

## 1 The Ancien Régime

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To have somewhere to live is to begin to exist. France had frontiers and a place to live even before it formally existed. These frontiers, inherited, conquered, or reconquered, marked out an enormous area if it is measured, as it should be, by the slow pace of communications in the past. In this respect, France was for a long time a “monster,” a “continent” in itself, a super-state, an over-sized political unit, not unlike an empire, uniting regions which were consequently hard to hold together and which had to be defended both against threats from within and, no less, from external dangers. The whole enterprise required an unbelievable outlay of strength, patience and vigilance.

Fernand Braudel, *The Identity of France*<sup>1</sup>

For French nationalist historians like Henri Martin, history showed the unity of “the new France, the old France, and ancient Gaul.” Reflecting his early nineteenth-century and romantic mentality, Martin even described these historical Frances as “the same moral person.”<sup>2</sup> Identifying France as Gaul had profound implications. In *The Gallic War*, Julius Caesar defined the boundaries of ancient Gaul as the Rhine, the Pyrenees, and the Alps.<sup>3</sup> The ancient world’s most prominent geographer, a Greek scholar named Strabo of Amasia, approved of Caesar’s assertion in a work that solidified the idea of the Gallic frontiers as permanent locations marked out by clear geographical features, most notably the Rhine.<sup>4</sup> The statements by Caesar and Strabo, removed from their appropriate contexts, provided fodder for much subsequent mythmaking. Claimed by many central figures of the French Revolution as France’s natural frontier, the Rhine could even be viewed as a *sacred* part of the *patrie* that had been stolen from France by the Germanic forces of the Holy Roman Empire during the Middle Ages – a lost land that had to be recovered to complete the construction of the French nation. As strange as it may seem to modern readers, this notion proved of

<sup>1</sup> Braudel, *Identity of France*, 1:309.    <sup>2</sup> Ibid.    <sup>3</sup> Julius Caesar, *Gallic War*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> See Duane, *The Geography of Strabo*, 2.

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great importance in the late eighteenth century and persisted through the nineteenth century and even into the twentieth.

But exactly how influential this mythical narrative proved for French foreign policy has kept historians deeply divided for quite some time. Prominent diplomatic historian Albert Sorel long ago presented the pursuit of the natural frontiers as a constant aspect of French foreign policy from the Middle Ages through the nineteenth century: the Revolution was only exceptional in that it actually *achieved* this long-standing nationalist mission. Sorel's thesis proved highly influential in the Third Republic and retains much recognition. Yet Gaston Zeller, one of France's leading historians in the interwar era and still the most important and commonly cited critic of the Sorel thesis, argued that the natural frontiers policy emerged only after the disappearance of the Bourbon *Fleur-de-lis* in 1792. Resulting from shifting political and academic concerns among modern scholars, the debate between Sorel and Zeller remains fundamentally unresolved as historians of nationalism continue to reference the natural frontiers doctrine even as diplomatic historians increasingly reject the Sorel thesis. An important article by Peter Sahlins represents the most substantial recent consideration of the dispute, which revives the notion of the natural frontiers as a primary concern of the French monarchy. Sahlins views the desire for natural frontiers in terms of a duality between "French foreign policy interests" and "the symbolic construction of French national identity."<sup>5</sup> In an excellent book on French Emperor Napoleon I's failure to accept the natural frontiers in 1813, Munro Price recently observed – without strongly committing to either side – that the "concept [of natural frontiers] had a long history" and that "the extent to which regaining these 'natural frontiers' shaped the foreign policy of the French kings remains controversial." While these scholars disagree on particulars pertaining to the ancien régime's foreign policy, they generally agree on one major point. As Price explains, "what is clear . . . is the central role it had come to occupy in revolutionary and republican rhetoric after 1792."<sup>6</sup> Thus, regardless of its influence under the monarchy, the orthodox view holds that the natural frontiers quickly became the accepted foreign policy paradigm of the French Revolution, or, as Fernand Braudel phrased it, "the argument swept all before it."<sup>7</sup> As we see in what follows, this interpretation – still widely accepted and emanating from a Sorel–Zeller consensus – demands careful scrutiny as it paints a rather blurry picture of French strategic culture and policy during the Revolution.

