

Frontier and border in Greek literary texts: a lexical and conceptual survey

Federica Pezzoli et David Hernández de la Fuente

This paper, stemming from a Spanish consolidated research group¹, aims to investigate the origin and development of the concept of frontier and border in the ancient Greek world starting from a philological and terminological discussion of some Greek sources from the VIII to the IV century B.C., when the related ideas of limit and barbarian are first conceptualized and developed.

The starting point of our investigation are our contemporary interests: the idea of frontier and otherness, as Tzvetan Todorov would put it in his famous work *Nous et les autres*², confronts us, like in a mirror, with our own identity and obliges us to delimit and define the 'Other'. Moreover, now and in the ancient world, borders constitute political more than geographical entities³ and, being political, they are potentially subjected to transformation over time, as some of the cases analysed in the next pages will show. Last but not least the origin of universal models on the barbarism-civilization and center-periphery dichotomies, used and abused in the Eurocentric – not to say xenophobic – discourse of the classicists since the birth of the German *Altertumswissenschaft* up to Victorian England, can be traced already in the Greek world. In fact, some of the Greek literary sources show the emergence of a rhetoric of power which undoubtedly uses relevant stereotypes that are repeated over the centuries creating an historical-anthropological discourse of a clash of cultures or – as Samuel Huntington would put it⁴ – of a clash of civilizations in the frame of the differences and divergences of limits and frontiers of identities.

I. Some theoretical remarks

¹ Project: “De ὄρος a limes : fuentes para el estudio del origen y desarrollo del concepto de frontera en el mundo antiguo”. Some results at <http://proyectofronteras.blogspot.com.es>. See also Marco Alviz Fernández and David Hernández de la Fuente, *De ὄρος a limes : el concepto de frontera en el mundo antiguo y su recepción*, Madrid, Escolar y Mayo, 2017.

² Tzvetan Todorov, *Nous et les autres*, Paris, Seuil, 1989.

³ As shown, for example, by the important changes that have occurred in the European territory after 1989 or by the *valla*, a 12-kilometer-long barrier that marks the border between Europe and Africa and is located in the Spanish city of Melilla, that lies surrounded by Moroccan territory.

⁴ Samuel. P. Huntington, *The clash of civilisations and the remaking of world order*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1996.

To start with, we would like to consider some theoretical aspects before we explore the Greek lexical implications of border and frontier in depth.

Why do we use borders?

According to Zanini, “L’uomo tende a vivere all’interno di uno spazio chiuso, limitato. Ha bisogno di avere attorno a sé una barriera che delimiti lo spazio che ha occupato, lo separi e lo protegga da un qualcosa che, nel momento stesso in cui viene tracciato il confine, diventa ‘altro’, ‘diverso’”⁵. Moreover, “délimiter le territoire d’une cité, c’est à la fois définir le champ d’exercice de l’autorité politique et la surface économiquement disponible”⁶.

Borders and frontiers then, today as much as in the ancient world, represent elements that belong to the anthropological and socio-political sphere more than the geographical one. As such, natural borders that define a ‘necessary limit’ do not exist⁷.

Another key aspect that needs to be kept in mind is the double-nature of limits that, in the context of the Greek world, emerges clearly in archaeological data and inscriptions.

Limit consists of a line that circumscribes and separates and, therefore, establishes a real or imagined difference between two territories : in the archaic period, this difference materialises in numerous conflicts between communities that fight over their territorial margins. In the Hellenistic period this ambiguity can be detected in the frequent practice of arbitration, that is to say the use of one or more arbitrators (monarchs, regional or federal courts, citizens of a third *polis*, etc.)⁸ to settle territorial disputes and appoint a third party to mark these limits with extreme rigour.

Nevertheless, limits, especially if considered as borderland, represent zones that promote interchange and encounters between the so-called ‘frontier societies’ : as theoretical and social anthropology have studied, and as many instances of ancient and later history demonstrate, societies on the limits of different cultures constitute the areas where civilization has advanced in knowledge thanks to a better understanding of the self-other dichotomy. Through the study of intergroup relations within the confines of civilizations, cultural anthropology has given special emphasis to the issue of peaceful and violent exchange among peoples, developed as a result of the establishment of borders, and to how this may affect cultural transformations and ideological processes in diverse societies. The Bronze Age research and the archaeological theory of Kristian

⁵ Piero Zanini, *Significati del confine. I limiti naturali, storici, mentali*, Milano, Bruno Mondadori, 2000, p. XV.

