



Center for Eastern
Mediterranean
Studies

CENTRAL
EUROPEAN
UNIVERSITY

CEMS Graduate Conference

Humans and Nature in the Mediterranean Landscape

30-31 May 2023

Central European University, Vienna

Participants and abstracts

Nükhet Varlık (Keynote speaker, (Rutgers University-Newark), Ecological Transformations in the Early Modern Mediterranean: Humans and the Environment

The early modern era marks the onset of a long process of ecological transformations across the globe. The rise of empires in the “Age of Discovery” signaled a sharp increase in new forms of mobility—both human and otherwise. Climate fluctuations coupled with new agrarian practices favored the proliferation of certain species of plants and animals while causing, in a cascade effect, a severe loss in overall biological diversity. Emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases circulated the globe causing havoc across populations. The Mediterranean world was no exception to this unsettling ecological state; its repercussions lasted into the modern era.

In this presentation, I will map out the dramatic changes in the Mediterranean ecologies during the early modern period with a special emphasis on the changing balance between humans and nature in the Ottoman Empire and the world around it. I will draw from historical and scientific studies in equal measure, while incorporating artistic representations of nature with a view to demonstrate the use of interdisciplinary methodologies to explore such complex questions.

Yana Georgakieva (Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski), Plague and remedies according to a few manuscripts preserved in the fund of the Oriental Department of St. St. Cyril and Methodius National Library

The Ottoman Turkish manuscripts are among the most widespread written monuments in the Bulgarian lands. A significant amount of those sources remains uncatalogued and therefore have never been an object of detailed study. The current paper is focused on a few medical manuscripts once preserved at the Samokov waqf library [currently in the fund of the Oriental Department of St. St. Cyril and Methodius National Library – Sofia, Republic of Bulgaria]. Particular attention is going to be given on their sections on the Plague as well as some of the medicines that are written explicitly on the last pages. There are a lot of examples of such recipes on the last fourteen pages of the “Risale-i tıbb-i mergube” [“Treatise on Desirable Medicine”, XVII-XVIII c., only the second part of the treatise survived], dedicated to the disease meningitis. Their presence indicates that this volume was used by someone who felt the necessity for keeping these remedies in case he or his relatives needed treatment. I am going to elaborate further on the Plague section as well.

Another interesting manuscript from the Samokov waqf library is a copy of Ebubekir Nusret Efendi’s “Risale fi’t-tıbb” [first half of the XVIII c.] with not so precise recipes but rich in talismans and magical formulas that are believed to be beneficial against any misfortunes, including the Plague. An additional intriguing finding was a recipe against Plague [طاعون] [with a few ingredients, followed by a description of how to prepare the medicine [حب], written on a blank page in the middle of Tāşköprī-zāde’s “Risale”, translated in Ottoman Turkish by ‘Abd al-Ganī [in the very beginning of the XVIII c.].

One of the main research questions of this paper is going to be focused on the ingredients used in medicines against Plague and other disease – are they different and to what extent? Is there a correlation between the remedies in the Bulgarian pharmacopoeias and those present in the Turkish ones, especially those of the Samokov waqf library? How do these sources refer to the Plague and what are the most effective remedies prescribed against it? Is it possible to trace some of the methods archaeologically?

Andrew McNey (University of Oxford), *Ecocide in Late Antiquity: Environmental Spoliation and Human Resilience in the Negev*

The dendroecological discovery of a “Little Ice Age” (536-660) has encouraged historiography of the Near East to lend greater agency to ecological factors within studies of the past. (2017, Harper, 287; 2012, Ellenblum, 121; 2019, Sessa, 244) Although this new paradigm introduces a series of factors hitherto missing from historical narratives, it is also constrained by deference to “vener theory”; emphasizing society’s innate fragility in the face of great crises (2020, Bregman, 4). This dangerously limits the role of anthropogenic agents to mere witnesses, incapable of shaping historical narratives. The Negev Highlands in Southern Palestine offer a plethora of archaeological and textual evidence to investigate how communities during this unsettled period engaged with the natural landscape. Through an interdisciplinary study of archaeological discoveries, paleoclimatic data, and the Nessana papyri corpus, this article will re-introduce human agency in environmental narratives. Lying at the core of the present study is the concept of *ecocide* - the human spoliation of ecological systems. Applying notions of community resilience theories within this framework reveals a negative feedback loop that is yet to be examined (2020, Lewit, 75). As settlements became more adaptive, their exploitation of natural resources escalated, thus resulting in greater ecological deterioration. Introducing *ecocide* as a historical agent where anthropogenic and environmental forces meet; we can elucidate the need for economic adaptation in rural areas

