

## THALASSOCRACY

### The Explanatory Power of the Mediterranean

An International Conference Marking Seven Years of Activity

29-31 May 2023

### ABSTRACTS

*Do Women Have an Antiquarianism? Hester Stanhope's Iconoclasm*

**Zoe Beenstock**, University of Haifa

Hester Stanhope's journey from the salon of her uncle Prime Minister William Pitt in London to the Levant is increasingly acknowledged as an important travel narrative for feminist history, and for studies of British-Ottoman relations alike. Yet in analyzing Stanhope's itinerary, critics invariably draw on accounts by her physician and niece, and on an edited volume by her lover's family, works that express varying degrees of abashment at her flaunting of convention. In contrast, Stanhope herself was both unapologetic, and a prolific letter writer, documenting her engagement with artifacts and ancient objects in the Levant. In particular, she repeatedly copied an account of smashing a colossal heathen statue in Ashkelon, an act symbolizing her turn away from imperialism, and towards a pre-monotheistic East, in which she imagines women as sovereigns. I analyze Stanhope's repetition of this narrative as a form of publication. Drawing on feminist book history, I suggest that she identified herself as an antiquarian by working with the media of manuscripts and material objects to recuperate her marginalization from print culture. Examining Stanhope's letters both excavates her from displacement by the third-person perspectives of family and acquaintances, and expands antiquarianism towards a model that can include women.

## THALASSOCRACY

### The Explanatory Power of the Mediterranean

An International Conference Marking Seven Years of Activity

29-31 May 2023

### ABSTRACTS

*We Are Here: Representing Malta in Words, Images, and Objects in the Wonnacott Family Letters (1867-1878)*

**Tamar Rozett**, University of Haifa

Personal letters have long served as a vicarious means of travel, circulating representations of places, people, and cultures. Familiar letters describing locations that piqued colonizers' curiosities, such as the Eastern Mediterranean, were passed along between friends and family members at the metropole. By the nineteenth century, however, new strictures of privacy slowed down the circulation of familiar letters. And yet, correspondents continued to labor over depictions of their surroundings, whether in written accounts or visual accompaniments. My presentation will interrogate the role of such personal travel narratives in light of changing correspondence norms. It will center on the Wonnacott family letters, sent between Malta and Britain in the 1860s. Alongside written representations of Maltese people and places, the Wonnacotts also sent back hand-drawn maps, sketches, photographs, newspaper cuttings, and material objects. I suggest that apart from their educational and entertaining value, these textual and material representations acted as a call for acknowledgement and validation. Representations of local surroundings gained importance in a bid to explicate the challenges faced by colonizers in new, often confounding colonial environments. Within the increasingly informal correspondence norms, these carefully constructed sections of familiar letters attest to the emotional need to be seen by distant loved ones.

## THALASSOCRACY

### The Explanatory Power of the Mediterranean

An International Conference Marking Seven Years of Activity

29-31 May 2023

### ABSTRACTS

*Wonderland: Anglo-American Bahá'ís in pre-war Akka and Haifa*

**Michael Leger-Lomas**, King's College

From 1898 to the outbreak of the First World War, a stream of American and British Bahá'ís steamed to Haifa to visit the revered founder of their faith, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and then wrote extensively about their experiences. Their accounts offer a fascinating variation on nineteenth-century travel writing about the Eastern Mediterranean. On the one hand, they belong to a distinctively Christian and Protestant genre of the pilgrimage. These pilgrims craved personal contact with 'Abdu'l-Bahá as a Christ-like master and were just as interested in paying visits to the tombs of his father Bahá'u'lláh in Akka and of the Bab on Mount Carmel. Their spiritual priorities encouraged them to represent Akka and Haifa in Orientalizing terms as a 'Wonderland' or 'Galilee' of timeless holiness, which was satisfyingly reminiscent of the Christian Scriptures with which they were deeply familiar. Yet Bahai pilgrimages were voyages into the future as well as the deep past. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was not just an Oriental, but a global religious figure who would exploit modern steam communications and the loosening grip of the Ottoman Empire to travel to Britain and the United States. For the Bahá'ís, Akka and Haifa were not timeless shrines but nodes in a spiritual network which stretched from their own homes to mission fields in Persia and India. Religious constructions of the Eastern Mediterranean therefore drew on deep continuities but also fostered innovative thinking about its place in the Edwardian world.

