

## **'The shape of "Europe" by about 1300 is very much the foundation of what we have now'**

*Peter Hoppenbrouwers en Peer Vries in gesprek met Robert Bartlett naar aanleiding van diens *The making of Europe: conquest, colonization and cultural change, 950-1350* (Londen 1993)*

**You were invited to give a lecture in a series with the title 'The European miracle', which refers to a book by E.L. Jones, an Australian economist and economic historian, in which he tries to explain why economic growth and development began in Europe while to his opinion they had after all been more likely to emerge in other parts of the world.<sup>1</sup> Can you as a historian of the Middle Ages help to unravel this mystery?**

I'm afraid this is a question that has a chronology beyond the period I really know about. But it might be worth pointing out that up until 1500 it might have been very surprising that Europe was to become the part of the world where it would all start. If you think about, for example, maritime exploration, the Chinese were exploring the coast of Africa in the fifteenth century just like the Portuguese. There were no, as I would say predictors that would make you say in the Middle Ages that Europe would become the hegemonic area of the world.

**Nevertheless, on the flap of *The making of Europe*, you, or maybe it was your publisher, describe late medieval Europe as a society that 'lay poised to enter a yet more expansionary phase of its history'.**

I think it was my publisher who wrote that. I think at the very end of the book I try and make some very general comments about the process I have described and which I think actually comes to a halt about 1300, or in the early fourteenth century. I think that there was a pause in this expansion in medieval Europe. There was a dynamic phase in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Then in the fourteenth century a period of economic crisis began, we see the ending of that expansion. In the late fifteenth century things then started again. But there are continuities. What one might say is that the heritage of the period I am talking about to early modern times and especially to modern colonialism is ideological: the ideological heritage is more important than the material or physical one. Obviously you need certain material or physical factors and certain demographic levels. It is a help to have military superiority for the kind of world-system we are talking about. You need some sort of maritime technology. But I think the real continuity is probably in the ideology. The components I try to analyze in the book when it comes to the ideology are a particular kind of aggression and a recognition of that aggression, that is not deeming it something that needs to be controlled but regarding it actually as a virtue which Western military aristocracies had. If you look at say the ideology of people like Cortes or Pizarro in the New World, that is

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very much a characteristic medieval-Western military-aristocratic ethos or outlook.

The aristocracy plays a very prominent role in your book and in the dynamics you describe. Is the aristocratic aggressiveness you describe typical of Europe? Is that what made Europe?

Obviously all societies are violent and all societies organize their violence in different ways. But if we look for distinctive features you might well say that the ethos of extreme individualistic honor-based violence was not as prominent in other important societies that arose in the Old World as it was in the West. Of course you have got violence, but you have also got a tendency to have professional armies and a tendency to regard the civilian as being important. In Byzantium it is very clear. There is actually a reference in my book to Anna Comnena,<sup>2</sup> the Byzantine princess and historian. She is looking at Westerners and says: 'Even the leaders fight'. She is used to a military system in which the Byzantine generals were meant to be men of cunning, tactics, they were meant to organize things, to be brave of course, but they were not meant to rush into the middle of the enemy, spear in the hand, as she sees the Westerners doing.

**Is your book a kind of rehabilitation of the influence of the aristocracy in European history? Normally innovation and dynamics are associated with the ever-rising bourgeoisie.**

Well, I am not painting a very nice picture of the aristocracy.

**But they are important and dynamic.**

If you look at the historiography in Britain and to some extent in the United States where I have taught, there has been an attempt for some twenty years or so to do a history from the bottom up, an attempt not just to look at the elites, the important people. Well that is a good thing. One needs to tackle it. But on the other hand the societies we are looking at, those of the Middle Ages or the early modern period, were societies dominated by small aristocracies and if a small group of people have a concentration of wealth and authority then obviously they are going to have a big effect on what those societies are like. You may not like it, you can have all sorts of political positions about it, but it seems silly to me to pretend that this was not the case.

