the old borderland. Because St. Andrews functioned as the seat of ecclesiastical authority in early Alba, this documentation serves as the best and most representative view of the early Alban church's structure, especially with regard to royal interests.

The Keledei of Loch Leven, located on St. Serf's Inch, appears very prominently in the historical record beginning in the mid-tenth century. An early charter documents the submission of the keledei to the protection and authority of Bishop Fothad of St. Andrews.[23] This is the earliest mention of the monastery in the chronicle record and the document makes it clear that the monastery was effectively independent from St. Andrews up until the mid-tenth century. This relatively late date suggests two important realities. First, this borderland monastery had been largely independent from the extant church hierarchy during the preceding generations, perhaps because of the patronage of borderland families. Second, the tenth century marked a period of greater centralization for the Scottish church. As the Kingdom of Alba emerged, the Bishopric of St. Andrews became the highest ecclesiastical authority in the new kingdom, and set about consolidating its relationships with local priories in the old borderlands.

In the mid-eleventh century, the Keledei became the object of a great deal of royal patronage. A charter at the Priory of St. Andrews documents a gift given by Macbeth and Gruoch, the King and Queen of Alba, to the Keledei, consisting of lands of Kirkness, along the southern shore of Loch Leven.[24] In 1055, another document demonstrates an episcopal gift from Maldunus, the Bishop of St. Andrews.[25] The Bishop gave the Church of Markinch, in present day Fifeshire over to the Keledei. The monastery was again honored according to a document dating to the late-eleventh century. This charter

23 Early Scottish Charters, 4; 228.
24 ESC, 5; 231.
25 ESC, 6, 233.

attests a royal grant made to the Keledei of Loch Leven on the Part of King Malcolm III (d. 1093) and his wife, Queen Margaret.[26] The royal family gave the monks the rights to the Vill of Balcristie, in the present-day parish of Newburn, Fifeshire, near the western tip of the Firth of Forth. In 1093, Bishop Modach of St. Andrews granted the Keledei another church.[27] The document refers to this Church as "ecclesiam de Hurkenedorath" which may be Aucterderran in southwestern Fife.[28] Reeves' identification makes sense in light of the pattern of land grants to the Keledei of land along the western end of the Firth of Forth. In the final years of the eleventh century or at the beginning of the twelfth, the Keledei at Loch Leven was again the beneficiary of royal patronage. A charter at the Priory of St. Andrews records a grant from Ethelred, a son of King Malcolm III of possessions to the Keledei.[29] It seems that Ethelred was simultaneously the abbot of the Loch Leven priory and also the Earl of Forthrif and Fife, a fact which is clear from the charter, which describes him as "Abbas de Dunkeldense et... Comes de Fyf." Importantly, this grant means that some lands around the Forth were held directly by the royal family even during the twelfth century. At some point during the twelfth century, the Keledei of Loch Leven became an Augustine priory and came to be known as the Keledei of St. Serf's. The last charter, written probably during the early years of the twelfth century, documents a grant from King Edgar to the Keledei of St. Surf's.[30] Edgar gave the monks Pernemokane, a parish adjoining Kirkness, also along the western tip of the Firth of Forth.

The charters documenting the relationship between the Keledei of Loch Leven and the Alban Crown convey a long history of royal patronage. Generation after generation of early Scottish kings and bishops gave to the priory, not just money, but feudal rights. The Keledei held substantial

26 ESC, 7; 234.
27 ESC, 9;239.
28 Reeves, *Culdees*, 129.
29 ESC, 11; 243-44.
30 ESC, 19; 259.

landholdings in and around the critical Firth of Forth region. The extent of royal patronage towards these institutions, which certainly predates the Kingdom of Alba, evinces the power of the institutions in the old borderland, even centuries after the formation of the Alban kingdom. Royal donations of land and rights to the monastery may indicate a desire to weaken the authority of local magnates by bringing more territory into the hands of royal aligned institutions, like the Keledei of Loch Leven. Alternatively, these grants may represent the ability of the monastery to influence the court. In either case, the patronage of the Keledei of Loch Leven illustrates the lasting significance of the former borderland region to the Kingdom of Alba.

The Ethelred charter demonstrates the political nature of royal patronage. This charter is of special significance in two ways. First, it is the only extant charter to document members of the royal house participating directly in the life of the priory as monks. In this sense, the keledei was very closely tied to, and probably allied with, the Alban royal family to the point that second sons might join the clergy at this institution. This fact suggests that the relationship between the monastery and the royal house was cooperative and that they shared political goals. For this reason, the Keledei of Loch Leven may have served as an important asset to the Alban government in imposing its authority in the old borderlands. Second, this charter demonstrates that the royal family delegated control of large swathes of the old borderland to cadet branches of the royal house. Ethelred himself was the Earl of Fife while also serving as abbot.[31] In these two roles, he would have controlled much of the former borderlands around the shores of the Forth. These enfeoffments make it clear that Malcolm III, Ethelred's father and the King of Alba, meant to ensure that the old border region would remain firmly in hand. Indeed, the early kings went to great lengths to secure their control over the old Anglo-Pictish borderlands. Unfortunately, documentation of secular land grants and other forms of temporal writing from the

31 Robertson, *Early Kings* I., 124.

period prior to the twelfth century is notoriously sparse.[32] Although the Alban kings certainly granted land to political allies, likely with the same aim of securing their authority over this new heartland, there are very few attested charters directly evincing this practice. There is, however, some evidence to be found in the chronicles, which suggests the continued political significance of the old borderlands to the Alban dynasty. Moreover, the archaeological record indicates that Edinburgh became an important political center during the tenth and eleventh centuries.

The archaeological evidence strongly suggests that the old borderland emerged as the political center of the early Alban kingdom. The growth of Edinburgh into a royal center is central in this regard. Situated on the southern coast of Forth, Edinburgh is located in the center of the old Anglo-Pictish borderland, and its development into the center of royal authority evinces the continued importance of this region to Alban political authority. While much of the city's early history remains unclear, it is known that it was used as a royal residence by the Alban monarchs from at least the mid-eleventh century, when King Malcolm III (r. 1057-93) established his seat at Edinburgh Castle.[33] Whether this was done for military or political purposes remains unclear, but it is highly significant that the early Alban kings chose to situate their court, and hence the political nucleus of the burgeoning kingdom, in the old borderland, instead of using the old Pictish heartland around Fortriu or the Gaelic center of old Dal Riada. The decision to locate the court at Edinburgh suggests a region-wide shift in power away from the ancient royal centers and into the old border region around the Firth.