where, previously, agriculture was the main commodity. The main implication here is for modern historiography where new conceptual frameworks for the study of the Umayyad period emphasize greater economic continuity. For too long *ecocide* has been limited to academia of the modern era. Its application to narratives of the past reveals untapped layers of knowledge that are uniquely related to the seeming ubiquity of human disregard for the natural environment.

Maha Shawki (American University of Cairo), How Plagues Affected Mamluk Scholars?

Losing family members due to a plague outbreak was a recurrent catastrophe during the end of the Mamluk period. This phenomenon started with the Black Death plague that took place in 1348. During this pandemic, the society is estimated to have lost a third of its population, with a slight recovery till the 15th century. The plague left its mark on Mamluk scholars, who suffered the loss of their families. For example, Ibn Khaldūn, al-Sha‘rānī, Ibn Ṭūlūn, al-Sakhāw, and other scholars repeatedly wrote about the death of their beloved family members at the hands of a plague.

This paper will focus on studying the effects of plague outbreaks on Mamluk scholars. First, it will examine the rise of family narratives and autobiographical writing in the historiography of the 14-15th centuries and how it could relate to the anxiety the Mamluk society faced due to the high mortality rate. Among other trends of the period that will be analyzed is the prominence of domestic life in the literature as well as the spread of treaties to console bereaved parents.

Secondly, the paper will examine how the plagues resulted in a wave of migration from rural to urban centers. A possible trajectory of this exodus and how it positively affected the academic life of migrating families will be highlighted. This will be attempted by studying the case of al-Sakhāwī’s family, who left Sakhá, a village in the Nile Delta, and settled in Cairo in (1389/791 AH - 1390/792 AH). By tracing the economic conditions of al-Sakhāwī’s family, the paper will investigate the role of textile trade and how it led to economic growth despite the negative aftermath of the plague and other natural catastrophes like shortage of the Nile water and famine.

In conclusion, this research will study the effect of plagues on the Mamluk scholars within the broader conditions of the late Mamluk period. It will examine the outbreaks as catalysts leading to challenges but also opportunities for Mamluk scholars.

Ahmed Kamal (Centre of Documentation of Islamic and Coptic Antiquities), Agricultural partnership in medieval Egypt

Agriculture was one of the most important daily activities of the Egyptians throughout history, and they were one of the earliest groups of people to engage in considerable agricultural activity. Several Arabic documents and papyri from medieval Egypt have survived, allowing us to identify some aspects of Islamic agricultural activities. The extant Arabic official administrative documents, particularly tax collections, provide some insight into agricultural activity in medieval Egypt. However, there has been little investigation into the farming operations details carried out by farmers.

In my talk, I'll discuss farmers' cooperation in medieval Egypt to cultivate land, depending on relevant published documents as well as a document being published for the first time from the

Berlin Egyptian Museum collection. The unpublished document is a list separated into four sections that was made by one of the farmers to track the amount of grain and seeds that were taken from his storage to cultivate various plots of land in collaboration with many other farmers. While each section of the paper is credited to a different partnership, they all include information about the amount of wheat or barley seed was used, the date it was created, and the recipient's name.

Zohrab Gevorgyan (American University of Armenia), Migration of labor and professions in the Mediterranean Sea. The Example of Cilician Armenia

When at the end of the 12th century King Levon I of Cilician Armenia (as Prince Levon II - 1187-1198, as King: 1198-1219) united a huge part of the northeastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, Cilician Armenia quickly became involved in the Mediterranean trade relations, which was the most developed financial and economic commercial system. The establishment of Venetian, Genoese and other communities in Cilician Armenia took place according to the same formula as in other places in the Mediterranean.