⁶ Denis Rousset, “Centre urbain, frontière et espace rural dans les cités de Grèce centrale”, *Territoires des cités grecque, Bulletin de Correspondence Hellenique, Supplément*, n. 34, 1999, p. 50.

⁷ Piero Zanini, *Significati del confine...*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁸ Denis Rousset, “Les frontières des cités grecques. Premières réflexions à partir du recueil des documents épigraphiques”, *Cahiers du Centre Glotz*, n. 5, 1994, p. 101 ss.

Kristiansen on decentralized division in less complex societies in different symbolic spaces⁹, exploring movements of people, things, animals and ideas, suggests that we consider the borders in the Greek world as a more permeable barrier. Other than pointing out the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’, discernible boundaries we end up generating a state of conceptual tension positive for the advance of the historical process. In *Magna Graecia* for example, a vast number of suburban sanctuaries have been used by two neighbouring communities (*poleis*)¹⁰, and borderland markets (ἐφορίαί ἀγοραί) constitute areas where people got to know others and develop relationships that have to be understood as much more significant and complex than purely economical ones¹¹.

If we want to explore these topics further, it appears necessary to differentiate between the boundary that separates two Greek communities – that can be politically organised as *polis*, *koinon* or *ethnos* – that is to say two ethnic and cultural equal entities that can be distinguished only politically (in this sense the border divides two areas that have something in common and, therefore, the term works as a mirror) and the border that separates a Greek community from a barbarian one¹². In this particular case, the word highlights the differences between two different entities, sometimes radically diverse in terms of costumes and races – thus the limit would be the one that separate us from the ‘Other’ and the image would appear as a reflection in a deforming mirror¹³ –, and the ‘Other’ is often primitive, speaks an incomprehensible language, eats raw flesh, as attested by Thucydides for the Eurytians¹⁴, who formed a great part of the Aetolian *ethnos*, and

⁹ Cf. for example Kristian Kristiansen, “Old boundaries and new frontiers : reflections on the identity of archaeology”, *Current Swedish Archaeology*, n. 4, 1996, p. 103-122.

¹⁰ Emanuele Greco, “Problemi della frontiera nel mondo coloniale”, *Confini e frontiera nella grecità d'occidente, Atti del XXXVI Convegno di Studi sulla Magna Grecia*, Taranto, Istituto per la Storia e Archeologia della Magna Grecia, 1999, p. 261-272.

¹¹ Carmine Ampolo, “La frontiera dei Greci come luogo del rapporto e dello scambio : i mercati di frontiera fino al V secolo a. C”, *Confini e frontiera nella grecità d'occidente...*, *op. cit.*, p. 451-464.

¹² The contact dynamics between the Greeks and the “others” generate the first conceptualization of boundaries – both in the epic and in historiography – and contribute to the creation and dissemination of the stereotype of the barbarian. A discourse on barbarism can be identified in the Greek literary sources dealing with the ‘Other’ and applies not only to peoples living outside of the limits of the Greek speaking world, but also to some peripheral areas of the Greek civilization (Asia Minor, the colonized areas of Magna Graecia, the Black Sea or the coasts of the nowadays France and Spain), where some ethnic, religious or linguistic boundaries exist.

¹³ Michel Casevitz, “Les mots de la frontière en grec”, *La Frontière. Séminaire de recherche sous la direction d'Yves Roman*, Lyon, Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée Jean Pouilloux, 1993, p. 17-24.

¹⁴ Cf. Thucydides, III, 94, 4-5: “they speak a dialect more unintelligible than any of their neighbours, and are believed to eat raw flesh” (eng. trans. B. Jowett). It is possible that Thucydides’ opinion reflected the Athenian prejudice toward peoples of northern Greece.

has strange habits, such as a form of communism of women, attested by Herodotus in the Agathyrsi¹⁵.

Bearing in mind this philosophical and anthropological perspective, in the following pages we will study the concept of border and frontier. We can be certain that the use of words – the different words which, in Greek, designate the idea of frontier – conceals notions that are also relevant on the boundaries of the Greek world, both internal and external, understanding internal boundaries as the contact areas between more urbanized areas and peripheries which are usually characterized in the sources as almost part of the barbaric lands.

