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A Concise Introduction to Greek Environmental History: Research Hubs, Threads, Themes and Projections into the Future

George L. Vlachos

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Special Section I / Section Spéciale I

CONFLICT AND THE ENVIRONMENT

A Concise Introduction to Greek Environmental History: Research Hubs, Threads, Themes and Projections into the Future

ABSTRACT: This article aims to provide a brief overview of the institutional emergence and development of environmental history in Greece, starting from its humble beginnings during the latter part of the 2000s to the rapid flourishing of the field in the late 2010s. After a brief discussion of the emergence of environmental history internationally, it highlights how environmental history evolved from an extracurricular research interest of a few scholars into a discipline that is being fostered by many institutions and has already appeared in several university curricula. Additionally, the article provides a coherent list of works by Greek scholars that have contributed to the development of environmental history in Greece. The last part of the article acts as a prologue to this special section, summarising the main idea behind each article and the elements that make them fit together, underlining the reason why it focuses on the concept of conflict and its environmental repercussions.

Determining the point when environmental history moved from the margins of historical scholarship to become a legitimate historical discipline with its own goals, analytical tools and intricacies can be exceptionally challenging. The task becomes even more difficult because of the asymmetry with which environmental history entered historical discourse or university curricula across the globe. Like social history earlier, environmental history grew gradually in popularity and certain academic circumstances. For social history, it was the need to build a narrative from below, free and antagonistic to the great-men-on-horses histories that had been written until then. Environmental history is also grounded in reality. More specifically, it was born in response to the intensifying environmental degradation the world has been facing since shortly after World War II, an era commonly labelled by environmental historians as the Anthropocene.¹

This article, however, will not discuss the course that has shaped environmental history and its academic milestones on an international level.

¹ While the term Anthropocene – defined as the era when the globe became shaped by human activity – is commonly accepted among environmental humanists, there have

Several authors have already engaged in the genealogy of environmental history, multiple times.² While it will not abstain from including a coherent list of the works of Greek scholars that made environmental history in Greece the discipline that it is today, as a first objective this article will give a brief synopsis of the institutional synergies that fostered it; briefly on an international level, starting from the humble beginnings and then tracing the emerging hubs of research and innovation in Greece. There are parallels to be drawn here. On an international level, these associations functioned as dissemination nodes comprised of only a few scholars each time that, over the years, became sturdier, passing on the notion of why environmental history can be relevant, even necessary. As the discipline gained momentum in Greece, similar developments can be observed. What began as an extracurricular research interest of only a handful of historians and merely a footnote in a few publications gradually became a discipline accepted by many. From there, it migrated to the curricula of universities, and today it is on the verge of being regarded as a separate, respected discipline, capable of discussing old and new subjects in an insightful light. Finally, the last part of this article acts as a prologue to this special edition. Apart from presenting the main idea behind each article and the elements that make them fit together in a special thematic edition, it also summarises the reason why it focuses on such an unpleasant concept, that of conflict, and its environmental repercussions, hinting at a precarious ecological future.

The Emergence of International Institutions

Environmental history has been recognised as a legitimate separate discipline since its emergence in the 1970s. At the time, well-known academics adopted

been a number of criticisms from several scholars who propose a shift from the collective responsibility that the term Anthropocene implies to a more targeted one. Thus, a number of different -cenes have been invented, each highlighting a different agent in the process of altering the global ecosystem. Most notable of these new approaches is the term Capitalocene, introduced by scholar and activist Jason W. Moore in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland: PM Press, 2016). For more -cenes, see Donna Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin,” *Environmental Humanities* 6, no. 1 (2015): 159–65; Michael Warren Murphy and Caitlin Schroering, “Refiguring the Plantationocene,” *Journal of World-Systems Research* 26, no. 2 (2020): 400–15; and Marco Armiero, *Wasteocene: Stories from the Global Dump* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

² Two of the more recent and complete examples are J. Donald Hughes, *What is Environmental History?* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 2016); Andrew C. Isenberg, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

the term to describe a particular sector of rural history that did not abide by the same research directives as economic, agricultural or social history as it was not centred on the economy, agriculture or rural societies.³ While it was possible to include them, those categories of analysis were only supplementary to the main argument. As self-explanatory as it may sound, environmental history focuses on the environment. A common misconception must be tackled here. The environment, as described most often in the literature of environmental history, is not merely the sum of a number of lifeless or mindless parts that merely exist until the day a historian decides to put their timeline into words. It is far more than that. In environmental history, the historian elevates the environment to a decisive agent that interacts with mankind, either in a conceptual or, more frequently, material way, seeking answers that cannot be found in ordinary archives or can be found in ordinary archives but cannot be interpreted in the same way.⁴ As such, environmental historians do not attempt to tell the history of a secluded environment but rather document the interplay of the environment with humanity, an endeavour that undoubtedly ends up telling more about humankind and less about the environment.

The emergence of environmental history predates the popularisation of the term; an early precursor to that course came much earlier, in the form of the Forest History Society (FHS), founded in 1946 in the USA amid the emergence of the American conservation movement. The FHS was the first such organisation that regarded ecosystems as subjects worth researching, even though it was dedicated to forests and foresters, only a tiny fragment of what environmental history would address in the future.⁵ A few decades later, the American Society for Environmental History (ASEH) offered a much more coherent theoretical framework and opened paths towards new research possibilities for historians to further develop environmental history. Founded in 1977, the ASEH became

³ William Cronon, "The Uses of Environmental History," *Environmental History Review* 17, no. 3 (1993): 1–22; Donald Worster and Alfred W. Crosby, eds., *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); William Ashworth, *The Late, Great Lakes: An Environmental History* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987); John Sheail, "Green History: The Evolving Agenda," *Rural History* 4, no. 2 (1993): 209–23.