According to calculations, Genoese notary documents drawn up in Ayas only in three years contain 684 personal names (340 in 1274, 213 in 1277 and 220 in 1279). Most of them were representatives of Genoa and other Ligurian cities. More than 102 are representatives of Genoese noble families, whose names are scattered in various sources related to Cilician Armenia. Along with merchants, people with many professions are mentioned: notaries (notarius, 20), secretaries (cancellarius, 2), scribes (scriba, 2), commercial intermediaries (censarius, 7), bankers (bancherius, 4), teachers (magister, doctor gramatice, 7), doctors (magister medicus, 2), pharmacists (speciarius, 3), barbers (barberius, 5), shipwrights (calafato, 3), candlemakers (candelarius, 1), blacksmiths (ferrarius, 2), carpenters (magister axie, 8), master of knives and swords (custurerius, 1), thread spinners (filatori, 2), cloth merchants (draperius, 3), furriers (pelliparius, 5), tailors (sartor, taliator, 6), wool shearers (accimator, 1), shoemakers (calegarius, 1), bakers (panerius, 1), shopkeepers (tabernarius, 11), crossbowmen (balistarius, 1), etc.

Such a large variety of professions is evidence of the organized community of the foreign population settled in Cilician Armenia. The intensification of communications led to changes in the content and speed of information flows between geographically distant countries, through which spatial and temporal perceptions changed. This report will focus on the movements of labor from Western Mediterranean to Cilician cities in the 13th-14th centuries, and the daily lives of the merchant communities in Cilicia, human relations and adaptation in the new environment.

Zeynep Akçakaya (Sabancı University), Victorious Çiftliks, Reign of Sheep, Expansionist Floods: Revisiting the 'Çiftlik Debate' from 19th Century Mihaliç Countryside

Agricultural change in the Ottoman Empire is a subject that historians have been trying to understand for many years, and produced a rich literature on it. 'Çiftlik debate' which predominated Ottoman historiography for a long time and is still a hot topic today in different contexts, produced an abundant literature in understanding Ottoman agricultural change. This literature scrutinized çiftlikization process in Ottoman Empire through several concepts, i.e., change in land ownership and regime, production relations, market-oriented character of the

production in these çiftliks, vakıf çiftliks and power relations concerning their management, and the power relations of the çiftlik-holders with the central imperial elites. However, there is still a need to fill gaps in understanding agricultural change by approaching this issue from different perspectives. This presentation revisits this debate by bringing forth the natural conditions, i.e., the significant role of the swamps and floods, in formation and spread of çiftliks, and by taking sheep and sheep husbandry to its center. It argues that it is crucial to examine inter-relationship between swamps and floods, the topographical features of Mihaliç, increasing demand for sheep, the tax farming system and the relations it creates, the indebtedness relations, and the policies of the state to develop a further understanding about Ottoman agricultural change, for which local trajectories reveals various networks. In this framework, this presentation focuses on 19th century Mihaliç which can almost be considered as the remote hinterland of Istanbul providing the capital city and its vicinity with all the vital necessities.

Gaetano Longo (CEU), Plotinus's Neoplatonism; Plotinus's conception of nature

Plotinus, the founder of what was later called “Neoplatonism,” is usually considered as a philosopher whose main aim was to grasp unity with the One, which is beyond intellect, being in general, every particular being, and hence nature. Some even consider Plotinus as a mystical thinker unconcerned with the sensible or perceptible world. However, I shall try to show that Platonism and Neoplatonism have an interest in *this* world, although from a top-down perspective (especially in the case of Plotinus). To put it in the Platonic parlance, the philosopher has to leave the cave to see true being, but then he or she *must return* to the cave, even if people can marginalize or kill them. Moreover, if we stick to the *Life of Plotinus* written by his pupil Porphyry, his lifestyle was in contrast with the narrative of an anti-social, transcendent, and purely mystical perspective. Still, in the last decades Plotinus scholars – such as Donald Blakeley, Kevin Corrigan and Michael F. Wagner – analyzed Plotinus's Neoplatonism in relation to ecology and the question how humans should treat the environment.

