

The Department of Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures presents

# Environmental Challenges in Premodern Eurasian and Mediterranean Narrative

14 - 15 JANUARY 2025

Aula Prodi - San Giovanni in Monte  
Piazza San Giovanni in Monte, 2  
*Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna*



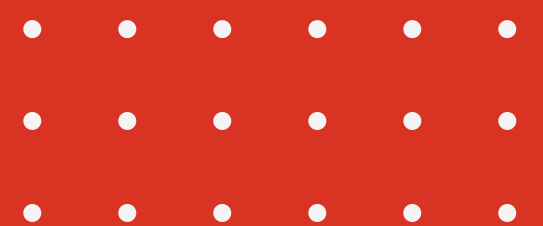
Discover the Conference Programme



In collaboration with



The conference *Environmental Challenges in Premodern Eurasian and Mediterranean Narratives*, a unique scholarly opportunity for interdisciplinary collaboration, aims to explore how the attitude towards environmental challenges, natural disasters, and calamities might be affected by contextual factors related to the socio-political scenario, ideological trajectories, or religious beliefs. The conference, covering the pre-modern era, focuses on the MENA region, the Mediterranean, and Europe. It gathers distinguished scholars from Europe, the MENA region, and the US to explore a wide range of thematic issues, from the challenges of mapping, reconstructing, and studying diverse sets of epistemic and ideological views used to interpret environmental phenomena, to the different conceptualizations of the relationship between humans and nature across time and place.



Conference Director: Ines Peta, Associate Professor of Arabic Language and Linguistics (University of Bologna); Chief Organizer: Chiara Fontana, Assistant Professor of Arabic Literature and Philology (University of Bologna); Scientific and Organizing Committee: Nahid Norozi, Assistant Professor of Persian Language and Literature (University of Bologna), Ilaria Cicola, Research Fellow in Arabic Linguistics (University of Bologna), Marco De Michelis, Assistant Professor of History of Islamic Thought (University of Bologna).

The conference is convened under the EU-granted project (NextGenerationEU - PRIN 2022): "Environmental Anomalies & Political Legitimacy in Global Eurasia, 12th-14th century." The project results from an inter-university collaboration between "L' Orientale" University of Naples, the Alma Mater Studiorum - University of Bologna, and Calabria University.

Discover the Conference Programme



## Tuesday, January 14, 2025 – Aula Giorgio Prodi

1.00 – 2.00 pm

### Welcome Lunch

2.00 – 2.30 pm

### Opening Remarks and Introduction

**Donatella Guida**

*L'Orientale University of Naples*

**Ines Peta**

*Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna*

2.30 – 4.00 pm

### Panel 1 - Ecology & Ethics: The Threshold Between Classical and Contemporary Islamic Discourses

Moderator: Ines Peta

**Emmanuel Pisani**

*Dominican Institute of Oriental Studies (Idéo)*

Asceticism (*zuhd*) as the Foundation of an Ecological Ethics According to al-Ghazālī's Theology of Creation

**Abdessamad Belhaj**

*University of Public Service – Budapest*

Drought in Classical Islamic Ethics: Reasons, Attitudes, and Approaches

**Haoues Seniguer**

*University of Louvain*

Eschatology and Apocalypse in Contemporary Islamic Discourse: Religious or Political Stances?

4.00 – 4.30 pm

### Coffee/Tea Break

4.30 – 6.00 pm

### Panel 2 - Literary Landscapes: Fictional and Symbolic Narratives of Environmental Challenges

Moderator: Chiara Fontana

**Nahyan Fancy**

*University of Exeter*

*Maqāmāt* on the Mid-14th Century Plague Outbreaks

**Nahid Norozi**

*Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna*

The Slaying of the Dragon and the Legitimation of Iranian Kingship in Persian epics (11th-14th centuries)

**Javier Albarran**

*University of Granada*

Natural Disasters, Landscape and Feelings: the Loss of *al-Andalus* and Beyond

8.00 pm

### Social dinner

## Wednesday, January 15, 2025 – Aula Giorgio Prodi

9.00 – 10.30 am

### Panel 3 – Reading Political Instability Overinterpretation of Natural Challenges During Historical Upheavals

Moderator: Ines Peta

#### **Marco Demichelis**

*Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna*

The river Nile and Who Holds Power Over Its Waters: a Study on the Islamic Sources (10th-14th centuries)

#### **Massimiliano Borroni**

*Ca' Foscari University of Venice*

Climate as Catalyst: The Role of a Cold Spell in the Mosul Uprising of 260/873

#### **Ilaria Cicola**

*Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna*

How to tame a disaster? Integrating Politics and Power Strategies into the Creation of a Disasters Database in Classical Arabic Sources.