The connection between the Alban monarchy and the border region goes beyond the location of the early court. Though little direct evidence remains, it seems that from an early date, political authority in the new kingdom was linked geographically with key sites in the old borderland. In particular, the royal ritual surrounding the Stone of Scone evinces an important though nebulous link

32 ESC, vi.
33 Lynch, "Edinburgh Castle" in OCSH.

between this region and the early monarchy. The Stone of Scone is a rectangular block of sandstone from the region around the tip of the Firth of Forth, that was used to inaugurate the Kings of Alba.[34] Although the first definitive documentation of this function dates to the mid-thirteenth century, "John of Fordun, who described the ceremony in much detail, stated that the seating of a king on the Stone was already an ancient ritual considered indispensable to kingly authority. Possibly Kenneth and all his successor were inaugurated on the Stone."[35] This ritual linkage between the Alban monarchy and Scone, deemed ancient by the thirteenth century, suggests that the connection between the Kings of Alba and the old borderland predate Malcolm III's residence at Edinburgh Castle by a century or more. Indeed, it seems that the significance of Scone may have closely coincided with the emergence of the Alban monarchy itself.[36]

Much of the earliest charter evidence for secular land grants from the Alban crown date to the early twelfth century. Indeed, of all charters attested from David I's reign that involve purely secular affairs, of which there are four, all pertain to land in the old border region. Two unique charters preserved at the Treasury of Durham and dating circa 1135 demonstrate the monarchy's continued interest in the old borderland.[37] These texts pertain to the lordship of Swinton, just south of the Firth of Forth.[38] The Alban monarchy granted this town to two knights in turn, Arnulf and Hernulf, during the early twelfth century. These two figures, though otherwise obscure, were doubtless part of the first wave of Norman aristocrats to settle in Scotland, often as in this case, with royal approval. The location

34 Ascherson, "Stone of Scone" in OCSH.
35 Ibid.
36 Driscoll, *Alba*, 38.
37 Although these documents both pertain to the same locale and grant feudal powers to men with similar names, there are sufficient differences in the texts of the charters to suggest that they were unique documents and not different recensions of the same text, especially considering that they were produced within some years of each other. One easily comparable feature of both texts is the list of witnesses presented: while there are unsurprisingly some repeat appearances, the order and grammar is so different that it is clear these dissimilarities did not arise as an error on the part of a copyist. Whether the first knight died without issue or otherwise forfeited his rights to Swinton is not clear, but it is significant that David I subsequently gave the same territory to another Norman.
38 ESC, 79-80.

of Swinton is quite suggestive: that David I enfeoffed his Norman *milites* in the old borderland as opposed to further south toward the border with England suggests the extent to which this region was central to Alban monarchical authority. By enfeoffing Norman knights in this area, it seems that David I hoped to secure the political center of his kingdom. That he chose to settle foreign soldiers in the borderland may suggest that he was unable to trust the local military elites, or certain sections thereof, not to subvert his government.

Two other secular charters survive from the reign of David I. The next dates to the mid-twelfth century, and indicates that the King granted "Alstanefurd" to a certain Alexander of St. Martin.[39] This man appears to have been born in Scotland to Norman parents and granted land in his own right in what is now Athelstoneford and Haddinton, East Lothian, near the southwestern coast of the Firth of Forth. The text is somewhat unusual in that it provides very precise geographic limits to the territory in question and refers at points to the holders of neighboring lands, including a certain "Robertus filii Galfridi."[40] This high level of precision may indicate that the region was rather densely populated by vassals, to the extent that oral tradition was no longer sufficient to mark off the boundaries between feudal domains. Moreover, the reference to Robert, son of Galfridus (who was likely a lord of Anglo-Norman descent), along with the above evidence, suggests that the border region was protected, to a high degree, by Norman vassals who swore fealty to the Alban crown. In this sense, the document suggests that the David I placed a high degree of importance on the old borderland, both politically and militarily.

The last charter attested during the reign of David I to deal with a secular land grant was actually issued by Earl Henry, his son and heir apparent.[41] This charter, which dates to the mid-twelfth

39 ESC, 149-50.
40 Ibid.
41 ESC, 154.

century, is very brief, and secures the Lady Beatrice de Belchaump in her feudal possessions around Roxburgh, which is near the southwestern shores of the Firth. The charter explains neither how she came to posses these lands, nor from what threat she sought the protection of Henry's dictum. It seems likely that she might have assumed control over these territories after the death of a husband. Lady de Belchamp's name suggests Norman ancestry, so any such marriage may have been to another Norman or to an English or Scottish aristocrat. In the first case, the charter suggests another instance of Normans settling along the Firth. The latter case suggests that the local elite made marital alliances with the Normans, suggesting that their influence was indeed very significant in the old borderland.

The pattern of monarchical involvement in the borderland at both the ecclesiastical and secular levels indicates that the region was a critical and central component of the new kingdom. The early Alban kings invested a great deal into insuring the support of local elites by granting privileges to monastic houses and placing loyal vassals, often Normans, in fiefs throughout the old border region. The emergence of Edinburgh as a royal, ecclesiastical, and military center, along with the evidence linking the inception and power of the Alban monarchy to Scone suggests that the old borderland was central to the new kingdom. After the collapse of Fortriu and the submission of Northumbria to more southerly powers, political power in northern Britain was re-centered during the tenth century, away from the old bastions of the Picts, Gaels, and Angles. In effect, the region around the Firth of Forth became the heartland of Alba.

Chapter Three: The County of Barcelona in the Spanish March

The County of Barcelona underwent a process very similar to that which transformed the borderlands of early medieval Scotland into the political heartland of the Kingdom of Alba. Over the course of several centuries, the Spanish fringe region at the outskirts of Frankish dominance developed into a major center of Iberian power, before ultimately coalescing into an independent kingdom in the twelfth century. The County of Barcelona emerged in the context of the Spanish March, itself originally a militarized borderland within the Carolingian Empire. As was the case in those medieval borderlands examined in previous chapters, the Spanish March and the County of Barcelona in particular exhibit a number of unique traits determined by borderland geography. From its inception, the region served an important military function for the Frankish empire. The unique nature of the borderland and the high level of military readiness shaped a special border culture in the Spanish March and a distinctive set of legal practices, that enshrined the privileges of the Counts of Barcelona. Largely as a consequence of these developments, the County of Barcelona increased in power, extending its influence throughout Catalonia and Southern France, and increasingly asserting its independence from the French crown. This initial period of growth and expansion culminated in a real re-centering of authority around the County of Barcelona, even after merging with the Kingdom of Aragon.[1] The County of Barcelona and its ruling family continued to exercise a controlling influence within the new kingdom, during the first century of its existence.

1 The terminology around the development of the Crown of Aragon requires clarification. Aragon was originally known as the County of Jaca, another of the borderland counties established by the Carolingian dynasty in the March. This county came to be known as the County of Aragon before it was subsumed by the Kingdom of Navarre. In the eleventh century, the Kingdom of Navarre was divided among the sons of the late King Sancho III (d. 1035) and Aragon became an independent monarchy. In the mid-twelfth century the Aragonese monarch was unable to produce a male heir, and so married his daughter off to the Count of Barcelona, whose son became king of a new state, which is called the Crown of Aragon.