⁴ An excellent example of the multiplicity present in primary sources about environmental history can be found in Erika Weiberg et al., "The Socio-environmental History of the Peloponnese during the Holocene: Towards an Integrated Understanding of the Past," *Quaternary Science Reviews* 136 (2016): 40–65.

⁵ "History," Forest History Society, <https://foresthistor.org/about/history/>.

the central research hub that drew a considerable number of scholars who had acquired their environmental consciousness within the rising ecological movements and the energy crisis of the 1970s.⁶ As stated on its website, the ASEH's mission is to advance "understanding of human interactions with the natural world by promoting historical research and teaching, and fostering dialogue about human use from a earth among humanists, social and environmental scientists, and the public".⁷

To that end, the ASEH organises an annual conference and has published – along with the FHS – one of the leading journals in the field, *Environmental History*, since 1976, which accepts articles from a vast international spectrum rather than just an American one.⁸

While these facts suggest that environmental history had been a discipline that flourished on American soil, this is not entirely true. Environmental history had been appearing in the works of European scholarship since the 1960s, most notably negotiated as a research theme of the Annales school of social history, without explicitly being stated as such.⁹ The official inauguration of the discipline in Europe came later, in 1999, with the foundation of European Society for Environmental History (ESEH), a counterpart of the ASEH. Structured on the same foundations as the ASEH, the ESEH's mission could be described as promoting the discipline across Europe's lecture halls and helping create a meeting hub for fellow environmental historians that could pursue common goals and even work toward the implementation of educational policies.¹⁰ More

⁶ Caleb Wellum, "The Ambivalent Aesthetics of Oil: Project Documerica and the Energy Crisis in 1970s America," *Environmental History* 22, no. 4 (2017): 723–32; Meg Jacobs, *Panic at the Pump: The Energy Crisis and the Transformation of American Politics in the 1970s* (New York: Macmillan, 2016).

⁷ "Our Mission," American Society for Environmental History, <https://aseh.org/mission>.

⁸ "Environmental History," University of Chicago Press Journals, <https://academic.oup.com/envhis>.

⁹ Although it would be easy to find authors that have adopted an environmental history perspective without doing so explicitly, there are two scholars in particulars whose books should be known to any environmental history enthusiasts: Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The Peasants of Languedoc* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), first published 1966; Le Roy Ladurie, *Histoire du climat depuis l'an mil* (Paris: Flammarion, 1967); Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 2 vols., trans. Siân Reynolds (1949; New York: Harper, 1973); Braudel, *L'identité de la France*, vol. 1, *Espace et histoire* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009); Braudel, *L'identité de la France*, vol. 2, *Les hommes et les choses* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009).

¹⁰ "About Us: Mission," European Society for Environmental History, <http://eseh.org/about-us/mission/>.

than that, and similarly to the ASEH, the ESEH holds a biennial environmental history conference, hosted by a different European city each time, and publishes the journal *Environment and History*.¹¹

The establishment of the international organisational foundation soon gave rise to many associations specialising in the environmental history of specific areas, regions and countries. Before long, and as the field thrived and scholarly works multiplied, Canada,¹² Australia and New Zealand,¹³ East Asia,¹⁴ Latin America and the Caribbean,¹⁵ Austria,¹⁶ Turkey¹⁷ and Estonia,¹⁸ to mention just a few, founded their environmental history cells.¹⁹ While this undoubtedly translates as a success for the discipline, such polyphony pointed to the need for a global environmental history umbrella confederation that could loosely coordinate the numerous national and supranational organisations and steer the discipline towards applicable and appropriate themes. Thus, the International Consortium of Environmental History Organisations (ICEHO) was founded in the 2000s in order “to provide a structured framework within which organisations and institutions worldwide interested in environmental history can meet and work in an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary manner”.²⁰ The major event organised by ICEHO is the World Congress of Environmental History, held every five years.²¹

Domestic Hubs and Research Threads

Environmental history did not land in Greece on completely uncultivated soil. Even though this article will offer a panorama of the institutional rise of the

¹¹ “Environmental History,” White Horse Press, <https://www.whpress.co.uk/EH.html>.

¹² “Niche: Network in Canadian History & Environment,” <http://niche-canada.org/>.

¹³ Australian and New Zealand Environmental History Network, <https://www.environmentalhistory-au-nz.org>.

¹⁴ Association for Environmental History, <http://www.aeah.org>.

¹⁵ Sociedad Latinoamericana de Historia Ambiental,” <http://solcha.org>.

¹⁶ “Center for Environmental History,” University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU), Vienna, <https://boku.ac.at/en/zentrum-fuer-umweltgeschichte>.

¹⁷ Turkish Environmental History Network, <http://www.envhistturkey.com>.

¹⁸ “Centre for Environmental History,” Tallinn University, <https://www.tlu.ee/en/ht/researchinstitute-history-archaeology-and-art-history/centre-environmental-history>.

¹⁹ International Consortium for Environmental History Organizations, <https://www.iceho.org/membership> (accessed 18 January 2023).