<sup>5</sup> Sahlins, "Natural Frontiers Revisited," 1424. <sup>6</sup> Price, *Napoleon*, 155.

<sup>7</sup> Braudel, *The Identity of France*, 1:323.

While this book concentrates on the natural frontiers policy of the Revolution, it begins with a brief analysis of the ancien régime. Before the mid-twentieth century most historians considered the pursuit of the natural frontiers a constant force in French history – and some still do.<sup>8</sup> Most commonly associated with Sorel, the orthodox view considers the natural frontiers a continuous goal of French foreign policy since the Middle Ages, a mission pursued by a succession of French monarchs and ministers. If true, the natural frontiers policy would constitute a vital factor in French national history that would blur the divide between monarchical and Revolutionary France. Comparable to Alexis de Tocqueville's interpretation in *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, the orthodox version of the natural frontiers thesis has been claimed to reveal an underlying continuity between the foreign policy of the ancien régime and the Revolution.<sup>9</sup>

Although shaped by contemporary political concerns relating to the First World War and the Treaty of Versailles, Zeller's criticisms of Sorel have nonetheless proven influential among modern historians. Unlike Sorel, Zeller could not accept the existence of the "French push to the Rhine" as an underlying dimension in French national history because he found little solid evidence of this impulse in the official documents he analyzed.<sup>10</sup> Yet just how influential have Zeller's ideas been? Peter Sahlins claims that historians "owe an unacknowledged debt" to Zeller while Denis Richet states without any qualification that Zeller "demolished" the Sorel thesis.<sup>11</sup> Specialist works by scholars such as Paul Schroeder and T. C. W. Blanning have equally shown that the natural frontiers policy was far from the only or most important motive of French

<sup>8</sup> Variations of the natural frontiers thesis appear in the works of French scholars such as Jules Michelet, Ernest Lavisse, Alfred Rambaud, Augustin Thierry, and Albert Mathiez. For discussions of the concept's prevalence among both French and German scholars in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Schulte, *Frankreich und das linke Rheinufer*; Mommsen, *Kardinal Richelieu, Seine Politik in Elsass und Lothringen*; Demangeon and Febvre, *Le Rhin*; Zeller, "Histoire d'une idée fausse"; Febvre, "Limites et frontières"; Dion, *Les frontières de la France*. See also Pounds, "The Idea of Natural Frontiers in France." More recently, French scholarship has questioned the veracity of the orthodox view and impacted American and British understanding; for a critical overview, see Richet, "Natural Borders." As noted, Sahlins, "Natural Frontiers Revisited," constitutes the most influential Anglophone essay on the issue of natural frontiers in French history. Recent French considerations of the influence of natural frontiers during different periods of French history are Schottler, "Le Rhin comme enjeu historiographique dans l'entre-deux-guerres," and Smets, "Le Rhin, frontière naturelle de la France."

<sup>9</sup> Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution française*; this view is elaborated in a prominent history of the French Revolution: Mathiez, *French Revolution*, 285–286.

<sup>10</sup> Zeller expressed this argument most forcefully in *La France et l'Allemagne depuis dix siècles*.

<sup>11</sup> Sahlins, "Natural Frontiers Revisited," 1423; Richet, "Natural Boundaries," 756.