## THALASSOCRACY

### The Explanatory Power of the Mediterranean

An International Conference Marking Seven Years of Activity

29-31 May 2023

### ABSTRACTS

*The Natufian Culture: Dynamics and Climate Instability*

**Prof. Leore Grosman**, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Most scholars agree that climate impacts human activity, but the degree of this impact is widely debated, especially the correlation between cultural changes and particular climatic events. The Natufian culture coincides with the Terminal Pleistocene, which is characterized both by climatic unpredictability and sudden reversals of existing conditions over the course of centuries or millennia i.e., the global events at the end of the Older Dryas cold phase, the Bølling-Allerød warm phase, and the Younger Dryas cold phase. How did this sequence of events influence human groups in the Levant? Were the groups in constant chaotic processes of reorganization, being unable to reach a standing equilibrium with their environment? Specifically, how did the Younger Dryas, which was a brief and dramatic event, influence the Natufian groups? It has been suggested that the combination of dense population and these environmental changes might have triggered the demand for agriculture production. This line of reasoning caused theoretical models considering climatic events as prime movers in the origin of agriculture to gain popularity.

This talk will try to assess the degree of impact these climatic conditions had on the Natufian groups, while trying to bridge between the archaeological evidence and local climatic reconstructions. The talk will question the extent of our understanding of the Y-D, and claim that such misconceptions influenced the importance we have accredited to it.

## THALASSOCRACY

### The Explanatory Power of the Mediterranean

An International Conference Marking Seven Years of Activity

29-31 May 2023

### ABSTRACTS

*Climate-induced Factors for the Fall of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and the Transition towards Babylonia*

**Prof. Hervé Reculeau**, University of Chicago

The history of Mesopotamia in the first half of the first millennium BCE is commonly seen as the ebb and flow of empires, starting with the Neo-Assyrian empire in the ninth century, followed by the Neo-Babylonian in the sixth century, and then the Achaemenid from the mid-sixth to the late fourth century. In recent years, scholars have increasingly linked imperial successes and failures (especially those of Assyria) to episodes of regional climate change, originally documented in low-resolution paleoclimate records from various parts of the Middle East, and most recently in a high-resolution speleothem record from a cave located within the Assyrian heartland, the Kuna Ba Cave. The identification in the latter record of a 200-year “Assyrian megapluvial” (ca. 925-725 BCE) followed by a 125-year “Assyrian megadrought” (ca. 675–550 BCE) offers a unique case study to test such claims against the material evidence left behind by these empires, manifest in both textual and material records, especially as imperial actions affected the landscapes in which the subjects of empires lived their daily lives. When careful attention is given to these data, it becomes possible to offer a nuanced view of how climate change could have affected certain aspects of empire-building and maintenance — but also of how societies could have mitigated its effects, or even remained mostly unaffected by it. Using an empirical, case-based approach offers methodological insights that can then be adapted for other areas and periods.

## THALASSOCRACY

### The Explanatory Power of the Mediterranean

An International Conference Marking Seven Years of Activity

29-31 May 2023

### ABSTRACTS

*The Vital Role of Food Security in Understanding the Climate-Society Nexus:  
Contemporary and Historical Cases*

**Tal Ulus**, Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Understanding the complex interconnections and the causal nexus between climate change and human societies is a challenging endeavor. This is especially true when studying past civilizations when information could be scarce and incomplete, but it is also challenging in today's world when we have direct measurements of climate conditions and access to social processes in real time.

My paper suggests that food security is a key factor in understanding the climate-society nexus in past and contemporary societies whose livelihoods depend on agriculture. It is argued that constant uncertainty and lack of control of climatic phenomena, and as a result, over our food security, have psychological effects (like fear and anger) that trigger human responses, personal and social alike. It is through the evaluation of these psychological effects that we are able to elucidate the complex interconnections between climate change and human society.

