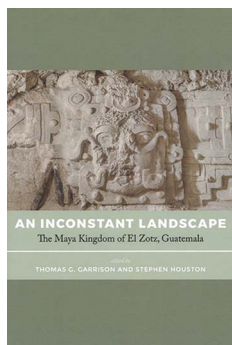


who served with the POUM (the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification), among other eye-witnesses to furnish the architectural description of the trenches with materiality and human experience. Orwell's writing offers a uniquely personal perspective on life in the Mediana entrenchments; this is complemented in Chapter 6 by 38 photographs of life on the front line. Garfi's volume is novel and challenges the traditional presentation of war as a grand narrative, exploring instead the harsh and visceral experience of a war lived on the battlefield.

Dynastic equilibriums

THOMAS G. GARRISON & STEPHEN HOUSTON (ed.). 2018. *An inconstant landscape: the Maya kingdom of El Zotz, Guatemala*. Louisville: University Press of Colorado; 978-1-60732-763-9 hardback \$90.

ALAIN GEORGE & ANDREW MARSHAM (ed.). 2018. *Power, patronage, and memory in early Islam: perspectives on Umayyad elites*. Oxford University Press; 978-0-19-049893-1 hardback £64.

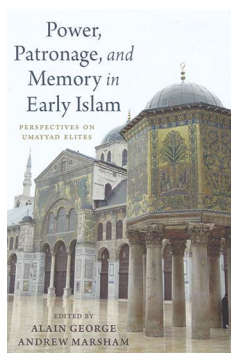


Our next two volumes chart the fortunes of two very different dynasties, the Maya kingdom of El Zotz in Guatemala and the Umayyad Dynasty of the Islamic Empire. Thomas Garrison and Stephen Houston's volume, *An inconstant landscape*, reports on six seasons of research and excavations at the Maya site of El Zotz, the seat of the Pa'ka'n Dynasty during the Classic period. The volume comprises 13 chapters divided into two broad sections. Part I includes six chapters that detail the culture history of the Pa'ka'n Dynasty, while Part II focuses on technical analysis at El Zotz. The volume is intended, in substitution for an excavation monograph, to report on the excavations at El Zotz in a timely fashion and to bring together concise

reports from the archaeologists working on the site. It certainly achieves this, with a balance of discussion and data providing a detailed yet accessible report on the archaeology of El Zotz and its significance in the region. Chapter 1 by Houston, Garrison and Edwin Román introduces the site and its history, and details the Proyecto Arqueológico El Zotz. Also included is a radiocarbon appendix listing all the radiocarbon samples taken by the project between 2008 and 2016, this offers a chronological framework at the start of the volume within which the subsequent chapters can be situated. The remaining chapters in Part I are arranged chronologically, beginning with James A. Doyle and Rony E. Piedrasanta (Chapter 2) discussing the dynamics of the Preclassic period in the Buenavista Valley to the establishment of the acropolis at El Zotz in the Early Classic period. Román, Garrison and Houston (Chapter 3) then take the reader through the beginnings of royal dynasty in the region in the Early Classic period. This includes precis of the significant regional sites, El Palmar, Bejucal and El Zotz. Although epigraphy does not reveal details of the rulers of El Zotz, funerary evidence suggests that Burial 9 represents a royal tomb—indeed, the earliest and most intact tomb at the site—thought to be the founder of the Pa'ka'n Dynasty.

Nicholas P. Carter, Yeny M. Gutiérrez Castillo and Sarah Newman guide us through the Late Classic period of the site, a time of monumental construction that appears closely tied to the rather fluid geopolitical climate in the central Maya Lowlands during this time. El Zotz's fortunes seem to have been linked to their choice of allies and trading partners. The fading fortunes of the site in the Terminal Classic and Early Postclassic periods are detailed in Chapter 5 (Sarah Newman, Jose Luis Garrido and Nicholas P. Carter) and Chapter 6 (Melanie J. Kingsley and Laura Gámez).

The second part of the volume, presenting the technical analyses of archaeological work at El Zotz, comprises detailed data analysis and descriptions of fieldwork, with reports focused on the environmental sampling (Timothy Beach, Sheryl Luzzadder-Beach, Colin Doyle and William Delgado); the ceramics (Ewa Czapiewska-Halliday, Nicholas P. Carter, Melanie J. Kingsley, Sarah Newman and Alyce de Carteret); lithics (Zachary Hruby); architecture (Cassandra Mesick Braun); and bioarchaeology and mortuary remains (Andrew K. Scherer). The volume closes with a chapter by Garrison and Houston taking a regional view of the Pa'ka'n Dynasty, which takes the form of a cultural synthesis of the Buenavista Valley from 1300 BC to AD 1500; what emerges is a picture of an adaptive, politically agile population whose fortunes were very much tied to their more powerful neighbours, but who expressed a distinct identity.