**Does this imply you would like to question the idea of the rising bourgeoisie for the Middle Ages?**

There is no doubt that the place, particularly of towns and town elites, is a special one. My argument in the book is really that if one looks for distinctive

features of Europe, then the Western European town, the way it is organized - the specific form it came to have, a small privileged corporate body - seems to be specifically a Western European development. It is very important, but I think also that the traditional marxist historiography in which the bourgeoisie are a new social force who are a threat to the feudal aristocracy, is quite wrong. It seems to me that the feudal aristocracy were intelligent about their interests, and if you look at most towns I have looked at, it is usually with aristocratic encouragement and support that they get going. Because the aristocracy think they can make more money out of a town than they can out of a village of peasants. And they are right, if they got a flourishing town that is a real asset to their capital. I do not think a fundamental bourgeois-aristocratic antagonism often existed in the Middle Ages.

**Could you dwell a little more on what made Europe and what made it specific? Everyone reading your book will constantly be asking: But what is Europe? What is it that is made in your book? You give indicators of its unity, but no definition by means of characteristics.**

Well the society I am seeing as the end product is one which is politically disunited, dominated by a military aristocracy which has a considerable sense of its own aggression; in which there are certain social forms which enshrine medieval and early modern ideas of liberty, such as the town and the free village, and the idea that economic forces can be developed; in which there is an aristocracy that can profit by relaxing its immediate social control rather than having the early medieval model in which the aristocracies try and control people and keep them down. They say actually: 'If we have a slightly more hands-off approach, if we allow these towns their freedoms, their free migration, then there will be economic development from which we can profit'. And it was a society which was culturally and ideologically united in various ways I tried to indicate through its religion and through its self-conception. That is what I think comes out quite strongly: by 1300 this is a part of the world which has a very strong awareness of itself, a very strong self-identity which marks it off against the surrounding cultures.

**And it excludes the Muslim civilizations, it excludes Byzantium?**

It excludes those but it also excludes 'internally'. For example it is generally accepted that the position of the Jews was far worse at the end of the Middle Ages than it had been at the beginning. There are other groups who suffer from this as well, for example the Muslims who were reconquered in Spain. It is an exclusive society, a society that is simultaneously expansionary and exclusive. Those things seem to me to go together.

**That brings us back to your remarks on aggressiveness. I would say that not the aggressiveness itself is distinctive of the aristocracy of Europe, compare for instance that in Japan, but the fact that it had a purpose, the**

**purpose to expand and to bring forward certain cultural values, for example religion. You say that around 1300 a certain awareness existed of what Europe had to be. Was this conception totally absent two hundred years before? Did the aggressors know where to stop?**

I think they were stopped rather than that they knew where to stop. To take the first question: 'Was there a sense of identity earlier'? I think obviously that whenever you write a book of history that covers a large chunk of time you have got to start somewhere and it is always possible for people to say: 'What about the hundred years earlier'? And people have said so, my friends who are studying the earlier Middle Ages are not particularly persuaded by what I am saying. But I think I would make a stand and say: 'Of course there are certain features that are already quite distinctive about Western Europe culturally. But if you look at the period from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, it seems to me unmistakable that there is an intensification of those things'. Of course in the eleventh century people already thought of themselves as Christians, or better as Latin Christians. But two hundred years later that was part of their identity in a much more conscious way and with a much bigger institutional backing. In the eleventh century that was largely symbolic. You would look to Rome, say, as your pilgrimage center, whereas two hundred years later there was an educational framework, there was a university system, the non-military elite were trained in a particular way that had clear geographical limits, people would go to Paris or Bologna or some of the other schools and they would get a training in Latin. The Roman Church had an international framework of Latin education, but it did not extend any further. You could actually map it, as I try to do in my book. Or to take another example, the contacts of the Western European aristocracy with their non-Latin neighbours obviously heightened their awareness of who they were. They were surrounded by different cultures, but in the years between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries they had undertaken aggressive expansionary expeditions into surrounding areas and had established colonies, Latin colonies, societies in which the elite were of a different language, a different religion and had come from a different part of the world. And that is really again where one of the possible links with later post-1500 developments comes on. In the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries there was a colonial experience in Europe. People had become used to societies which were racially or linguistically divided and in which small groups of traders, aristocrats or clerics established dominant positions surrounded by populations who were native, alien and sometimes hostile.