II. The Greek vocabulary of the border and the frontier

Focusing now on the terms used in the literary sources to define the border and the frontier, we can point out that in Greek there is not a single or a specific term that can account for each one of these concepts, but that we are faced with a variety of terms that stress either the impenetrable or, vice versa, the permeable nature of the limit itself¹⁶. It seems that this can be explained as of limited interest to the Greeks, and especially their literary sources, showed in regard to liminal spaces, preferring to focus their attention on the *asty* – the political, economic and religious core of their community. On the other hand, limit can be understood, at least theoretically, as an element that shows how at the beginning they have put no emphasis on clear distinctions between themselves or between their community as a whole and Others, the barbarians¹⁷.

The border as a fixed line (and a fixed mark) : the ὄρος

The first word we will consider here is ὄρος (cf. *uruus* in latin, that designate the circuit of the city marked by the physical trace) that has been used in classical Greek to indicate the border – the term did not differentiate between the limit of a property, of the territory that made up a city or the limit of an ethnic group – but that is already present in the Homeric poems.

ὄρος at its origins represented the furrow that a plough leaves on the land and divides what is

¹⁵ Cf. Herodotus, IV, 104: “The Agathyrsi are the most refined of men and especially given to wearing gold. Their intercourse with women is promiscuous, so that they may be consanguine with one another and, all being relations, not harbor jealousy or animosity toward one another. In the rest of their customs they are like the Thracians” (eng. trans. A. D. Godley).

¹⁶ Michel Casevitz, “Les mots de la frontière en grec...”, *op. cit.*, p. 23-24.

¹⁷ The Greek identity or Greekness (τό Ἑλληνικόν), as said by Herodotus, VIII, 144, 2, was founded more on the community of race, language, religion and costumes than on a concept of territoriality. Cf. Francisco J. Gómez Espelosín, “Los límites de Grecia en la geografía griega”, Pedro López Barja and Susaba Reboreda Morillo (eds.), *Fronteras e identidad en el mundo griego antiguo*, Santiago de Compostela-Vigo, Universidade de Santiago de Compostela-Universidade de Vigo, 2001, p. 87-88.

‘inside’ from what has been left ‘outside’. Later on, the word came to signify the landmark, in many occasions a stone, that indicated the presence of a furrow and, only subsequently, limit and border in abstract terms¹⁸.

We will now provide some examples to clarify its usage.

In *Iliad*, XII, v. 421¹⁹, the word appeared in its neutral form οὔρον, in plural and as a term in a similitude, and designated the stones that marked the boundaries of a common field that had been the object of a dispute between two people : “But as two men with measuring-rods in hand strive about the **landmark-stones** in a common field, and in a narrow space contend each for his equal share...” (eng. trans. A.T. Murray).

In Herodotus, *Histories*, in its Ionian variation οὔρος, the word appeared 23 times to designate the boundaries between different barbarian territories and the border between Greek territories and barbarian ones.

In I, 72, the historian used οὔρος to define Halys, a river that flowed from the mountains of Armenia through the Cilician region and traced the landmark that separated the Median and the Lydian empires²⁰ ; in VII, 126, 1 οὔρος appeared as the zone limited by two rivers, the Nestus and the Achelous, that flowed on the northern part of Greece ; it constituted the border of the land inhabited by lions²¹.

If in these two examples the border coincides with natural and geographical elements such as rivers, in other cases the term acquires a more abstract meaning and designates the boundaries of a territory or the very territory that is enclosed in it.

In III, 117, 1 we can appreciate the description of a plain surrounded by mountains that historically belonged to the Chorasmians because it was located “at the boundaries of the Chorasmians, the Hyrcanians, Parthians, Sarangians, and Thamanaei”²², which later on was

¹⁸ Cf. Celestina Milani, “Il ‘confine’: note linguistiche”, Marta Sordi (ed.), *Il confine nel mondo classico*, Milano, Vita e pensiero, 1987, p. 3-12 ; Fritz Gschnitzer, “Zur Terminologie der Grenze und des Gebietes im Griechischen”, *Stuttgarter Kolloquium zur Historischen Geographie des Altertums. IV. Grenze und Grenzland*, E. Olshausen and H. Sonnabend ed., Amsterdam, A.M. Hakkert, 1994, p. 21-33 ; Michel Casevitz, “Les mots de la frontière en grec”,..., *op. cit.*, p. 17-24 and Michel Casevitz, “Sur ἐσχατία (*eschatia*). Histoire du mot”, Aline Rousselle (ed.), *Frontières terrestres, frontières célestes dans l’antiquité*, Paris, De Boccard-Presses universitaire de Perpignan, 1995, p. 19-30.