Now, by analyzing key passages from the *Enneads*, and taking into account the relevant secondary literature, I shall focus on three points:

- 1) Plotinus's conception of nature can provide a framework for ecology in which we consider nature in its own complexity and all elements are interconnected.
- 2) According to Plotinus, we should respect and honor the Good, which he identifies with the One. Now, insofar as everything comes from the One/Good and everything, even the sensible world, is to some extent one/good, we should respect and honor it. Moreover, we can put this prescription negatively by saying that we should not harm the world.
- 3) Plotinus puts an emphasis on a cosmic rather than individualistic perspective on the world, which fits better with contemporary key concepts such as ecological justice. The latter goes beyond the centrality of individuals as subjects of justice going back to a worldview based on order and measure, which – in another framework, with different purposes and reasons – characterizes classical thought.

Sebastian Marshall (University of Cambridge), “Savage, yet classic, picturesqueness”: Visions of Greek Woodland in Victorian Illustrated Travelogues

The landscape of Greece, like much of the eastern Mediterranean, has long been ‘envisioned as an artifact’ in a potent triangulation of environment, memory, and artistic practice (Della Dora 2008). But while many studies have explored how travelling writers and artists idealised or denigrated Greece according to benchmarks of European modernity or the putative heights of its own ancient heritage, there has been less focus on the ways Greece’s natural environment tallied with the preconceptions of foreign visitors. By comparing the illustrated travel publications of Edward Lear and William Linton, two British artists who visited Greece in the mid nineteenth century, this study shifts the focus from archaeological heritage to ecological elements of Greece’s landscapes – specifically their interest in trees and forests. For Lear and Linton, Greece’s environment was just as iconic as its ancient history; ecology and geology conditioned their views on archaeology as well as vice versa. On the one hand, encountering anthropogenic degradation of phrygana and mountain soil erosion frustrated their preconceptions of Greece as verdant Arcadia. On the other hand, in different ways the pair’s journals and sketches reveal how historical meanings of Greece’s landscape were stimulated and supplemented by unexpected sensory experiences of its trees. Art historians have long shown how foreign artists’ vision of Greece was conditioned by canonical painters like Poussin and Salvator Rosa, but even the maligned practice of ‘picturesque sketching’ practiced by countless amateur landscapists required close observation of environmental features. Rather than taking the work of these Victorian painters as nostalgic documents of Greece before mass tourism and overdevelopment, this paper explores the longevity of tropes for idealising and deprecating its landscape, and reflects on ways of looking that see through both.

Enver Ali Akova (Koç University), Seferis at Ephesus, Erhat at Troy: Asia Minor in George Seferis and Azra Erhat

In conceptualizing the Mediterranean, connectivity has been established as a prominent element utilized throughout many different approaches, including critical localism, which Edwige Tamalet Talbayev highlights in *The Transcontinental Maghreb* (2017). Critical localism, as a countermove against the extensive emphasis on global connectivities in literary studies, counteracts the ahistorical character of theoretical and structuralist studies of the Mediterranean over long time periods and underlines the agency of particular writers and communities that have been assigned to margins in understanding the Mediterranean. In this paper, I focus on how George Seferis (1900-1971) and Azra Erhat (1915-1982) appropriate classical Greek literature through the Mediterranean landscape in conceptualizing Asia Minor as a part of the larger Mediterranean. I provide an ecocritical approach to their writings based on their visit to Western Asia Minor in the 1950s and discuss how they undermine the rigidity of nationalist boundaries in their description of the Mediterranean landscape, ancient ruins, and spolia from Asia Minor. First, I will examine Seferis’s poem *Μνήμη, Β’* (Memory II), subtitled “Ephesus,” and his posthumous diaries around his visit to Ephesus, as a point of emotional purification for Seferis, where his approach to nature, antiquity (via Heraclitus of Ephesus), and the trauma of losing his home (πατρίδα) converged and crystallized his stance against irredentism, which he coins “the mechanism of catastrophe.” Then, I will investigate Azra Erhat’s travelogue *Mavi Yolculuk* (Blue Voyage) as well as her archive at Anadolu University and delineate her reception of *The Iliad*, which, in organic unity with the Asia Minor landscape, conveys an anti-imperialist parable. In an attempt to explore how critical localism can generate new axes of comparison, my method departs from recent scholarship, which positions Turkish and Greek claims to the classical past in an open rivalry with a near-exclusive