**Then there is the basic question: 'What was the cause of this dynamism'? When I understand you well you are saying that between the eleventh and the fourteenth centuries European society is a dynamic society, but why then and why did this dynamism disappear in the following two centuries?**

When I started writing the book I hoped to have an answer to that question. In the course of writing it I thought that probably the best thing I could do was to describe the process as carefully as possible.

**But if you were pressed for an answer?**

I suppose I would say that demographic expansion was a necessary precondition, that military superiority in some aspects was also very important and that the most difficult thing to explain is the change in ideology that took place in the eleventh century. That is obviously connected with changes in the nature at the top level of the Church. By the end of the eleventh century for example Christian 'holy war' existed, which was not really the case at the beginning of that century.

**Marxists would try and explain these developments by referring to economic changes and relate the Crusades to say a search for wealth by people in an overpopulated Western Europe.**

The northern French did not really have an obvious interest in Palestine, so why do they march 2000 miles to get there? This is a highly ideological matter. By the twelfth century it is possible for a churchman to say that killing non-Christians will send you to heaven. That is a hard thing to explain. But it is obviously part of the mixture. The popes recognized this. In the famous speech that started the crusading movement the pope said: 'Stop killing each other, go and kill Muslims'. He recognized what the energy was and tried to channel that. The complicating thing however - and this is something I looked at in the book - is that you can see somewhat similar processes going on in the Celtic world, in Wales and Ireland, and there of course the Welsh and the Irish were already Christian. So the obvious explanation is not that this is a Holy War. If you actually look at what is happening there and compare it with what is happening along other fronts, where Christians and non-Christians meet, there are all sorts of similarities: a heavy feudal cavalry that is leading and spearheading conquest, the introduction of the Western model of town and new peasant settlement that comes in with this peasant freedom that I described. So obviously the religious coloration that was given to much of this expansion was not always absolutely necessary.

**You are talking about a knightly-clerical-mercantile consortium that orchestrated the most characteristic expansionary movements of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>3</sup> What exactly is the role of the mercantile element in this consortium? The bourgeois element really only comes in at the end of the book.**

Townsmen are getting in on the act I think. If you take the case of Ireland, the intrusion there is military. It is spearheaded by a small group of feudal aristocrats from England and from across the Channel. But after the establish-

ment of a new lordship the first thing that happens is that Dublin is given to a group of English merchants, English townsmen who are going there and settle as artisans and traders in a colonial area. That is exactly what is happening in Riga. The Baltic conquest states were studded with new cities consciously founded, sometimes even laid out like Riga. A city like Dublin already existed - it was founded by the Vikings a couple of hundred years before - but it was as it were taken over by a new urban, immigrant population.

**But why then did the Vikings not succeed while the Anglo Normans did?**

Well in a way I think the Vikings did succeed. They came there in the eighth and ninth centuries. They established those Irish towns. They were quite dominant up until the eleventh century. Obviously one of the things that happened in the eleventh century is that Viking expansion itself began to disappear. I think that is because it is then taken over by the state in a way it has not been before. One of the things that happened in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was that the Scandinavian countries began to develop monarchies of the Western European kind so that things were then being orchestrated by a royal government.

**That brings us to the role of the state. In the classical medieval historiography - for example in the work of Strayer and Hoyt<sup>4</sup> - it is the creation of the national state in the eleventh and twelfth centuries that is at the basis of dynamism and expansion.**

I have quite consciously chosen to disagree. Particularly in England which has a tradition of strong royal government and wonderful records which are all centralized, there has been a very strong tendency to see things from the king's point of view, from the central point of view. I think it is a good idea to try and look at medieval European history leaving that to one side and to look at other things. Even in the case of England one could stress the role of independent social forces. Not just the aristocracy but also the Church and in some cases the towns. If you look at other monarchies, for instance France or the Empire, then I think the case is even stronger. A very great deal is independently organized. This first struck me when I was looking at the so-called German *Ostsiedlung*. In the tenth century the Ottonian kings are able to manage a little bit of expansion at the frontier. Not much and it collapses quite soon. And they were a Saxon dynasty based right on the frontier with the whole of royal power behind it! In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries there is an enormous expansion of German settlements of all kinds, some of it violent some of it not violent, extending the German language and German settlement hundreds of miles to the East and none of that, or hardly any of it, involved royal initiative at all.