¹⁹ ἀλλ’ ὥς τ’ ἀμφ’ οὔροισι δὺ’ ἀνέρε δηριάασθον[^{SEP}] μέτρ’ ἐν χερσὶν ἔχοντες ἐπιζύνω ἐν ἀρούρη[^{SEP}]
ὦ τ’ ὀλίγω ἐνὶ χώρῳ ἐρίζητον περὶ ἴσης.

²⁰ Ὁ γὰρ οὔρος ἦν τῆς τε Μηδικῆς ἀρχῆς καὶ τῆς Λυδικῆς ὁ Ἄλυς ποταμός, ὃς ῥέει ἐξ Ἀρμενίου ὄρεος διὰ Κιλικῶν.

²¹ Οὔρος δὲ τοῖσι λέουσι ἐστὶ ὃ τε δι’ Ἀβδήρων ῥέων ποταμός Νέστος καὶ ὁ δι’ Ἀκαρνανίης ῥέων Ἀχελῷος.

²² τοῦτο τὸ πεδῖον ἦν μὲν κοτε Χορασμίων, ἐν οὔροισι ἐὼν Χορασμίων τε αὐτῶν καὶ Ὑρκανίων καὶ Πάρθων καὶ Σαραγγέων καὶ Θαμαναίων.

included in the Persian Empire ; moreover, in VII, 141, 3, as the Delphian oracle decreed to the inhabitants of Athens, the Attic territories, that will be devastated by Xerxes's armies before they were beaten in the battle of Salamis, have been defined as Κέκροπος οὄρος, “the border of Cecrops”²³.

In Thucydides' *History of Peloponnesian war* the term ὄρος is used twice in the same paragraph : in IV, 92 Pagondas, one of the boeotarchs of Thebes, recommends war against Athens and states several reasons to justify his position ; amongst those, the strong need to defend the very existence of Boeotia that would be threatened if they lost against Athens. In fact, according to him, Athens will unilaterally impose a border and there will be no room for negotiation : “we must realize that, whereas others make war with their neighbours about territorial boundaries (περὶ γῆς ὄρων), for us, if we are conquered, one boundary beyond dispute (εἷς ὄρος οὐκ ἀντίλεκτος) will be fixed for our whole land”²⁴.

In this particular case, the term ὄρος acquires an abstract meaning and the historian suggests that borders between territories belonging to two different communities are negotiable only if the rivals share equal strength or the same power position²⁵.

The word ὄρος, as it has been made clear in the previous examples, is intimately linked to a physical spatial dimension after the space itself has been occupied both publicly and/or privately. This claiming can take place through the usage of natural elements (such as rivers, mountains, forests) as much as the use of objects (stone-landmarks, piles of stones or steles). The word is also related to the foundation of the *polis*, the political community itself, that, through a furrow in the land, fixes a border and separates the internal from the external space conceived as ‘other’.

Once stabilised, the border mark that bounds the civic space has to be respected and it becomes sacred thanks to the Gods' protection, sanctuaries – mainly dedicated to Hermes or Aphrodite – or the burial of heroes on its margins. Oedipus's case, as it has been recorded in Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonos*, represents an example of the corpse of a hero that works as a protective force in maintaining the boundaries between Attica and Boeotia.

The very choice of using stone-landmarks – the ὄροι – to mark the limits between lands represents the will to symbolically establish the existence of a fixed and lasting boundary.

The multi-centered and multipolar configuration of the Greek world, in which many independent States are forced to share quite a limited space, allows for the border to be respected in

²³ Τῶν ἄλλων γὰρ ἀλισκομένων ὅσα Κέκροπος οὄρος ἐντὸς ἔχει κευθμών τε Κιθαιρῶνος ζαθέιο.