Chapter Three: Spain

After the collapse of effective Roman control in the fifth century, the Pyrenees demarcated the boundary between the Iberian Kingdom of the Visigoths and the Kingdom of the Franks.[2] Following the ultimate breakdown of the Visigothic domain and the defeat of the newly established Muslim presence at the Battle of Tours (732), the border between the Frankish Kingdom and the Umayyad Caliphate was delineated by the Pyrenees. The Carolingian monarchs fought to establish buffer states between their domains and the Caliphate, leading to the creation of several feudal territories throughout the Pyrenees, many of which owed allegiance to the western Carolingian monarch. Toward the western end of the Pyrenees, the Kingdom of Navarre emerged from a Carolingian duchy as a *de facto* independent entity. Toward the eastern end of the range, the Carolingians established the series of vassal states, which came to be knows as the Spanish March. This region comprised much of the eastern Pyrenees proper and extended south at the westernmost terminus, encompassing much of the Catalonian highlands north of the Ebro River. As part of the military effort to establish a buffer zone between the Franks and the Caliphate, Louis the Pious seized control of Barcelona from the Caliphate in 801.[3] The County of Barcelona slowly became the strongest Christian state south of the Pyrenees and the most powerful domain in the Spanish March.[4]

The Carolingian conquest of the Spanish March was part of a programmatic series of military campaigns undertaken by Charlemagne and his successors to protect the Frankish kingdom. By the eighth century, when Frankish conquest in Iberia began, the Caliphate posed a distinct threat to Frankish power:

> Beginning with the Muslim invasion of the Iberian peninsula in 711, by 717 Islamic rule had penetrated throughout the territories of the Visigothic kingdom and, in the 720s and 730s, Muslim armies raided Frankish Gaul. Although Muslims continued to raid north of the Pyrenees and

2 Ganshof, François L. "Charlemagne" in *Speculum*, 525.
3 Jarrett, Jonathan. *Rules and Ruled in Frontier Catalonia*, 3-4.
4 Freedman, Paul. "Cowardice, Heroism, and the Legendary Origin of Catalonia" in *Past and Present,* 5; Donald J. Kagay, *The Usatges of Barcelona*, 5.

> along the Mediterranean coast of southern Gaul as late as the 790s, the Pyrenean region was never fully incorporated into the Umayyad caliphate.[5]

The Battle of Tours in 732 was the most historically significant of these early engagements, and the one which most vividly illuminated the threat of the Umayyads in the minds of the Frankish aristocracy. The Frankish Prince Charles Martel roundly defeated an Umayyad force that had advanced far to the north of the Pyrenees. This attack at the heart of the Frankish kingdom was never repeated, but it certainly attracted the awareness of the Frankish leadership to the political significance of Iberian events. In the decades after the battle, the descendants of Charles Martel established themselves as the rulers of the Frankish kingdom and went about militarizing the border between Frankia and the Caliphate. In this sense, the Spanish March was a deliberate creation: the Carolingian court pursued the development of border counties in order to prevent further Umayyad encroachment on Christendom. In some sense, these counties were far more successful than their Carolingian originators could possibly have foreseen. Certainly, the creation of the Catalonian Counties forestalled any further Islamic advance, and over the long term, these states were instrumental in the re-conquest of Iberia.

The establishment of counties so far from the Carolingian court at Aachen was part of a widespread and intentional military program to defend the outer limits of the Empire. In their earliest incarnations, these states were backed by the dynastic centers, in an effort to stabilize political authority in the Frankish kingdom. Sven Tagil notes:

> Charlemagne's empire can be analysed in a centre/periphery perspective.... In the conquered border areas, defensive marches and administrative areas were created, under the leadership of individual margraves, for example, the Spanish March with Barcelona as its centre, the Eastern Marches with Vienna at its center.... Defence considerations obviously played the major role in these frontier arrangements; natural barriers, such as mountain chains or wilderness areas... were used for defensive purposes.[6]

5 Chandler, Cullen J. "Heresy and Empire" in *The International History Review*, 507.
6 Tagil, Sven. "The Question of Border Regions in Western Europe" in *West European Politics*, 23.

The Spanish March is, perhaps, the most successful example of this strategy in all of the Carolingian realms. Unlike the marches in Austria or Denmark, which defended the Franks from relatively weak threats, the Spanish March bordered the Islamic society in al-Andalus, which was very strong and well organized during the ninth and tenth centuries. The Carolingians acted quickly in the decades after Tours to deny the Umayyads a foothold across the mountains. Indeed, it seems that the emirs had largely ignored the peripheral mountain communities in order to concentrate their efforts on more lucrative areas. This oversight allowed the Carolingians to control the mountain range and militarize it effectively, a precaution which was highly effective in protecting Frankish domains from further incursions by the Caliphate.

The conquest of Barcelona by Louis the Pious in 801 marked the completion of the Spanish March from the perspective of the Carolingian court. Frankish monarchs would never again directly intervene South of the Pyrenees as Louis the Pious had, but rather, the Marcher lords were directly responsible for the defense of their realms and, therefore, for the defense of the Carolingian border. This system created a self-sustaining military hierarchy that provided for border defense without the need for intervention from the center. By placing the burden of defense on the regional counts, however, the Carolingian monarchy incentivized local magnates to maintain a strong central authority in their own fiefdoms, which largely prevented the systemic decentralization of power that so plagued the rest of the Carolingian state in the coming decades.[7]

As the most southerly and valuable of the Catalonian Counties, Barcelona experienced the threat of Umayyad strength most acutely. Accordingly, Barcelona acted as the tip of the spear for many of the early campaigns by the Catalan counts against the Caliphate. As early as the mid-ninth century,

7 MacLean, Simon, *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century,* 11-20.

the counts of Barcelona acted on behalf of all of Catalonia to ensure the defense of the March, and Barcelona bore the brunt of most of these attacks.[8] Indeed, the Muslims were able to sack Barcelona in 852 and, in 856 they captured the nearby castle of Tarrassa, before making peace with a Carolingian viceroy and withdrawing. Because of Barcelona's more southerly location, these incursions affected Catalonian Counties most of all the Christian domains spanning the Pyrenees.[9] The unique military pressures on Barcelona during this and later periods undoubtedly contributed to its success and growth as a regional power.

One of the noteworthy steps taken by the Catalan counts, and the rulers of Barcelona in particular, in service of border defense was the maintenance of fortifications both around major cities, and as frontier outposts.[10] In the decades after the establishment of the March, the Carolingians and their deputies constructed and maintained a series of castles along the borderland, which prevented the Andalusians from conducting long-distance raiding into the interior. The fortification of the March continued through the tenth century. Archibald Lewis notes:

> When we approach the frontier... castles multiply. Our sources give us information of some twenty-two located near the Moslem border in the counties of Barcelona, Ausona, and Manressa... in addition to the numerous *turres* which dotted the mountainsides. Obviously, the Spanish March was a land of castles.[11]

Many of these castles were built during the ninth and early tenth centuries in order to ensure the safety of the Carolingian frontier and the suzerainty of the Marcher lords. By the mid-eleventh century, sources mention nearly one hundred significant installations, not including the far more numerous *turres*.[12] Of these, many were constructed in the eleventh century, which saw a reinvigoration of castle

8 Lewis, Archibald R. *The Development of Southern French and Catalan Society*, 99.
9 Ibid., 100.
10 Ibid., 61; Kagay, 6.
11 Lewis, 229-30.
12 Ibid., 297-99.

construction along the Spanish March, coinciding with the significant growth of the Catalan economy and the power of the Count of Barcelona. The pattern of these castles suggests not only a defensive network: castles constructed during the eleventh century are often noticeably closer to important Muslim centers, indicating a slow encroachment by the Catalonians into the *taifa* of Tarragona, and other settlements in the Ebro river valley.

Barcelona itself was well fortified as part of this defensive network. From an early date, the defense of the city was secured by a curtain wall, which was able to resist a concerted effort to take the city in 828.[13] In 1030, during the reign of the particularly powerful Count Ramon Berenguer I, the walls of Barcelona were renovated, as part of the eleventh century renewal of Catalan fortress building.[14] The construction of new walls for Barcelona suggests not only the city's continued importance as a military center but also the growth of its population.[15] By this time, so much of the city had spilled over the ninth century walls that it was deemed necessary to construct new ones in order to adequately protect the Count's interests.