Since human societies require a constant food supply, which to this day depends largely on agriculture, our vulnerability to climate changes and anomalies is crucial. This dependency is exacerbated by the fact that in the past, and to a large extent today, our ability to forecast or predict seasonal climate changes remains limited. There is no reliable way to forecast precipitation amounts for the following year or the temperatures for the coming winter, especially when considering the fluctuations in these parameters in the past decades as a result of climate change. Having no control over climatic phenomena (and, as a result, food security) triggers anxiety and other psychological responses. The nature of these responses varies depending on culture and context. In some cases, this can lead to social changes, such as political instability, conflicts, and migration. Notwithstanding the importance of each human society's unique characters and historical context, this paper argues that food security is a key factor to consider when exploring the relationship between climate and social processes in current and past societies.

My talk will demonstrate this mechanism through contemporary and historical cases. The contemporary cases examine the relationship between climatic anomalies, mainly droughts, and political instability, conflicts, and migration from sub-Saharan Africa in

## THALASSOCRACY

### The Explanatory Power of the Mediterranean

An International Conference Marking Seven Years of Activity

29-31 May 2023

### ABSTRACTS

the last decades. Historical examples are drawn from the studies of the late Ronnie Ellenblum and his Fragility Theory.

*“They will also plant vineyards and eat their fruit...”: The Fate of the Eastern Mediterranean Wine Trade in the Sixth Century and Beyond*

**Michael Decker**, University of South Florida

The ‘Age of Justinian’, or ‘long sixth century’ corresponding roughly from CE 491-626, witnessed tremendous changes in political, cultural, and material life. One major material manifestation of the dynamism of the age was the efflorescence of a booming wine trade in the hinterland of Gaza and Ascalon. Hitherto a backwater of the East Roman Empire, this hinterland, comprising especially the Negev region of what is today Israel, came to prominence in the long distance exchange and consumption of wine evidenced in texts and in amphorae finds from the British Isles to the Black Sea and beyond. Building on the recently published ground-breaking work of Avni, Bar-Oz, and Gambash, in this paper I will explore broader implications of the proposed sixth century decline of the Gaza wine trade. Aspects of the questions I seek to address include what the termination of the SE Mediterranean wineries meant for wine consumers around the Mediterranean and what the ‘new’ landscape of the wine production, consumption, and trade looked like without the famous vintages of Gaza and Ascalon in the ports, shops, and taverns throughout the late antique world.

## THALASSOCRACY

### The Explanatory Power of the Mediterranean

An International Conference Marking Seven Years of Activity

29-31 May 2023

### ABSTRACTS

*Grape Varieties of the Cretan Vineyard: Origin, History and Names Revisited*

**Maritina Stavrakaki & Katerina Biniari**, Agricultural University of Athens

The talk will provide facts about the history, the organization and structure, the surface area, the production of viticultural products and the contribution of the Cretan vineyard to the formation of the aesthetics of the rural landscape, and to the economy and culture of Crete. An important part of the talk is devoted to the comparative nomenclature and the matching of the names of the varieties, as recorded since the 14th century, to the present varieties. From the citation of the detailed descriptions of the training and trellis systems of the vineyards, important information is retrieved on the viticultural practice and the gradual transition from the Cretan traditional vineyard to the linear vineyards.

*Reconsidering Heritage Vineyards in the Southern Levant*

**Shulamit Miller**, University of Haifa

Through a holistic study of archaeological data and literary sources, this paper aims to reconsider vineyard design in the Late Antique southern Levant, with special reference to the Negev Highlands. Archeological remains include agricultural terraces and installations such as winepresses and dovecotes, typically situated in close proximity to vineyards. In addition, grape pips, some of which have been identified to exact cultivars, are abundant. To supplement missing evidence in the archaeological record for the planning and composition of the ancient vineyards, we compare the Negev Highlands finds to remains of contemporaneous vineyards in the Mediterranean basin, where further evidence of viticulture is preserved. A variety of literary sources, including Roman and Byzantine agricultural treatises, as well as Rabbinic literature, assist us in determining ways in which vineyards were cultivated to maximize yields in varied terrains.