²⁴ Thucydides, VI, 92, 4: καὶ γινῶναι ὅτι τοῖς μὲν ἄλλοις οἱ πλησιόχωροι περὶ γῆς ὄρων τὰς μάχας ποιοῦνται, ἡμῖν δὲ ἐς πᾶσαν, ἣν νικηθῶμεν, εἷς ὄρος οὐκ ἀντίλεκτος παγήσεται;

²⁵ Cf. Giovanna Daverio Rocchi, *Frontiera e confini nella Grecia antica*, Roma, L'Erma di Bretschneider, 1988, chap. 1.

so far as the different neighbouring states involved share an equal amount of power as Thucydides' Pagondas points out. Thus, when borders are removed, the *polis* loses its identity : Plutarch in the *Life of Aristides* 11, 8, reminds us that in 479 B.C. the Plataeans have removed τὰ πρὸς τὴν Ἀττικὴν ὄρια²⁶, “the boundaries of Plataea on the side toward Attica”, and therefore have given it over to Athens and its citizens.

III. The boundary as the end : πέρασ

The Attic word πέρασ²⁷, and its variations πεῖραρ (Homer) and πεῖρασ (Pindar), indicate that point beyond which nothing exists. The terms come from the root **per-*, “to cross”, and ideally show that the limit is a line that can be crossed²⁸. But, since the world or the reality beyond the border is radically different and other, this limit, in fact, cannot be crossed without putting ourselves in danger of being in another world.

In Homer we can find the expression πείρατα γαίης, in plural, to indicate the external frontiers of the Earth. The same expression will appear later on, in Thucydides I, 69, 5, in the form ἐκ περάτων γῆς to define those far removed regions at the end of the world from which the Persians have come to conquer the Peloponnesus²⁹.

We should mention here the importance of the concept of πέρασ for the so-called Presocratic philosophers, such as Anaximander or Pythagoras, for whom the idea of limit and unlimited help to define the nature of reality.

As it is well known, Anaximander, defining the ἀρχή of the entire cosmos, theorised about the ἄπειρον, the “indeterminate” or “unlimited”, a sort of infinite and undifferentiated mass in perpetual motion, rather similar to what the mythical chaos of Hesiod implied, in which the elements were still together and could not distinguish them : “Anaximander said that the unlimited (ἄπειρον) was the cause of all birth and destruction. He states that from this matter the heavens and in general all the worlds, which are also indeterminate, were made. He said that both destruction, and before that, generation occur from an indeterminate time and place, all of them in turn” (Ps.-Plutarque, *Misc.* 2 = 10). In this regard, it seems that the philosophical concept of πέρασ had much to do with the Greek geopolitical and cultural mentality of the boundaries and borders here discussed : the

²⁶ The word ὄριον is the diminutive form of ὄρος. Cf. Michel Casevitz, “Les mots de la frontière en grec..., *op. cit.*, p. 19, who says that the neuter plural ὄρια means “zone frontalière”.

²⁷ Connected to πέρασ is the adjective ἄπειρος, “unlimited”, “infinite”.

²⁸ Gabriella Vanotti, “L’idea di confine nella Grecia antica : qualche considerazione”, Gisella Cantino Wataghin (ed.), *Finem dare. Il confine tra sacro, profano e immaginario*, Vercelli, Edizioni Mercurio, 2011, p. 150.

²⁹ τὸν τε γὰρ Μῆδον αὐτοὶ ἴσμεν ἐκ περάτων γῆς πρότερον ἐπὶ τὴν Πελοπόννησον ἐλθόντα ἢ τὰ παρ’ ὑμῶν ἀξίως προαπαντῆσαι.

ἄπειρον, for example, is unlimited both externally, for it is infinite regarding space, and internally, for it has no internal borders. The world, from there, would have been formed by the separation of different qualities, and when the hot and dry elements constituted a flaming sphere that surrounded the remaining unlimited and indeterminate mass and subdivided it through the circular motion.