²⁰ “Mission,” International Consortium for Environmental History Organizations, <https://www.iceho.org/mission>.

²¹ “Past World Conferences,” International Consortium for Environmental History Organizations, <https://www.iceho.org/past-wceh-conferences>.

discipline, there is one honourable mention that young environmental historians should be acquainted with. Panos Grispos deserves a place in this genealogy of Greek environmental history because he bore a fundamental element found in present-day environmental historical narratives: a genuine devotion to documenting the history of Greek ecosystems. Grispos was a forester and his story reads like that of the FHS but without the institutional gown. Stemming from his professional capacity, he set off to write the history of Greek forests, perhaps as a crucial step towards managing woodlands more effectively. Remarkably his publications start in the 1960s, with short treatises on certain forests around Greece.²² His perspective is not exclusively historical, as in his narratives he includes ethnographic and folklore elements. Undoubtedly, his most systematic work is the 1973 monograph *Δασική ιστορία της νεωτέρας Ελλάδος*, which constitutes a reference point for any environmental history-related venture.²³ But it was only decades later that present-day scholars would pick up on his legacy. In fact, three-and-a-half decades later.

In 2009, Vaso Seirinidou, at the time lecturer at the National Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA), opened an article intended to familiarise Greek historical readership and scholars with the notion of environmental history as follows:

Historians do not feel at ease in nature. As intellectual residents of humanism, of the social and the cultural, these stereotypical “bookworms” of archives and libraries do not feel at home in their “universal home”. In the realm where the notions of society, culture, nation, class and gender dominate the discourse, nature belongs to the margins, even as a rhetorical device. After all, [according to them] only natural scientists are responsible for that.²⁴

These lines were meant to criticise Greek historians’ reluctance and even indifference to become engaged with a field of historical research that had already been established internationally. Indeed, up until Seirinidou’s involvement with the discipline, environmental history had been completely ignored. The article cited above, titled “Historians at nature: An introduction to environmental history”, published in an acclaimed journal addressed to a Greek readership,

²² Panos Grispos. Το σφακιανό κυπαρισσόδασος (Athens: s.n., 1968); Grispos, *Η δασική φυσιολογία των κυκλάδων νήσων* (Athens: Κυπριαίου, 1968); Grispos, “Δασική λαογραφία,” *Ηπειρωτική Εστία*, no. 16–21 (1967–1972).

²³ Panos Grispos, *Δασική ιστορία της νεωτέρας Ελλάδος: Από του ΙΕ΄ αιώνας μέχρι του 1971* (Athens: Forestry Agency, 1973).

²⁴ Vaso Seirinidou, “Οι ιστορικοί στη φύση: Μια εισαγωγή στην περιβαλλοντική ιστορία,” *Τα Ιστορικά* 26, no. 51 (2009): 275–97.

should probably be regarded as a milestone in Greece, being the first that acknowledged the term “environmental history”. In it, Seirinidou provided the unaware readers with all the necessary information and state-of-the-art reports that researchers would need at the time to begin their inquiries in the field on equal grounds as his colleagues in academic environments where environmental history had already been endorsed its potential. Seirinidou went through all the cornerstones of the discipline, covering many different shades and themes, starting from the early conservationist discourse of John Muir and Aldo Leopold to works of environmental history that defined the field, like those of David Worster and William Cronon, to the eco-feminist perspective that Carolyn Merchant introduced.

It was a slow start and, at the time, the weight of the further development of environmental history was undertaken by Seirinidou alone. The major Greek economic crisis that would unfold during the next few years would cripple any confidence in advancing an approach to history that was still considered experimental. In this light, Seirinidou’s efforts were bold as she set up a postgraduate seminar at the Department History and Archaeology of the NKUA. Titled “Common, public and private: Nature and property in Greece, 15th–19th centuries”, it explored the conceptual formation of property in several early modern and modern sociocultural frameworks vis-à-vis their detrimental interplay with the natural environment.²⁵ The same effort continued with the postgraduate course “Mediterranean mountains: Uses and perceptions of changing space (16th–19th centuries)” (a title that perhaps echoed Marco Armiero’s well-known book),²⁶ again at NKUA in 2016 and the seminar course “Environmental knowledge and its social condition” in 2018 at the Democritus University of Thrace.²⁷ Seirinidou’s courses were enhanced by journal publications from 2014 to 2017,²⁸ combined with being

²⁵ “Φύση και ιδιοκτησία στον ελληνικό χώρο, 15ος–19ος αιώνας (Κωδ.: 70/4/11107),” Department of History and Archaeology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, <http://www.arch.uoa.gr/ereyna/ereynhtika-programmata/trexonta/fysh-kai-idiokthsia-ston-ellhniko-xoro-15os-19os-aionas.html>.

²⁶ Marco Armiero, *A Rugged Nation: Mountains and the Making of Modern Italy: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Cambridge: White Horse, 2011).

²⁷ “Η περιβαλλοντική γνώση και η κοινωνική της συνθήκη,” Democritus University of Thrace, http://pmsees.psed.duth.gr/102_lesson.html.

²⁸ Vaso Seirinidou, “Environmental Narratives and Sociopolitical Agendas in Greece in the 18th and 19th Centuries,” in *Environmentalism in Central and Southeastern Europe: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Hrvoje Petrić and Žebec Šilj Ivana (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017), 91–101; Seirinidou, “Notes from the Edges: Environmental History Writing in a Mediterranean ‘Periphery,’” *Environmental History in the Making*, vol. 1, *Explaining* (Cham: Springer, 2017),

elected the ESEH's first regional representative for Greece, a position she held until 2019.