The high degree of militarization in the Spanish March had a profound impact on local culture in the Christian states. Specifically, the martial nature of the March played an important role in the development of a unique borderland culture in the Catalonian Counties. The complex nature of this culture, especially with regard to the feudal elites, determined Barcelona's interactions with neighboring domains, and largely shaped the growing power of Barcelona in the March. Two major factors influenced the nature of this culture. First, the military structure of the Christian forces, the proliferation of castles, the privileges of the counts, and the relationship between the high lords and the lesser vassals shaped the relationships between different Christian rulers, and between the Christians

13 Ibid., p. 61 note 51.
14 Ibid., 299.
15 Ibid., 396.

and Muslims. Second, the presence of Muslims in Catalonia, and the interactions between the Christian counties and the Muslim *taifas*, led to cross-cultural exchange and a semi-cosmopolitan atmosphere in Barcelona, which facilitated borderland communication between Christians and Muslims.

The relationships between the Counts of Barcelona and the other Christian lords of Spain were determined largely by momentary political necessities. Although all the Marcher lords were de jure vassals of the French king, the realities of borderland politics were much more complex, and frequently Christian lords would pledge fealty to the emirs of a nearby *taifa* in order to secure protection against a rival emir, or even from Christian lords.[16] So it happened that Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar, while in service to the Emir of Zaragoza, found himself on the opposite side of a battle against Barcelona, and briefly held the Count as a captive, an episode which was later depicted in a famous *chanson de geste*.[17] This kind of military rivalry shaped the borderland, as stronger counties swallowed their neighbors or rebelled against outside domination.

The borderland was, by nature, a rather difficult place to rule: rocky mountains studded with fortresses would seem to provide the local magnates with some advantages over the regional lords. Unlike Languedoc, however, which largely fell prey to the decentralization that affected much of Western Europe during the ninth, tenth and eleventh centuries, the lords of the Catalonian Counties, and Barcelona in particular, were able to maintain a strong central authority.[18] This was accomplished, in part, through the incessant campaigning of the *Reconquista*, which ensured a strong relationship between vassals and lords, as vassals were regularly called upon to provide military service.

The militarization of the March largely determined the way in which the aristocratic population was settled. Many lesser aristocrats in Catalonia were placed in the castles and towers that marked the

16 Kagay, 9.
17 Montgomery, Thomas. "The Cid and the Count of Barcelona" in *Hispanic Review*, 1-11; Joseph O'Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain*, 205.
18 O'Callaghan, 166.

countryside.[19] Most of the castles in Catalonia were held directly from the several counts, often by vassals known as vicars, who might hold the castle for life or for some specific period of time.[20] The castles were staffed by men referred to in the sources as *milites* which, in this context, varied in valence from "soldier" to someone that might be recognized as a "knight." The charters suggest that these men were permanently attached to the castles, perhaps as vassals to the castellan or to the count himself.[21] In either case they were associated with a particular fortification where they lived and worked, the lord of which was responsible for levying them should they be called to campaign. The high number of castles in the March meant that, even far from the court of any count, substantial numbers of armed men were always near at hand.

The presence of Islamic influence in Catalonia also shaped the borderland culture that developed there. Indeed, as Frankish authority faded in the tenth century, the Counts of Barcelona developed an alliance with the Emirs of Cordova.[22] Several embassies were exchanged and the Counts of Barcelona seem to have hoped that the emirs would aid them in their war against the *taifas* of Zaragoza and Tortosa. During the tenth and eleventh century, increased sea trade along the Mediterranean led to the growth of Barcelona as a major port, which facilitated communication between the Muslims and Christians, as shipping vessels from Grenada, Valencia, Tortosa, and other Islamic or recently reconquered cities visited the Catalan ports.[23] Barcelona's contacts with the Islamic inhabitants of Iberia exposed Catalonians to the culture of al-Andalus, and fostered in Barcelona's rulers and inhabitants a greater ability to communicate effectively with their Islamic neighbors.

Meanwhile, the overall political orientation of the Spanish March changed substantially

19 Lewis, 299.
20 Ibid., 231-34.
21 Ibid., 301 and 301 notes 61 and 62.
22 Ibid., 191.
23 Callaghan, 296.

between the ninth and eleventh centuries. Over time, the feudal structure of the Spanish March increasingly codified Barcelona's supremacy in the region. During the ninth century, Barcelona was ostensibly one of many Marcher fiefdoms, but in truth, early counts were often able to control multiple counties, with Barcelona forming the political center of a wider Catalan power base.[24] The early counts Sunifred (d. 848) and Wifred (d. 897) were appointed by the King to rule multiple counties but soon gathered their authority around Barcelona. By the end of the twelfth century, so many of these counties had fallen together, under the jurisdiction of the Counts of Barcelona, that the Counts came to dominate the other lords by law, as well as in fact. Indeed, by the end of the twelfth century, the Counts of Barcelona could seriously consider taking for themselves a royal title in their own right.[25] For this reason, many authors of secondary literature refer to the rulers of Barcelona after the mid-eleventh century as "Count-Princes." Barcelona's rise to ascendance in the March during the eleventh century occurred largely under the auspices of Ramon Berenguer I (r. 1035-1076), who was able to secure the fealty of the lesser Marcher lords and unite Catalonia behind him. Archibald Lewis explains:

> In 1039, Raymond Berengar the Old... became count. He reorganized and strengthened the judicial institutions of his counties... which led to the codification of Barcelona's laws in the famous *Usatches*... He understood the importance of control of castles, and forced the Marcher lords who possessed them to do him homage and to recognize the rights which he had over them as count... and assume[d] control over all Catalonia.[26]

Ramon Berenguer I was able to accomplish this, in part, because he came to inherit the other Counties of Gerona and Ausona, in addition to Barcelona, which gave him control over "the essential nucleus of Catalonia."[27] Ultimately, the rest of the Catalonian Counties acquiesced, and Ramon Berenguer I was able to exert unprecedented control over the Spanish March.

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24 Lewis, 208-09, 379.
25 O'Callaghan, 257.
26 Lewis, 380-81.
27 O'Callaghan, 195.

Chapter Three: Spain

During the reign of Ramon Berenguer I, Barcelona's influence began to spread south into al-Andalus and north into Languedoc. He had several important successes against the emirs of the neighboring *taifas* and was able to extend his influence far into Muslim controlled lands.[28] North of the Pyrenees, he acquired the County of Carcassonne in 1070.[29] These gains were instrumental in extending Barcelona's influence outside the March and marked the beginnings of what John Le Patourel termed a "feudal empire."[30]

The influence of the Counts of Barcelona grew over the course of the twelfth century: Ramon Berenguer I's grandson, Ramon Berenguer III (r. 1082-1131) had a long and successful career. During Ramon Berenguer III's reign, he was able to gain control of the County of Provence in southern France, while continuing to extend Barcelona's influence throughout al-Andalus. Barcelona gained control over Provence in 1112, by means of Ramon Berenguer III's advantageous marriage to Douce, the young Countess and heiress apparent.[31] The acquisition of Provence extended the importance of Barcelona's trans-Pyrenean holdings, and made the counts a very significant force in Languedoc. In addition, Ramon Berenguer III was responsible for the Catalonian attack on Majorca in 1114.[32] This naval attack was part of a broader assault on the neighboring *taifas* and Zaragoza in particular, one which Ramon Berenguer III waged actively throughout his reign, before retiring to the Templar order.[33]