10.30 – 11.00 am

### Coffee/Tea Break

11.00 – 12.30 pm

### Panel 4 – Omens of Climate Change as Occult Narratives of Power

Moderator: Chiara Fontana

#### **Ahmed Y. Almaazmi**

*Princeton University*

Cosmic Climate: How Arabian Astrologers Interpreted the Little Ice Age

#### **Andrea Piras**

*Alma Mater Studiorum – University of Bologna*

Environmental Ghosts and Omens in Ancient Iran: Between Care for Life and Apocalyptic Terrors

#### **Matt Melvin Koushki**

*University of South Carolina*

Islamic Neopagan Earth Magic: Notes Toward a Decolonial Typology

12.30 – 1.00 pm

### Closing Remarks

1.00 – 2.30 pm

### Lunch

2.30 – 5.00 pm

### Walking Tour – Bologna City Centre

## Speakers

### Javier Albarrán

Javier Albarrán is Tenure-track "Ramón y Cajal" researcher at the Department of Medieval History of the Universidad de Granada. He focuses his research on the medieval Islamic West, particularly on issues related to religious violence, the history of *jihād*, the figure and veneration of prophet Muḥammad. He also published extensively on the creation of sacred memory and spaces, and encounters between religions. His last edited book, *Violencia Interconfesional. Realidades y percepciones en la península ibérica*, has been published by the Universidad de Granada Press (2024).

### Abdessamad Belhaj

Abdessamad Belhaj is a senior researcher in Islamic Studies at the Institute of Religion and Society (UNPS-Budapest). He holds a PhD in Islamic Studies from Mohammed V University (Rabat, 2001) and a PhD in Political and Social Sciences from UCLouvain (Louvain-la-Neuve, 2008). He worked as a researcher and visiting lecturer at UCLouvain between 2012 and 2024. His latest book, published in 2023, is entitled *Authority in Contemporary Islam: Structures, Figures and Functions*.

### Massimiliano Borroni

Massimiliano Borroni is a researcher in the History of Islamic Countries at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, where he teaches in the Master's program in Environmental Humanities. His work initially focused on the Iranian calendar and its New Year during the Abbasid period, examining fiscal and cultural dimensions. He later shifted his research to traditional irrigation techniques and the conceptualization of water, focusing on the history of thought on the water cycle, the role of the sea in creation, and the physical behavior of water. He recently published a monograph titled *Connecting Water: Environmental Views in Premodern Arabic Writings*, which explores these themes. Massimiliano is also a senior team member of the ERC project "Science, Society, and Environment in the First Millennium."

### Ilaria Cicola

Ilaria Cicola is Adjunct professor at University of Bologna since 2017. Her studies focus on Arabic language and linguistics, with particular emphasis on sectorial jargons, corpus linguistics and computational linguistics. Her research interests span from medieval Arabic alchemical jargon to the lexicon on non-normative sexualities in classical and modern texts. She is currently studying the semiautomatic annotation of digitalized corpora. She also works for the Istituto per l'Oriente C.A. Nallino to create a digital index of names and toponyms in the historical review "Oriente Moderno." From February 2024 she is a Research Fellow at the Department of Languages and Literatures at University of Bologna within the PRIN project "Environmental Anomalies & Political Legitimacy in Global Eurasia, 12th-14th century".

### Marco De Michelis

Marco Demichelis is Assistant Professor in History of Islamic World and Islamic Thought at the Alma Mater University of Bologna. He has been Senior Research Fellow in Islamic Studies within the ICS at the University of Navarra after having worked as Marie Curie Fellow (IF 2016) in the same and post-Doctoral Research Fellow within the Department of Religious Studies at the Catholic University in Milan (2013-2016). Among his last monographs *Violence in Early Islam. Religious Narratives, the Arab Conquests and the Canonization of Jihād* (IB Tauris, 2021) and *Salvation and Hell in Classical Islamic Thought: Can Allah Save Us All?* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2018). His last edited Special Issue is *The Qur'an in History. The History of the Qur'an. From Canonization to Critique and Semantic Hermeneutics* (*mdpi.com*).

### Nahyan Fancy

Nahyan Fancy is the Al Qasimi Professor of Islamic Studies at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, UK. He examines the intersections of medicine, philosophy and religion in post-1200 Islamic societies. His first book, *Science and Religion in Mamluk Egypt: Ibn al-Nafīs, Pulmonary Transit and Bodily Resurrection* was published by Routledge (2013). He is currently working on a follow-up monograph, *In Ibn al-Nafīs's Shadow*, which examines eight medical commentaries produced on the *Canon of Medicine* and its abridgment between 1160 and 1520 CE. He has also published on and is currently working on understanding the the onset of the second plague pandemic and its impact on Middle Eastern societies from the 13th to the 14th centuries. He has received grants and fellowships from the National Endowment of Humanities, American Council of Learned Societies, British Academy and the Institute of Advanced Study, Princeton for his work.