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foreign policy.<sup>12</sup> Yet Sorel – not Zeller – remains commonly cited as *the* authority on the natural frontiers doctrine and French diplomacy during the Revolution. Moreover, the persistence of debate over the main question raised by Sorel – whether the monarchy bequeathed the policy to the Revolution – indicates that Zeller's success in challenging the Sorel thesis might be less definitive than these historians suggested. For example, in an article on the debate published in 1998, historian of the Revolutionary Rhineland Josef Smets promotes the traditional interpretation, stating that Revolutionary foreign policy “re-enacted that of the old regime.”<sup>13</sup> In *The Identity of France*, Braudel acknowledges that France's natural frontiers may not have been the “guiding principle of French foreign policy,” but simultaneously refuses to “quarrel neither with Augustin Thierry, Henri Martin, nor Albert Sorel for drawing attention to the continuity of this policy: the Revolution simply pursued (although making rather a mess of it) the policy of the ancien régime.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, many scholars continue to view the natural frontiers as a product of ancien régime foreign policy, with perhaps the most important intellectual and cultural history of the Napoleonic Wars describing them as one of “the long-frustrated dreams of the monarchy.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, although the modern French and German peoples seem to have discarded any struggle over the Rhine frontier, the historical debate over the origins of the “French push to the Rhine” – a historical equivalent of and possible inspiration for the German “*Drang nach Osten*” – remains combative.<sup>16</sup> By tackling this historical debate squarely, this book offers the first complete narrative reconsideration of the natural frontiers policy throughout the French Revolution, concentrating on the most controversial frontier: the Rhine. It reveals the caustic political turmoil that emanated from this misguided policy and the challenges this ideological and even dream-like notion posed to France's war effort in Belgium and the Rhineland. For the pursuit of the natural frontier on the Rhine was not only a political and philosophical dispute. It was fundamentally a war of conquest, which had profound implications for the fate of France's “citizen army.”

The point of this chapter is not simply to debunk Sorel, which Zeller has already been justifiably credited for having accomplished. Yet some additional resolution of their dispute based on modern scholarship helps us to effectively understand the unique nature of the French government's pursuit

<sup>12</sup> Schroeder, *Transformation of European Politics*; Blanning, *French Revolution in Germany*.

<sup>13</sup> Smets, “Le Rhin,” abstract, 682–683, 697. <sup>14</sup> Braudel, *The Identity of France*, 323.

<sup>15</sup> Bell, *First Total War*, 194.

<sup>16</sup> For a comparative analysis of these concepts, see Zientara, “Zum Problem des geschichtlichen Terminus ‘Drang nach Osten,’” 1:171–181; Torsten, “The German Drang nach Osten.”

of the Rhine frontier during the Revolution, especially considering continued endorsement of the Sorel thesis. In particular, the extent to which French kings, from the Capetians to the Bourbons, did or did not pursue the Rhine frontier as a goal of expansion establishes a crucial context for understanding the Rhine policy of the Revolution. Was it an old tradition or was it truly revolutionary? Even if, as this chapter asserts, the French crown did not seek to attain the Rhine in totality, it remains necessary to establish where and when the concept emerged to have any hope of understanding how it influenced the French Revolution. Although historians no longer accept Sorel's thesis uncritically, the natural frontiers as an aspect of French nationalism remains an important point of inquiry. Braudel acknowledges that "the theory of natural frontiers did not triumph until the justifications advanced by the revolutionaries after 1789."<sup>17</sup> Yet he still regards the policy's advancement as a "triumph." A modern corrective to such remarks must provide a careful consideration of the theory's influence – and the limitations of its influence – on French foreign policy and warfare. Thus, this chapter offers some insights on the strategic culture of ancien régime France, one that typically epitomized a pragmatic pursuit of clear and limited dynastic interests rather than an obsession with regaining mythical natural frontiers. This makes the profound contrast with the foreign policies advocated and adopted by many leaders of the French Revolution all the more clear while also highlighting continuities between the pragmatists of the ancien régime and those who struggled – ultimately in vain – to limit French territorial ambitions during the Revolution.

