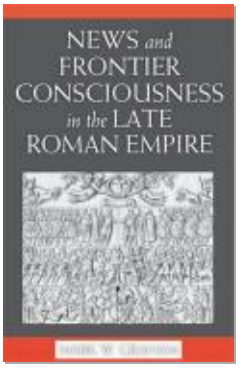
# 1. Frontiers, News, and Worldview



# PART I

# *Worldview*

# 1

# *Frontiers, News, and Worldview*

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> But even the deafest and most stay-at-home began to hear queer tales; and those whose business took them to the borders saw strange things.
> —J. R. R. Tolkien, *Fellowship of the Ring*

This chapter locates the scope of this study, both inside and outside of the contours of existing frontier studies and within methodological paradigms that have informed my reading of the ancient sources. It provides definitions for the terms and concepts central to this study. Frontier studies are fraught with the normal dangers inherent in a subject with a high level of interest and debate but only few and fragmentary sources, which themselves often beg multiple or even contradictory readings. A detailed review of the literature will help frame the basic questions.

## *Review of the Literature*

Roman frontier studies go back centuries. Their sheer volume suggests a topic of importance and enduring interest.[1] In a basic sense, a study of imperial frontiers helps one to define the term *Roman*. Scholars have found in frontier studies valuable information about Roman economy, society, strategy, defense, foreign policy, and even embryonic notions of state and nation. Contemporary and ongoing interest in Roman frontiers is clear in the well-established series of *Limeskongresses* begun in 1949 and still going strong

(sixteen volumes to date). The more recent biennial Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity Conference has resulted in three published volumes and more on the way.[2] Owing in part to the interdisciplinary efforts of frontier studies in general, research on Roman frontiers has added to traditional historical studies methodologies borrowed from archaeology, anthropology, sociology, and literary studies.

The study of Roman imperial frontiers in Late Antiquity remains, though, despite a few protests from the peripheries of frontier scholarship, entrenched in a military/political framework. Little has been done from cultural and intellectual perspectives specifically about the imperial frontiers. This is not to say that a military/political framework is wrongheaded; rather, it is to suggest that there are other viable perspectives that must be taken up if we are more fully to come to terms with a Roman and, more specifically in this case, with a late Roman or Late Antique, experience of frontiers. There are, of course, serious political and military considerations that must guide, at some level, any study of imperial frontiers. Ancient writings usually speak of frontiers, as with much else, exclusively in military terms. Our foremost historical source for the period, Ammianus Marcellinus, himself gives throughout the perspective of a military figure.[3]

Recent literature addresses some of the central issues that guide this study by focusing on four basic areas: (1) the concept of background knowledge, defined as geographical knowledge, or how Romans thought about their world in terms of geography and limits, an area in which recent studies of Roman theoretical and historical geography are to the fore; (2) topography and the question of "natural frontiers," or debates over the role of rivers and mountains as literal frontiers; (3) news and information, particularly the dynamics, contexts, and structures of news and information flow in the later Roman Empire; (4) the intangibles of mentalities, worldviews, and ideology and how these related to the ways that Romans viewed their place in the world and any limits to their claims on a portion of it.

First, several recent scholars have debated how background knowledge might have influenced Roman perceptions of frontiers. Their questions are crucial here because it is against and in terms of such background knowledge that news was reported and understood. Discussion of news and information flow only makes sense against the backdrop of the Romans' knowledge of geographical space and topographical context. Whether their knowledge was right or wrong in relation to findings of modern satellite mapping projects, it is important to explore the knowledge the ancients held and the assumptions they shared. To some extent this is a question loaded with a priori behaviorist assumptions because it holds that the way the Romans acted and thought

depended on the way they perceived their world. This assumption may be contrasted with a structural determinist one that assumes they acted on the way the world actually is.[4]

