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

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

The term "Triplex confinium" is also useful in a more general sense to refer to a wider frontier region in the Northern Croatian-Dalmatian-Bosnian hinterland. With the Ottoman conquests of Croatian territory and increasing threats to the Venetian Adriatic and Dalmatian hinterland, and with the Habsburg election to the Croatian throne in 1527 (with promises to organize frontier defences against the “Türk”), a three-way frontier emerged in the sixteenth century, defined by the territories—and military systems—of the three imperial states. Raids from Ottoman territory and the turbulent circumstances of Ottoman conquest led to the flight of the population from the frontier zone. Their lands were settled in further migrations from the hinterland, sporadic at first but increasing very substantially from the end of the sixteenth century. The Long Turkish War (1592–1666) marked the beginnings of the influx of new settlers onto Habsburg territory in Croatia and Slavonia which would reach its peak in the eighteenth century; while in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the Candian (1645–1669) and Morean (1684–1699; 1714–1718) wars saw a wave of emigration of Ottoman subjects into Venetian Dalmatia. These frontier populations, known as Vlachs (or Morlachs in Venetian territory), were settled on state- or noble-owned lands, and were granted various...
concessions in return for military service, replicating their status as stock-herders and frontier raiders under the Ottomans. They formed a privileged social group of free frontiersmen, distinct from the original peasantry, all along the Triplex confinium. These Vlach settlers also differed from the original inhabitants with respect to religion (from the 1590s they were largely Orthodox), and in terms of ethnicity (though in exactly what ways is debated). On all sides of the frontier, the frontier system developed incrementally as a patchwork of agreements, concessions and jurisdictions; attempts at comprehensive reform and regulation were left to centralizing governments in the eighteenth century.

The active military significance of this triple frontier can be delimited fairly precisely in temporal terms: from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, changing its character as a site of continuous Kleinkrieg with the end of the Ottoman wars, and particularly with the Treaty of Karlowitz, which marked official Ottoman acceptance of a demarcated frontier (though even afterwards a frontier mentality persisted, and the Habsburg Military Frontier – the Militärgrenze – continued to serve as a source of troops for Habsburg wars elsewhere in Europe). Apart from the tumulus marking the three-way boundary point, it is not easy to define the wider triple frontier with any precision in terms of territory. Nonetheless, each state did develop military systems which were comparable in character. The Habsburg Military Frontier in Croatia is probably the best known in Western historiography though Military Frontier districts stretched from the Adriatic to the Carpathians, but similar military institutions also existed on Ottoman frontier territory, and along the Venetian frontier in Dalmatia. The terms most often used to characterize the area and its military character at the time (gраница or Grenze, krajina, serhad, confinium) carry the sense of a frontier zone, as well as a boundary line, and in practice were often used to denote the shared world of the hinterland marches just as much as the separate military administrative units. The wider Triplex confinium can be understood, therefore, not just in terms of the military institutions of each separate state, but also in terms of a common set of military, social and economic patterns and relationships, at the same time cut across by political, religious and cultural differences; a frontier zone characterized by alternating state military campaigns and perennial guerrilla warfare, carried out by a privileged frontier population with a recognized military role, living partly on plunder or military pay but also from pastoralism, trade and some agriculture.

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

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

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

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

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

There have been a number of ways of framing the history of the Triplex contermin. Important approaches might be loosely identified as the imperial, local, national and social-historical. ‘Imperial’ accounts look out from the centre. In these histories the Triplex contermin itself tends to appear as a periphery where narratives originating elsewhere were played out: wars and treaty negotiations; the military strategies and institutional projects of rulers and their commanders; power struggles among rival factions; or reform programmes dictated from the courts. An older imperial historiographical tradition produced accounts of frontier warfare with the attention focused on battles, commanders and rulers. This grand-scale ‘kings-and-battles’ history lost some of its power in the twentieth century, as the empires whose history such writings glorified faded from the scene, and the historical profession widened the accepted subject of history beyond wars and diplomatic relations. Studies of frontier warfare from an imperial perspective have concentrated more recently on the economic and institutional basis of warfare. Gunther Rothenberg’s two-part history of the Croatian Military Frontier is an excellent example of this approach, tracing the development of the military and administrative infrastructure of the Habsburg Militärgränze largely in terms of measures imposed from the centre. At the other end of the historiographical spectrum lie small-scale, local accounts, focusing on a single region, fortress, incident or individual. This has been an important strand in Triplex contermin historiography from the earliest times, with local studies asserting the glory of a particular region in terms of its contribution to warfare and defence, as the title of Vaclav’s Die Ehre des Herzogthums Kroatien (1689) suggests (the text is an apologia for Carniola’s role in the defence of Europe against the Ottoman threat). The local and the individual account can overlap substantially with the national approach, where the place or person discussed is made to stand as an embodiment of the nation as a whole, and as an example ‘to stimulate and inspire their contemporary descendants to virtuous deeds, of benefit to the whole nation’ as one nineteenth-century Croatian study of two frontier heroes put it. On the other hand, such local or individual studies can be made to serve as a critique of accounts framed on a wider basis, tracing and testing their assumptions and generalizations in a specific setting.