During the eleventh century, under the oversight of Ramon Berenguer I, a series of legal codes were passed, known as the *Usatges*, which enshrined comital authority in Catalonia and reflect the power of Barcelona over the neighboring counties. This series of documents codified Catalonian law

28 Lewis, 349.
29 Frederic Cheyette. "The 'Sale' of Carcassonne to the Counts of Barcelona and the Rise of the Trancavels" in *Speculum*, 827 n. 3.
30 Le Partourel, John. *Feudal Empires*, 1-45.
31 O'Callaghan, 218.
32 Ibid., 219.
33 Ibid., 224.

for the first time since the Visigothic Period, and served as the fundamental basis for legal practice in the region for centuries. Laws in the tenth and eleventh centuries were primarily oral, remembered, and traditional in nature, and it was highly unusual for laws to be written down. Where laws were recorded, this process was usually undertaken at a dynastic center under the authority of a king.[34] That Ramon Berenguer I was able to create such a document and impose it on his lords attests not only the strength of his county, but also the relative sophistication of his approach. The *Usatges* expound at length the procedures and penalties for petty feuds between knights, provide for the establishment of courts to adjudicate disputes between lords and vassals, and lay out the legal institutions to be applied to city dwellers (in addition to other material). Importantly, the *Usatges*, though they largely enshrine the power of the Count of Barcelona, were accepted by the Catalonian counts, and they appear to have been enforced to a fair extent.[35] In effect, eleventh-century Counts of Barcelona were able to curb their vassals through legal means, requiring that the count adjudicate disputes, extract goods and services, appoint heirs when no arrangements had been made, and various other powers that were politically advantageous to the counts. In effect, the existence of the *Usatges* demonstrates the ability of the Count of Barcelona to dominate the other Catalan Counts. Such an arrangement was truly remarkable for the eleventh century; the Kings of France would not be able to effectively implement a similar system for some two hundred years.

All the while, the French court was slowly losing control over the territories of the Spanish March as the Counts of Barcelona grew more powerful. The relationship between the marchers and the Carolingian court was always defined by a dynamic tension between Marcher power and Carolingian suzerainty. During the reign of Charlemagne, the Carolingian state granted special land charters, called *aprisio* grants, to nobles in the Spanish March to encourage land reclamation and militarization of the

34 Kagay, 24-29.
35 Ibid., 2; Lewis, 375-76,

borderland.[36] These arrangements granted Marcher lords special feudal privileges, beyond those held by regular landlords in the Carolingian Empire. In the century and a half after the formation of the Spanish March the authority of the Frankish crown declined sharply, and the Marcher lords increasingly began to act independently of royal authority. This process began during the late ninth century and continued throughout the tenth century as Carolingian authority continued to decline. According to tradition, this process began during the reign of Wilfred the Hairy r. (878-897), who was the last count to be appointed by a Carolingian monarch. He successfully asserted the right of the counts to be succeeded by their heirs, which cut the Carolingian court out of determining succession in the Spanish March, and opened the door to dynasticism.[37] Because the counts were no longer appointed by the Carolingians, the primary source of Carolingian authority in the March was greatly lessened, while the ability to create lasting dynasties freed the Marcher lords from central control. This process occurred naturally, as Carolingian power was weakened by ineffective leadership, constant raiding from the North and East, and incessant civil warfare between Carolingian dynasts.[38] The deterioration of the Carolingian court, coupled with the special properties of the Spanish March, allowed for a high degree of independence in Catalonia during the late ninth and tenth century.[39]

By the late tenth century, Frankish authority had deteriorated to the point that Count Borrell II (r. 940-992) could refuse to pay homage and fealty to King Hugh Capet, effectively marking the end of formal French rule in the Spanish March.[40] In the tenth century, Borrell II requested assistance from the King in his war against the neighboring emir, however this was stymied by a power struggle between the Carolingian monarchs and the Counts of Paris. Borrell II's defiance of Hugh Capet was largely the

36 Cullen Chandler. "Between Courts and Counts: Carolingian Catalonia and the *Aprisio* Grant" in *Early Medieval Europe*, 19; Jarrett, Jonathan. "Settling the Kings' Lands: *aprisio* in Catalonia in Perspective" in *Early Medieval Europe*, 1-4.
37 O'Callaghan, 166.
38 Lewis, 91.
39 Freedman, 5.
40 O'Callaghan, 128-29.

product of the King's failure to assist him against the emirs of al-Andalus. Borrell II's refusal to pay homage was immediately caused by momentary political realities, but also reflected the larger shift in regional power away from the central authority of the Carolingians. While the concept of French overlordship was remembered in Catalonia for centuries, no Count of Barcelona swore fealty to the French crown thereafter. The nominal jurisdiction of the Frankish kingdom lost all real significance by the end of the tenth century, and the County of Barcelona was left as the suzerain power in Catalonia.

From its inception, the Spanish March had been a military creation, designed to alleviate pressure on the Carolingian basis of power, to which end the court gave the Marcher lords sweeping powers within their domains. In this sense, the early medieval County of Barcelona is analogous to the Hwicce and Magonsaete sub-kingdoms, which developed in the margins between Mercia and Gwenydd. The constant threat of violence from Islamic Iberia led to the development of a highly militarized society in the Spanish March, marked by widespread fortification networks, and substantially greater authority held by lords over their vassals. The nature of borderland culture fostered this militarization, with substantial communication and exchange between Muslim and Christian forces. As the ability of Carolingian monarchs to exert their influence in the far reaches of their empire declined, the power of Barcelona grew to the point that the other Catalonian Counties were forced to recognize their suzerainty. All the while, the administration of Barcelona grew more ambitious and sophisticated. Successive generations of counts were able to successfully extend their holdings into Muslim territory and North into France. At the same time, the *curiae comitatuum* grew increasingly sophisticated, as counts surrounded themselves with scholars, who drew up legal documents and charters. This second process culminated in the monumental *Usatges*, the eleventh century charter, which laid out the fundamental structure of Catalonian law. That the Catalonian counts accepted the *Usatges* evinces the extent to which they were subject to the authority of Barcelona, and

reflects the early efforts of the Counts of Barcelona toward an increasingly centralized state.

In the mid-twelfth century, the House of Aragon and the House of Barcelona were united when Ramon Berenguer IV (r. 1131-1162) married Petronilla of Aragon. This marriage joined Catalonia and the Kingdom of Aragon, which became one of the three powerful kingdoms that dominated the Iberian Peninsula of late medieval and early modern Europe.[41] This union represents a re-centering of power into the territory of the former Spanish March as the region coalesced into a well ordered kingdom, which would remain a major power in southern Europe for several centuries. As such, the Crown's development is analogous to the emergence of Alba in the Scottish borderland, or the establishment of powerful new liberties in the March of Wales. The merger of Aragon and Barcelona into the Crown of Aragon represents the ultimate assertion of Marcher power over French or Islamic domination and marks the culmination of the Marcher lords' struggle for independent sovereignty against their erstwhile overlords.