Luckily, Seirinidou, in her effort to disseminate the meaning of environmental history, found two sturdy institutional supporters, the cooperation of which created the first significant hub that fostered the discipline in Greece. The first was the Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation (PIOP), an unlikely ally as it did not have ties to traditional Greek academia. Nevertheless, Eleni Beneki, the head of the historical archive of the foundation, took the initiative to establish in 2015 what would become a reference point for every environmental history enthusiast and scholar in Greece: two-day History of the Environment Workshop. Since then, the workshop has been dedicated to exploring fundamental themes that follow the international developments in the field. Organised roughly every autumn or winter, the workshop gets much scholarly attention. It draws together environmental historians and humanists from all career stages and academic tracks, eager to discuss and negotiate the essence of Greek environmental history. The workshop's scope is broad and directed towards a transdisciplinary perspective. While historians make up a large proportion of the participants and the audience, they do not monopolise the discourse. In addition, the PIOP has also published a considerable number of works that address environmental subjects. An example of such publishing activity is the collective volume titled *Ελιά και λάδι στην ανατολική Μεσόγειο*, which expands this classic agricultural subject with environmental perspectives, or the monograph of Christos Chatziliias *Οι πετράδες της Λέσβου* that explores the interaction of a unique material – stone – with the community that utilised it both as resource and commodity.²⁹

The second institutional pillar that supported environmental history in its humble beginnings has been the Institute of Historical Research of the National Hellenic Research Foundation (IHR/NHRF), one of the oldest institutions in Greece dedicated to historical research. Environmental topics have featured in the works of several IHR/NHRF researchers since the very early days of the field. Spearheading this effort, Maria Leontsini inaugurated her engagement with environmental history in 2008 with a paper that introduced a human-animal

207–21; Seirinidou, “Δάση στον ελληνικό χώρο (15ος–18ος αι.): Αναψηλαφώντας μια ιστορία καταστροφής,” *Μεσαιωνικά και Νέα Ελληνικά* 11 (2014): 69–87.

²⁹ Pias Anagnostakis and Evangelia Balta, eds., *Ελιά και λάδι στην ανατολική Μεσόγειο: Από την αρχαιότητα στην προβιομηχανική εποχή* (Athens: Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation, 2020); Christos N. Chatziliias, *Οι πετράδες της Λέσβου: Κοινωνικά δίκτυα, τεχνικές και τοπική ιστορία (1850–1950)* (Athens: Piraeus Bank Group Cultural Foundation, 2020).

perspective, titled “Οικόσιτα, ωδικά και εξωτικά πτηνά: Αισθητική πρόσληψη και χρηστικές όψεις (7ος–11ος αι.)”.³⁰ Since then, Leontsini has offered the Greek environmental readership insightful works on several subjects that few scholars are capable of discussing, such as the environmental history of the Middle Ages, and especially of the Eastern Roman Empire, zooming in on matters that range from the dietary choices of the Mediterranean rural space to the history of forest management and clearings during the Byzantine era.³¹

In a country where environmental history was still barely known, however, publications did not convey the importance of the young discipline. To nurture this, the IHR/NHRF took up initiatives on multiple occasions to disseminate environmental history through activities on its premises. From 2010 to 2013, the institute organised the Historical Workshops (Φροντιστήριο Ιστορικών Επιστημών) programme, a series of public seminars and workshops, throughout which Leontsini hosted four complete courses centred on the interaction between state, society and environment from the 5th to the 16th centuries, exploring topics such as maritime environmental history and the environmental history of resources. A considerable number of students attended all four courses.

In an effort to introduce environmental topics to a broader audience, Leontsini also participated in the well-known annual conference The Seminars of Ermoupoli in 2013, presenting her paper “Το νερό και ο πολιτισμός της καθημερινότητας στις βυζαντινές πόλεις” as part of a research panel titled “Before Ecology: Environmental Management in Pre-industrial Societies”, in which Leontsini and the rest of the panel participants traced the transformative anthropocenic mentality back to the early modern era.³² Finally, Leontsini has been the constant delegate of the IHR/NHRF in the organisation and scientific committee for many environmentally driven events, including the annual

³⁰ Maria Leontsini, *Οικόσιτα, ωδικά και εξωτικά πτηνά: Αισθητική πρόσληψη και χρηστικές όψεις (7ος–11ος αι.)* (Athens: Institute of Byzantine Research–National Hellenic Research Foundation, 2011).

³¹ Gerasimos Merianos and Maria Leontsini, “From Culinary to Alchemical Recipes: Various Uses of Milk and Cheese in Byzantium,” in *Latte e Latticini: Aspetti della produzione e del consumo nelle società mediterranee dell’Antichità e del Medioevo*, ed. Ilias Anagnostakis and Antonella Pellettieri (Lagonegro: Grafica Zaccara, 2016), 205–22; Maria Leontsini, “Butter and Lard instead of Olive Oil? Fatty Byzantine Meals,” in *Identità euromediterranea e paesaggi culturali del vino e dell’olio*, ed. Antonella Pellettieri (Foggia: Centro Grafico, 2014), 217–29; Maria Leontsini, “Wonders of Nature and Heroism in the Narratives of Herakleios’ Campaigns Against Persia,” in *Narratives Across Space and Time: Transmissions and Adaptations*, ed. Aikaterini Polymerou-Kamilaki (Athens: Academy of Athens, 2014), 2:337–56.