The story of France's supposed claim to the Rhine begins with Gaul, where the Rhine actually served less as a barrier than as a highway often traversed by various Gallic and Germanic peoples in a truly frontier region.<sup>18</sup> During the Gallic War, the Romans encountered invading Germanic tribes and struggled to preserve stability. Caesar himself made two significant attempts to move Roman legions across the Rhine to project power into Germania. He hoped to "strike fear into the Germans" and to bring an end to their routine migrations across the frontier. On both occasions, first in 55 BC and second in 53 BC, logistical constraints required the Romans to retreat west of the Rhine. In particular, the Romans discovered insufficient agricultural productivity in the Rhineland to feed their legions while on campaign, an interesting omen for the ill-fated French expeditions of 1795 and 1796.<sup>19</sup> Subsequently, the Rhine became a defensive barrier of Roman Gaul maintained by the creation of military camps at various

<sup>17</sup> Braudel, *The Identity of France*, 322.

<sup>18</sup> For example, studies of coinage among the Treveri, a name that possibly meant "river crossers," reveal "a cultural continuum across the Rhine." Wightman, *Gallia Belgica*, 31.

<sup>19</sup> Caesar, *Gallic War*, 78, 123, 131–134.

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positions. Although it never completely prevented Germanic encroachments, the Rhine barrier at least defended the territorial integrity of Roman Gaul successfully until the invasions of the third, fourth, and fifth centuries.<sup>20</sup>

Gaul's population fluctuated with several periods of migrations. Like modern France, Gaul possessed a number of different ethnic groups. More than 300 Gallic tribes constituted the core population. After the Roman conquests, a Gallo-Roman population emerged, predominately in the south and in urban centers. By the second century, Roman Gaul's population probably stood at ten million, with the various Gauls remaining the largest group.<sup>21</sup> The Gallic myth of France's origins overlooks the heterogeneous nature of Gaul's population. As Caesar detailed, the parts of Gaul that bordered the Rhine did not contain ethnic Gauls but rather various Germanic peoples and the Belgae. According to the geographer Strabo, the Belgae shared more ethnic similarities with the Germans than with the Gauls.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the group most commonly considered the founders of modern France, the Franks, only arrived on the left bank of the Rhine during the collapse of Gaul as a Roman province. Demonstrating the lack of genuine ethnic connection between the ancient Gauls and the modern French, the barbarian invasions entailed huge migrations of diverse people within, into, and out of Roman Gaul. In place of the Gallic majority came various groups such as the Ostrogoths, the Visigoths, the Burgundians, the Alamanni, and the Franks. Each of these migratory groups established control over parts of modern France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland. Unstable living conditions contributed to the outbreak of plague in the fifth and sixth centuries, which reduced the population by approximately 75 percent.<sup>23</sup>

Originally a Rhenish tribe, the Franks established control over Köln and expanded their territory to form what they called *Francia*, "the land of the Franks," which originally extended to Cambrai and Tournai.<sup>24</sup> From their base at Köln, the early Franks advanced southwest toward Arras and, within less than one century, the tiny Gallo-Roman city of Paris.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Scherman refers to the Rhine as a "feeble barrier to the continuing stream of barbarian tribes, who combined a natural disposition to belligerence with a real and pressing need for a new home." *Birth of France*, 46; King, in *Roman Gaul*, 155, concludes that "there must have been a considerable mixing of populations along the frontier regions . . . Mixing of Germans and Gauls was a process that continued after the Roman conquest."

<sup>21</sup> Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul*, 15–16, 23, 28–31; Wightman, *Gallia Belgica*, 32–33.

<sup>22</sup> Duane, *The Geography of Strabo*.

<sup>23</sup> Latouche, *Caesar to Charlemagne*, 77–89; Wightman, *Gallia Belgica*, 193–201.

<sup>24</sup> Bachrach, *Merovingian Military Organization*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Wightman, *Gallia Belgica*, 300–312; van Dam, *Late Antique Gaul*, 177–180; Latouche, *Caesar to Charlemagne*, 151–201; Bachrach, *Merovingian Military Organization*, 3–5; Rouche, *Clovis*, 72–113.

