

**Delfi I. Nieto-Isabel, Laura Miquel Milian (ed.),
Living on the Edge. Transgression, Exclusion, and
Persecution in the Middle Ages, Berlin, Boston
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This collection of essays addresses the experiences of marginality and marginalization in the Middle Ages head-on, joining the growing body of scholarship on this topic. The volume's varied contributions approach the question of »Who inhabited the margins of medieval society?« from a variety of directions, from heretics and lepers to aging bodies, widowed women, enslaved persons, and the monstrous »races« residing on the imaginary edges of the medieval world. Throughout, »Living on the Edge« demonstrates that the groups inhabiting religious, social, and symbolic margins deserve inclusion not merely to create a more diverse and polyphonic vision of the Middle Ages. On the contrary, upon examination, what may have once seemed marginal becomes central to our understanding of the period. Likewise, the volume's contributions stress the diversity of experiences of liminality even for members of the same marginalized group, complicating the binary of exclusion and inclusion. As the volume's editors argue using an evocative metaphor, »the essence of a manuscript cannot be fully grasped without studying its marginalia«. This emphasis on questioning the relationship between center and periphery – on stressing the value of the margins – becomes this collection's thematic throughline.

The first group of essays in this collection addresses the »Fundamental Edge«. The four chapters masterfully explore the roles of community and gender in the processes of inclusion and marginalization. The essays by Sergi Sancho Fibla and Courtney A. Krolikoski examine themes of individual and collective devotion in hagiographic texts, from the models for communal religious life (represented by the early 14th-century beguines at Roubaud) to the association between sainted royal women and lepers. In both cases, these hagiographies promoted the normalization and inclusion of non-monastic women and lepers, complicating our understanding of their existence. The essays by Mireia Comas-Via and Laura Cayrol-Bernardo address the marginalization of widowed and aging women in urban communities and art. In both cases, patriarchal conventions drove their exclusion. Urban communities often pushed widows – left socially and economically vulnerable without the support and protection of their husbands – to or over the edge of poverty. Similarly, artistic conventions largely left visibly aging women out of medieval religious art (as opposed to the commonplace depictions of aged men), signaling



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the broader tendency of the male gaze to devalue and erase aging female bodies.

The essays by Rachel Ernst and Marta Fernández Lahosa open Part Two of the collection, concerned with »The Religious Edge«. Both contribute to reevaluating our knowledge about the two heresies of the late antiquity and the early Middle Ages: Manichaeism and Arianism. Given the fact that these early religious traditions were frequently invoked and castigated in anti-heretical polemics of the high Middle Ages, these studies help us to understand the contours of medieval religious »error« as a whole. The second pair of essays focuses on the attitudes toward persecution, including varying justifications for and reactions to it. Stamatia Noutsou's chapter observes the hesitancy of ecclesiastical authors – Bernard of Clairvaux and Geoffrey of Auxerre – to call for the large-scale, violent persecution of heretics, even as their polemical style warned of the dangers of heresy for Christendom's well-being. In the essay that follows, Jordi Casals i Parés reverses the perspective, analyzing Jewish responses to increasing anti-Judaism in Aragon, especially in the aftermath of the disastrous pogroms of 1391. As the author points out, the violence of 1391 »acted as a spiritual forerunner« to the eventual expulsion of Jews in 1492, becoming an event that severed the ties between the two religious communities (p. 196).

Part Three of the volume explores »The Edge of Society«, stressing its importance for understanding the medieval social fabric. The essay by Ivan Armenteros-Martínez applies – and complicates – Orlando Patterson's concept of the »social death« of an enslaved person to the context of medieval slavery in the western Mediterranean. The author underscores the roles of agency and socialization in the lives of enslaved persons, who were forcibly uprooted and integrated into the societies of their enslavers. Socialization and the ability to satisfy a particular prescribed role also defined the attitudes toward medieval lepers, as explored in the chapter by Anna M. Peterson. While medieval lepers were not universally excluded, they were expected to conform to lives of seclusion and separation from society in exchange for care. Conversely, those lepers who transgressed these boundaries became the focus of social anxiety, exemplified by the regulations concerning lepers in medieval legal texts. The last two chapters explore what one could find on the social and geographical »edge«. Within the conventions of medieval romances, as Angana Moitra argues in her analysis of »Sir Orfeo«, a hero's self-imposed exile from society was a narrative motif associated with reflection and character development. The medieval worldview also populated the imaginary geographic edge with »monstrous peoples«. According to Estela Estévez Benítez, these beings defied categorization, prompting the miniaturist tasked with depicting them to contain and order them within a gilded frame, as if to reinforce their otherness.

This brief review can hardly do justice to the stimulating, scholarly insights assembled in »Living on the Edge«. It is fair to say that

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edited volumes may, at times, be too eclectic. However, in this case, the volume's eclectic collection of essays is an apt reflection of the diverse and interdisciplinary approaches to medieval exclusion, marginalization, and transgression. Moreover, the fact that the contributions in this volume come from scholars in the early stages of their careers suggests that studies of marginalization will continue to feature in medievalist historiography in the years to come.

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