Collating these diverse sources, we attempt to revive and restore the features of regional vineyards in Late Antiquity. To further explore the feasibility of such vineyards, we present an experimental project for plotting and cultivating a heritage vineyard in Avdat, at the heart of the historical wine region of the Negev Highlands.



## THALASSOCRACY

### The Explanatory Power of the Mediterranean

An International Conference Marking Seven Years of Activity

29-31 May 2023

### ABSTRACTS

*“From Civitas to Madīna” in the Western Mediterranean: The Iberian Peninsula  
between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*

**Sabine Panzram**, University of Hamburg

The paper attempts to understand how the cities in the Western Mediterranean in Late Antiquity changed, taking the Iberian Peninsula as a case study. Being a city and, in particular a provincial capital, in the imperial period means to be dominated by the gleaming marble constructions of the municipal and provincial imperial cult with its statues and sculptures and to be represented by a regional elite who is in charge of key positions within the socio-economic relationship network and holding prestigious offices and thus belonging to a group of persons responsible for the communication between the periphery and the centre, Rome. This configuration seems to have been transformed from the end of the fourth, beginning of the fifth century on, as the Iberian Peninsula suffered from the so called ‘invasions’ of the barbari, the impact of Christianity and again at the beginning of the eighth century when the Umayyads started their conquest of this region: I argue, however, that the cities’ strength and importance as sovereigns remained unbroken during this time of political-social realignment and disorientation. Urbanism is characterised not by decline, but by transformation; the functions performed by its social elites are marked not by change, but by continuity. For the goal of the ‘barbarians’ had by no means been the short-term destruction of the cities, institutions and society, but rather long-term integration – they retained traditional forms and adapted these to the changing action context.

## THALASSOCRACY

### The Explanatory Power of the Mediterranean

An International Conference Marking Seven Years of Activity

29-31 May 2023

### ABSTRACTS

*From Polis to Madina? Changing Urban Concepts in the Cities of Palestine Following the Arab Conquest: Jerusalem and Ramla as Case Studies.*

**Gideon Avni**, Hebrew University of Jerusalem & Israel Antiquities Authority

The 1985 publication of Hugh Kennedy's seminal research "From Polis to Madina" set the tone for a new conceptual view on the pattern of urban changes in cities of the Near East and the eastern Mediterranean between Late Antiquity and the Medieval period. Since then, and in the past 40 years, large-scale excavations conducted in urban centers in the southern Levant provided a good basis and higher resolution for the evaluation of changes in settlement and population. The excavations at Jarash, Pella, Beth Shean, Tiberias, Caesarea, and other cities that were established in the Roman period and continued into Medieval times, enabled a detailed discussion on the intensification and abatement processes between the sixth to the eleventh centuries. The ongoing archaeological and historical research of Early Islamic urban communities in Bilad al-Sham has provided two contradictory patterns: while several large cities declined in their area and population following the Arab conquests, other cities flourished and expanded.

In the light of the increased data on these processes of change, my presentation will focus on two significant centers in Early Islamic Palestine: Jerusalem, which continued to form the religious and cultural hub of the country for Christians, Jews and Muslims, and Ramla, the newly established capital of Early Islamic Palestine, which was constructed ex-nihilo in the early eighth century and flourished until the eleventh century, presenting a different concept in its urban layout.

Thus, Jerusalem and Ramla reflect a much wider process of conceptual urban change in the cities of the Near East, which echoes and modifies the "Polis to Madina" paradigm.