A small Celtic settlement, Paris fell under Frankish control during the reign of Clovis. From this point, the Merovingian rulers of the Franks became intensely tied to the Paris region as the base of their empire. Although the Franks remained divided among numerous tribes, contemporary sources refer to Clovis (466–511) as “King of the Franks.” Moreover, sixth-century chronicler Bishop Gregory of Tours contends that during the fifth century, “a great many people in Gaul were very keen on having the Franks as their rulers.” Yet the bishop misleadingly states that this policy enabled Clovis to “spread his dominion over the whole of Gaul.”<sup>26</sup> In reality, Clovis did not conquer the entirety of Roman Gaul, nor did he establish a territorial structure to emulate the pre-Roman Gallic kingdom according to natural boundaries. Areas ruled by the Burgundians, the Bretons, the Visigoths, the Frisians, and the Alamanni remained outside his control.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Salian Frankish law required the equal division of Clovis’s empire to his four sons – Theuderic, Chlodimir, Cheldebert, and Lothaire – after his death in 511. After Clovis’s burial at the Abbey of Saint-Genevieve in Paris, his heirs extended their divided domains by defeating the Burgundians and the Visigoths.<sup>28</sup>

By the eighth century, the Franks constituted the major geopolitical force in Western Europe and the area of Frankish domination far surpassed the territory of Roman Gaul. The Merovingian kings did not continue the Roman tradition of maintaining the Rhine as a military barrier. Constituting one of several rivers that ran through their expansive domains, the Rhine lost the symbolic meaning Caesar had ascribed to it. The Franks seem to have viewed the Rhine as one of many important geographical features around which their empire spread both east and west.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, the development of modern France – and the French race – did not follow a linear pattern from either ancient Gaul or the Franks. The later Carolingian period was an “interlude” in the origins of France because these leaders ruled over territories far larger than did their Merovingian predecessors or any subsequent French king, a situation allowing for further population fluctuations and migrations.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Gregory of Tours, *A History of the Franks*, 150, 158.

<sup>27</sup> For the extent of Clovis’s empire, see Bachrach, *Merovingian Military Organization*, 10–17; Scherman, *Birth of France*, 133; and Rouche, *Clovis*, 337.

<sup>28</sup> Rouche, *Clovis*, 369–375; Scherman, *Birth of France*, 134–150. Clovis’s remains were transferred to the Basilica of Saint-Denis in the eighteenth century.

<sup>29</sup> Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms*, 164.

<sup>30</sup> Collins, *From Tribes to Nation*, 14–23. Major works on this topic include Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity and the Framing of Western Ethnicity*, Geary, *Before France and Germany*, and Dupraz, *Le royaume des Francs*.

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The greatest Frankish ruler, Charlemagne, made the Rhineland the heartland of his European empire, using Aachen as the residential and administrative base on which he built his “universal monarchy.”<sup>31</sup> Charlemagne's empire expanded far beyond the limits of Roman Gaul and the Merovingian empire, occupying territories of modern France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, Italy, and Spain. Undeniably, the great emperor established many precedents later adopted by the kings of France. Imperial iconography and symbolism constituted an important model for the culture of French royalty.<sup>32</sup> Yet Charlemagne's empire did not serve to inspire a coherent natural frontiers policy among subsequent French rulers if only because it clearly surpassed the limits of ancient Gaul. Although Charlemagne's most significant early biographer, Einhard, notes that the Rhine initially served as a “boundary” for the Eastern Franks, Charlemagne notably expanded far beyond it. Einhard especially praises Charlemagne for building a bridge “spanning the Rhine River at Mainz” to connect the eastern and western halves of his empire, though the bridge unfortunately burned down shortly thereafter.<sup>33</sup> Rather than a desire for natural frontiers, Charlemagne's greatest contribution to the subsequent foreign policy of some French rulers was more plausibly the desire for a “universal monarchy” or a pan-European empire. Medieval sources of Carolingian propaganda such as the *Annales Mettenses Priores* (*The Earlier Annals of Metz*), a version of which was republished in 1626 by André Duchesne, certainly advance this view.<sup>34</sup>