Some have concluded that geographic background knowledge in particular played a crucial part in Roman perceptions of frontiers. The questions these scholars raise shape chapter 2. A. D. Lee's study of strategic intelligence and foreign relations in Late Antiquity argues that it is crucial to look at background knowledge when analyzing the diffusion and acquisition of information.[5] His work contends that frontiers were information permeable and explores how knowledge of geography and environment helped Romans imagine regions they had never seen, often by a consistent pattern of news flow. He shows in an original way how the human context of frontier zones—urbanization and road patterns, for example—affected their "imageability" in the Roman mind and what role new information played in that process. B. Shaw consistently has argued that such factors as roads, trade routes, settlements, and corresponding architectural arrangements played a part of this human context and must be taken into account in any study of the ancient world. Study of ancient landscapes—the human context—he maintains, must go beyond the mere recounting of features and connect them to the humans who lived there.[6] Columns, triumphal arches, public artwork—all of these played a part in reflecting the setting within which human minds could imagine their world. Frontiers functioned in this context—even if only in the imagination of frontier populations or travelers such as pilgrims, merchants, or soldiers on campaign. As a recent work on worldviews and space has pointed out, "images of space are influenced by settlement pattern, mobility, and means of communication."[7] The very way the Romans viewed their world was influenced by the human context of settlement, mobility, and ease of communication.

F. Millar, the first Roman historian systematically to treat information as a viable historical research problem within frontier studies, explores the role of background geographic and ethnographic knowledge that would have guided emperors and advisers as they worked within a certain conceptual framework of the empire.[8] Although his focus throughout, like Lee's, is on policy decisions, he was an innovator in getting historians to think about the dynamics of information flowing from frontiers. Millar concluded that frontiers were information barriers—a contention that Lee convincingly challenges. C. Nicolet, in a unique work that has introduced Roman historians to theoretical historical geography, concludes that Romans, particularly of the early Empire, needed a certain perception of geographic space in order to set boundaries to their empire.[9] He analyzes how Romans

perceived geographic space and how those perceptions, in part, shaped their understanding of boundaries. As he writes,

> what interested me is not so much the spatial and territorial reality of the Roman Empire at its foundation, but the awareness of it possessed by the main players: the Romans and their adversaries, the ruling classes and the subjects. In a study such as this, geography should not be understood as a reality but as a representation of that reality.

"Geography," he continues, is the "knowledge and representation of the earth."[10] D. Braund, in his various analyses of the Roman frontier in the Caucasus region, concludes that geographical knowledge as well as geographical myth played an important role in how Romans imagined their frontiers.[11] He opens up new avenues for research by asking what Romans thought about their geography and how that affected the way they acted and reacted in response to those assumptions. Particularly, his approach expands the range of sources and approaches one may use in exploring background knowledge. C. R. Whittaker, following Nicolet to some extent, argues that perceptions of geographic space, of which frontiers played a part, are crucial to national solidarity.[12] The first section of his recent survey of frontiers explores how Romans, again mostly of the early Empire, imagined the world and the space of their Empire within it. He argues that one must take into account the knowledge Romans shared about their geography and their cosmology.

Other historians have downplayed the role of background geographic knowledge in Roman perceptions of their frontiers. Many of these historians, implicitly at least, point to the "primitive state" of Roman knowledge of geography and topography compared to a "true" (that is, modern) geographic rendering necessary for legitimate background knowledge. In this sense, most of these writers would be structural determinists in that they assume that people act primarily on the basis of the way the world is rather than on the basis of the way they perceive the world to be. D. Cherry, in a recent work on frontier society in North Africa, concludes that Romans knew—or, rather, cared—little about geography.[13] Such assumptions, it seems, use a modern yardstick of geographical knowledge and refuse to elevate Roman thinking about geography to the level of *real* geography. Cherry's assumptions about the relationship between geography and frontier studies come across in his claim that frontiers performed no "historically recoverable function other than to have accommodated contact."[14] In short, to him, Romans simply did not think about frontiers in terms of or against a set of background assumptions that may be termed geography or geographic background knowledge.