## Speakers

### Ahmed AlMaazmi

Ahmed AlMaazmi is an Emirati historian who focuses on the intersection of occultism and imperialism in the Indian Ocean world. After completing his studies in cultural anthropology at Rutgers University as a Fulbright fellow, he pursued a PhD in Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University. His dissertation, *An Enchanted Sea: The Occult Sciences in the Early Modern Indian Ocean World, 1450-1750*, examines the connected histories of occult sciences and empire-building across Arabia, East Africa, and South Asia, told through intellectual projects that accompanied the rise of the Omani empire and its diasporic communities. His recent work includes the article, "I Authored This Book in the Absence of My Slave: Enslaved East Africans and the Production of Occult Knowledge across the Omani Empire," published in *Monsoon Journal*.

### Matthew Melvin-Koushki

Matthew Melvin-Koushki (PhD Yale) is Associate Professor of Islamic History at the University of South Carolina. He specializes in early modern Islamicate intellectual and imperial history, with a philological focus on the theory and practice of the occult sciences in Timurid-Safavid Iran and the broader Persianate world to the nineteenth century, and a disciplinary focus on history of science, history of philosophy and history of the book through the lens of the Islamic Weird. His several forthcoming books include *The Lettrist Treatises of Ibn Turka: Persian Pythagoreanism and Occult Imperialism in the Timurid Renaissance* and *The Occult Science of Empire in Early Modern Iran: Four Persian Lettrists and Their Manuals of Magic*. He is co-editor of the volumes *Islamicate Occultism: New Perspectives* (2017) and *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice* (2021). While being President of *Societas Magica*, he is also cofounder of the international working group IOSOTR.

### Nahid Norozi

Nahid Norozi is Associate Professor of Persian Language and Literature at the University of Bologna. She is editor in chief of 'Ferdows. Collana di Studi Iranici e Islamici' (WriteUp Books) and co-founder of the 'Quaderni di Meykhane', an e-journal of Iranian studies. Her research focuses on medieval Persian epics, verse romance and Arabic-Persian mystical treatises. She has published extensively on contemporary and medieval Persian authors such as Najm al-Din Kubrā, Sohrāb Sepehri, Khwāju Kermāni, al-Sahlaḡī and Gorgāni. Among her last monographs, *Esordi del romanzo persiano. Dal Vis e Rāmin di Gorgāni (XI sec.) al ciclo di Tristano* (2022); "La mia spada è la poesia". Versi di lotta e d'amore nella poetessa persiana Simin Behbahāni (2023); *Amori e demoni nel Libro di Sām. Storia di plagi riscritture e collages in un epos persiano cripto-mazdeo, dal XI al XVII sec.* (2024).

### Andrea Piras

Andrea Piras is Professor of Iranian Studies at University of Bologna and Visiting Professor of Iranian Philology at University Ca'Foscari of Venice. Member of the Institute for Advanced Study (Princeton), he is also Directeur d'études invité at École Pratique des Hautes Études (Section de Sciences historiques et philologiques). Being a specialist in writings, languages, texts, and cultural history of pre-Islamic Iran and Central Asia, his research interests include Avestan and Pahlavi texts, epigraphic corpora and pragmatics of communication (epistolography); Manichaean texts and the employ of images; contacts between Iran, Greece, Rome, Byzantium and Empires of the Steppes. His publications also refer to the religious history of the Iranian world (myth and ritual, eschatology, soteriology, asceticism, ecstasy, apocalypticism) and phenomena of interaction and shared textualities between Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. Among his books are *Hādōxt Nask II. Il racconto zoroastriano della sorte dell'anima* (Roma 2000), *Verba Lucis. Scrittura, immagine e libro nel manicheismo* (Udine-Milano 2012), and *Manicheismo* (Brescia 2015).

### Emmanuel Pisani

Emmanuel Pisani is an Islamologist, Director of the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies, and Associate Professor at the Vice-Rectorate for Research at the Institut Catholique de Paris. A doctor of philosophy and theology, his research focuses particularly on the thought of al-Ġazālī (d. 505/1111), the question of otherness in Islam, and a Muslim theology of religions. A member of the Scientific Council of PLURIEL and the Network of Centers for Christian-Muslim Relations (NCCMR), he has held the Anawati Chair, "Fighting Extremism through Interreligious Dialogue," since October 2023. He recently published *Hétérodoxes et non musulmans dans la pensée d'al-Ġazālī* (Vrin, 2022) and co-edited *Dynamiques de l'islamologie en Europe* (Cerf, 2023).

### Haoues Seniguer

Haoues Seniguer is a lecturer in political science at Sciences Po Lyon. He holds a "Habilitation à diriger des recherches" in political science from the Université Jules Verne de Picardie (Amiens). He is a researcher at the "Laboratoire Triangle", part of the Ecole normale supérieure de Lyon and the CNRS. He specializes in Islamism in the Arab world and the relationship between Islam and politics in France.