## THALASSOCRACY

### The Explanatory Power of the Mediterranean

An International Conference Marking Seven Years of Activity

29-31 May 2023

### ABSTRACTS

*Ravenna in the Central Middle Ages: City in Stasis, Hinterland in Motion*

**Edward Schoolman**, University of Nevada, Reno

In all of Italy, the city of Ravenna records one of the most active late antique building programs. Following its development in the sixth and seventh centuries, its political and economic decline became manifest in the city's urban and suburban decay, a feature clearly noticeable in the 840s when a cleric named Agnellus wrote a history of the city's bishops. Ravenna would regain some prominence in the tenth century and experience limited urban and exurban renovations, but essentially remain in a state of physical stasis. The written records of the city's institutions, however, demonstrate an intensification of rural exploitation – including the reclamation of marginal lands – in parallel to this slow urban development. The evidence suggests that this bifurcation in development is related to the adoption of different types of local elite patronage and the rise in power of the city's land-holding aristocracy.

## THALASSOCRACY

### The Explanatory Power of the Mediterranean

An International Conference Marking Seven Years of Activity

29-31 May 2023

### ABSTRACTS

*Beyond Architecture: Ancient Greek Sanctuaries from a Sensorial Perspective*

**Ioannis Mylonopoulos**, Columbia University

In 1996, Juhani Pallasmaa wrote in his *The Eyes of the Skin* "I confront the city with my body; my legs measure the length of the arcade and the width of the square; my gaze unconsciously projects my body onto the façade of the cathedral, where it roams over the mouldings and contours, sensing the size of recesses and projections; my body weight meets the mass of the cathedral door, and my hand grasps the door pull as I enter the dark void behind. I experience myself in the city, and the city exists through my embodied experience. The city and my body supplement and define each other. I dwell in the city and the city dwells in me." What Pallasmaa describes here is an almost holistic sensorial experience of space while in movement. Contrary to this, scholarly approach to ancient Greek sanctuaries has remained a rather dry academic exercise in which researchers occupied the position of an external – allegedly objective – observer. We often failed to recognize sacred spaces beyond their architectural structures, their materials, or a habitually descriptive appreciation of aesthetics and instead acknowledge Greek sanctuaries as a constructed frame for ever-changing ritual practices, as a spatial configuration that consciously challenges and requires the polyphony of the senses.

My paper will attempt to present ancient Greek sanctuaries as spaces that were anything but empty contemplative environments. In order to do so, the use and experience of sacred spatial fabrics will have to be addressed as non-static processes. Sanctuaries' perception in antiquity (and today) should be understood as a multi-sensorial procedure. It will be shown that the ancient sacred built environment was created for sets of actions and practices performed by users who were not simply non-participating observers or passive consumers, but rather "agents" whose movement through and sensorial interaction with their sacred surroundings fleetingly defined, utilized, abandoned, and re-defined the individual spaces in any given ancient sanctuary.

## THALASSOCRACY

### The Explanatory Power of the Mediterranean

An International Conference Marking Seven Years of Activity

29-31 May 2023

### ABSTRACTS

*"A Tale of Two Caves": Human Bodies, Caves and Rituals*

**Yulia Ustinova**, Ben Gurion University of the Negev

Rituals performed in the Charonium at Acharaca (Caria, Asia Minor), and the Idaean Cave on Crete left rich evidence, which requires a multi-directional approach to their study, including an examination of acoustic and visual effects in group rituals, toxicology of poisonous gases and their role in cults, and the connection between the physical characteristics of a location in a cave and the ritual performed there.

At Acharaca, olfactory effects and the chemical properties of poisonous gas were used in a complex two-fold initiatory cult, focused on an extreme ritual. In the Idaean cave, both mythology and historical evidence (written and archaeological), as well as the results of modern research on cave acoustics, attest to two domains, of prolonged isolation and of high arousal rituals.

Each cave housed two types of initiations, that differed in terms of their location in the cave (deep inside vs. near the entrance); duration (minutes or hours vs. days); nature (solitary sojourn vs. extreme or high arousal ritual); and aims (vision quest vs. male initiations).

These examples of different initiatory cults based on physical characteristics and chemical properties of locales inside the same cave demonstrate the importance of close attention to the setting of ancient cults, which can be reconstructed only by juxtaposing written, archaeological, and environmental evidence.