B. Isaac, in probably the most important book on Roman frontiers written in the last twenty years, is less adamant than Cherry on this point but nonetheless works with some of the same assumptions.[15] Through detailed studies of Roman geographic knowledge of the early Empire, Isaac concludes that the focus of Roman imperialism in the frontier zones was always ethnic and had little to do with geographic or background knowledge. In fact, he disparages Roman "knowledge" of geography, a crucial impediment, as he puts it, to any global strategizing about frontiers. The assumption here, it seems, is that because Romans did not grasp a modern and scientific understanding of geography, they were therefore unable to strategize effectively with their frontiers, and thus they did not really think in terms of literal territorial frontiers. Such conclusions, I will argue, do not seem to follow for the late Empire in particular. There is no necessary connection between sharpened perceptions of frontiers and the type of "Grand Strategy" thinking that Isaac is challenging.[16] J. C. Mann likewise concludes that Romans could never have had anything close to a Grand Strategy with their frontiers, in part because they had a poor knowledge of geography and cartography.[17] Again, the standard is modern understanding of the way the world is. S. Mattern also argues, essentially, that geographic knowledge was such that it could not have played a significant role in Roman imperial strategy of the Principate. Rather, the projection of might and the provocation of fear were the central Roman concerns.[18]

Second, many recent historians have explored what role natural topographical or geographic features such as deserts, mountains, and rivers played as frontiers. This question, handled in chapter 3, is part of a much larger historiographical debate in many eras and contexts over the role of "natural frontiers."[19] The question here differs from the preceding one in that it tries to determine if or how topographical or geographical features literally served as frontiers rather than if or how people imagined them as such. The overlap between this category and the previous one is well laid out, in the specific context of North Africa, by B. Hitchner as a question of ideal versus reality. The major issue here is whether so-called natural frontiers such as the Euphrates, Tigris, Danube, and Rhine Rivers or mountains served as military barriers and/or frontiers. An oft-cited exposition of the problem for ancient historians—one that remained dominant for some time—is A. Alföldi's presentation of the Rhine/Danube frontier as a "moral barrier." Alföldi claimed that this frontier solidified a common sense of belonging to an indivisible empire, thus fostering a sense of national solidarity. The question may be contrasted with the preceding one in its structural determinist presuppositions, for it assumes that people act according to the way the world is.[20] Developments in military studies often work this way—ancient battles are analyzed in light of

satellite or other high-altitude photographs to see why they turned out the way they did.[21] The debates here, like the Roman border skirmishes they often focus on, are intense. They are instructive here in their struggles with how natural frontiers were imagined as such by the Romans and how Romans received information from and about them.

Some dismiss the idea of natural boundaries entirely. Much of this research has followed from C. Wells's pronouncement in the early 1970s that rivers never served as barriers in the Roman Empire. Isaac likewise claims that natural boundaries such as rivers do not ever serve as frontiers. In fact, he claims that there is no evidence that geography ever determined boundaries. He proposes that it did not matter much to the Romans where the frontiers ran because Roman imperialism focused on peoples, not territories. There is no evidence, he claims, that topography or geography determined boundaries. Whittaker likewise claims that natural features never served as real boundaries but rather that they often were promoted to that status for propagandistic purposes. Both Isaac and Whittaker would agree that natural boundaries do not serve as real frontiers, but Whittaker holds that Romans did care, at some level, how or where those frontiers were imagined. Furthermore, Whittaker claims, the conflicts among military, political, and administrative considerations in the Roman Empire "preclude natural frontiers." Mattern, while claiming that any educated Roman of the Principate would claim rivers, mountains, deserts, and oceans as borders, argues that this knowledge did not translate into any action in terms of strategy.[22]

Others, though, have seen natural boundaries as literal frontiers. The arguments here tend to support some of my central contentions, especially those focused on rivers. At one time this view more or less was taken for granted, but few have defended it since Wells, Whittaker, Isaac, and others have come out strongly against it. M. J. Nicasie is unusual among recent historians in arguing that "natural frontiers do, as a rule, make sense in military terms. They constitute barriers." These natural boundaries, he claims, did help Romans feel an "acute sense of belonging to one indivisible Empire." Nicasie, then, echoes Alföldi's "moral barrier." D. Braund explores river frontiers, arguing that to look at the purely military functions of rivers misses the point.[23] In the worldview of Romans, he claims, rivers did serve as boundaries both by nature of their "religiosity" and their "natural power to divide and to bound." Braund takes some modern military historians to task for missing what he calls the "point which lies embedded in the environmental psychology of the Roman world."[24] Braund's work undergirds the emphasis on worldview throughout this study. His argument that worldview shaped Romans' background knowledge of their frontiers is compelling. Also, it is important to note that this

worldview shaped the context and format of news coming from natural frontiers, however imagined.

