



Borders as a Place of Separation and Intersection An Introduction

Letizia Vezzosi

Università degli Studi di Firenze (<letizia.vezzosi@unifi.it>)

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The present section gathers six papers addressing the issue of “borders” in Medieval Germanic languages and cultures. Such a collection was inspired by the history of the word itself, i.e. a reborrowing, since the French *bordeure* in turn has Germanic origins, being etymologically related to a Proto-Germanic root *burda, and thus strictly connected with the words *board* and *bord*. During these coming and going across different languages and cultures, this reborrowing has spread into different lexical fields and develop a wide range of semantic nuances, many of which are still present and testify to their history and their semantic evolution. This section aims to put together studies that mirror the nuances implied in the concept of border from different perspectives and approaches.

An overview on its etymology might shed some light on its semantic development.

The word *border* is a relatively late French loanword: its first attestation occurred in a fourteenth-century text, *Libeaus Desconus*, although transmitted through several fifteenth-century manuscript, where it designated “broad, coloured band surrounding the shield” (*Middle English Dictionary* (MED) sv. *bordure*) in alignment with the Old French *bordeure* “seam, edge of a shield”¹ (ex. 1), but established itself in the Middle English lexicon only in the course of the fifteenth century, spreading from heraldry to many other fields, where its meaning of “contour, boundary” adjusted to different contexts. Accordingly, it could refer either to the ornamental border along the edge of an object (ex. 2), such as a dish, a garment, a helmet or a window, or a geographical, spatial boundary or margin if in relations to sections of the sky (ex. 3) or urban conglomerations or countries (ex. 4)

¹ According to Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales (henceforth CNRTL), sv. *bordeure* : “1240 ‘ce qui garnit le bord de qqc.’ fréq. commeterme herald”.

or even to what a boundary contains, as in ex. 5 where it signals a district lying along the boundary of a country, thus overlapping the semantic domain of another loan, *marche*.

- (1) a1425-a1500(?c1350) Libeaus (Kaluza)915: He bar þescheld of goules.. Of gold was þe bordure.
- (2) (1415) Will in Bdf.HRS228: It'm a flat basyn of siluer with a bordeure gilt.. It'm a saler of siluer with iij bordures about ygilt.
- (3) c1400 *Chaucer Astr.(Brussels 4869)1.21.83a: The ecliptiklyne of thy zodiac is the outerest bordure of thy zodiac.
- (4) c1450 Capgr.St.Kath.(Arun 396)1.93: Alysavndre.. On the bordour [vr. bordyr] of Egypt it stant.
- (5) (1435) Wars France in RS 22.2580: It is thoughte that it is nedefulle to sende into Normandie v c speris, to be set upon the borderers, and to make werre opon Anyou.

The Old French *bordeure* is a secondary formation from *bord*. It shows the nominal derivative suffix *-ure* (from Latin *-ura*) that forms feminine abstracts, denoting employment or result, from the verb *border*, a suffix that was maintained in the Middle English loanword only in heraldry (see *bordure* n. in Caxton *bordeure*), while it was otherwise weakened through *-ur* to *-er* via *-or*, thus disguising the etymology. The Old French verb *border* preceded the deverbal noun *bordeure*: it was first used to express the act of garnishing or constituting the edge of something,² but also attested quite early with the nautical denotation of providing (the ship) with planking and later on with the meaning of placing one thing on the edge of another.³ The senses in which the Old French verb occurred mirror the meaning of the loanword from which the verb derives: that is, *bord* or *bort* in the Frankish form, initially attested in two meanings, i.e. “a ship’s side”⁴ and “edge, contour of a surface”,⁵ and from the 14th century in the sense of “strip of land along a watercourse”,⁶ a denotation never associated to the Middle English *bord*, but transferred to the Middle English *bordure*. Old French received this word, via either Medieval Latin or Frankish, from Old English, where two originally distinct nouns – namely *bord* (neuter)⁷ “board” and *bord* (masculine)⁸ “margin, border, ship-board” has already coalesced, probably under the influence of Old Norse *borð* (neuter) which denoted both “board, plank, table, maintenance at table” and “margin, shore, ship-board”. The relationship between these two words is still debated:

² See CNRTL sv. *border*: “Ca 1170 ‘(d’une chose), garnir, constituer le bord de qqc.’ (*Fierabras*, 6054, A.P. dans *R. Hist. litt. Fr.* 1898, 297)”.

³ See CNRTL sv. *border*: “1264 [date du ms.] mar. borderlesnes ‘munir [lesnefs] de bordages’ (B. de Ste Maure, *Troie*, 17468, var. dans T.-L.); 1296 id. (*Compte de Jean Arrode et de Michel Gascoing*, 26 août dans Jal1); [...] 4. ‘placer une chose au bord d’une autre’ spéc. xiiies. border le lit [littéralement: assujettir les couvertures au bord du lit] (*Chansons et dits artésiens*, XI, 10, *ibid.*)”.

