

# Editorial

This year's issue brings together papers that examine political, geographical, socio-cultural, and technological boundaries in the Nile Valley and the Mediterranean from late prehistory to medieval times. It explores the complexity of these boundaries through the concept of the 'borderscape', understood here as the political, cultural, physical, mental, intellectual, and spiritual geography in which boundaries exist and where both tangible and intangible practices of boundary-making and boundary-maintenance occur. The focus is on how boundaries are actively constructed and negotiated in specific locations – even when these places are not materially delineated. The study of physical and non-physical boundaries has long been central to archaeological inquiry, and various theoretical approaches have been developed to address this topic. However, the notion of the borderscape remains relatively new to archaeology, even if it has a more established presence in Critical Border Studies and related disciplines.

The idea of dedicating the issue to this transdisciplinary perspective arises from the research conducted within the BORDERSCAPE Project, led by Maria Carmela Gatto from 2021 to 2024 at the Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences.<sup>1</sup> The project employed this conceptual framework to examine how ancient Egyptian state formation influenced the socio-spatial landscape of the First Nile Cataract region (**Fig. 1**).

The papers in the special section of the volume explore diachronic and synchronic aspects of the borderscape concept. They examine how boundaries took multiple forms, evolving dynamically through time and across regions. Most contributions focus on geopolitical boundaries – especially Egypt's southern frontier with Nubia – but the issue also embraces broader comparative and theoretical perspectives. All but one of the contributions were first presented at the symposium, 'Borderscapes of Ancient Egypt', held in February 2024 to mark the conclusion of the BORDERSCAPE Project. The main session was preceded by a keynote lecture, delivered by Krzysztof Ciałowicz (Jagiellonian University), which addressed Egypt's north-eastern border with the Levant during Predynastic and Early Dynastic times, offering

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<sup>1</sup> Funded by the Norway Grants (Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014–2021) through the Polish National Science Centre (POLN Call 2020/37/K/HS3/04097).



1. The Nile at the First Cataract, with its granitic formations and the desert encroaching on the river (The Aswan-Kom Ombo Archaeological Project (AKAP) Archive).

a comparative dimension to the project's southern focus. Samantha Sink's paper, originally presented at the European Association of Archaeologists Conference in Rome (August 2024) in the session 'The Archaeology of Ancient Borderscapes: Multiple Approaches, New Paradigms' (organised by Maria Carmela Gatto with Marco Ferrario and Serena Nicolini), was added to this volume for its complementary perspective on Hellenistic intellectual borderscapes in the Mediterranean.

The issue opens with Oren Siegel's article, which offers a critical overview of Egyptological research on Pharaonic boundaries and discusses the theoretical frameworks employed in the field. This sets a solid conceptual foundation for the subsequent contributions. Jade Bajeot explores how ceramic technological traditions illuminate social boundaries in Predynastic Egypt, focusing on regional technological diversity between the Delta, the Nile Valley, and the First Cataract region. Audrey Eller's paper considers how the borderscape of Lower Nubia evolved during the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, emphasising the interplay of geography, imperial policy, and cultural interaction. Katarzyna de Lellis-Danys investigates pottery production across the Egyptian-Nubian frontier in the ninth and tenth centuries CE, interpreting stylistic variations in ledged vases as evidence of socio-cultural adaptation and cross-border exchange. Finally, Samantha Sink's contribution offers a different application of the borderscape concept, focusing on how Eratosthenes' *Geographika* mathematically conceptualised the edges of the *oikoumene*, shaping an intellectual borderscape that redefined the Mediterranean's spatial imagination.

Together, the contributions dedicated to ancient borderscapes showcase the analytical potential of the borderscape approach. They encourage us to view borders not just as fixed lines but as active zones of interaction, imagination, and change. We hope the perspectives gathered here will inspire further research into the diversity of ancient borderscapes – physical and conceptual alike – and how they continue to influence our understanding of past worlds.

In addition to the special section, the volume contains regular papers, primarily focusing on Egypt. These include a study on the Collection of Ancient Art at the National Museum in Warsaw during the Second World War (by Kacper Laube); and an analysis of the unusual funerary practice of covering the heads of the deceased with vessels, as observed during the Late and Ptolemaic periods at Saqqara West (by Małgorzata Radomska). A paper on clay smoking pipes from Tell el-Retaba (by Piotr Sójka) provides insight into Egypt in Ottoman times, a period that is rarely the focus of archaeologists. Two papers present the results of research related to Nea Paphos in Cyprus. The first (by Krzysztof Domżański and Monika Miziołek) is dedicated to Eastern Sigillata C and Late Roman C ware vessels found at the site, while the second (by Marcin Romaniuk) examines the evolution of water management in the city's residential quarter during the Hellenistic and early Roman periods. The volume also features a study (by Jacek Michniewicz, Andrzej Szydło, and Mariusz Burdajewicz) on the possible origins of the so-called Black-on-Red pottery found at Tell Keisan, in light of petrographic, chemical, and micropalaeontological analyses.

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XXXVIII



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The project entitled “Internationalisation, enhancement and popularisation of the research conducted by the IMOC PAS on ancient Egypt, classical Mediterranean cultures, Nubia, the reception of antiquity and the Silk Road” (No. MNiSW/2025/DAP/723) was financed by the Minister of Science and Higher Education.

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Warsaw 2025

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ISSN 2084-6762  
(until 2010: 0079-3566)  
e-ISSN 2449-9579

The printed version of the journal is the primary one.  
Online version available at <http://www.etudesettravaux.iksiopan.pl>

Layout, typesetting and graphic edition: Dariusz Górski – Usługi Wydawniczo-Edytorskie

General cover design: Jadwiga Iwaszczuk  
Cover photo: The Nile at the First Cataract (AKAP Archive) and an artistic rendering of a pottery ledged vase from Faras (inv. no. 238045 MNW; based on a drawing by K. de Lellis-Danys).

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