The merger of Aragon and Barcelona was devised by the talented Count Ramon Berenguer IV, who negotiated the marriage in 1137. Under Ramon Berenguer IV, vast swathes of Muslim Iberia were conquered, including the powerful *taifa* of Tortosa, and Valencia was forced to pay tribute.[42] The late twelfth and thirteenth century saw the Crown of Aragon continue to expand: during the reign of James I (r. 1213-1278), Aragon was able to overwhelm the Muslim *taifa* of Majorca, followed quickly by the Balearic Islands, and the *taifa* of Valencia itself.[43] James' son, Peter III (r. 1276-1285) continued this trend toward naval expansion, conquering Sicily and other territories throughout the Mediterranean. Thomas Bisson went so far as to say this of the able Count-King:

> Peter III is that rarity in history: the greater son of a great father. Faced with two dangerous challenges – rebellious aristocracies in Aragon and Catalonia and the collapse of Angevin rule

41 Herr, Richard. *An Historical Essay on Modern Spain*, 40-41; Bisson, Thomas N. *The Medieval Crown of Aragon*, 31.
42 Bisson, 32-33.
43 Payne, Stanley G. *A History of Spain and Portugal*, 95-96; Bisson, 63-66.

> in Sicily – Peter accepted both and prevailed. In so doing he opened a new phase of dynastic and colonial expansion that threatened for a time to turn the Mediterranean into a Catalonian lake.[44]

These maritime conquests expanded the interests of the Crown of Aragon outside the Spanish March in a more substantial and permanent way than Ramon Berenguer I could have conceived of when he first acquired Carcassonne or when Ramon Berenguer III first attacked Islamic Majorca. Driven largely by Catalonian maritime trade, the Crown of Aragon was able to establish a Mediterranean empire, which lasted into the eighteenth century.[45]

Though the late medieval Crown of Aragon incorporated many powerful groups, including the intractable Aragonese elite and a strong contingent of Templars, its actions were often dominated by the Catalonian aristocracy.[46] In particular, the rise of overseas acquisition was driven by Catalonian shipping interests, often justified by claims of piracy by the Crown's enemies on the sea.[47] These expeditions, though they increased in size and frequency during the thirteenth century, reflect a certain continuity between the new Crown of Aragon and the old County of Barcelona. Joseph O'Callaghan explains:

> For more than a century the Catalans had been interested in the conquest of Majorca. Count Ramon Berenguer III had joined a Pisan expedition which overran the island in 1114, but the occupation was only temporary. Since then, numerous projects for conquest had been suggested, and by the early thirteenth century, the Catalans themselves possessed the naval power necessary to complete the task.[48]

In particular, these endeavors represent the conclusion of the earlier Catalonian expeditions against Majorca and the Balearic Islands, led by the Counts of Barcelona in a pseudo-crusade to strengthen

44 Bisson, 86.
45 Payne, 171-72.
46 Freedman, 4.
47 Bisson, 64-65.
48 O'Callaghan, 341.

Catalonian shipping interests. Catalonian lords also dominated much of the land conquered by the Crown of Aragon from the Islamic *taifas*.[49] These conquests produced a dramatic demographic shift in Catalonia, characterized by an increase in population as new land was brought under cultivation by settlers, who "streamed into the hinterlands of Tarragona as well as Tortosa and Lerida..."[50] These holdings were largely responsible for the continued rise in Catalonian wealth and prestige during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Catalonian interests were also at the forefront of the Crown's policy in Languedoc, where the monarchy attempted to retain much of Barcelona's holdings at great cost.[51] In the late twelfth century, a dynastic crisis in the County of Provence brought the Crown of Aragon into conflict with the powerful County of Toulouse.[52] This conflict forced Aragon to war in southern France over the protection of the Catalonian Counties, and the assertion of the House of Barcelona's territorial claims to Provence and Carcassonne.[53] Throughout the first century and a half of its existence, Catalonian interests were central to the policies of the Crown of Aragon, which demonstrates the underlying power of the Catalan Counties and the House of Barcelona as the central force driving the Crown of Aragon's early successes.

Indeed, the overweening influence of Catalonia on the Crown of Aragon proved to be a troublesome issue for the Kings, as Aragonese nobles grew increasingly discontented with Catalan dominance. Eventually, the situation grew so urgent that, when the French invaded Catalonia in 1282, the Aragonese nobility took the opportunity to force the King to cede them certain constitutional powers.[54] The reason for this action was the Catalonian domination of the Crown, as explained by Stanley Payne:

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49 Bisson, 66-67.
50 Ibid., 40.
51 Ibid., 36-37.
52 Ibid., 67, 89-90.
53 Ibid., 69, 87-92.
54 Ibid., 88.

> The bulk of the Aragonese aristocracy remained poorer than that of... Catalonia, where some of the petty nobility were involving themselves in commerce. It was clear toward the end of the thirteenth century that Catalonia was the more populous, wealthy, and important of the two principalities. Aragon... was a social and economic backwater by comparison. Most of the Aragonese aristocracy joined a special "Union" of 1283 to press... their status grievances and protests against new taxation and the growing predominance of Catalan interests in royal policy.[55]

The Union of 1283 was a stopgap measure enforced to prevent a kingdom made of multiple constituencies from fragmenting completely. In this sense, the Union was effective: the Crown of Aragon remained united and in subsequent decades the ascendance of Castille-Leon dwarfed the internal rivalries faced by the Crown of Aragon. Early Catalan dominance of the Crown of Aragon, however, reflected the extent to which that kingdom represented an extension of the County of Barcelona's power. In that sense, the Crown of Aragon itself constitutes the result of a major re-centering of power into the old Pyrenean borderland.

The institutional development of Catalonia, and the County of Barcelona in particular, is characterized by increasing power and independence from the inception of the Spanish March in the eighth and ninth centuries. During the first two hundred years of its existence, the County of Barcelona developed a borderland culture distinguished by a high degree of militarization, cross-cultural exchange, and firm lord-vassal relationships. The Counts of Barcelona were slowly able to extricate themselves from Frankish domination and to begin the project of expansion, first into southern France, and then across the sea to Majorca. Though originally established at the margins of the Carolingian Empire, the County of Barcelona was able to re-center power around Catalonia through the creation of the Crown of Aragon, which was dominated by Catalan interests for much of its early history. This reorganization of power around Aragon and Catalonia was the product of borderland geography and the

55 Stanley, 97.

institutions to which it gave rise.

The entire political culture and feudal structure of Catalonia were produced by the features of borderland geography. Those powerful institutions which made the political achievements of the House of Barcelona possible were the product of Carolingian deterioration and incessant warfare with the forces of al-Andalus. The military realities of the Spanish March largely prevented the total disintegration of comital authority that eventually became the norm in Carolingian lands. Languedoc provides an ideal test case because it was largely similar to the Spanish March, except that it was not a border region. Though otherwise culturally akin to Catalonia, feudal authority in most of the Languedoc fragmented so completely that power rested in much of the region solely with the castellans, who were able to control only that territory immediately dominated by their keeps. Whereas Barcelona was able to establish a strong comital center and expand outward, eventually becoming the political heartland of an independent kingdom, the lords of Languedoc were never able to concentrate so much power in their hands, and spent much of their energy attempting to subdue their own intractable vassals. The political achievements of the Counts of Barcelona would not have been possible without the constant external threat of Islamic Iberia, and the readymade opportunities for conquest in Muslim lands with which to control and reward their vassals. In this sense, Barcelona's success as a feudal power was largely the product of its borderland environment.