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

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

Frontier historiography could also be pressed into use to legitimate current politics and vindicate current conflicts, as well as underpinning attempts to use history to understand the present. One example will suffice here: the link between the debates over the fate of the Military Frontier in the Croatian Sabor in the 1860s, which broached for the first time the issue of the national profile and origins of the frontier population, and the appearance of the first Croatian scholarly accounts of the origins and history of the Frontier.7 Nor was the Yugoslav Marxist approach to frontier history without an ideological role, given its official status in Titoist Yugoslavia, though research on sixteenth to eighteenth-century history did not bear the same burden of legitimating revolution and building socialism as did twentieth-century historiography.8 Accusations of nationalism (whether taking the form of 'Great-Serbism' or an obsession with Croatian state and historical right), and of a lack of Marxist consciousness, would emerge in polemics over issues in frontier historiography in 1980s Yugoslavia.9 At the same time, asserting a distance from 'national prejudice' has been a regular rhetorical stance taken by authors writing on triple frontier topics outside the Yugoslav context (partly as a way of claiming added authority), but it should also be recognized that the body of existing scholarship and the historiographical tradition inevitably shapes the questions that are asked and the materials used to answer them.10 It is difficult to write entirely outside this tradition, even from a geographical distance.

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

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7 See Jaroslav Šiško, O značenju Vojne krajine u hrvatskoj povijesti, in: Vojne krajine, 9-10 for a discussion of the Sabor debates of 1861 and Military Frontier historiography.
8 Nevertheless, see the comments by Academica Vasa Ćubrićević introducing the collection Vojne krajine u jugoslovenskom srednjem, in which he traces the 'self-sacrifice, persistence and heroism' of the WW2 National Liberation Struggle to the experience of frontier warfare against the Ottoman Empire. 6
9 See, for example, the exchanges between Vasilje Kretić and Mirko Valentić in Časopis za sručne poznatosti, 3, 1983.
10 For example, Michael Hickok, Ottoman Military Administration in Eighteenth-Century Bosnia, Leiden 1997, sets his own arguments against a particularly black-and-white assessment of the perspectives of Yugoslav (and particularly Bosnian) historiography on the frontier; Nenad Mojačanin's review. Exposing existing fallacies regarding the capricies in the Bosnian frontier area between the 16th–18th centuries, effectively demolishes a simple dichotomy between 'enlightened' internationalists and 'narrow-minded' local historians (in Dragica Roksandić and Naraša Štefanec. Constructing Border Societies on the Triplex Confinium, Budapest 2000, 75-89).
of the local populations—all of these could and did clash dramatically. Which conflicts, which ways of defining differences, and which communities are treated as definitive in understanding the triple frontier? Historians’ choices over which of these should bear the burden of interpretation provide a revealing way of surveying changing approaches to frontier history in the region.

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

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

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

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

Conflict and community among adherents of the Christian confessions are also illuminated by research into religious change. Catholic conversion to Orthodoxy in Bosnia (and Catholic flight across the frontier) has been explained by the pressures caused by the three-way relationship between the Catholic Church (represented by the Franciscans in Bosnia); the Orthodox clergy, attempting to extend its jurisdiction (and right to collect tithes) over all Ottoman Christians, regardless of confession; and the Ottoman authorities, profoundly suspicious of the Catholics’ allegiance to authorities outside the Empire and beyond Ottoman control, but recognizing the Orthodox Church as a part of the wider Ottoman state apparatus. However, here too popular attitudes, more
tolerant of confessional difference than the ecclesiastical rivalries would suggest, seem to have contributed to conversion, with evidence of the weakness of a Catholic confessional identity (particularly due to the lack of Catholic clergy), as well as such issues as resistance to the introduction of the new calendar among Catholics, or the problems caused by mixed marriages and by divorce. Catholic flight to the Habsburg frontier (and to the Venetian territories) seems to have been connected above all with specific military campaigns, especially in the seventeenth century, and the fear of reprisal. 16

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

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


18 See on this Fedor Močanin, Vojna krajina do kanonskog uredjaja 1787, in: Vojna krajina, 41-42.

19 See for example Slavko Gavrilović, Istorijske Srba u Hrvatskoj, Slavoniji i Ugarskoj (XV-XIX vek), Belgrade 1953.
population of the Ottoman hinterland. Some historians have claimed the Vlachs of the triple frontier in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as Serbs (usually equating Orthodoxy with Serbdom, and simply translating the earlier usage of Vlach as Serb). Others, in contrast, have emphasized the evidence of Vlach Romanic origins, sometimes as a way of denying the Serbian origins of the modern Serbian population of Croatia and Bosnia; sometimes seeking an explanation for their particular way of life in their ethnic origins. Both approaches tend to ignore the very varied usages of the term in the period in question, as well as evidence that suggests individuals and groups could acquire or lose a Vlach identity (especially by gaining ‘Vlach rights’). The ethnic answer to the ‘Vlach question’ betrays an essentialist model of nationhood that projects current categories into the past. Moreover to the point in this inquiry into the triple frontier, it does little to illuminate the problem of conflict and division among the frontier populations.

