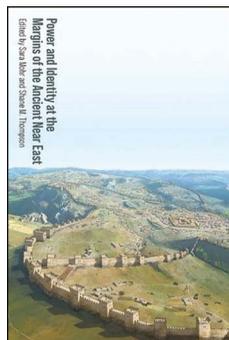


Meanwhile, focusing on Africa, Scott MacEachern researches the Wandala people of the Sahel zone (AD 1500–1900) and challenges the view that this group were just slave traders. The results show the Wandala as part of a more nuanced world of Islamic and non-Islamic groups that existed together and influenced each other in the marginal landscape.

The final chapter takes the reader to the fifth/fourth millennium BC Egypt and Nubia. Elena Garcea looks at the relationship between these two regions of the Nile Valley, as each developed distinct subsistence systems. These systems resulted in different ways of living and societies but were, especially in these early times, very much intertwined and they fuelled each other's developing complexity. This interpretation makes Nubia an active partner and not, as traditionally seen, a mere bystander.

These wide-ranging case studies are not easily comparable, but all highlight the importance of the geography of these borderlands and show that unique lifeways and identities can emerge from these perceived marginal places, sometimes with a long-term historical impact. The authors all succeed in shifting our focus and delivering a new perspective from within these 'borderlandscapes'.

SARA MOHR & SHANE M. THOMPSON (ed.). 2023. *Power and identity at the margins of the Near East*. Denver: University Press of Colorado; 978-1-64642-357-6 hardback \$63.



The second volume in this NBC is similar in topic to the previous one but investigates a much closer temporal and spatial span: the Bronze and Iron Ages of the Near East. The book is the outcome of a conference held in October 2019 at Brown University, Rhode Island, USA, and written and edited during the difficult times of the Covid pandemic.

Sara Mohr and Shane Thompson as editors open the discussion in their introduction 'Notes in the margins' and advocate to change the view from traditional centre-periphery studies to more open-minded perspectives and looking from the margins themselves outward. The varied case studies also reveal a strong independence and sense of identity of the people in the margins and turn them into actors and not simply those acted upon. These places in the shadow of the Egyptian and Hittite empires became often crucial areas of sociopolitical change. The editors also stress the importance of combining archaeological and textual sources to gain a deeper understanding. Although the contributions include archaeological evidence, at least in part, the interpretative influence of ancient texts remains overwhelmingly dominant in this volume. Eric Trnka closes the book with 'Reflections from the margins' and incorporates the themes of the contributions with further thoughts on how the study of margins can be brought fruitfully forward by the change of traditional frameworks such as the core-periphery theories. Eight chapters deliver detailed studies on places and people in the margins.

The scene of the first case study by Avraham Faust is Late Bronze/Iron Age Canaan (1300–1100 BC). The shift from indirect to stricter direct control by Egypt over Canaan lowlands in the thirteenth century BC led to a settlement surge in the highlands and ultimately to

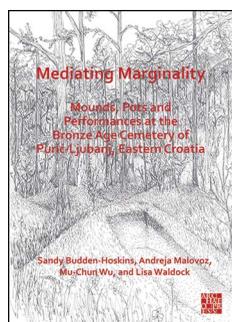
the forming of a highland kingdom, an area that before was only sparsely settled. While this topic is much discussed in past studies, Faust adopts a different angle and looks at how identities become visible and distinguishes then between lowland (more Egyptian) and marginal highland identities. Only in the material record of the Iron Age do sharp boundaries become apparent and deliver evidence for an independent highland kingdom with its own ideologies, the forebearers of the biblical Israelites. In Chapter 3 Alexander Ahrens reviews the depth of affiliation during the Bronze Age between northern Levantine elites and their imperial neighbours. The latter never managed to dominate this region fully and it remained a connection point for trade and contact between the empires. The relationship with Egypt is the main focus, and Ahrens details many aspects of the affiliation with the Levantine elites. He shows that their 'central' place in between, and choice of adopting some Egyptian ways but keeping some of their own, should be interpreted as an independent position not a mere 'Egyptianization'. Through studying religion and symbolism, Valeria Turriziani explores how the Egyptians perceived the centre and the margins and the meaning of their borders. Their worldview incorporates the political state territory as well as the mythical border of the cosmos and the chapter explores how these two worlds were interrelated. Ellen Morris, on the other hand, investigates the more worldly marginal habitats within Egypt and at its fringes—such as marshes, deserts and mountains—illuminating the special position of the people who lived in these areas.