Medieval Borderlands: Some Concluding Remarks

Substantial similarities exist among these three borderlands, especially with regards to their political development. The most striking of these commonalities is sustained political autonomy, which characterized all of the regions discussed for much of their history. The critical feature that allowed these regions to exist outside of monarchical power structures was borderland geography: the ability to seek alliances from other power centers greatly diminished the ability of any one of those centers to completely assert control over the region. Examples abound of border lords simply switching sides, and forging alliances with other kingdoms when the current situation did not work to their advantage. Any number of Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman magnates, for example, allied with the Welsh in rebellion against English dynastic power. In Spain, Borrell II failed to swear fealty to the King of France, knowing full well that he could pledge loyalty to the emir of a neighboring *taifa*. Indeed, it was not uncommon for Christian lords in the Spanish March to side with Muslim emirs against a mutual enemy, either Christian or Muslim and vice versa. In Scotland, the Kingdom of Alba emerged between power centers, out of the multiethnic borderland between the English, Gaels, and Picts. Indeed, it seems that in the beginning, Alba was a consciously multiethnic kingdom, made possible only by years of borderland cultural interactions between disparate power centers and ethnic groups. The option to pursue political and military ties with another dynastic power gave border lords a unique and forceful tool with which to defy the creeping influence of dynastic authority, and preserve an otherwise rare degree of political independence.

In the case of the Welsh and Spanish border regions, borderland autonomy is unusually visible to historians, because it was recorded and institutionalized in various forms of law. In Wales, these

were codified as privileges reserved for Marcher lords and are reflected in the high frequency with which liberties were created in the March. In the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries, borderland autonomy was embodied by the sub-kingdoms of Mercia, which retained their status as self-ruling entities even while accepting Mercian suzerainty. In the Spanish March, similar codifications of Marcher autonomy existed. During the early Carolingian period, tenants in the Spanish March received special feudal privileges from the court through *aprisio* grants, which granted the landholders certain dispensations from taxation, and from the authority of Carolingian officials.[1] The refusal of successive generations of Counts to swear fealty to the French king reflected another legal shift, as Catalonia began to actively assert its autonomy. I suggest that these legal developments are not of critical importance in and of themselves, but simply call attention to more fundamental trends: these institutional irregularities reflect underlying dynamics whereby borderlands maintained or advanced their considerable autonomy. The County of Barcelona did not become self-governing because Borrell II failed to pledge fealty to the King, but rather, it was possible for the Count to do this because of an enduring but often invisible state of affairs that empowered Barcelona over other, non-borderland fiefdoms. In this sense, many of the legal anomalies that mark medieval borderlands as distinct are best understood as works of artifice: their primary importance is that they reflect the longstanding realities that define the relationships between borderland autonomy and dynastic authority. They do not themselves so much create the power that allows borderlands this increased self-rule as they do emerge from the same underlying relationships of power.

In Wales and Spain, borderland autonomy grew around subordinate borderland realms, which explicitly held political standing within a larger kingdom. In the Anglo-Saxon borderland, these were the border kingdoms that became part of Mercia in the seventh century, including the *Hwicce*,

1 Chandler, "Between Courts and Counts," 20.

Magonsaete, and several others. These kingdoms retained the privileges of self-rule for several centuries after accepting Mercian suzerainty, even while the rulers of comparable entities in the rest of Mercia were reduced in status to ealdormen. The counties of the Spanish March represent an analogous political arrangement, although here, the Carolingian court deliberately created these fiefdoms as subordinate buffer states, whereas Mercia swallowed pre-existing kingdoms. The border lords of the Spanish March were explicitly tasked with protecting the Carolingian heartland from Islamic raiding, a task at which they were entirely successful. In this sense as well, the counties of the Spanish March were similar to the borderland sub-kingdoms of Mercia, which performed a comparable defensive function for their Mercian overlords. In this way, borderland states proved useful to dynastic powers, especially early on in the history of the relationship between the dynastic center and the border region. These states and, as in the March of Wales, their successors, exhibited enduring political and cultural characteristics of medieval borderlands, including resistance to the incursion of central authority. For this reason, as the borderland developed, interactions with the dynastic center generally became more hostile. In the Anglo-Brythonic borderland, this manifested in the frequent Marcher rebellions, which plagued the Norman and Angevin dynasties. In the March of Spain, this process culminated with the rejection of French domination and the complete re-centering of power around Catalonia.

Violence represents another common feature of medieval borderlands. Indeed, in many of these regions certain forms of violence were culturally imbedded. In both the Welsh and Scottish border regions, an honor culture arose, characterized by persistent vendettas and feuds within and across ethnic lines. In the March of Wales, vendettas against and between Norman and Welsh aristocrats was a constant political reality extensively documented by the chronicle evidence. In Scotland, the existence of an honor culture is primarily attested through the extant poetry, which reflects the prevalence of feuds and other forms of honor based violence. Deliberate conquest represents the other primary

expression of borderland violence, distinguished by concerted military actions intended to capture territory. Although it is clear that the English and Picts both mounted frequent military expeditions, the extent to which any of these succeeded or even intended to capture and and control territory is obscure. It is exceedingly likely, however, that these campaigns were in some sense intended to expand the control of the dynastic centers into the borderland. In the Anglo-Brythonic and Spanish borderlands, conquest is very clearly attested in the sources. The Marcher lords in both the Welsh and Spanish Marches continuously sought to expand their territory. In the March of Wales, the Anglo-Norman lords persistently advanced west, building castles and establishing new fiefdoms. In the March of Spain, the Catalan counts pressed south into Islamic Zaragoza and the Ebro River valley, expanding the territory under their control in a piecemeal fashion during successive centuries.

Cultures of violence gave rise to abundant fortifications throughout medieval borderlands. In the pre-Norman borderland between Mercia and the Welsh kingdoms, several dykes were raised, most prominently by Anglo-Saxon kings like Wat and Offa. These earthworks ran North-South through the borderland and seem to have been at least partially effective in mitigating the effects of Welsh raiding. The Marcher barons of the Norman borderland produced some of Britain's most spectacular strongholds, and the March of Wales is known for the numerousness and sophistication of its castles. Of particular note are Caernarfon Castle, Caerphilly Castle, Conwy Castle, Pembroke Castle, and Ludlow Castle, all built to ensure English control over territory in the March of Wales between the eleventh and thirteenth century. The extent to which the region between Northhumbria and Fortriu was fortified is somewhat unclear, but it is known that certain consequential fortifications were constructed within the borderland. Chief among these is Edinburgh Castle, which seems to have been first fortified in the late sixth or early seventh century.[2] Ultimately, this fortress would become the primary seat of

2 Lynch, "Edinburgh Castle" in *The Oxford Companion to Scottish History*; MacQuarrie, Alan. *Medieval Scotland: Kingship and Nation*, 29-30.

