

Tamar Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession: Spain and Portugal in Europe and the Americas*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015, 384 pp.

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In this book, Tamar Herzog explores how concepts of territory in the Iberian Peninsula and the American continent were formed over a prolonged time period encompassing the medieval era to the nineteenth century. The focus is on areas of the border shared by Spain and Portugal as well as large sections of eastern South America under their contested control. The book alternates discussions of broad questions about empire, sovereignty, colonialism, and identity, among others, with extremely detailed examinations of the interactions of a range of actors as they put forward varied claims over land. Herzog's argument runs against the well-established idea that the shaping and setting of frontiers belong to the domain of diplomatic and military history, fields "naturally" steered by elites, their incidents unfolding on battlefields and in ministerial cabinets, their conclusions meticulously written up in treaties and safely archived for posterity.

This book shows that borders are complex, shifting, and rarely regular or static. How they are conceptualized depends upon an array of circumstances including the varied uses people make of resources contained in a territory and the multiple relations built and maintained around it. The making of claims and the use of the law are at the heart of continuous movements that produce identities, and they reveal how untidily memory operates in the delineation of frontiers.

Anthropologists and geographers have long employed these approaches to border-making, yet Herzog's book is innovative nonetheless, not only because she supports it with meticulous archival research but also because of her overall perspective. She approaches Europe and the Americas, and Spain and Portugal, not as separate and hardly related, but rather as deeply connected regions and continents. Moreover, Herzog demonstrates the extent to which the interactions she has so painstakingly documented as leading to the formation of frontiers, territories and identities—regional, ethnic, and national—were informed by legal traditions shared by many, even if those using them did not learn them formally and were unaware of their genealogy.

Herzog's study should inspire further reflections and investigations into, among other themes, the political cultures surrounding the shaping of territories, which often involve debates over access to resources, and concepts of citizenship, sovereignty, and statehood. While historians of early modern history are this book's main audience, scholars in other disciplines concerned with present-day borderland issues will find in this impressive study a wealth of ideas with which to better understand the world today.

———Gabriela Ramos, University of Cambridge