emphasis on chauvinistic nationalism, and fleshes out the interwoven margins of Turkish and Greek literary history via the Mediterranean landscape.

Atdhe Thaçi (İbn Haldun University), The Malisor : mountains and mountaineers of North Albania at the end of the 19th century

One of the notable characteristics of today's border triangle between Montenegro-Albania-Kosova is the mountaineers who have inhabited the mountains for centuries. The traditions of the Malisors and their lifestyle have had a significant impact on the environment of this region. Known for their blood feuds, which were often caused by natural resources such as the usage of forests, water streams, pastures, and animal theft, the cost of these feuds was often the killing of animals, burning of pastures, and deforestation. Thus, this study aims to cover how their animosities impacted nature and the environment and how nature impacted their animosities. There were also political impacts on the life of Malisors, such as the border division between Albania and Montenegro after the Berlin Congress of 1878, which disrupted their habitus.

Environmental History, as a sub-discipline of History, is relatively new when compared to other sub-disciplines. When it comes to studying Southeastern Europe, there appears to be a lack of work on the subject. However, there are plenty of unused primary sources available in this region for this historiographical approach, including Ottoman sources, which we mostly used in our work here. The interaction between humans and nature, and the impact that they have on each other, is the key theme when it comes to the study of Environmental History.

We will study this case from this approach, and in the conclusion, we will provide examples of further topics that can be researched in this part of the Mediterranean region from the approach of Environmental History.

Vangelis Maladakis (Aristotle University of Thessalonike), Mount Athos and the water resources: Formulating hydraulic landscapes in Northern Greece

Mount Athos, as a vital part of the peninsula of Chalkidiki, represents a *par excellence* case for the study of the water resources of the medieval and post-medieval centuries in Northern Greece; this is owing: i) to the information delivered by the numerous documents kept in the monastic archives, ii) to the extensive archaeological research conducted there during the last forty years.

Chalkidiki and the whole rural Northern Greece entered the medieval era with the expansion of the monastic life on Athos. The monasteries invested more intensively after the 13th c. in Chalkidiki, in the hinterland of Thessaloniki, and in the Strymon valley by purchasing or leasing lands (*metochia*), which were cultivated by tenant-farmers. Archaeological excavations, architectural restorations and archival documentation yield an amount of valuable information on water technology illustrating how technological change is closely dependent on social practice.

The Byzantine watermill of the tower of Galatista, the post-Byzantine aqueducts of the monasteries of Pantocrator and Stavronikita, and the Ottoman water-bridge of the monastery of Zygos will be among the case studies that will be presented as typical paradigms of conscious manipulation of water resources.

I will focus on the development of complex schemes incorporating elements of several technologies, in a long-term formulation of the hydraulic landscape of Chalkidiki. In other words, my argument will be based on the exploitation of water as an indicator of the economic expansion and the social welfare in a rural milieu of the medieval and pre-modern eras.

Ebru Erginbaş (Brown University), Back to Nature Before Parting: Karl Ambros Bernard (1808-1844), Modernization of Ottoman Medicine and Hydro-tourism

This paper examines the role of Austrian physician and scholar Karl Ambros Bernard (1808- 1844) in the 19th century transimperial knowledge creation and knowledge transfer in the context of modernization of the Ottoman Medicine during the reign of Mahmud II (r. 1808- 1839). A special attention will be paid to a relatively less scrutinized aspect of Bernard's contribution to the transition to modern medicine by analyzing his emphasis on hot springs and hydrotherapy. Thus, this paper puts Bernard on the map of the environmental history of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century by underscoring hydrotherapy, hydro-thermal therapy, and its role in the formation of the modern health tourism and natural therapies before a turn away from nature was witnessed due to the birth of modern pharmaceuticals and biomedicine.