In a unique approach to the geopolitical world of Late Antiquity, G. Fowden analyzes the crucial role that geography played in shaping the diverse cultures of Late Antiquity.[25] One line of his argument suggests that the ideology of a universal Christian empire forced frontiers to diminish in importance in the later Empire. As he implies, geography, not artificially constructed or imagined frontiers, posed the real limits on culture. Christianity in the Empire, for example, pushed far beyond national boundaries through its expansion efforts, its only limit being geography. Thus, geography, he affirms, was the real mover of the history of the region he studies: the notion of frontiers was actually less relevant in terms of culture. His account presents another option in the polarized natural frontiers debate. For if geography provides the real limits, then the Roman Imperial frontiers are not the issue at stake.

Third, some recent works have explored directly the role of information and news in the Roman Empire. Very few studies have analyzed how information moved from peripheries to center. Some of these have debated whether the frontiers were barriers to information from beyond the frontiers. Fewer have studied how information from the frontiers moved and functioned within the Roman Empire.[26] Furthermore, the focus of these studies almost exclusively has been on foreign policy and military decisions.[27]

The study of communication in Roman frontier studies largely has sprung up in response to E. N. Luttwak's (in)famous *Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, published in 1976. Luttwak argued that the Roman Empire saw a gradual shift in defensive posture, informed by a Grand Strategy which itself developed over time. Few if any significant studies of Roman frontiers in the past thirty years have failed to react to this work. In spite of some initial positive reviews by foremost Roman historians, the subsequent tide of opinion has shifted to criticism and often hostility.[28] However, it does seem that the work deserves solitary credit for prompting research in a neglected area of frontier studies. In an oft-cited review of Luttwak, Mann concluded that there was "no capacity" for Grand Strategy in the Roman Empire because of the limited means of communication and resulting lack of information available to the central government and because of the Romans' poor knowledge of geography and cartography.[29] Mann critiques Luttwak for assuming widespread proliferation of news and information and with them geographical knowledge. But Luttwak, a policymaker and not a trained ancient historian per se, did not have subsequent studies of Roman news, information, and background knowledge at his disposal. Mann's critique, then, is tantamount to an indictment of Roman military and frontier studies in general up until the time that Luttwak

wrote. This is a point that a continued historiographical tradition of Luttwak-bashing fails to consider.

In a study explicitly prompted by Luttwak, Millar analyzed the formulations of Roman frontier policies and the conceptual framework within which they worked. Millar, who initially described Luttwak's work as "excellent," sought to analyze further some of the issues that Luttwak had left unexplored. Millar argues that there were frontier policies and that they did have "fundamental effects on the political, social, and cultural contexts within which millions of people lived." Furthermore, Millar argues, it is important to note the "extent of geographical and ethnographical knowledge available to emperors and the nature of the conceptual framework which they could apply to this knowledge." Millar focuses on the means by which information was gained, the forms in which it was presented, and the "conceptual frameworks within which it could be used to produce decisions about frontier policy."[30] The way the empire worked as a system, he claims, was very much a function of the way that information was appropriated by the government. His article remains standard for its basic and seminal treatment of how information proliferated *within* the Empire at the political level. He concludes, with analogy to Alföldi's moral barrier, that frontiers were, in essence, information barriers. For him, the study of information was crucial to a study of Roman frontiers. Millar closes his study with some provocative statements designed to prompt further work. He claims that when culture changed (as with the victory of Christianity), so did the values that informed foreign relations. Part 3 here relates this issue to background knowledge, news, and information, with somewhat different results.