**But the role of the monarchical state is then taken over by the territorial princes.**

That is part of the question: 'Where do you want to identify the state? As far as I can see in medieval history you could create a perfectly good story by saying that state power is in private hands and another perfectly good story by saying there is no state power. What are kings but just the most successful lords?

**I am inclined to defend the thesis that in medieval Europe there was no such thing as a state in the modern sense of the word.**

That seems to me a plausible argument. It is partly a matter of which term you wish to use. The traditional formula, I believe it is Strayer's, is that feudalism is 'public authority ... treated as private possession'.<sup>5</sup> You could put it the other way around by saying that in the case of medieval kings there was no distinction between public and private in the modern sense. There is no doubt that certain monarchies became very much more powerful over the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The French monarchy is the most famous example. My own feeling is that in some ways the state acted as a brake on expansion. The expansion had been taking place independently, by forces not connected with the state or the royal monarchy. When monarchies got more powerful they actually wanted to use those resources, if they could control aristocracies, for their own purposes. They did not want their aristocracies to go and set up little states in southern Italy, Antioch or Ireland.

**By the way the word 'feudalism' does not come up much in your book.**

I try to avoid using it. If you use it, everybody wants to make an argument about it and I never wanted that. If I did use it, I would do it carefully as describing a form of land tenure and a type of relationship between individuals, an honorable form of subordination in vassalage and so on. I have no objection to it. There are people who go mad when they see it. I am not one of those but I would tend to use the word in a narrow, perhaps somewhat technical sense as an aspect of medieval legal systems.

**One could compare these expansionist tendencies to the way for example the Dutch government in the nineteenth century tried to contain its people in the Netherlands Indies. The central government *in patria* was not really fond of all those expansionist activities of their compatriots at the frontier.**

I think you are right. You can see that kind of a paradox quite clearly in the Late Middle Ages too. The political imperatives of people who want large stable lordships in Western Europe and the interest of people who want to go to the periphery of Europe to create something for themselves, new towns and colonies, are not necessarily the same.

**It seems you have always been fascinated with the border, the margin.<sup>6</sup> Is it because you are a 'frontiersman' yourself?**

I was born in London from a family that lived there for generations and as a child I had never been outside of London for more than a week's holiday. I do not know what is at the root of this fascination with the border. I started my serious studies by looking at someone - Gerald of Wales - who was very much a child and a product of a border society: a frontier society in the sense that it was militarily and politically divided between people who had just arrived there and people who had been there for a long time and that it was linguistically and culturally divided. So it was in that sense of the word a colonial situation. It seemed to me that in order to understand him I needed to know something about the processes in which he found himself. And of course you can look at that just from the point of view of the British Isles. That is often done, because the relationship of England with Wales, Scotland and Ireland is an important aspect of British history. As I taught in Scotland it became even more important to me. What started me thinking comparatively about it was noticing that what Gerald of Wales was saying about the Irish and the Welsh was very similar to what some of the German chronicles were saying about the Slavs or the Scandinavians. So it started by trying to create a sort of mental picture. Then I thought that I would not really be able to give a good account of the mental pictures unless I knew how much they corresponded to reality. So then I started to have a look at these peripheral areas. And as soon as one begins to invest effort and time in such a topic it begins to snowball and becomes interesting in itself. And the final ambitious and maybe foolhardy decision was to try and cover the whole lot and to look at the society as a whole from its edges. And I thought if it is to be done, one might as well be bold.