Pythagorism, in its second generation, uses the concept of πέρας as a determined and measurable limit – the idea is often attributed to Philolaus of Croton. Pythagoreanism is the first philosophy that seeks to explain in detail the world through oppositions between limited and unlimited, a notion with a remarkable influence on posterity. Here the monism of the Ionian school is radically transformed and some parameters of great importance to later thinkers are introduced. Everything limited and harmonious, following the numerical-musical proportion regulating the universe, is a positive and dignified order or *kosmos*, as natural creation of the divinity. Number and proportion introduce limit (πέρας) in the unlimited (ἄπειρον), creating the limited (πεπερασμένον) and thus ordering the universe.

IV. The border as a passage : τέρμων and τέρμα

Τέρμα and τέρμων (cf. the latin word *terminus*) represent two terms that have been used, especially in poetry, to designate the ultimate border. They both derive from the root **ter-*, “to cross”, “to cross over”³⁰. The first form, τέρμα, that can be translated as “end” or “limit” and, in the plural form, as “border”, appears in Homer to signify an object that marks the border and function as a frontier³¹ ; later on in Herodotus, II, 8, 1 is used to designate, in the plural form, boundaries, the external limits of a mountain range and in VII, 54, 2 it indicates European external borders (ἐπὶ τέρμασι τοῖσι ἐκείνης [of Europe] γένηται).

The term τέρμων has been frequently used by tragic poets and in the Hellenistic inscriptions of the Doric and Western Greek areas to generally designate “limit” or “boundary”. In fragment 191 Radt³² of Aeschylus, for example, the τέρμων between Asia and Europe is the river Phasis, modern Rioni in western Georgia ; in Euripides’ *Hippolytus*, v. 1159 the word, in plural, means the territory inside the boundaries : “who dwell in Athens and in the land of Trozen (γῆς τέρμονας Τροζηνίας)”³³.

³⁰ Cf. the Roman god *Terminus*, ruling precisely on the limits and borders of lands and fields.

³¹ In *Iliad*, XXIII, v. 309, the poet is talking about the “turning point”, i.e. the object which indicates the point where the chariots participating in the race of Patroclus’ funeral games have to turn to go back.

³² πῆ μὲν δίδυμον χθονὸς Εὐρώπης / μέγαν ἦδ’ Ἀξίας τέρμονα Φᾶσιν.

³³ οἳ τ’ Ἀθηναίων πόλιν / ναίουσι καὶ γῆς τέρμονας Τροζηνίας.

As Casevitz³⁴ reveals, the root of these two words “exprime qu’il y a limite fixée, mais qu’il y a un au-delà, radicalement autre ou non, qui est défini par règle ou convention, et dont le franchissement est une possibilité réelle”.

V. The frontier : μεθόριος, ἐσχατιά and ἔρημος χώρα

The last two terms we have analysed have revealed how borders can be crossed and that beyond them we will be faced by a totally different reality.

Limits have not been always represented as lines that separate two territories but as borderlands that define simultaneously the inside and the outside of these very lines, as the terms we are about to consider show.

The first adjective, μεθόριος, is a compound word derived from ὄρος ; it indicates what lies in between and “qui forme la frontière entre³⁵”. In the plural form the term refers to a territory or a piece of land that can be found between the borders of two different states. In fact, according to the Suda Lexicon, μεθόρια is the land *metaxu ton horon*, between the borders of two different communities. Thucydides uses this adjective frequently, both in singular and plural.

In II, 27, 2, for example, the historian defines the territory of Thyrea, where the Aeginetans have to settle, “a land on the frontier (γῆ μεθορία) of Argolis and Laconia, reaching down to the sea”³⁶. In II, 18, 2, the Peloponnesian army prepares to assault Oenoe, which is “a walled town, standing upon the Athenian and Boeotian border (ἐν μεθορίοις τῆς Ἀττικῆς καὶ Βοιωτίας)”³⁷, used as fortress by the Athenians in times of war. Moreover, in V, 3, 5 Thucydides remembers how the fortress of Panactum, ἐν μεθορίοις of Attica and Boeotia, was taken by the Boeotians, that later on destroyed it in the name of ancient oaths that stressed how the borderland between the two regions should not be inhabited by Athenians or Boeotians³⁸.

Therefore, as this passage and some inscriptions show, μεθόρια (the land between borders) –

³⁴ Michel Casevitz, “Les mots de la frontière en grec,...”, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

³⁵ Pierre Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, Paris, Editions Klincksieck, 1974, III, p. 825.