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


Aleksa Ivić, Migracije Srba u Hrvatsku tokom 16., 17. i 18. stoljeća, Subotica, 1923.


Sučević’s later article, Razvijaj vlaških povratnih ideja i Varaždinskom generatu, in: Historijski zbornik 6, 1953, 33-70 was a programmatic statement for this approach, as well as a model study.
could bridge the gap between the various political, religious and social structures that shaped frontier life, and the ways the people of the triple frontier made their own choices, selecting the rhetoric most useful to the occasion, manipulating the rules or exploiting expectations about how they should behave — in their own interests and to their own advantage. It is only then that we will be able to understand which divisions mattered, and when.

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

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

27 An early effort, Istorijska narodna jugoslavija, vols. 1-2, Zagreb 1953, 1960, contained sketches of frontier issues, but on a piecemeal basis, incorporated within the separate national histories, making synthesis or even comparison impossible (much like the volumes as a whole).

28 Vinko Gudrič (ed.), Vojna krajina u jugoslovenskim zemljama u novom seku do Karlovca 1699, Belgrade 1989, 47.


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

Subsequent studies, particularly those dealing with the economic basis of frontier life (landholding patterns; the relative importance of pastoralism, plunder, trade and agriculture; the variety of dues and services demanded of the frontiersmen) on the one hand, and frontier rebellions on the other, produced a nuanced assessment of the conflicting social and economic interests of the military colonists and their leaders (both the increasingly stratified military leadership and the Orthodox clergy); the Habsburg rulers in Vienna and Graz; the Inner Austrian estates; the Military Frontier officers; the Croatian noble land-holders and the political representatives of the Croatian estates; the peasantry and non-privileged rural population.27 Studies of individual cases of frontier rebellion, in particular, made it possible to trace divisions through specific instances of conflict, illustrating the ways religious, ethnic and socio-economic antagonisms could cut across or reinforce one another in different circumstances. To take just one example, the notion of shared ‘Vlach rights’ could be made to transcend divisions of confession and origin. In response to a 1642 demand by the Bishop of Zagreb that Catholic settlers from Ottoman Slavonia (predavci) were not ‘proper’ Vlachs and should pay him feudal dues, he received the reply from the ‘Vlach sons’ of the Ivančić krajina that ‘we are all brothers; they cannot live without us, nor we without them’.28 In practice, most research on frontier conflict and the identities it reveals, has, of necessity, paid most attention to the claims and manipulations of social elites — these are what appear in the sources. But this remark suggests the possibilities of a contrasting ‘history from below’, that might look more closely at the ways the frontier people defined (and manipulated claims about) their own sense of belonging. But as well as the problem of sources, a second hindrance to this has been the determinism of a socio-economic historical approach — in some ways as rigid and unhelpful as the determinism of the national approach. Even in studies of frontier revolts, individuals rarely appeared as more than the representatives of wider socio-economic interests and structural divisions. A more complete understanding of conflict and community demands an approach to history that...
their reflection in historiography from the 1980s on, this was also paralleled by a reaction against history in the service of the nation, however tentative or marginal this reaction may have seemed at times. At the same time, there was an increased interest in issues related to Triplex confinium history from scholars working outside the Yugoslav context. Here, too, the Yugoslav wars may have provided one impetus; a desire to trace contemporary conflict and violence to their (ostensible) origins. But there were also other reasons, whether the historian was working in revisionist mode, reconsidering older interpretations of the frontier in ‘imperial’ – Austrian, Venetian or Ottoman – history in a new light; or whether because the circumstances of the Triplex confinium offered a vantage point for looking at familiar events – and theoretical propositions – from a different perspective. A large and complex international research group under the Triplex confinium title (headed by Drago Roksandič at the University of Zagreb) has provided an umbrella for a variety of such initiatives. The comparative aims of the project have been addressed through conferences and publications addressing specific themes (microhistories; state and society; tolerance and intolerance); but the wider value of the project has been the way that it has brought together researchers with very different concerns and disciplinary approaches in a common dialogue. The very wide range of works on aspects of triple-frontier history published in the last few years are testimony to the potential of this subject.

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


34 It is perhaps invidious to single out specific works, but for studies which give a sense of the range of approaches being taken, see: Nenad Močanin’s local study of a frontier administrative unit, *Pohag i područja u okolju Ormanjskog crnca 1537–1691*, Jastrebarsko 1997; Nada Štefančič’s study of a single man, Juraj IV Zrinski, and his wider context, *Herceg Njegoš Volosinina*, Zagreb 2000; Zrinka Blazević’s analysis of Vitezović’s ideological discourse on Croatia, *Vitezovića Hrvatska ideologia i smanjić*, Zagreb 2002. See also works such as Karl Kagor, *Freier Bauer und Soldat: Die Militarisation der österreichischen Gesellschaft an der kroatisch-slawischen Militärgrenze (1535–1881)*, Vienna 1997; and most recently Filippo Maria Paladini, *Un comune che spartisce: Poteri, territori e religioni di frontiera nella Dalmazia della tarda età veneta*, Venice 2002, an inspiring attempt at combining top-down and bottom-up perspectives on the eighteenth-century frontier.