³² “Τα Σεμινάρια της Ερμούπολης 2013,” Ermoupoli, 5–14 July 2013, programme, https://infostrag.gr/syros/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/SEM_ERM_-20132.pdf.

workshop of the PIOP. At the same time, from 2017 to 2021, she oversaw the project “Domesticated and wild fauna in the Greek world (9th–15th centuries): Written accounts and archaeological data”, part of the overarching Anavathmis project that was run by the IHR/NHRF.

The IHR/NHRF did not rely only on Leontsini, however. Several more of the institute’s researchers engaged in topics that reflected the rising interest in the field. Most notably, Angeliki Panopoulou, a close acquaintance of Leontsini’s in many of her ventures and frequently a member of the organising and scientific committee of PIOP workshops, exhibited notable publication activity in the field, focusing on the early modern period.³³ Dimitris Dimitropoulos, on the other hand, focused on modern history. He had edited an essential collective volume on fishing in Greece³⁴ while, more recently, he and his team of early-career scholars undertook a project that investigated the abandoned settlements in the Peloponnese since the early nineteenth century, taking into consideration environmental factors, among others.³⁵

Athens hosts yet another significant hub that has taken environmental history forward in the country: the History and Philosophy of Science Department of the NKUA. Unlike the IHR/NHRF, the starting point of the department is the history of technology above anything else, which has a long-standing tradition.³⁶ The department’s specialisation – unique across research institutions in Greece – is exploring technological breakthroughs from a historical standpoint concerning their everyday impact and interaction with the public. Aristotle Tympas, arguably the foremost exponent of this effort, has maintained a circle of young scholars that demonstrates remarkable publishing activity. At the core of the department’s ventures lie topics regarding the history of infrastructure, examined critically and interpreted as a driving force that alters economy and society to an equal

³³ Angeliki Panopoulou, “Ένα παράδειγμα εκμετάλλευσης των θαλάσσιων πόρων στη βενετοκρατία: οι αλυκές της Καμενίτσας (17ος–18ος αι.),” in *Φραγκοκρατία – Βενετοκρατία – Α΄ Τουρκοκρατία*, ed. Eleni Saranti (Patras: Municipality of Dimos, 2012), 269–77.

³⁴ Dimitris Dimitropoulos and Evdokia Olympitou, eds., *Ψαρεύοντας στις ελληνικές θάλασσες: Από τις μαρτυρίες του παρελθόντος στη σύγχρονη πραγματικότητα* (Athens: Institute for Neohellenic Research of the National Hellenic Research Foundation, 2010).

³⁵ The research team has not produced publications on the matter, as the project is ongoing. For more, see <https://www.settlements-peloponnese1821.eu>.

³⁶ Aristotle Tympas, “Methods in the History of Technology,” in *Encyclopedia of 20th-Century Technology*, ed. Colin A. Hempstead (New York: Routledge, 2005), 485–89; Aristotle Tympas, “Ιστορία και ιστοριογραφία της τεχνολογίας: Μια εισαγωγή,” in *Ιστορίες της τεχνολογίας του εικοστού αιώνα: Ηλεκτρικά αυτοκίνητα, ξύλινα αεροπλάνα, γαλλικοί αντιδραστήρες, γυναικείες υπολογιστές*, ed. Aristotle Tympas and Eirini Mergoupi-Savaidou (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 2013), 1–40.

degree.³⁷ Inherent in this analysis is also the perspective that regards experts as ideological players in this process and not simply as passive employees of the state or private contractors, thus attributing them with agency.³⁸ Topics concerning energy matters have also been on the long list of the department's research interests, with issues of co-dependency and sustainability being the most prevalent.³⁹ Additionally, Tympas has been very active in the realm of international research projects. Through him, the department has participated in a considerable number of projects, out of which "HoNESt (History of Nuclear Energy and Society)"⁴⁰ and "EUROCRIT-Europe Goes Critical. The Emergence and Governance of Critical: The European Infrastructures"⁴¹ stand out thanks to the substantial contributions they have made both to the international literature on the matters they explored as well as the dissemination efforts to the public. Other members of the department have also noted similar successes. One such case is Stathis Arapostathis, an associate professor in the department, who has been the principal investigator of the "Configuring Environment and Food: Critical Techno-Scientific Networks and the Agri-food Sector in Greece, 1950-2017 (CON-EF)" project, which evaluates the complex web of interdependencies

³⁷ Irene Anastasiadou and Aristotle Tympas, "Iron Silk Roads: Comparing Interwar and Post-war Transnational Asian Railway Projects," *Linking Networks: The Formation of Common Standards and Visions for Infrastructure Development*, ed. Hans-Liudger Dienel and Martin Schiefelbusch (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 169–86; Aristotle Tympas, Stathis Arapostathis, Katerina Vlantonis and Yiannis Garyfallos, "Border-crossing Electrons: Critical Energy Flows to and from Greece," in *The Making of Europe's Critical Infrastructure: Common Connections and Shared Vulnerabilities*, ed. Per Högselius, Anique Hommels, Arne Kaijser and Erik Vleuten (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 157–83.