Millar's work in turn prompted other significant studies of foreign relations that challenged his notion that frontiers were information barriers. The question behind such studies is whether or not Roman policies were based at all on the retrieval of information from frontiers or beyond them. Lee concludes, in his study of third- to seventh-century Roman foreign relations, that frontiers were "information permeable" and that Romans developed regular networks for gleaning information on their neighbors. Lee's work highlights the personnel, frequency, and context of information ebb and flow across frontiers in Late Antiquity. As such, it sets out parameters of the study of information in Late Antiquity. N. J. E. Austin and N. B. Rankov recently have produced a detailed survey of political and military intelligence in the Roman world, particularly explaining the roles of the various officials involved.[31] Their work, the first of its kind, makes valuable contributions to the study of information in the Roman world by its complete explanation of intelligence functionaries.

Very recently, historians have begun to consider communication outside of foreign relations. Ando, an innovator in this regard, analyzes the Roman government's use of communicative action in building a consensus of power between center and periphery. While his focus is more on official government communication and thus differs from mine, his is the first study to explore in any detail communication action without being limited to military intelligence. The recent Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity Conference collection, *Travel, Communication, and Geography in Late Antiquity: Sacred and Profane*, likewise explores communication from a wide variety of angles beyond military.[32]

Finally, fighting against a predominant tendency to view frontiers as objects only of military and/or political study and importance, a few very recent works have shown how religious and mythical worldviews and cultural mentalities have shaped the placement, defense, and perceptions of imperial frontiers. For the Principate, this now has been skillfully explored by Mattern, who analyzes the role of ideology, psychology, and worldview in Roman Imperial strategy.[33] For Late Antiquity, though, many questions remain. There persists, it seems, a cleavage between predominant views of Late Antiquity as a "supremely religious or spiritual age"[34] and frontier studies of the period that treat the age as if it were striving to be rationalistic and modern in its attempts to construct and defend borders. Works exploring only the purely military or political nature of frontiers are too numerous to mention here. Historians have argued that Late Antiquity was a world rustling with deities and have imagined the powerful role of holy men and women in shaping the age. On the cynical side, the age has been characterized as superstitious and irrational. The notion that this same sense of spirituality and religiosity should be applied to frontier studies has been lacking almost entirely from frontier studies until very recently. Persons of Late Antiquity begin to resemble hard-core "modern" strategists who, as logical calculating individuals, certainly knew better than to let religious ideas and beliefs interfere with their practical considerations. Emperors, governors, or whoever could, in fine empirical fashion, sort out not only what was really out there but also what really mattered.

The Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity conferences have made efforts to bring these two extremes together, but in some senses they have preserved the spiritual versus rational political divide in their treatment of "metaphysical" frontiers over against political and imperial ones. The editors of the first volume of papers explicitly react against an image of *limes* studies that calls to mind a "vast linear array, manned by soldiers and strengthened by fortifications, with the Romans on one side and the rest of the world on the other."[35] By expanding the parameters of frontier studies to include metaphorical and

metaphysical frontiers, they have highlighted a variety of social, ethnic, intellectual, and spiritual boundaries within Late Antique societies. These have been set against traditional studies of geographical frontiers, defined as political frontiers. A collection of articles edited by A. Rousselle attempts much the same thing as the Shifting Frontiers papers and publications and produces similar results. Its insightful papers on celestial and terrestrial frontiers certainly propose new directions in frontier studies and serve as models for expanding beyond traditional historiographical paradigms. Whittaker presents a unique perspective by arguing that we must take into account the "symbolic, sacred character of Roman *limites*." He argues that territoriality, suggested by notions of cosmology, is crucial to understanding a Roman mentality of frontiers. D. Braund innovatively argues for considering the psychology and worldview of Romans and how these affected their perceptions of frontiers.[36] For him, geographical myth and old stories are as important for understanding how Romans perceived frontiers as are any attempts at seeing how Roman policy took account of frontiers. Both Whittaker and Braund suggest that, in the Roman mind, territorial space had a direct relationship to the cosmos. They both acknowledge that frontiers, in a Roman way of thinking, were connected to a notion of sacral space.