Turning north to Anatolia and examining the territorial perception of the Hittite Old Kingdom to the Empire (c. 1650–1190 BC), Alvisi Matessi utilises material culture, such as seals, and textual evidence to highlight shifts in administrative strategies from an urban network with a few main centres towards the formation of regional provinces. Daniel Fleming draws the focus to the margins of the Hittite kingdom during the Late Bronze Age and the city of Emar on the banks of the River Euphrates in northern Syria. Emar has been researched in the past as a peripheral space but here it is viewed from within. For Emar, the position between larger powers resulted in innovation and, rather than becoming part of the Hittite kingdom, it served as an autonomous border guard against the Assyrians.

Peter Dubovský researches the lesser-known kingdom of Suḫu and the use of titles in people's names by its elites in contacts and relationships with the Assyrian Empire. The nuanced study of textual and linguistic details reveal that the Suḫian elites strived to differentiate themselves from the powerful entities around them. The social landscape of Iron Age Timnah, in modern Israel, is the topic of Mahri Leonard-Fleckman's chapter. The archaeological evidence is examined and compared with the many biblical sources, to provide a more contextualised view of these texts, which are through this work identified as an outsider's view describing this marginal area. The author critically observes how the texts have influenced the interpretation of the archaeological record and asserts that, although Timnah has been claimed by many different groups, it retained a level of social independence.

Rather than viewing from the perspective of the powerful entities around them, this thought-provoking volume invites the reader to look at often well-known areas from within the marginal societies. This approach reveals the more independent identity of the people living in these margins, which in turn have neither clear nor fixed boundaries but are more of a contact zone between groups.

SANDY BUDDEN-HOSKINS, ANDREJA MALOVOZ, MU-CHUN WU & LISA WALDOCK. 2022. *Mediating marginality: mounds, pots and performances at the Bronze Age cemetery of Purić-Ljubanj, Eastern Croatia*. Oxford: Archaeopress; 978-1-78969-972-2 paperback £32.



The volume *Mediating marginality* is the outcome of more than eight years of excavation on the site of Purić-Ljubanj in Eastern Croatia by an international collaboration of the local Stjepan Gruber Museum in Županja, Southampton University and National Taiwan University and many affiliated students who undertook their summer school here. This Bronze Age cemetery, with an estimated 100-plus burial mounds, lies in the Spačva Basin and has not seen much research in the past, mainly for political and economic reasons. The book is beautifully illustrated, incorporating a site report as well as an exploration into the wider landscape of the county of Vukovar-Syrmia. It highlights a previously unknown distinct cul-

tural group that lived in the margins of well-studied groups around them. A new perspective is added to the material culture with thoughts and ideas on the performances undertaken and skills needed to produce the pots and build the tumuli.

The book is organised in six chapters and begins with the research history and the geological surveys that led to an excavation strategy. This is followed by a chapter placing the site in the wider context of the cultural groups around them and detailing the finds and features of the Belegiš and the West-Serbian variant of the Vatin group. Chapter 3 makes up the largest part of the volume and describes the results of the excavation, especially the finds from the three excavated tumuli with multiple burials, pottery assemblages, human cremations and animal bones. The tumuli are between 19 and 22.5m in diameter with a surviving height of 2–2.7m, and have multiple cremation burials, some in pits. Tumulus 3 remains only partly excavated. They are dated through radiocarbon on bones and charcoal and through comparative pottery typologies. Through careful interpretation, a detailed sequence of events can be distinguished for each tumulus. This reveals insights into the mortuary practices and demonstrates that the tumuli were not built in one go, but changed and grew in size with more burials over time. For instance, all three have one or more layers of burnt clay, which are interpreted as funerary platforms. Tumuli 1 and 3 appear to be earlier, emerging in the Middle Bronze Age and being used into the Late Bronze Age; the tumuli were therefore active for hundreds of years, and in one case almost for 800 years. Chapter 4 looks beyond the archaeological record and combines geology and raw material resources to illuminate the redistribution and use of material and shows how well the people of Purić-Ljubanj used the modest resources around them. The level of skill and performance that was put into making the pottery and the tumuli is also assessed. This last part is discussed further in the following chapter ‘The scales of performance at Purić-Ljubanj: assembling the cemetery, the landscape, and the dead’. The tumuli were built to be highly visible in the landscape, and in the wider area of the Spačva Forest 19 more sites with burial mounds were found. Mounded sites in this region are highly uncommon and “can give evidence for place-based identity formation in this region in the Bronze