³⁸ Aristotle Tympas, Spyros Tzokas and Giannis Garyfallos, "Το μεγαλύτερον υδραγωγείον της Ευρώπης: αντιπαραθετικοί υπολογισμοί μηχανικών για την Αθήνα και την ύδρευση της," in *Η ελληνική πόλη σε ιστορική προοπτική*, ed. Lydia Drakaki (Athens: Dionikos, 2005), 209–19.

³⁹ Stathis Arapostathis, Aspasia Kandaraki, Yannis Garyfallos and Aristotle Tympas, "'Tobacco for Atoms': Nuclear Politics, Ambivalences and Resistances about a Reactor that was Never Built," *History of Technology* 33 (2017): 205–27; Tympas et al., "Border-crossing Electrons"; Constantinos Morfakis, Katerina Vlantonis, Dimitris Katsaros and Aristotle Tympas, "Between the Regenerative and the Renewable: Patterns in the Media Beautification of Technology and Science, from Stem Cells to Wind Farms," in *Quality, Honesty and Beauty in Science and Technology Communication PCST 2012: Book of Papers*, Massimiano Bucchi and Brian Trench (Vicenza: Observa Science in Society, 2012), 186–92.

⁴⁰ History of Nuclear Energy and Society (HONES), <http://www.honest2020.eu>.

⁴¹ Europe Goes Critical. The Emergence and Governance of Critical Transnational European Infrastructures (EUROCRIT), Tensions of Europe, <https://www.tensionsofeurope.eu/projects-and-publications/research/eurocrit>.

in the Greek food chain from a historical point of view (among others).⁴² Similarly, other long-standing affiliates of the department, like Christos Karampatsos, have been funded to explore the interwar efforts of the Greek state to find and exploit petroleum deposits.⁴³

These milestones confirmed that environmental history was a worthy new research field in Greek academia. Soon enough, environmental history rippled out from Athens to meet research demands expressed from different regional universities all over Greece. At the University of Crete (UoC) and its renowned History and Archaeology Department, Elias Kolovos and his colleagues set up a loose research node that carried out original research on environmental history. The UoC hub has an impressive list of publications spread across three separate directions. The first moves on the border between rural and environmental history, researching the transformative forces that moulded the Greek rural ecosystem, emphasising its grassroots perspective.⁴⁴ The second research thread assumes a hard-science approach. Kolovos and the UoC have been part of a project undertaken by the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History in Vienna, which investigates how palynological research (the research of pollen indicators found in sediment cores)⁴⁵ could contribute to the field of environmental history, a task at which Georgios Liakopoulos, a Greek environmental historian affiliated with the Max Planck Institute, excels.⁴⁶ Finally, the diversity of environmental themes is completed with a more traditional

⁴² See <https://conef.gr>.

⁴³ Christos Karampatsos, “Το γενικότερο συμφέρον του κράτους: η ‘συνέχεια των ελληνικών χωρών’ και οι Έλληνες γεωλόγοι, 1908–1925,” *Τα Ιστορικά* 73 (2021): 125–54.

⁴⁴ The bulk of Kolovos’ publication record in environmental history can be found in Elias Kolovos, *Across the Aegean: Islands, Monasteries and Rural Societies in the Ottoman Greek Lands* (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2018). For even more, however, see Kolovos, *Όπου ην κήπος: Η μεσογειακή νησιωτική οικονομία της Άνδρου σύμφωνα με το οθωμανικό κτηματολόγιο του 1670* (Heraklion: Crete University Press, 2017); Kolovos, “The Mediterranean Economies as ‘Garden Economies’,” *Meltem: İzmir Akdeniz Akademisi Dergisi* 5 (2019): 90–92; Elias Kolovos, Georgios Vidras and Christos Kyriakopoulos, “The Rural Economy of Ottoman Crete (1650–1670): A Spatial Approach,” *Études balkaniques* 55, no. 4 (2019): 801–30.

⁴⁵ Heidemarie Halbritter, Silvia Ulrich, Friðgeir Grímsson, Martina Weber, Reinhard Zetter, Michael Hesse, Ralf Buchner, Matthias Svojtka and Andrea Frosch-Radivo, “Palynology: History and Systematic Aspects,” in *Illustrated Pollen Terminology*, ed. Heidemarie Halbritter et al. (Cham: Springer, 2018), 3–21.

⁴⁶ Elias Kolovos and Phokion Kotzageorgis, “Searching for the ‘Little Ice Age’ effects in the Ottoman Greek Lands: The Cases of Salonica and Crete,” in *Seeds of Power: Explorations in Ottoman Environmental History*, ed. Onur Inal and Yavuz Köse (Winwick: White Horse Press, 2019), 17–34.

environmental perspective, which focuses on mines and extractivism in the late Ottoman era, specialising in Halkidiki in Macedonia. What made this particular research strand more pertinent was that it tapped into the events that shook the area in the 2010s, when the Halkidiki mines were leased to a Canadian company that sought to extract minerals from the subsoil using environmentally controversial methods.⁴⁷