Charlemagne's heir, Louis the Pious, made no significant additions to Carolingian territory but instead attempted to consolidate the new areas. The three sons of Louis the Pious, however, warred for supremacy following their father's death in 840.<sup>35</sup> Meeting on the Meuse River, the three brothers famously signed the Treaty of Verdun in 843. The stepbrother, Charles, received the territory of “Francia,” the western portion of the Carolingian empire. Louis, known as “the German,” gained the eastern

<sup>31</sup> McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 175–176.

<sup>32</sup> James, *Origins of France*, 157–169; Dunbabin, *France in the Making*, 27–36, 133–140; Collins, *From Tribes to Nation*, 25. A recent assessment of Charlemagne is Fried, *Charlemagne*.

<sup>33</sup> *The Complete Einhard*, 25–26.

<sup>34</sup> “*Annales Mettenses Priores*,” in Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, 331–364. For example, both Charlemagne and Pepin are credited for crossing the Rhine to campaign in Bavaria and Saxony.

<sup>35</sup> Noble states in “Frontier of the Frankish Realm,” 340, that “Louis's border policy was really not so very different from that of his father. Charlemagne had sought peace and order much more than simple military advance, but in many cases he was faced, because of his and his ancestor's conquests on the frontier, with the problem of establishing and securing the very borders that Louis inherited and in his turn retained and consolidated.”

portion of the empire from the right bank of the Rhine to the Elbe River. Finally, Lothair acquired the middle portion, stretching north from Italy through Switzerland to the North Sea coast.<sup>36</sup> Charles and Louis reduced Lothair's inheritance in the 870 "Partition of Mersen." Charles gained parts of the Netherlands, Belgium, and Lorraine, while Louis annexed the remainder, including the left bank of the Rhine.<sup>37</sup> The orthodox interpretation depicts the Mersen settlement as the catalyst for the natural frontiers policy. According to this argument, by depriving Charles the Bald the full territory of ancient Gaul, the Mersen settlement inspired subsequent generations of rulers to extend French territory to the left bank of the Rhine.<sup>38</sup>

Early medieval rulers associated the extent of their territories with dynastic prestige and considered expansion a means of bolstering their image and power.<sup>39</sup> After the Partition of Mersen, Charles the Bald ruled a territory bounded by the Meuse, Saône, and Rhône Rivers to the north and east that stretched deep into modern-day Spain as far south as the Ebro River. In his short reign as Holy Roman Emperor from 875 to 877, Charles fought unsuccessfully to reunite the empire of Charlemagne by conquering the territories ruled by Lothair and Louis.<sup>40</sup> Yet most of the immediate successors of Charles the Bald did not pursue the reunification of Charlemagne's empire. In fact, his successors ruled during a period of turbulence that witnessed the drastic reduction of the crown's territory.<sup>41</sup> Some evidence suggests that the outcome of the Mersen settlement and the campaigns of Charles the Bald actually reduced identification of the Rhine as a meaningful cultural boundary even further. For example, sometime before the Verdun Treaty, a ninth-century French humanist, Lupus Servatus, abbot of Ferrières, wrote to Einhard of having "moved from Gaul to this other side of the Rhine."<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, the notion of the Rhine boundary had changed not long after 843 for prevailing notions

<sup>36</sup> Dunbabin, *The Making of France*, 1–4, notes that "the inhabitants of West Francia hardly saw their common allegiance to one king as creating any sort of bond between them."

<sup>37</sup> Collins, *From Tribes to Nation*, 20, asserts that "no ninth-century evidence suggests contemporaries viewed these divisions as anything other than temporary arrangements" and that the "Carolingians signed a bewildering variety of agreements throughout the ninth century."