**From the edges one can look in two directions, inside out and outside in. One can look back at the society one came from. That is what you are doing in your book on Gerald of Wales. In the first part you describe his relations with the English king and the English court and then you describe what he thinks of Wales and Ireland. In *The making of Europe* you never describe the center as it is seen from the periphery.**

I just received a review of the book by Chris Wickham in the *New Left Review* and he makes exactly this point by saying: 'Where is the middle?' Well, the criticism that you have left something out, that something is not in, can always be made. I wanted to tell the story looking at it from this point of view. I do not claim completeness. I do not think anyone can ever do. I just say if you look at it systematically from this angle, from this perspective, then this is the result.

**Nevertheless people could say: 'How exactly is Europe made at the frontier'? The implication of the title of your book is that things that happened at the frontier helped to shape the core. Then what exactly was the influence of happenings at the frontier on the core?**

*'The shape of "Europe" by about 1300'*

If you look at the geopolitics then the lines you would have to draw on the map in 1300 would be bigger than in 1000. The center obviously did change quite a lot. Take for example demographic growth. When I discuss demographic growth I am not talking about the edge, then I am talking about Western Europe as a whole. Take the developments that took place in the Catholic Church, such as the changing ideology of the papacy. They are not specific to the periphery although obviously they had a big impact there. I think of the development of military technology, the growth of the castle in particular, that is something that clearly starts in Northern France and the Rhineland so it is very much a Western European development that then spread outward. So for certain things I look at the core. I agree they do not get much space in terms of numbers of pages because that is not my theme, but I think those are the things that actually do have their origin in the core, the heartland and spread out. And then in the chapter about cultural homogeneity, how the different parts of Europe became more similar, what I say there applies to the core as well as to the peripheries of Europe.

**But still, one criticism, however strange it may sound, could be that this book is too Eurocentric, too uni-directional.**

That is a criticism that has been made!

**The acculturation process, those things the Europeans borrowed from for example the Arabs or the Byzantines, get no attention. Is this because you think they were not important, or is it just a matter of this not being your subject?**

This is another point Chris Wickham makes in his review in particular in relation to what was learned in Spain. I think it is fair. I do not think there is any harm in selfcriticism. I am not going to rewrite the book but if I had put more emphasis on that, it would have been a better book.

**What influences would you mention if you were to rewrite the book?**

If you think of the Arabs in Spain then obviously there is the whole formation of the central intellectual tradition of Western Christendom, scholasticism, which is very heavily dependent on Arabic cultural influence, e.g. the translations in Spain, not only of Greek but also of Arabic sources. By the mid-thirteenth century what is being taught for example in Paris, the theological center of Western Europe, is impossible to have imagined from what was going on some hundred and fifty years before without Arabic influences. More concretely if one was looking specifically at the case of Spain you probably would have to mention a lot of things, for example irrigation practices or farming. I think there is probably more influence on the Mediterranean frontier where Western Europeans confronted literate urban-commercial societies than there was say in the Celtic world or in the Eastern Baltic where

they really did feel they were culturally superior and were not borrowing much.

**What strikes me is that you emphasize the dynamics and the influence of the processes on the frontier without ever referring to the work of Turner.<sup>8</sup> Would you regard for instance the Elbian frontier as the 'Wild West' of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries?**

I think that there is one aspect of Turner's work that is right, which is the association of frontiers and freedom. I think that is accurate. There are obvious reasons for that because in attempting to woo immigrants in such difficult new situations you have to offer them something. I think that was what was happening East of the Elbe, in Ireland and in other places. But Turner's American frontier tends to be a rather 'unpeopled' and empty frontier and that means he did not take an issue seriously which I think is very important, i.e. race relations. In my book there are two chapters on race relations. These frontiers brought people in contact with people with different cultures and different languages that were already there. That is a permanent feature that goes right on into the present day. Take the Baltic states at the beginning of this century with their German elite - urban and rural - and the mass of the rural population being Baltic speaking and so on. That situation was really very important and, as I said, Turner's frontier is a bit of an empty frontier.