Treading along the same lines, but for the more recent past and from a labour history perspective, Leda Papastefanaki, of the University of Ioannina (UoI), has set out to explore the extractivist history of several Aegean islands. While labour history and environmental history seem an unlikely pair, Papastefanaki succeeds in combining the two fields in a harmonious whole, where the exploitation of the natural environment also echoes that of the labourers by their employers. Her first major publication on the subject came in 2017 with the book *Η φλέβα της γης*, which explored the extractivist enterprises that flourished all over Greece after the foundation of the Greek state, engaging with unique historical fields ranging from gender to environmental history.⁴⁸ Her publishing endeavours continued in 2018 and discussed the commodification of Theran earth on the island of Santorini, an enterprise that featured and affected many agents,⁴⁹ while she is currently working on the lime kilns of the island of Astypalea. Moreover, commendable is the cooperation between the UoI and the Forestry Service of Ioannina, personified in Kalliopi Stara and Rigas Tsiakiris, that led to an intriguing list of publications exploring the custom of “sacred forests” in Greece’s modern history.⁵⁰

The centrifugal forces meant that environmental history would find fertile ground in even more regional Greek universities. Although more erratically,

⁴⁷ Elias Kolovos, “Mines and the Environment in Halkidiki: A Story from the Ottoman Past,” *Environmental History* 42 (2003): 5–43; Elias Kolovos and Phokion Kotzageorgis, “Halkidiki in the Early Modern Period: Towards an Environmental History,” in *Mines, Olives and Monasteries: Aspects of Halkidiki’s Environmental History*, ed. Basil C. Gounaris (Thessaloniki: Epikentro; Pharos, 2015), 327–54.

⁴⁸ Leda Papastefanaki, *Η φλέβα της γης: Τα μεταλλεία της Ελλάδας, 19ος–20ός αιώνας* (Athens: Vivliorama, 2017).

⁴⁹ Leda Papastefanaki, “From Santorini to Trieste and Suez: Scientific Knowledge, Discovery and Use of Theran Earth in the Mediterranean (From the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century),” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 33, no. 1 (2018): 67–88.

⁵⁰ Kalliopi Stara, Rigas Tsiakiris and Jennifer L.G. Wong, “The Trees of the Sacred Natural Sites of Zagori, NW Greece,” *Landscape Research* 40, no. 7 (2015): 884–904; Kalliopi Stara, Rigas Tsiakiris and Jennifer L.G. Wong, “Valuing Trees in a Changing Cultural Landscape: A Case Study from Northwestern Greece,” *Human Ecology* 43, no. 1 (2015): 153–67; Valentino Marini Govigli, Anthoula Efthymiou and Kalliopi Stara, “From Religion to Conservation:

several scholars in various positions brought the environmental perspective to more of their works and curricula. The most prominent examples come from the University of the Aegean (UoA), where Iosif Botetzagias and Giorgos Kostopoulos have established a lively research node that promoted the discipline, centred around the undergraduate course in environmental history, supplemented by a rich list of publications.⁵¹ Similarly, Dimitra Mylona, an environmental zooarchaeologist, has shown remarkable activity in Crete as a member of the Institute for Aegean Prehistory Study Center for East Crete (INSTPAP SCEC). Mylona specialises in the interaction of the ancient Greek world with the sea and especially as a food source. This research field has produced several important and original publications, most important of which is her book *Fish-Eating in Greece*, which has effectively highlighted an aspect of the social, environmental and economic life of classical Greece that had remained unexplored to a large extent.⁵²

The future of environmental history in Greece and of the scholars that serve the discipline seems promising. The work that has been done is undoubtedly an indicator that a solid foundation has already been built. Greek historians are beginning to see why history can be written or even rewritten through environmental lenses, from antiquity to the Middle Ages, to early, high and late modernity. The challenge we will face from now on will be to prevent those disparate hubs – both geographically and in terms of the particular topics they examine – from growing apart into scholarly seclusion. As it happened with the rest of the European examples presented, the establishment of an association for the environmental history of Greece is in order. Hopefully, such an organisation will act as a cohesive element, facilitating communication among the hubs and institutions that comprise the country's colourful mosaic of environmental history. Additionally, it will be responsible for the promotion, orientation and

Unfolding 300 Years of Collective Action in a Greek Sacred Forest,” *Forest Policy and Economics* 131 (2021): 102575.

⁵¹ Iosif Botetzagias, *Η ανθρώπινη ιστορία των σκύλων* (Athens: Alexandria, 2017); Botetzagias, “Η υπόλοιπη φύση: μια σύντομη αναδρομή στις σχέσεις Ανθρώπου και φυσικού περιβάλλοντος,” in *Πολιτική οικολογία: Οκτώ συμβολές στην ελληνική*, ed. Giorgos Velegrakis, Haris Konstantatos and Costis Hadjimichalis (Athens: Nissos, 2017); Botetzagias, *Η ιδέα της φύσης: Απόψεις για το περιβάλλον από την αρχαιότητα μέχρι τις μέρες μας* (Athens: Kritiki, 2010); Iosif Botetzagias and Giorgos Kostopoulos, “For the Thorough Conservation of the Forests’: A History of Forest Management and Protection in ‘Old Greece’, 1830–1880,” *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 39, no. 1 (2021): 93–116; Giorgos Kostopoulos, “The War Against the Goats in Interwar Greece,” *Arcadia*, no. 8 (Spring 2020), <https://doi.org/10.5282/rcc/9011>.

⁵² Dimitra Mylona, *Fish-Eating in Greece from the Fifth Century B.C. to the Seventh Century A.D.: A Story of Impoverished Fishermen or Luxurious Fish Banquets?* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2008).

coordination of the discipline. This was precisely the reasoning that led to the foundation of the Hellenic Society for Environmental History, which will join the rest of environmental history associations in the joint effort to advance the discipline.

