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A General Typology of Transcultural Wars – The Early Middle Ages and Beyond

Introduction

This article attempts to develop a general typology of transcultural wars in as broad and theoretical way as possible. My examples will be drawn primarily from early medieval European warfare (up to c. 1200, and sometimes from beyond Europe in this chronological era), but as the references to other articles in this collection will try to show, I aim at a general typology that transcends this chronological limit.[1]

Terms and Concepts

Constructing a typology of transcultural warfare requires first that we have some working notion of what we mean by *culture* and how cultural boundaries can affect the conduct of war. This is of course not an easy first step, given the multiple vectors along which personal identity can be and historically has been constructed, and may be more problematic for the early middle ages, an era long before nationalism in its various guises appeared to dominate the stage of (international) identity formation. If we are strict enough about what counts as a unitary culture, all wars will count as transcultural, which would make a typology of them pointless.

Pragmatically, we can probably make a distinction between *Big Cultures* on the one hand and *Subcultures*, component segments of Big Cultures, on the other. The former consist of broad areas sharing major cultural features ranging from basic ecological and subsistence patterns and material culture to broadly shared aspects of world view –