Another major argument of this paper is that transimperial intermediaries like Karl Ambros Bernard not only helped transform and modernize the institutional aspects of Ottoman Medicine but also contributed immensely to the formation of modern medical literature in the Ottoman Empire. By contextualizing Bernard's work on hot springs of the Ottoman Empire, this paper will showcase Bernard as one of the pioneering scholars of modern medicine who ushered new ways of looking at health, nature, and the environment by emphasizing the health benefits of groundwater, particularly geothermal waters. His preservationist approach to groundwaters helped conserve natural resources and helped facilitate later developments that yielded the way to modern hydro-tourism in Turkey and beyond.

Dimitrios K. Lamprakis (University of Crete), Climate Catastrophes, Morality Plays and Punishment Stories: The palimpsest of human collective unconscious in Islamic myths

The Holy Qur'ān and the Stories and Legends of the Prophets (*Qiṣaṣ al- 'Anbiyā'*) provide a series of narrations which play a crucial role in the ethical formation and teaching the true tenets of Islam to the community (*'ummah*) of believers. Among the numerous stories found in them, there is a certain group that may be classified under the rubric of "punishment stories". Such are the stories of the Islamic prophets Nūḥ, Lūṭ, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Shu'aib in which a prophet forewarns his people of an imminent catastrophe and when the people fail to believe and repent, they are collectively punished with only a few select believers being delivered.

Powerful though these messages may be, it is the express purpose of this paper to show that behind these stories there lies an even more urgent, though encrypted, message. Building on my recent research on the story of the biblical-cum-Qur'ānic figure of Lūṭ/Lot and his relationship with the areas of Zoara/Zughar/Ghor aṣ-Ṣāfi and Deir 'Ayn 'Abata in Jordan, I propose to present in this paper a new approach to the stories of the prophets Hūd and Ṣāliḥ. By dissecting their contents and by applying a critical textual analysis of their structural elements, I will attempt to denude

them from their moralising character, typical of monotheistic religious doctrine, in order to allow for their primordial substratum to emerge. Next, I will juxtapose this substratum to extant scientific observations pertaining to the climate macrohistory of the area of the Arabian Peninsula and the Fertile Crescent in order to show that the true message behind these two stories, and by extension *grosso modo* that of other such stories of a similar content, is that of climate crises and catastrophes that took humanity by surprise and, aside from leading to the extirpation of cultures and civilizations, they almost led to the obliteration of the human species off the face of the earth.

Put simply, this paper will argue that humanity faced climate catastrophes since the earliest stages of its existence as a species; that some catastrophes were so global and overwhelming that became ancestral memory and entered the collective subconscious (e.g. the Deluge and distinction between antediluvian and postdiluvian humanity), whilst others were of a more local scope (e.g. the stories of Hūd and Šālīḥ that pertain to the rapid desertification of the Arabian Peninsula and the Fertile Crescent) and thus survived solely in the memory of the peoples who experienced it; that these stories were originally formed by survivors of these climate catastrophes and were passed orally in the form of myths down from generation to generation as a reminder; and finally that it was the emergence of sedentary societies that transformed these stories into legends and myths about the wrath of the gods (in polytheistic cultures) and ultimately of the One God (in monotheistic religious systems).

Be that as it may, this paper argues, what always lies hidden and encrypted behind these stories that form the Islamic version of the palimpsest of human collective subconscious is the fragility of humanity and our lifestyle that tends to function at the expense of and contrary to the laws of nature and our planet.

Chiara Bach (Johannes Guttenberg University), The relation between Nature, Divinity, and Gender in the *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene

The following abstract deals with a source analysis of Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*. Anna Komnene (1083-1153) was the eldest daughter of the Byzantine emperor Alexios I (r. 1081- 1118). In the middle of the twelfth century, when literature was flourishing, Anna Komnene recorded her father's life for future generations. In the men's world of contemporary literature, where rhetoric and nature were linked, the highly educated Anna was an exception.