In contrast to the Pa'ka'n Dynasty, the Umayyad caliphate was relatively short-lived, lasting just over a century from AD 644–750. Nonetheless, in that time the Umayyads governed a vast empire. Alain George and Andrew Marsham's volume *Power, patronage, and memory in early Islam* brings together a collection of essays offering perspectives on the Umayyad Dynasty. Based on a 2011 conference hosted at Edinburgh University, the volume includes 11 papers broadly divided into representations of caliphal authority and legitimacy in text and images (Part I), evidence for Umayyad patronage of large residences and agricultural estates in Greater Syria, often referred to as the 'desert castles' (Part II), and historical memory (Part III), which considers the use of

Umayyad sources in other communities such as in Abbasid Iraq and Christian communities ruled by the caliphate. This section includes a chapter on modern portrayals of the Umayyads in a contemporary Arab television drama (Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen).

Following a brief introduction by the editors, Andrew Marsham opens the volume with his chapter considering the origins of the Umayyad's title 'God's Caliph'. Various explanations of the origin of this title are explored including Roman imperial titulature, Qur'anic ideology and pre-Islamic Arabian inscriptions. Drawing on texts, inscriptions and numismatic evidence, Marsham concludes that the epithet is not necessarily derived from Roman usage, and that the idea of rulers as deputies of the gods had an ancient heritage in the Middle East.

Alain George (Chapter 2) continues the theme of how power might be suggested or reinforced, this time in imagery as he explores the symbolism in the decoration of the Dome of the Rock and the Great Mosque of Damascus, both built when the Umayyad Dynasty were seeking to reinforce their power and the legitimacy of Islam. The architecture and iconography of these buildings, George argues, combine suggestions of both the heavenly and the imperial, designed to make the two inseparable. The use of architecture to assert traditions and achieve

a political impact is explored further by Robert Hillenbrand in his paper focusing on the art and architecture of Qaṣr Al-Ḥayr Al-Gharbī, one of the so-called ‘desert castles’. Hillenbrand’s detailed examination of the site leads him to the conclusion that the palace reflects caliph Hishām’s attempt to balance the competing cultures that pulled the empire in different directions.

The final part of the volume comprises contributions that consider narratives of the Umayyads, both historic and modern, in text and dramatic portrayals. Antoine Borrut seeks out early Islamic historiography and questions how we know what we think we know about the first Islamic dynasty. Nicola Clarke meanwhile considers how different narratives of the Islamic conquest of Iberia were used to legitimise and reinforce Umayyad rule. The final chapter by Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen explores how the Umayyad period is understood by Arab Muslims as portrayed through television drama, and discovers that “the Umayyads, with their nationalist appeal and complex Islamic legacy, are once again at the centre of the struggle over Arab historical consciousness” (p. 331).

Despite the varied focus and approaches of the books explored in this NBC, they emphasise how, in myriad ways, archaeology demonstrates its value to the modern world. It is only by interrogating the relationships between ecology, power and resilience in past societies that we are able to reflect on the challenges facing the contemporary world more fully.

Reference

Evans, S. 2019. Analysis: UK renewables generate more electricity than fossil fuels for first time. Available at:

<https://www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-uk-renewables-generate-more-electricity-than-fossil-fuels-for-first-time> (accessed 22 June 2020).

Books received

This list includes all books received between 1 March 2020 and 30 April 2020. Those featuring at the beginning of New Book Chronicle have, however, not been duplicated in this list. The listing of a book in this chronicle does not preclude its subsequent review in *Antiquity*.

European pre- and protohistory

KURT J. GRON, LASSE SORENSSEN & PETER ROWLEY-CONWY (ed.). *Farmers at the frontier: a pan European perspective on*

Neolithisation. 2020. Oxford: Oxbow; 978-1-7892-5140-1 hardback £45.

Mediterranean archaeology

GREG WOOLF. *The life and death of ancient cities: a natural history*. 2020. Oxford: Oxford

University Press; 978-0-1996-6473-3 hardback £25.