*Ludic Lamentation: Mourning Places and Bodies in Judaism in Late Antiquity*

**Michael Swartz**, Ohio State University

This paper will discuss how poetic features such as paronomasia, allusion, and irony contribute to lamentations for the Temple in piyyut and in Aramaic funeral poetry in late antiquity. The variety of rhetorical and prosodic forms attests to the range of functions and contexts of these genres, functions that go beyond consolation. The sources used will be pre-classical piyyutim associated with the Yom Kippur liturgy and the Aramaic eulogies published in Yahalom and Sokoloff's *Shirat Bene Ma'rava*.

## THALASSOCRACY

### The Explanatory Power of the Mediterranean

An International Conference Marking Seven Years of Activity

29-31 May 2023

### ABSTRACTS

*Sacred and Secular Waters in Encyclopedic Literature: Comparing Isidore of Seville and Lambert of St. Omer*

**Ellen Fenzel Arnold**, University of Stavanger

This talk will look at the geographical, religious, and scientific world view of Lambert of St-Omer, a canon living and working in Northern France between ca. 1090 and 1121. Lambert produced an encyclopedic work, the *Liber Floridus*. As Lambert's magnum opus, it is a unique book that is part world chronicle, part encyclopedia, part natural history, and part personal world-view. The manuscript includes a diagram of the six "ages of the world," a discussion of the creation of the world, a bestiary, a lapidary, astronomical star charts, a gazetteer of "wonders of the world," excerpts from theological treatises, information on local saints, and histories of the ancient world and the crusades. Lambert appears to have consulted almost 100 other works of science, literature, history, geography, and religion available to him at his own monastery and in nearby Ghent. The *Liber Floridus* is a remarkable reminder that medieval Europeans were engaged in and curious about the world, and that they saw the ways that many kinds of knowledge could intersect and combine to help people understand the world. By setting *Liber Floridus* against Isidore's *summa* of universal knowledge, the *Etymologiae*, I will discuss how Lambert understands both the secular and spiritual roles of water, and also how he understands the Mediterranean region as pivotal to both divine and human history.

## THALASSOCRACY

### The Explanatory Power of the Mediterranean

An International Conference Marking Seven Years of Activity

29-31 May 2023

### ABSTRACTS

*Water and Land in Mediterranean River Basins: Wetlands, Land Reclamation, and Water Management in Medieval Italian Societies (9th-12th Centuries)*

**Michele Campopiano**, University of York.

This contribution will study the relationship that Italian societies established with wetlands in the central centuries of the Middle Ages, trying to frame them in the context of the issues of land reclamation in the Mediterranean basin. In order to understand what kind of relationship was established with the wetlands, and what stimuli or interests led to land reclamation activities, the contribution will analyse modes of economic exploitation of these areas, but also the interplay between property relations and political hegemonies. The contribution will focus on the areas of river basins, confronting the specific dynamics linked to the indispensable presence of water in these geographical areas. The main case study will be water management in the Po Valley, but the paper will also offer some reflections and comparisons with other geographical areas of the Peninsula, in particular with the Volturno river basin in southern Italy.

*A Medical Thermalism? Perceptions and Uses of Hot and Mineral Waters in the Mediterranean*

**Marilyn Nicoud**, Avignon University

The word "thermalism", used as much in Antiquity as today, hides for ancient times very different realities: on the one hand, large thermal baths, places of hygiene and sociability which appear as a marker of Roman civilization; on the other hand, more modest places of care, recognized for the therapeutic qualities of their waters. Present throughout the Mediterranean world, certain springs were used for their curative effects. Sometimes known since Antiquity when their virtues were often associated with the proximity of a sanctuary and the action of a divinity, many of them were found and frequented in the Middle Ages for both recreational and medical reasons. A new rational discourse accompanied this evolution. Contrary to Greek and Arab scholars, who were often quick to point out the danger of mineral waters, medieval and early modern physicians sought to know and value these springs and to promote their medical use.