⁴ CNRTL sv. *bord*: “Ca 1121 mar. ‘côté d’un navire’ *bord de la nef* (*Saint Brendan*, éd. Suchier dans *Rom. Studies*, t. 1, p. 578, 1011)”.

⁵ CNRTL sv. *bord*: “1160 ‘contour d’une surface’ (B. de Ste Maure, *Troie*, 23454 dans T.-L.)”.

⁶ CNRTL sv. *bord*: “1307 ‘bande de terrain le long d’un cours d’eau’ (G. Guiart, *op. cit.*, II, 4602 dans T.-L.)”.

⁷ This neuter form had its own relatives in Old Frisian and Old Saxon *bord* (Middle Dutch *bort*, *borde*, Dutch *boord* “board”, *bord* “shelf, plate, trencher”), Middle High German and Modern German *bort* “board”, Gothic *baurd* in *forubaurd* “foot-stool”.

⁸ The masculine noun had corresponding forms in Old Saxon *bord*, Middle Dutch *bort*, *boort* or *boorde*, Dutch *boord* (masculine), “border, edge, ship’s side”, Old High German, Middle High German *bort* (masculine), and Modern German *bord* “margin, shore, ship-board”.

according to Pokorny (1959-69), both nouns relate to the Indo-European root *bheredh- “to cut”, and should derive from a zero-grade form *bhṛdh-o- “plank, board”, indicating either the cut that limits a surface or the surface resulting from cutting; Franck (1912) instead proposed that the masculine *bord* “margin, border, ship-board” is a participial form *bhṛtós “raised, made projecting” from the Indo-European verbal root *bher- “to raise”. Independently of the different etymological proposals, in Old English (and also in other Germanic languages) the two were already associated and confused at an early date; hence, the Old French *bord*, *bort* had meant both “a plank, flat surface” and “a ship’s side, edge, border” since its first attestations.

In Middle English, the denotations of the original Germanic word, *bord*, got specialised in that it was used to indicate a “board, plank”, and accordingly the table or metaphorically even a meal, retaining the nautical meaning mainly in prepositional phrases, but losing the sense of “margin, edge”: e.g. *binnenbord*, “within a ship, aboard”; (*up*)*onbord* “on board a ship, on deck”; *on the bord* “on the side of the ship, on the gunwale”; *over the bord* “over the side of the ship, overboard”; *into shipesbord* “aboard a ship”; *withoutenshipesbord* “out of the ships”; and so on. The idea of boundary was, on the other hand, first conveyed by the Middle English continuations of the Old English (*ge*)*mære* and (*ge*)*mearc* (*mere* and *mark* respectively) and from the thirteenth century enriched by the new Romance loans: *marche* (ex. 6), i.e. the Romance form to the Old English *mearc*, and especially *bound*, the first in terms of attestations (ex. 7), expressed a geographical limit in more unambiguous and specific ways.

- (6) c1330 (?a1300) Arth.& M.(Auch)4352 : Pai.. senten after manimo.. For to loke..
Al þe marches of Galoine & of Cornwaile þe pleines.
- (7) c1275 (?a1200) Lazamon, Brut (Caligula MS.) : Þa comen heo to þan bunnan [c1300
Otho MS. wonigge]. þa Hercules makede.

These different words conceptualised the notion of geographical limit with different semantic nuances according to their etymological meaning and their mutual influence. Thus, the use of Middle English *mark* (OE (*ge*)*mearc*) reflects both the original meaning of its etymological Indo-European root *mereǵ- “edge, border”, and at the same time shares features proper to words belonging to the same semantic field, such as *mere*, *marche*, and *bound*. The semantic range of the Middle English *mark* embraces the notion of border and edge as well as the indication of the object that marks such a border – that is, a nuance rooted in the etymologic stem of (*ge*)*mære* – or of a (trade)mark, a trace or a sign or whatever serves as symbol or indicator of a condition, emotion and so on.⁹ Interestingly this word later tended to be associated with the acquired meanings rather than with its etymology. Similarly, while the Old English (*ge*)*mære* still retained the original sense of its etymological root – the Indo-European *mei- “to strengthen, to pole” and the Proto-Germanic *mairja- “border post” –, the Middle English continuation only marginally maintained it and started to indicate what the object was for: that is, a “boundary line”, likely under the influence of its concurrent *mark* and the new entries. As a matter of fact, in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, new lexical entries enriched this semantic field, such as the Anglo-Norman *bounde* – from the Old French *bodne*, *bone*, *bunde* etc. – which primarily refers to “border, boundary” as its original medieval Latin *bodena* from an