<sup>38</sup> For example, in *German Policy*, 1:6, Biro argues that the Partition of Mersen was the "root of the problem."

<sup>39</sup> Beaune, *Birth of an Ideology*, 172–196; Baldwin, *The Government of Philip Augustus*, 27.

<sup>40</sup> Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution française*, 1:287–288.

<sup>41</sup> According to Dunbabin, *The Making of France*, 14–15, "Charles's pursuit of Lotharingia and then of the imperial crown received little support from his magnates. His death in Italy provoked a crisis. His son, Louis the Stammerer, was forced to make extensive gifts to obtain recognition as king." See also McKeon, *Hincmar of Laon and Carolingian Politics*, and MacLean, *Kingship and Politics in the Late Ninth Century*, for background on the fractious nature of ninth-century Carolingian politics.

<sup>42</sup> *Letters of Lupus*, 2, 21, 28.

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of French boundaries from the tenth through at least the sixteenth century stressed the role of the “Four Rivers” – the Saône, Rhône, Meuse, and Scheldt – as France's *limites naturelles* in the north and east.<sup>43</sup>

The reign of the Capetians (987–1328) marked an important step toward the development of France. Despite the obvious contrasts between the pursuit of the greater empire of Charlemagne and the natural frontiers of ancient Gaul, Sorel equates Philip Augustus's desire to “raise France to the height it was at the time of Charlemagne” to advocacy for the natural frontiers.<sup>44</sup> Yet Hugh Capet and the early Capetians ruled during a period of weak kingship and powerful princes. Accordingly, their efforts focused overwhelmingly on internal centralization and consolidation.<sup>45</sup> Even the most pro-expansionist rulers during this period pursued territorial aggrandizement within a system of clear limitations. For example, Philip Augustus, who reigned from 1179 to 1223, focused on territorial consolidation within the traditional Four Rivers frontier. Rather than pursuing expansion toward the Rhine, Philip aimed to destroy the Angevin empire and to consolidate control over Valois, Vermandois, Artois, and the Loire region.<sup>46</sup> The consolidation of royal power remained the primary concern of the most famous Capetian king, Louis IX (1226–1270). The expansion that occurred during the reign of the highly venerated “Saint Louis” brought Normandy and Languedoc under royal control.<sup>47</sup> The reign of his successor, Philip III (1270–1285), witnessed conflict with England on the Atlantic coast. Moreover, Philip's campaign south of the Pyrenees against Aragon in 1285 ended in disaster and exhausted the crown's treasury.<sup>48</sup> Although the twelfth and thirteenth centuries proved important for French geographical development, the minor extent of the crown's territorial expansion reflected the medieval state's limited ability to conquer and consolidate vast amounts of new territory.<sup>49</sup>

How exactly did French nationalist historians such as Sorel trace France's pursuit of natural frontiers – particularly the Rhine – to the Middle Ages? Relying on the work of nineteenth-century historian and literary figure Ernest Renan, Sorel argues that Philip IV (1285–1314) and his advisor, Pierre Dubois, established the diplomatic tradition of the

<sup>43</sup> Sahlins, “Natural Frontiers Revisited,” 1425–1426; Dunbabin, *The Making of France*, 220–222.

<sup>44</sup> Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution française*, 1:247–248.

<sup>45</sup> Hallam, *Capetian France*, 64–67; Bautier, *Études sur la France capétienne*, 21–28.

<sup>46</sup> Bradbury, *Philip Augustus*, 107–111. <sup>47</sup> Hallam, *Capetian France*, 239–269.

<sup>48</sup> According to Hallam in *Capetian France*, 277, “the lesson of the campaign was not lost on his son, Philip IV, who turned away from the expensive expeditions to the south.”

<sup>49</sup> The limited aims and outlook of the medieval French monarchy are documented in Brown, *Customary Aids*, 1–9.