Working on a later period, E. K. Fowden argues strongly for breaking down the barrier separating frontier studies from religious studies in Late Antiquity. Her work has been one of a few that recently have challenged the glaring dichotomy between secular and sacred in the Late Antique historiography. In tracing the cult of St. Sergius at the eastern frontier with Persia, she shows the importance of looking to religious forces, such as the power of saints and relics to influence political and military history of the frontier zone. Her approach highlights the role of "divine defense" surrounding holy sites, and she convincingly criticizes frontier studies limited to "arms and walls." "We cannot afford," she writes, "to project onto our evidence a separation of religious belief and political or military action."[37] Her conclusions parallel Braund's, although she analyzes a Christian social context, while he is dealing largely with a pre-Christian Roman world. G. Fowden likewise insists that the changes brought about by Constantine are only comprehensible when we resist separating religion from politics/military.

My approach to frontier studies, although informed by these discussions throughout, is unique in a variety of ways. First, by handling the idea of frontier consciousness, which includes background information as well as news, this study is not limited to policy decisions or strategic intelligence. To date, all studies that explore information and frontiers together have been focused exclusively on policy and/or strategy. Second, I address the question

of worldview in a changing context in a unique way, bridging the gap between pagan and Christian, analyzing changes and continuities. I conclude, on the basis of worldview analysis, that frontiers did matter and that they played a role in Roman perceptions of space, specifically for the later Empire. Third, I present Roman frontier consciousness as different in the third through fifth centuries from what it was in the first and second centuries: it did not, as some have implied, merely replicate or freeze in time the ideology of the early Empire. I maintain that new forces acted on Roman frontier consciousness, diffused in part through heightened news flow. Thus, traditional Roman imperial ideology alone cannot account for the change in worldview in the later Empire. Fourth, by focusing on the third to fifth centuries, this study presents a time in which Romans came to see frontiers as territorial and not just as divisions between peoples. This aspect cannot be found as readily for the early Empire, and it appears to weaken, in some sectors, with the fifth-century invasions. By leaving off where many studies of Late Antique frontiers begin, I believe that I have isolated a period of decided and influential development and change.

## *Information/Communication/News*

M. Stephens defines news as "new information about a subject of some public interest that is shared with some portion of the public."[38] Growing alongside recent emphasis on media has been scholarship across the disciplines in the fields of information and communication theory. Many such analyses have attempted to comparatively analyze premodern and nonmodern societies in light of modern. Such efforts, largely within media studies and sociology, have provided models for analyzing the flow of information.[39]

Historians of all periods have benefited from methodologies gleaned from other disciplines in the study of information and news.[40] One of the upshots of this sociological emphasis has been heightened awareness of terminology in the study of information. Should the appropriate term of study be *news*, *media*, *information*, *communication*, or what? Modern sources tend to highlight news and the dynamics of information flow. Ancient sources rarely if ever mention the context and dynamic of information flow. As S. Lewis contends, news is one of the most taken-for-granted aspects of life in the premodern world. To us, in a modern world, news holds "a privileged and prestigious position in our culture's hierarchy of values." But to the ancients, the "very ordinariness of news means that its transmission is often present in our sources in inexplicit form, because it required no explanation."[41] Reconstructing how news functioned in any ancient society requires detailed reading of a variety of ancient sources. Further complicating study is the fact

that ancient sources and modern studies tend to overemphasize the military and other visible institutions of communication. Lewis claims to have written her book in reaction to the idea that the entirety of news flow among the ancient Greek *poleis* could be understood merely with reference to the herald or signal fire.