⁹ Such a polysemy is due to “a merging of at least three distinct but related Germanic base forms, whose reflexes remained distinct in Old English, but had fallen together by late Middle English” (OED, sv. “mark, n.¹, Etymology” doi: 10.1093/OED/2149063313).

earlier *butina* “meta, limes”, or the Anglo-Norman and Old French *marche*, which is ultimately based on Old English *mearc* and meant “border” much alike the eighth century post-classical Latin *marchia*. Irrespective of their origin and their original meaning, in the course of Middle English they were initially used as synonyms, referring to a landmark denoting the limit of a territory, the boundary line of a territory, the territory situated on or near a boundary and so on. This situation sorted into gradual processes of semantic shift and specialization, in which each word seemed to have selected a particular aspect of the wide semantic range it used to indicate, and which made space for new lexical borrowings. Thus, while the Middle English *marche* came to mean “borderland”, probably also due to the semantic shift, the ninth-century Latin *marchia* had already underwent in the continental area, new words were borrowed to express what was no longer expressed by the already semantically specialised words or was too ambiguously expressed by polysemic words. Among them, there was the Old French *bordeure*, which initially embodied all the polysemy typical of its lexical family and only later, much alike the other members of its semantic family, got specialised, but to express the dividing line between two or more entities *par excellence*: it became a toponym designating the boundary between England and Scotland (*the Border(s)*).¹⁰

From this sketchy overview, the history of the word *border* and of the lexical items belonging to its semantic field already attested in the temporal interval proper of the subject of Germanic Philology, i.e. Middle Ages, is a narration of language crossing, borrowing and reborrowing of words whose meanings shift, change, and are enriched or specialised at each step. From their semantic range, it is clear that the notion of “border” not only implies the demarcation of the boundaries between entities, the “elements” that constitute such a delimitation, but also involves the denotation and identification of entity to which limits are set. Indeed, the term “border” designates a wide variety of phenomena: physical geographical limits, that can be signalled by border markers or natural features, points where toll has to be paid, political boundaries, that vary from points in space to linear and fortified military fronts, ways of controlling space, frontier zones, borderlands, porous zones of encounters and contact, ways of limiting community and identity, ideological and metaphorical delimitation including discourse and representation, bordering practices, the process of creating and performing borders, and borderscapes to capture fluidity and change over time. Borders can relate to definitions of self and other, to belonging and becoming, to material and symbolic construction, to relational and perspectival spatial and temporal realities, to language module and language construction.

The papers selected focus on “borders” in all their variety, from physical boundaries and material borders to dynamic social and spatial relationships, to language and genre boundaries. Concetta Giliberto deals with a special kind of medieval geographical border, namely the sea, in particular the North Sea. Analysing different textual sources, from literary texts to runic inscriptions, the author demonstrates that the North Sea, which separated different territories, was at the same time a “meeting area” for the Germanic tribes that lived around it and the bridge through which these tribes got into contact. The nature of such interactions was never clear-cut peaceful or warlike, rather marked by a certain ambiguity and complexity. The paper reconstructs the ethnic and cultural puzzle of the North Sea border in the early Middle Ages as it is depicted in the different textual sources. The North Sea represents a dynamic boundary between the Frankish people and the Vikings, which has a strategic role in the ideological con-

¹⁰ The term was first established in Scotland, where the English border was actually the only one and therefore emphatically called “the border”. The first attestation is the chronicle by Hector Boethius, *Buick of Cronicles of Scotland* (1535): Gif thift or reif maid upon the bordour (OED2 sv. *border*).

flict between the pagan invaders and the Frankish Christian people according to the Frankish annals, while it was a bridge for the Vikings to cross to capture and enslave Frisian men, and for the Frisian men to fight the Vikings according to the Frisian law, but it was the scenario for cooperation and peaceful (economic and cultural) relations between these two populations. Daniela Fruscione and Carla Riviello focus on cultural borders, that is, on the border of magic in medieval laws and sermons respectively. Fruscione analyses the Romano-Germanic laws, tackling how the border between magic and witchcraft was defined and what limited magic from other human experiences. In particular, her paper analyses the concerns of the authorities and more precisely how the provisions on witchcraft and magic contained in Romano-Germanic laws were enacted, showing that the attitude of the authorities towards magic and witchcraft was never univocal, mainly because of the religious and ethnic bipolarism which constituted the background of the early European legislation on magic. The author, however, notices that, although, already in the early medieval laws, it was possible to observe public concerns over the practice of magic, in most *leges* the use of magic was not punished as a religious offence, but rather for its destabilizing aspect regarding the social order. Accordingly, the border delineating magic practices was fluid as it depended on the perceiver and included practices and beliefs on the border with other features of human experience like religion and law itself. The paper by Carla Riviello closely links to this last aspect in the Old English homiletic tradition; and demonstrates that the apocryphal material relating to the struggle between Peter and Simon Magus offered, to the medieval man, a useful paradigm to fix the boundary between miracle and magic. The author takes into consideration the works of three homileticians – the anonymous author of the *Blickling Homily XV*, Ælfric and Wulfstan – on the theme of Peter and Simon Magus's struggle, and observes that, drawing mainly from the codification proposed in the *Passio sanctorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli*, the medieval authors exploited the unstable fluidity of the narrative, expanding or narrowing infinitely through additions and subtractions of episodes and dialogues. Riviello's investigation identifies the significant elements that highlight the different attitudes assumed by the three homileticians with respect to the subject matter, from the "simple" translation of the *Blickling Homily* to Ælfric's reworking to Wulfstan's *exemplum*.