**There seem to be no natives on his frontier, or rather, they were there but Turner does not mention them. The frontier could indeed be associated with freedom but as you well know the frontier regions of Europe soon became the regions of unfree labor. Not only in the Baltic but one might also assert this of Spain, Sicily, the Southern parts of Italy. Somewhere in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries I think freedom eclipsed at the borders.**

I suppose for the Baltic region you are referring to the so-called 'second serfdom' and I suppose the parallel between what happened in the Baltic and in Spain is the growth of *latifundia*. What happened in Eastern Europe, as far as I understand it, is that it became an economic dependency in a way that it was not in the period I am talking about. In the period I am talking about it was a grain producing region and it was based on the idea of semi-independent peasant farms. Then at some point in the course of the Later Middle Ages and the sixteenth century, you get a different social system with *latifundia* and a peasantry that is no longer free, producing grain for export. Incidentally if you talk about the word 'feudalism', there is that Polish economic historian Witold Kula who wrote a lovely book on the feudal system; and what is his feudalism? It is eighteenth-century Poland!<sup>9</sup> That is why I do not use the word! If you have that system then there is an integration which is more like that of modern colonial dependency. You have an enserfed population producing a

consumer product, foodstuff, for more urbanized Western Europe for the profit of this 'entrepreneurial aristocracy'. About developments in Southern Europe I don't think I know enough.

**Is there a relation between this development - the hardening of race relationships in the periphery - and the growth of the central state in Western Europe or is this just a coincidence?**

I do not know, the thing I tend to associate it with, although I am not certain of my ideas on this at all, is economic recession. I think that when these towns and these areas had been settled in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that happened at a time of general demographic and economic growth. That means that different economic interest groups, although of course there might be antagonisms, were not competing for shrinking resources. Once you get to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the resources seem to be contracting. There is a Late Medieval contraction and as one can see in modern history when people are in competition they fasten on and identify possible justifications for exclusion and attack. In a growing economy racial antagonism tends to be less acute than in a shrinking economy.

**You refer to this antagonism as 'racial', why not 'national' or 'ethnic'?**

At the end of the book I use the word 'racial'. I did the final stages of the book when I was still in America and of course there you have to be very careful when using these words. I was constantly being asked: 'Don't you mean 'ethnic'? In American circumstances 'racial' means black and white. I thought about it quite consciously and at length. In a way of course it is not an empirical question. It is a choice, a strategy, which word you choose. I think I will stick with 'racial' because of what is said in the sources. Most of the sources I looked at are in Latin, the word they use is *gens*. Of course *gens* can mean a lot of things but it does have the idea of a breeding stock, a group of people who have common blood or descent. And even though that is not true empirically - most of the people who would call themselves the German *gens* or the Slave *gens* were probably not of common descent, there was probably a lot of intermixture - that was how they conceptualized it. The fact that there is not a big physical marker like skin color or an elaborate racial theory like Nazi Aryan theory does not mean you want to call that anything other than a concept of race and racism. I would not call that national thinking. That is separate from racial thinking. That does not mean national thinking is nonexistent in the Middle Ages. A very good example, one that I have been looking at quite recently, is connected with Scotland. Scotland was a unified kingdom and although it was small and relatively poor it was effectively politically united. It consisted of different groups of people speaking different languages - Gaelic, English and so on - but by the year 1300 there is quite clearly in Scotland a sense of national identity which is not based on unity of descent.

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And 'ethnic', that is just a modern word used by people who do not want to say 'racial'.

**But you use the word 'ethnicity' too.**

I am not a hardliner on this. In America nowadays the words 'racial' and 'ethnic' are both used and the argument about what they mean seems to me almost completely incoherent. It is historical: black and white is racial, Italian and Portuguese is ethnic. The racial/ ethnic distinction is a construction of modern political discourse. I think in my book there is a good case for using the word 'race'.

**The word and the idea 'Europe' are central to your book. Was the word 'Europe' known in the period you are describing and were there debates about who was European?**

Yes, it was known and you do find occasional examples of the word but I think it was not very important. I have called my book *The making of Europe* not because that is a contemporary term. The question what is Europe is rather open even today. What I am talking about is Latin Christendom, the society based in Western Europe. It is clearly a shorthand modern term referring to that distinction.