³⁶ γῆ μεθορία τῆς Ἀργείας καὶ Λακωνικῆς ἐστίν, ἐπὶ θάλασσαν καθήκουσα.

³⁷ ἢ γὰρ Οἰνὸν οὔσα ἐν μεθορίοις τῆς Ἀττικῆς καὶ Βοιωτίας ἐτετεύχιστο, καὶ αὐτῷ φρουρίῳ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι ἐχρῶντο ὅποτε πόλεμος καταλάβοι.

³⁸ Thucydides, V, 42, 1: οἱ πρέσβεις τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων [...] τὸ μὲν Πάνακτον ὑπὸ τῶν Βοιωτῶν αὐτῶν καθηρημένον ἠῦρον, ἐπὶ προφάσει ὡς ἦσαν ποτε Ἀθηναίους καὶ Βοιωτοῖς ἐκ διαφορᾶς περὶ αὐτοῦ ὄρκοι παλαιοὶ μηδετέρους οἰκεῖν τὸ χωρίον, ἀλλὰ κοινῇ νέμειν, “the Lacedaemonian ambassadors, Andromedes, Phaedimus, and Antimenidas, who were to receive the prisoners from the Boeotians and restore them and Panactum to the Athenians, found that the Boeotians had themselves razed Panactum, upon the plea that oaths had been anciently exchanged between their people and the Athenians, after a dispute on the subject, to the effect that neither should inhabit the place, but that they should graze it in common”.

the territorial units that signified the external limits of two *poleis* – were generally named κοινά χωρά, lands where both communities were considered holders of a common of estovers, piscary and grazing rights³⁹.

These territories, resting outside the *polis*' borders and the sacred and political sphere of the community, represented nevertheless a dynamic frontier. As Thucydides reveals, they were linked to the needs of the communities that shared them : in times of war or in periods of demographic boom, these very territories could be included, thanks to the erosion of the external border, in the city land and would be exploited unilaterally.

The expression ἔρημος χώρα, literally “desert land”, *terra nullius*, and ἐρημία, “desert”, “wilderness” are strongly linked to the term μεθόρια and somehow can be considered its synonyms. In fact, they refer to geographical and political marginality, to wild and empty landscapes inhabited by very few people and that are located near the border.

These particular forms appear mainly in Hellenistic inscriptions to designate inhospitable lands characterised by mountain ranges, lakes, forests or swamps that separate the territories of two *poleis* or two regions⁴⁰.

Somehow a mirror image of the μεθόρια and ἔρημος χώρα, ἐσχατιά constitutes the border zone that is located far away from the centre of the *polis* but is still considered part of its political and juridical unity, its “internal frontier”⁴¹.

In Greek, the words ἐσχατιά⁴² and τὰ ἔσχατα, linked to the adjective ἔσχατος, “farthest”, “extreme”, refer to the frontier as a peripheral region far removed from the centre of the city or country but also, at times, from the civilised world.

In Homer, ἐσχατιά acquires a “local” meaning and simply indicates the most remote areas of a country, of a region or of an island. In *Odyssey*, V, vv. 237-240, for example, the trees Odysseus used to build his raft could only be found in the most removed area of Calypso's island (νήσου ἐπ' ἐσχατιῆς). Herodotus in III, 106, 1 uses the word ἐσχατιά, in the plural, to designate the most remote lands of the inhabited world (αἱ δ' ἐσχατιαί κως τῆς οἰκεομένης), where precious and beautiful objects can be discovered.

On the other hand, these far away areas belonging to a region or a country are also the areas

³⁹ Giovanna Daverio Rocchi, “Confini e frontiere della *polis*: spazio di vita e categorie geografiche”, *Geographia antiqua*, n. 18, 2009, p. 55-56.

⁴⁰ Cf. Giovanna Daverio Rocchi, *Frontiere e confini...*, *op.cit.*, p. 31.

⁴¹ Cf. Daverio Rocchi, *Frontiera e confini...*, *op.cit.*, p. 40-47. *Contra* Maurizio Giangliulo, “L'*eschatia*. Prospettive critiche su rappresentazioni antiche e modelli moderni”, *Problemi della chora coloniale dall'Occidente al Mar Nero. Atti del quarantesimo Convegno di studi sulla Magna Grecia*, Taranto, Istituto per la storia e l'archeologia della Magna Grecia, 2001, p. 333-361.