Alban political power. It is also worth noting that an ancient Roman fortification existed in the borderland between Fortriu and the English kingdoms: the Antonine Wall, though utterly abandoned by Rome in the third century, directly abuts the Firth of Forth, and runs west from that point.[3] Little archaeological work has been done on the uses of the wall during the Early Middle Ages, however it is possible that the rampart or even certain small forts along the wall were adopted by borderland magnates for their own purposes. In the Spanish March, fortifications became a nearly constant feature of the Catalan landscape. The high level of castle construction and the vast network of small *turres* maintained by the lesser aristocrats made Catalonia perhaps the most highly fortified of the borderlands considered here. While in each case, many fortifications may have initially been constructed to protect one power center from another, these fortifications quickly became enmeshed within the borderland culture, and could just as easily defend the borderland magnates from their erstwhile overlords as from other enemies. In the March of Spain, castle construction was certainly motivated by a desire to protect territory from Islamic incursion, however these castles worked equally well at deterring rival Christian lords as Muslim emirs. In this sense, even those fortifications, such as Offa's Dyke, that evidently reflect the effort of one dynastic power could become entangled almost immediately in the complexities of borderland political violence.

Perhaps the most interesting facet of borderland politics is the long-term tendency for power to re-center into these once marginal regions. The Anglo-Pictish borderland and the Spanish March ultimately became power centers in their own right. In Scotland, the Kingdom of Alba emerged along the shores of the Firth of Forth, as Dal Riada and Fortriu disintegrated in the process, while the political stability of Northumbria remained unscathed. In Spain, the re-centering of power into Catalonia proceeded without the destruction of any established power centers. The political heartland of France

3 Concerning the Antonine Wall, see Hanson, William S. and Gordon S. Maxwell. *Rome's North West Frontier: The Antonine Wall.*

was completely unaffected by Barcelona's newfound sovereignty and, while the neighboring *taifa* had been conquered by the Almohads some decades earlier, the power of Islamic Iberia remained unbroken. The primary distinction between the Alban case and the Catalonian case is the distance between the two power centers: Barcelona was quite distant both from the political heartland of France and Islamic Spain, whereas Alba was relatively near to Fortriu and Northumbria. For that reason, Barcelona was able to re-center power into the Spanish borderlands without seriously challenging either France or the Almohads. On the other hand, the re-centering of power into the Anglo-Pictish borderland could not have occurred if both Northumbria and Fortriu had remained functional political entities. Because the history surrounding the inception of the Alban Kingdom is so uncertain, it is not possible to say whether the re-centering of power to the borderland contributed to the collapse of the Pictish kingdom or if the downfall of Fortriu was merely a precondition that allowed power to become re-centered in the borderland.

Several factors prevented the Anglo-Welsh borderland from developing into an independent center of power. The Viking invasions of the ninth and tenth century and the Norman Conquest in the eleventh are the two most critical developments in this regard. The Vikings devastated much of Mercia and the borderlands and, to some extent stifled the growth of borderland power. Moreover, the presence of the Viking armies in Northumbria, Mercia, and Anglia had the effect of empowering Wessex, which re-conquered Mercia and its sub-kingdoms in the tenth century, and set about imposing a greater degree of central authority on the borderland. Indeed, many West Saxon lords retained land in the region until the Conquest. The arrival of William the Conquerer meant a very serious reorganization of the borderland, as the Normans divvied it into separate fiefs, each controlled by the first Marcher barons. Despite this, the March of Wales was able to grow, eventually overrunning many of the Welsh kingdoms. In this sense, the growth of Marcher power in Wales did finally destroy the independent

power centers in Wales, much as the development of Alba entailed the collapse of Fortriu. While the post-Conquest period did see the borderlands increase in power, the March was never sufficiently powerful to extricate itself completely from central domination, which grew in England under West Saxon and Norman charge.

This propensity for borderlands to become political centers in their own right may have had an important effect on the development of early medieval kingdoms. It is possible that, on some level, the early political centers of Western Europe represented the re-centering of power into earlier borderlands. In early England, Mercia and Northumbria were the most powerful of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms to emerge prior to the devastation of the ninth century and both of these kingdoms shared large open borders with established Brythonic kingdoms. It is possible that their political strength during the eighth century was conditioned by a process similar to the re-centering of power around Alba and Barcelona. Likewise, the kingdom of Neustria, which became the political heartland of the Western Franks, was taken by conquest from the westernmost reaches of older Frankish territory. In this sense, it is plausible that the most powerful Anglo-Saxon and Frankish kingdoms of the eighth century were themselves the product of borderland power.

While I have confined the discussion thus far to the three borderlands considered at some length in the preceding chapters, I will now briefly suggest that the process whereby borderlands re-centered power occurred elsewhere. Several other cases in medieval Europe seem to fit this pattern well. First, it seems likely that the low countries developed along similar lines to Alba and Barcelona: the region near the mouth of the Rhine River is an important political and linguistic divide. The regional fiefdoms, namely the County of Flanders, the County of Holland, the Duchy of Brabant, and the Duchy of Luxembourg, retained significant regional autonomy from French and German dynastic authorities, eventually re-centering power into independent kingdoms and principalities. Second, Burgundy and

Medieval Borderlands: Concluding Remarks

Provence constitute a substantial border region that defied the Frankish political center for much of its history. Burgundy organized into an independent kingdom on several occasions, the most significant and lasting being the Kingdom of Arles, which controlled much of Burgundy, Provence, and what is now Switzerland for centuries. Austria and Denmark as well emerged out of Carolingian borderlands, Austria from the East March, and Denmark along the Danish side of the Danish-Carolingian border. Indeed, the name "Denmark" itself originated as a description of this borderland, known widely in Europe as the Dane Mark or Dane March.[4] Lastly, it is possible that Prussia emerged in the sixteenth century through a similar process of re-centering. Indeed, the central territory of Prussia during the sixteenth century is coterminous with the region called the 'New March' and the Ordensstaat, the military state of the Teutonic Order, which had dominated the region for nearly three centuries prior to the establishment of Prussia. As was the case in many other medieval borderlands, the landholders (in this case the Teutonic Order) built strong fortifications in the region and waged successful campaigns of conquest eastward along the Baltic Sea. The establishment of the powerful Duchy of Prussia and its subsequent growth represented a profound re-centering of political power into a late medieval borderland.

While it may be the case that the re-centering of power into borderlands operated fairly widely in Europe, it seems likely that these dynamics were restricted to feudal societies and therefore largely to Western Europe. It is possible, however, that similar dynamics prevailed in the Levant: within the Kingdom of Jerusalem the Lords of Oultrejordain, a highly fortified and intractable borderland on the fringes of the crusader state, were particularly problematic vassals for the King. The incessant rebelliousness of the Lords of Oultrejordain might best be understood within the context of political autonomy in other feudal borderlands.

4 "Dane, *n.*" *Oxford English Dictionary.* ed. 2003.

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If this process were to have operated as widely as I have speculated above, then it may have had a significant impact upon European geography. Indeed, the re-centering of political authority around medieval borderlands may explain some unusual features of modern European geography, such as the prevalence of relatively small states, between larger and more powerful ones. Countries like Andorra, which is itself a product of the borderland dynamics of the medieval Spanish March, persisted into modernity. The existence of very small countries in medieval borderlands, Monaco, Liechtenstein, and Luxembourg for example, may have originated as the products of medieval borderland dynamics. Other countries, such as Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Denmark, may also have originated as states, whose authority initially resulted from borderland re-centering. In this way, the politics of medieval borderlands have potentially exerted a lasting influence on the map of Europe.

Appendix of Maps

Welsh Borderlands:

Circa 700:

=>

Circa 1200:

Scottish Borderlands:

Circa 700:

=>

Circa 950:

Appendix

Spanish Borderlands:

Circa 825:

=>

Circa 1200:

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