**People in the Middle Ages did not refer to themselves as 'Europeans'?**

Not very much. The expression became significant really only after the Great Discoveries and the beginning of transatlantic, intercontinental contact.

**Do you think the present Europe has some sort of cultural identity that goes back to some extent to this period? Should your book have been subsidized by the EC?**

Absolutely, there is no question about that. If you put aside the religious split of the Reformation and to some extent also the effects of differential industrialization which has obviously changed the map, I think that the shape of 'Europe' by about 1300 is very much the foundation of what we have now. For example: 'What are the countries which are now most likely to join the EC from Eastern Europe'?

**Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic,**

These are the countries that were part of Latin Christendom. The divide between Eastern and Western Europe ran to the East of those countries. I think their traditions and orientations were shaped culturally in that period. I have just been reviewing a book on the history of East Central Europe, a very tricky expression, not very elegant, but it is an attempt to describe this world

we were just talking about, this swathe of Eastern Europe that is actually oriented to the West.<sup>10</sup> One of the things the author looks at is the tension between Orthodox and Catholic in the Late Middle Ages, bans on intermarriage, expulsion of orthodox priests and so on. That is something I could have talked about in my book. It is actually quite a hot frontier.

### **Who are the ideologists behind this, the Church?**

Are you thinking of the relations with the Orthodox or of racism in general?

#### **Of racism in general.**

It depends really on what one means by 'the Church'. I have got no bias in favour of the leaders of the Church at all, but I think that the Church authorities, the popes and the bishops and so on, actually have a reasonably humane record in the attempt to control racial violence. If you look at the relations with the Jews, you will find that in the Rhineland cities it is the bishops of for example Cologne and Worms who actually try to protect Jews from pogroms. The popes' line was always absolutely clear. They issued a whole series of legislation in which there was discrimination - they did not think Jews were equal - but nevertheless they thought Jews should be protected. One source of active antisemitism are the kings who alternate between getting everything they can from the Jews because the Jews were theirs, their private property, and thinking they get more from expelling them. Another source of violence, quite often, are the debtors, not the very poorest people, but people who are in the middling levels of society, gentry or maybe urban, who hate the Jews because they owe them money and who can justify their hatred by the fact that they are different. So the two things come together. I think the worst possible thing for the Jews was a king who was pious, say Saint Louis of France. He had the Christian ideology. The burning of Talmuds started under him. It was so successful that there is apparently only one medieval Talmud left. But he was also in the tradition of the kings of France who regarded the Jews as a useful financial asset.

**An interesting phenomenon in this context are the religious military orders. Your remarks on Saint Louis with regard to the Jews remind me of Philip the Fair and the Order of the Templars. Did these military orders play a distinctive role in the process of expansion you describe?**

I think they are very central because they combine two aspects: the aspect of being dedicated to aggressive military activity and the Christian-religious aspect. Their training was the ordinary training for a western military aristocrat, but they were unmarried, had no family ties, no property and were under orders of obedience. So they had some of the characteristics that modern armies have tried to inculcate, that is discipline and all the things that go with drilling and obeying orders. They are cut off from their family ties as much as

possible. They are not meant to have property nor wives, children or family interests. That is actually built into their system. They are meant to be obedient to their superiors. They are undying corporations that go on forever. The Assassins, Muslims dedicated to killing the leaders of their enemies, did not bother with the Templars or the Hospitallers because they knew that if they killed one he would just be replaced by another one. If you look at the various arenas of expansion that I discussed you can go and visit the castles of these orders. They are in Palestine and Syria, on Cyprus and Malta but also in Spain and in the Eastern Baltic, in all the corners where expansion was going on.