⁴² Cf. Michel Casevitz, “Sur ἐσχατιά (*eschatia*). Histoire du mot...”, *op. cit.*

where people, sometimes willingly, can experience marginalization and alienation : once more, in Herodotus, VI, 127, 2 we can read the story of Aetolian Titormus “who surpassed all the Greeks in strength, and fled from the sight of men to the farthest parts of the Aetolian land (ἐς τὰς ἐσχατιὰς τῆς Αἰτωλίδος χώρας)”.

Inside the *polis*' territory, ἐσχατιὰ denotes a marginal space, integrated in the city economy as an extra-supply and normally located near the sea or the mountains⁴³.

It presents, located as it is far away from the centre (*asty*), peculiar geographic traits such as the progressive disappearance of plough fields and the emergence of forests that provide with wood, game, fish the inhabitants of the area⁴⁴. In this zone the ephebes undergo their military training : being still deprived of full citizenship and therefore “marginal” in comparison to adults, they are expected, in their second year of service, to surveil the countryside and the community's frontier⁴⁵ and, at the same time, they will have to get to know this territory intimately. Furthermore, the juridical status of those that live in the ἐσχατιὰ varies in relation to the *polis* they belong to : in Athens they are considered citizens with full rights despite the fact that they live far away from the centre ; in other communities such as Sparta, those that reside in the ἐσχατιὰ, the *perioeci*, do not enjoy political rights.

Finally, we should also reflect upon the fact that the progressive inclusion of the ἐσχατιὰ in the urban territory – mostly the inclusion translates to the conversion of wild into farmed lands, especially vineyards, as Demosthenes certifies in his *Against Phaenippus*⁴⁶ – constitutes the reason why part of the μεθόρια as much as inter-borderlands are eroded and, later on, included in the metropolitan area as a new ἐσχατιὰ.

This transformation, as recorded in various Hellenistic inscriptions, implied the settlement, in the new urban area, of *neopolitai* – people that have obtained their citizenship recently – or individuals that did not enjoy the status of citizens yet.

● * *

To conclude this short lexical and conceptual survey on border and frontier, we are about to present some provisional conclusions.

⁴³ On the importance of the integration of such marginal areas in the public life cf. the political project of Plato in the *Laws* and that of Aristotle in book VII of *Politics* : both philosophers put forwards that every citizen should own two *kleroi*, one downtown and another one in the borderland.

⁴⁴ Cf. for example Aristophanes, *Acharnians*, vv. 33-36.

⁴⁵ On the institution of epheby cf. Pierre Vidal-Naquet, “Le chasseur noir et l'origine de l'éphebie athénienne”, *Le chasseur noir. Formes de pensée et formes de société dans le monde grec*, Paris, Editions La Découverte 2005, p. 151-207.

⁴⁶ Phaenippus could tell on a farm placed near the border of the deme of Cytherus, cf. § 5.

It seems evident that the Greek language offers several elements to think about borders. On one hand, the border represents the line or furrow traced by the plough on a piece of land (ὄρος) that will mark the separation between what is included or excluded from the city and the political community. This limit is sacred and, at least theoretically, cannot be modified. In fact, any alteration would determine a strong reaction from the Gods. Nevertheless, as it has been highlighted by numerous wars between neighbouring *poleis* in the Archaic period, the border and the physical objects that are used to designate it, can change their positions to reflect victorious or unsuccessful military actions.

On the other hand, words such as *τέρμα* and *τέρμων* describe the border as a fixed line that can be crossed, highlighting therefore the possibility of encounters with the “Other” that lives beyond the limit imposed by the community.

The frontier is represented in the Greek imagination as a remote territory (*μεθόριος*) far removed from the *asty* – the political centre of the community – and located near the sea or the mountains (*ἐσχατιά*) ; furthermore, it is described as an almost deserted land, or inhabited by individuals who have been condemned to exile, or by those responsible of desecration (*ἔρημος χώρα*).

Nevertheless, it constitutes a space characterised by extreme dynamism, integrated in the urban territory as an economic extra-supply and it is clearly subjected to changes and re-definitions according to the needs of the *chora* of the *polis*.