I break the study of information into two basic components. The first is what Lee calls background knowledge, which I incorporate into analysis of worldview. Worldview involves knowledge and assumptions about cosmology, geography, topography, chorography, and environment. The second category is what I will call news. Whether coming from persons such as soldiers, pilgrims, merchants, spies, hostages, and so forth and channeled through various media, there was new information about Roman frontiers working its way to people throughout the Roman Empire. To be news to the ancients, it did not have to be as recent as what we today would define as news. Ando gives a helpful definition of *contemporary* in the ancient world as "within living memory."[42] News was prompted by disastrous events such as the surrender of Nisibis in 363 or the Battle of Adrianople in 378, but it also arose from less momentous observations by persons talking or writing about their experiences at or near frontier zones. News was interpreted and appropriated vis à vis worldview or background knowledge. Images of space are, in fact, influenced by settlement pattern, mobility, and means of communication.[43] Through a variety of media, news reached the Roman people and challenged or confirmed their worldview(s). Both of these aspects of information, worldview and news, functioning together, are crucial to the study of frontier consciousness.

Sociologist P. Bourdieu provides a model for understanding thought and action (that is, practice) in a habitus, a concept with much in common with my use of worldview. Central to Bourdieu's approach are questions of how a society is held together, how it comes to be a unit, so to speak. One of the means is communication, which allows actors to participate in a "commonsense world endowed with objectivity secured by a consensus of meaning." Communication can only be communication if there is some type of mechanism whereby the members of a society can share in its meaning. He posits a dialectical relationship between objective structures, some of which I will explore for the later Roman Empire, and cognitive or motivating structures that they produce and of which they are products.[44] Communication structures play a part in this process. His explorations of how historical events, especially "newsworthy" ones, related to human practice have shaped my understanding of societies and communication in this project and will be explored in more detail.

## *Worldview Analysis*

The analytical category of worldview (*Weltanschauung*) requires some explanation. I present it here as a coherent theoretical framework on which may be located the many stray pieces of evidence that come together in this study.[45] Analyzed first in German scientific historical study, worldview suggests an intellectual environment. The historian and historical theorist W. Dilthey (1833–1911) was one of the first to employ the term. Dilthey's emphasis on studying the totality of human life itself led him to demarcate a category of thought that guided human action but that was rarely set forth by humans explicitly. Worldview analysis emerges as a response within and against scientific approaches to history, as the coherency that comes forth as humans piece together a "pattern of *meaning* for life." Even as scientific and "objective" a historian as Dilthey recognized the need to account for a fuzzy region in which "humans' minds come to terms with the riddle of life"—the *Rätselhaftigkeit*. A worldview is a "general sense or feeling about how life as a whole hangs together."[46] M. Kearney also provides some helpful approaches to worldview, drawing analogies to cosmology and insisting that ideas in worldviews are rarely expressed directly "and thus consist of tacit knowledge." Particularly helpful has been Kearney's analysis of images of space as a function of worldview. He shows how means of communication and mobility have an influence on images of space and thus worldview.[47]

To the extent that this "region," to use Dilthey's own term, can be studied historically, it is useful for considerations of Late Antiquity.[48] Crucial questions I ask here are what role frontiers and information about them and from them served in modifying and confirming Late Antique worldviews and to what extent that process varied in different regions of the Empire and between center and periphery. At the frontiers or limits to one's claims on the world, the ideological limits of one's worldview may be analyzed. As Whittaker notes, borrowing from anthropological study, "ideology tends to be at its purest on the frontier, where it is most under pressure."[49]

But how does one analyze something as fuzzy and implicit as a worldview? The study here is an experiment in how information shapes and is shaped by worldview. Subtly, through choice of what to record and how, historians, poets, churchwomen and churchmen, orators, architects, artisans, and so on betray to readers, listeners, or other consumers their worldview. Historical and polemical accounts, monuments, and visual arts all give information filtered through a worldview. An analysis of a change in limits, for example, can reveal how one views his or her world, a "worldview." Here the stress and strain of change is reflected by and on the way that one views the world.