The idea of "border" as a delimiting and defining line of a geographical entity is at the centre of Bria's paper. Although based on literary texts, the author's investigation ponders on the symbolic charge and the conflicting meanings placed on the frontiers, as they sign the space of alterity. It does not come as a surprise that beyond the frontier, ancient and medieval literary texts place strangeness and monstrosity. However, the strange and the monstrous is usually connected with the alien, the foreign, i.e. incarnated by the inhabitant beyond the border. Therefore, it is puzzling that Early Medieval English people appeared to see monstrosity as a foundation for their own culture, as proved by the abundance of monstrous figures characterising their literature, as they felt intimately linked to a sense of strangeness. The author explains this peculiarity, going back to a very informative text for the medieval England, the old English *Wonders of the East*, a text that located in the East everything (perceived as) strange, thus displaying a Mediterranean-centric perspective, where Europe works as the ideal centre of the cosmos. She attributes the peculiar attitude of the Early English Medieval people towards the strange to the fact that they adopted this Mediterranean-centric perspective, and thus consigned the island to the margins of civilisation. The paper investigates how the position of Britain at the border of the geographical map impacted the perceived degree of civilisation of the Early Medieval English people and how their geographical location might have imbued the idea of Englishness with monstrosity. Being beyond the border rooted the English's own cultural identity in alterity: ambiguous characters straddling the boundaries of animal and man such as Hengest and Horsa

or the lone-dwellers of the fens such as Grendel represent a kind of cultural shorthand which medieval English society used to manage their own cultural hybridity.

The border is the theme of a literary work, that is *Austrfararvísur* (Verses on a Journey to the East), preserved in Snorri Sturluson's *Óláfs saga Helga*, which Lombardi defined as a poem of borders: as a matter of fact, the skald Sigvatr Þórðarson, who was part of Óláfr the Saint's entourage, composed these *vísur* on his own experience of crossing geographical, political, religious borders. In particular, Sigvatr described his retracing in the opposite direction the path of the mythological kings towards Norway he portrayed in *Vestrfararvísur* (Verses on a Journey to the West). He told about the dramatic moments and inhospitable places of his travel from Norway to Sweden where an immense forest was and still is a natural border: in the past it separated geographical areas, political domains and also religions. But in the poem, this natural border is also harbinger of contact: the visit by Sigvatr to Västergötland is indeed preparatory to the peace deal between King Óláfr Haraldsson of Norway and the king of Sweden, Óláfr Skötkonung.

A completely different approach to the topic is followed by Chiara De Bastiani, who applied it to language. In particular, she crosses the border between meter, syntax and information structure, showing how combining research in these three (traditionally) separated language modules can both enhance our understanding of the syntax of a given historical text and help gather insights into the relation between metrical prominence and information structure. The contribution illustrates two case studies conducted on historical English texts: Old English *Beowulf* and Early Middle English *Ormulum*. The author shows that taking into account the metrical structure in the study of poetic texts can not only shed light on the syntax of a work, but also provide valuable clues regarding the prosodic contour of utterances, thereby providing indirect confirmation to formal linguistic theories integrating prosody and information structure in the study of language change and enlarging the set of methodological choices at the service of the historical linguist and philologist. In other words, linguistic structures and choices are the consequence of an intricate crisscrossing and interweaving between syntax, meter and information structure.

This collection of papers gives an idea of how the polysemy of the term "border" mirrors its conceptual complexity and according to its usage in different fields, trying to answer different questions: what characteristics "borders" have, whether they separate one thing from another real or imaginary, what they represent for the local environment, the cultures and people that inhabited it, whether "borders" were only separating lines or places of encounter. The answers are restricted to a time – Middle Ages – and a space – areas inhabited by Germanic people – but the results they offer can be of inspiration and validity for any other period and geographical area: a border is no limit, but promising and proliferous intersection.

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