In my paper I suggest that Anna Komnene describes the landscape in connection with gender. In the fifteen books of the *Alexiad*, Komnene describes her father's military exploits. She, therefore, uses a rhetoric that describes the landscape in great detail within the context of military strategy. At the same time, she uses nature-related terminology when describing masculinity, or refers to the climate, when for example, describing the circumstances that led to her husband's death. She also often invokes "God's will" when discussing decisions made by men.

Anna's rhetoric concerning nature raises the question of whether she uses nature-terminology exclusively to characterize masculinity, or whether she also uses it in the context of describing female attributes. To answer this question, I will analyze Book II where Komnene describes how Alexios' mother, Anna Dallassene supported him in his strategy to become emperor. In this case Anna demonstrates that her grandmother also used nature to reach her political aims.

The question remains what exactly is nature in Anna Komnene. While in the Prologue Komnene credits her ability to write the *Alexiad* inter alia to the qualities given to her by Nature and the will of God, implying that Nature and God are not the same, or rather that Nature is not an instrument of God's will, in the Book I she makes an opposite statement, when she describes the Komnenoi Constantine as a "Nature's masterpiece" as it were from "God's handiwork". Thus, relations between Nature and God as well as the uses of nature by different gender remain ambivalent. This ambivalence contributes to the popularity of the *Alexiad* up to the present day.

Rosie Thomas-Boulgakova (University of Oxford), Byzantine attitudes to the natural world through the lens of hymnography

The natural world posed a theological problem for the Byzantines: material reality was eternally marred as a result of the fall, but the incarnation and the salvific work of Christ's death and resurrection had redeemed the physical world. Eve had brought calamity on mankind by eating of the forbidden fruit, but the fruits of the earth were offered back to God in the Eucharist. Worship of creation was condemned as idolatry, but the created world also represented a reflection of divine work. Byzantine ambivalence towards and preoccupation with nature is clearly evident within the theological treatises, religious poetry and hymnography of the Byzantine Empire. Nature could either be derided as a destructive force and a fleeting source of deceptive sensual pleasures or praised as a vehicle for the action of God's grace.

This paper will explore the Byzantine conception of the natural world and the suspicion (particularly in the post-iconoclastic period) of anything resembling a nature cult or worship of creation over Creator. It will engage with representations of nature and natural imagery – both positive and negative – in the hymnography of the Eastern Church, considering the multi-valent nature "types" and nature metaphors that abound in Orthodox worship. In particular it will focus on plant and foliage imagery and its relationship to fallenness and redemption.

Osman Yüksel Özdemir (CEU), Depicting Change Through Urban Landscape: Sasanid Occupation of Jerusalem in 614 C.E.

The perception of public and religious spaces within urban centers was a considerable component of daily life in Late Antique cities. The visibility and perceived associations of a given space provided the related cultural communities with discourses that would secure their sense of identity. It is possible to track such perceptions through the tension between different cultural groups contesting the public spaces. Such contestation resulted in changes within the urban landscape which would in turn provide literary reactions.

A fundamental record of change comes from seventh-century Jerusalem. In the course of the Byzantine-Sasanid war (602-628 C.E), the Sasanid Empire was able to dive deep into Byzantine territories and conquer Jerusalem. The written sources describe a significant loss of lives together with the destruction of the religious urban landscape. The uncritical incorporation of such depictions to the scholarly literature would form a metanarrative later on. According to this metanarrative, the occupation of the Sasanid empire resulted in a huge devastation effectively ruining the normal rhythms of the daily life. This devastation was seen as the principal cause of

the rapid expansion of the early Islamic state under the Rashidun Caliphs since the previous war eliminated all the resources to retaliate. Thanks to the archeological studies in the last decades, it is understood that although the peripheries of the city including the city walls were subjected to destruction, other religious spaces which were mentioned in several sources remained unharmed.