**How did they fit in with the Christian ideology? They were a kind of religious order but at the same time they were given to violence and aggressiveness.**

This is an example of the revolution that takes place in the eleventh century. Up until the eleventh century Christianity is a religion that can be interpreted as pacifist. There is quite a lot to suggest that - unlike some other religions, for example Islam. That is not a pacifist religion, and it does not claim to be one. In the fourth century Christianity becomes a state religion and you can not have a state religion that is pacifist. So from the fourth century onwards there is the problem of reconciling Christianity with violence. This is where Saint Augustine comes in who lays down the Christian rules for justifiable violence. But the awkwardness carries on until the eleventh century. Then there is an ideological revolution. The Church embraces violence and says it can be holy. Saint Bernard very soon gave his backing to the Templars. He writes that it is morally virtuous to kill non-Christians. There is a complete embrace of the idea of holy warfare that has not been there before and that obviously is one of the things that gives the expansion we discussed its edge. And it is one of the things that had a future. Look at the Spaniards.

**Aren't there indications that the Latin Church borrowed this idea from the Arabs?**

There is a big debate about this. In particular there is a debate whether the institute of crusading orders has been borrowed from the Arabs. There is an institution in Islam, the *Ribat*, which is actually a border fortress. People, dedicated Muslims, commit themselves to go and occupy it against the Christians. They dedicate themselves to a life of fighting. I think that most people feel that this argument does not actually work and the crusading orders are homegrown. They come out of the Christian tradition. But obviously if you look at it from a bigger distance then clearly there are similar forms in those two religions. The other thing about Islam of course is that it has a concept of *Jihad* from the beginning. War can be holy. That is not a complicated issue. The Christians spent hundreds of years to try and get themselves

to justify it. In Islam it is there from the very beginning, from the prophet. That is one of the things that obviously changes in Western Europe.

**To take this comparison a little bit further: would you describe European society in the eleventh and twelfth centuries as fundamentalist? I sometimes do this when lecturing to my students.**

I can see that. Well yes. It is a society in which right belief becomes a criterion for full membership. A society that becomes more and more active in the suppression of people it identifies as not having the right beliefs, both within and outside. This is the period of the persecution of heresy in Western Europe and it has been argued by various people, most recently by R.I. Moore, that the Church in a sense creates heresy by defining itself more and more rigidly and saying doctrinal belief has to be absolutely what it says.<sup>11</sup> The twelfth and thirteenth centuries obviously see the creation of a machinery of suppression, a machinery that borrows some of its institutions from this expansionary movement. When the crusade against heretics takes place, an institution that started as an expansionary movement in the Mediterranean is being used for an act of political and military repression right in the heart of Western society, the South of France. There is a kind of feedback of this expansion into repression in the center of society, an example if you wish of how the frontier made the center.

**Noten:**

1. E.L. Jones, *The European miracle. Environments, economies and geopolitics in the history of Europe and Asia* (2e druk Cambridge 1987) X.
2. Bartlett, *The making of Europe*, 89.
3. Bartlett, *The making of Europe*, 308.
4. J.R. Strayer en D.C. Munro, *The Middle Ages, 395-1500* (5e druk; Santa Monica 1970; J.R. Strayer, *On the medieval origins of the modern state* (Princeton 1970) en R.S. Hoyt, *Europe in the Middle Ages* (2e druk; New York 1966).
5. Strayer en Munro, *The Middle Ages*, 114.
6. Dat blijkt behalve uit het boek over Gerard of Wales waar Bartlett in het interview zelf naar verwijst - *Gerard of Wales, 1146-1223* (Oxford 1982) - ook uit R. Bartlett en A. Mackay, ed., *Medieval frontier societies* (Oxford 1989).
7. Chris Wickham, 'Making Europes', *New Left Review* 208 (1994) 133-143.
8. F.J. Turner, *The frontier in American history* (New York 1921). Voor een toepassing van de Turner-these op de Middeleeuwse expansiegeschiedenis zie R.I. Burns, 'The significance of the frontier in the Middle Ages' in: Bartlett en Mackay, *Medieval frontier societies*, 307-330.
9. W. Kula, *Théorie économique du système féodal: pour un modèle de l'économie polonaise 16e-18e siècle* (herziene en uitgebreide druk; Parijs 1970). Oorspronkelijk verschenen in het Pools in 1962.
10. J.W. Sedlar, *East Central Europe in the Middle Ages. A history of East Central Europe III* (Seattle 1994).
11. R.I. Moore, *The formation of a persecuting society* (Oxford 1987).