Conflict and the Environment

In the not so distant 2014, John R. McNeill and Peter Engelke, both seasoned environmental humanists, published a book that established a different perspective in the way we viewed, thought and taught environmental history. In *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945*,⁵³ the authors attempted to introduce a new turning point in global history, one that had not usually featured in the curricula of modern history. It was the era of the Great Acceleration and, according to McNeill and Engelke, it represented a dramatic escalation of transformative human activity in the world that started after World War II. Thought of as an era of progress and development, the post-1945 world changed rapidly to accommodate the increasing material needs of the – also increasing – global population. The radical improvements in living standards were readily noted by historians, who often translated this newly found bliss as the triumph of technology over poverty and misery. And while this reasoning seemed valid (especially for the “developed” Western world and the classes that reaped its rewards), it came with rapid environmental degradation, reflected in a series of graphs that triggered the birth of the Great Acceleration concept.⁵⁴

Among the many points that are tackled in the book, McNeill and Engelke emphasised in particular the agency of conflict. Present throughout its pages, conflict seems to be the major driving force that propelled the Great Acceleration

⁵³ John Roberts McNeill and Peter Engelke, *The Great Acceleration: An Environmental History of the Anthropocene since 1945* (Harvard: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014). The concept of the Great Acceleration did not appear suddenly. It came into existence gradually and was being worked on since the early 2000s. The following articles contain its theoretical antecedents: Paul J. Crutzen, “Geology of Mankind,” in *Paul J. Crutzen: A Pioneer on Atmospheric Chemistry and Climate Change in the Anthropocene*, ed. Paul J. Crutzen and Hans Günter Brauch (Cham: Springer, 2016), 211–15; Crutzen, “The ‘Anthropocene,’” In *Earth System Science in the Anthropocene: Emerging Issues and Problems*, ed. Eckart Ehlers and Thomas Krafft (Berlin: Springer, 2006), 13–18.

⁵⁴ Will Steffen, Wendy Broadgate, Lisa Deutsch, Owen Gaffney and Cornelia Ludwig, “The Trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration,” *Anthropocene Review* 2, no. 1 (2015): 81–98.

forward without any regard for possible long-term consequences. During the Cold War the world became the theatre of an undeclared race for military and infrastructural supremacy that was nurtured by the USA, USSR and People's Republic of China. The implementation of the Mutual Assured Destruction doctrine permeated all levels of governance to such a degree that slowing down was simply not an option. Even though the ideological grievances subsided to a certain degree, with the collapse of the socialist ideological flagship, the USSR, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the system of exploitation that remained was constantly in need of new resources, which at the time still seemed inexhaustible in the eyes of those who had ended history, despite the rising concerns of environmental scientists.

This special edition does not challenge McNeill's and Engelke's argument. It highlights its merits. More than scrutinising the detrimental effects of the technological and scientific leaps in recent history, it will demonstrate that the primary necessary condition that pushed us into this environmental downward spiral was not the technological advancements of the past. These were merely the inanimate tools our economic and productive systems utilised. What the following selection of articles showcases is the ravenous Hobbesian-like appetite that the modern state, or the people representing it, worked up even before World War II. The mental trajectory of manipulating our ecosystems was already there; as will be shown, our historical actors only lacked the efficient means to do so well enough. The next three glimpses into the environmental history of modern Greece demonstrate exactly that; and although the ramifications are far from serious as to affect the Earth system, our contributors succeed in showing, in qualitative terms, the true colours of humanity during modernity.

In his article Dimitris Glistras explores the annihilation of a river. The Kifisos, the largest river that once flowed through the capital of Greece, Athens, did not manage to co-exist with the city. The river was first seen as an antagonist as early as the late nineteenth century after a series of catastrophic floods. With the turn of the century, a process started that sought to tame the river into becoming a compatible element with the ever-growing and -expanding city of Athens. Throughout Greek modern history, the Kifisos was marked by large-scale projects, undertaken in 1900, 1936, between 1961 and 1964, and after 1972 that aimed at straightening, deepening and widening the riverbed, eventually turning the Kifisos into the concrete drainpipe that it is today.

The same spirit of correction can be seen in Giorgos Kostopoulos and Iosif Botetzagias' article, which traces the restriction on transhumant goat grazing in Greece since 1830. Even though it had been an activity that at times was

deemed beneficial to the national economy, goat grazing came to be regarded as the primary deforester of the Greek countryside. The path that the two scholars follow starts in 1836 and ends almost exactly a century later. The struggle for the alleged modernisation of Greece legitimised the restrictive policies to be implemented on goat grazing in Greek forests. After 1937 forest grazing, as well as transhumant pastoralism, was indeed heavily mitigated by a number of new laws which saw the numbers of goats in Greece plummet rapidly.

Finally, Christos Karamatsos, Spyros Tzokas, Giorgos Velegrakis and Gelina Harlaftis embark on an almost cinematic article that deals with the (failed) attempts of the Greek state to exploit its subsoil. Even though the environment is placed in the background, primarily as an apple of discord, the article uncovers the limitless ambition of two antagonistic geologists to find lignite and – more importantly – oil in Greece. What we see as the story unfolds is the triumph of speculative flattery and wishful thinking over caution and level-headed scientific discourse. Remarkably though, no environment was harmed in the making of the venerable geologists.

George L. Vlachos

Institute of Historical Research / NHRF