What to make out of this contradiction between the sources and the archeological data? Why did the authors depict the Sasanid occupation through changes in the urban landscape? My hypothetical answer lies in the notion of space. Thanks to the so-called “spatial turn,” space no longer is just a container for events but also is an element for the creation of personal and collective identity. In the same way, I argue that the relevant written sources do not use the topography of Jerusalem just as a container. In fact, these spaces have been used as objects in a discursive narrative which was directly affected by various subjects.

Bilal Hamza Erbaş (University of Szeged), Ottoman Expedition Diaries for Environmental and Climate History: Mehmed III's 1596 Expedition

Expedition Diaries (*Sefer Rûznâmesi*) are an important source group used for Ottoman military history research from the early 16th century to the late 18th century. The sources, also known as "Sefer Rûznâmçesi, Menzîlnâme, Harp Jürnali", consist of daily recordings of events, where "rûznâme" comes from the Persian words "rûz" meaning day and "nâme" meaning letter. These sources contain valuable records about the developments during the campaign, such as the settlements along the route of the army, the physical and psychological condition of the soldiers, logistics, traveling, and accommodation, as well as topography and weather conditions. Despite their frequent use in Ottoman historiography, these diaries have not yet been utilized for environmental and climate history studies in Ottoman history. The case study of this presentation is to analyze the diary of Mehmed III's 1596 expedition to Eger Castle, which contains 186 daily entries between 20 June 1596 and 22 December 1596. Additionally, it will focus on how and to what extent campaign diaries provide information on travel, accommodation, environment, climate, and logistics. The significance of this research stems from the role that these sources play in environmental and climate history studies, an area that has gained increasing attention in Ottoman historiography.

Furkan Işın (McGill University), “A Slight Earthquake Occurred”: Ottoman Conquest of the Middle East and Environmental History

Between 1514 and 1517, the Ottomans conquered what is now Southeast Turkey, Greater Syria, Egypt, and Hijaz. This paper questions the reasons behind these swift conquests. It argues that natural disasters such as an earthquake that occurred in 1514 and plagues that ravaged the Mamluks in the 1510s played a significant role in weakening the defense systems, administration, and public morale of the conquered states. While scholarship has shown that the success of the Ottoman army was due to its extensive usage of gunpowder and artillery, this paper takes the environment seriously and contends that environmental factors contributed to the Ottoman victories. However, it also shows the limits of environmental history for a period when available source material mostly focuses on political events and overlooks how everyday lives were shaped by natural catastrophes and the environment. Overall, this paper highlights the importance of considering natural disasters and their impacts when analyzing historical events, particularly in the context of empire-building

and conquest. It also underscores the interdisciplinary nature of historical research, drawing on insights from fields such as environmental studies, seismology, and historiography to provide a more nuanced understanding of the complex factors that shape historical events.

Savaş Boyraz, The Eye of the Mountain

Eye of the Mountain / Nature of Resistance is an artistic research project investigating the relationship among humans, machines and nature, in a colonial context. Looking at the Kurdish landscape, the project aims to unfold the reflection of nature on colonial military practices, as well as on the various modes of resistance.

The design history of the colonial military technologies is decorated with taxidermies of appropriated and assimilated life forms. This appropriation spans from biomechanical imitation to representational evisceration. From Fighting Falcons, Black Hawks, “Kirpi”s, to Herons and Leopards, what we see is an engineered generation of colonial invasive species.

On the other side, for people, nature emerges as an organic platform upon which culture and cultural resistance is imagined and executed. Compared to biomechanical appropriation of animals in military technology, for people, nature gets translated into the human body.

Bodily and vocal imitations of animals in folk dances and traditional singing styles, and the role of these practices in organization of a cultural self-defense is another focal point of the research.

Within the scope of the research “Partridge Nation” film is produced. Partridge Nation is a visual deconstruction of a contemporary political mythology in the Kurdish mountains. It follows the practice of partridge hunting and its political connotations in a colonial context, creating a set of new imaginings proposing an alternative visual vocabulary of a cultural-self-defense.