To illustrate the importance of worldview, a personal anecdote might help. I have stood at the Roman frontier zones of North Africa and the eastern Roman Empire and asked the proverbial "Why?" To my view, both regions appeared desolate, arid, semidesert, and rocky. Why would anyone want to hold onto these regions or struggle for recognized mastery over them? By my worldview, it seems absurd to fight over these regions, but to a Roman, the answer was self-evident—so much so, in fact, that no Roman, to my knowledge, ever gives us a detailed answer to my basic question.[50] As Bourdieu put it, "what goes without saying goes without saying."[51]

It is in the step the researcher must take from the individual text(s) or piece of material culture to generalizable conclusion(s), however, that problems arise. Reading texts in terms of audience expectation presents a host of thorny issues and very difficult questions. Can one really speak in general terms of a late Roman or Late Antique worldview, or must one speak of a North African worldview or even a Cappadocian worldview? In the most extreme reduction, is the question really one of analyzing St. Augustine's or Julian the Apostate's worldview? My perspective is that texts are not individual and personal symbol systems but that they must be read in terms of audience expectation, as part of a collective enterprise.[52] Granted, texts can also present idiosyncrasies, but images in a variety of texts and shared by a wide variety of writers can certainly get us toward a worldview.

Along with these physical elements come the intellectual and cultural context that likewise shaped worldview. Myth, religion, history, memory, sacred texts, oracles, and satire all shaped and expressed the worldview(s) of Romans. Comparatively few Romans ever visited their frontier zones. But most or all from the late Empire had some consciousness of what those frontiers were like, what they meant, and what they signified. Whether submerged in ideologies of *imperium sine fine* or in Augustine's musings on the problem of shrunken borders, Romans of the later Empire had some consciousness of frontiers. Fluctuating frontiers or ever-advancing frontiers were both ideas arising out of intellectual and cultural milieus.

Myth also has proven helpful in analyzing Roman thinking on frontiers. D. Braund has argued that myths about rivers, for example, were a very important part of the "environmental psychology" of the Roman world. He also contends that myth was "very much part of contemporary government and diplomacy." "Myth," he writes, "structures the world and makes sense of it."[53] An understanding of such myths is necessary if we are to enter the world of Late Antiquity and explore the ways in which frontier consciousness functioned in a Late Antique worldview.

Working in a way similar to myth are biblical texts that shaped the way persons of Late Antiquity imagined their geography. That late Romans were influenced by biblical texts is beyond doubt. Interpretation, as always, was tricky business, but the fact that the Scriptures shaped the later Roman and Late Antique imagination is certain. A. Cameron writes,

> The Scriptures, then, presented both an opportunity and a challenge in late antiquity. They provided vocabulary, imagery, and subject matter for poets; models for holy men and women; and ways of understanding humanity and the world. But they required exegesis, and this could be difficult and risky.[54]

The extent of the difference Christianity made in the late Roman Empire is the topic of part 3. Behind my analysis here lie questions of both how their own view of geography affected the way persons of Late Antiquity read biblical texts and how biblical texts affected their worldview. In the allusions of Romans of the later Empire to biblical texts, one may in some sense see the current state of their knowledge of the world. The Euphrates River, for example, was a powerful biblical symbol for borders; its role as such must be considered in any study of Late Antique borders.[55]

Prophecy reflects worldview as well. Prophecy formed a part of the Late Antique worldview in that history made sense, to Christians anyway, as part of the plan of God—past, present, and future were all part of a continuum that had its fulfillment in prophecy. To pagans, history was no less viewed as part of a pattern—oracles, prodigies, and the like were part and parcel of the notion of history and could not be divorced from it. Prophecy connected nature to religion in a way that expressed and shaped worldview. In this sense, commentaries or references to the prophetic works of the Hebrew Scriptures as well as pagan and Christian prodigies and oracles also play a part in shaping and/or revealing a late Roman worldview.[56]

Taken together, these testimonies—ancient as well as modern—give strong suggestions as to how the Romans of the late Empire made sense of changes on and challenges to their frontier zones. The combination of worldview analysis and the focus on news can expand the scope of frontier studies, especially as regards the Roman world. As an analytical category worldview is helpful, and arguably essential, to frontier studies because it highlights how Romans viewed the Late Antique world as they struggled between its dominant forces of perceived ancient structure and rampant innovation.