

## Tabula rasa. Destructions and rebirths of urban and natural ecosystems

Deadline: Oct 15, 2025

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The monographic issue of the journal "Ateneo Veneto," scheduled for December 2026, will be dedicated to the destruction and rebirth of urban and natural ecosystems throughout history, from the destruction of ancient cities to the bombings of World War II and until the atomic martyrdom of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. These catastrophic processes involve the systematic and deliberate destruction of entire urban structures and have taken on extraordinary symbolic significance. It is recognized in scientific literature that the demolition of the "urbs" (built city) corresponds to the killing of the "civitas" (the city in its social dimension): for this reason, in the 1990s, the term "urbicide" was coined to refer not only to destruction due to external causes, but also to the 'slow' death of a city due to internal causes, including food, health, demographic, and socio-economic crises. As in the case of destruction of natural origin (eruptions, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis...) or divine intervention (e.g., Sodom and Gomorrah), cities have almost always been rebuilt, demonstrating a vitality and adherence to the "genius loci" that runs through the entire history of humanity.

At the same time, the ecological crisis of recent decades is only the latest stage in a long history of large-scale and irreversible destruction of natural ecosystems caused by human activity. Coined by biologist Arthur Galston at the Congressional Conference on War and National Responsibility of the United States Congress (Washington DC, 1970) to describe the destruction of ecosystems in Vietnam and Cambodia due to Agent Orange, the term "ecocide" as a criminal act is at the centre of international legal debate.

From this perspective, two types of processes can be recognized: some of an immediate catastrophic nature, such as Pliny's account of the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD; others, on the other hand, have a longer course but equally lead to the effective uninhabitability of certain territories, such as some of the effects linked to climate change. These issues have been addressed by social, economic, and urban historians, as well as ecologists and geographers. On the other hand, art history, literature, and cinema offer a vast field of possible insights related to the reading, narration, and representation of these dynamics and their effects.

We therefore propose to address these highly topical and dramatic issues in an interdisciplinary manner, using an exclusively historical approach, focused on the one hand on investigating the nature of anthropogenic destructive intervention on urban and natural ecosystems, and on the other hand on the capacity for regeneration and rebirth that natural environments and cities have always demonstrated. In this sense, Venice and its lagoon are an extraordinary example of successive regeneration. In fact, after the fires of the 11th century, the city was never completely destroyed but always rebuilt on itself, and the lagoon was reborn several times after environmen-

tal crises that threatened to annihilate it due to silting. In this case, therefore, human action has had a virtuous and non-destructive character.

Papers with a strong interdisciplinary, intercultural, and multiscale character (from the city to the territory) but with a precise historical perspective (from Antiquity to the mid-20th century) will be accepted, i.e., those not oriented towards the most immediate current events and focused on the following thematic areas:

- Destructions and rebirths of cities due to war or accidental events (fires, etc.), with a cultural and urban history approach;
- Bombing of cities and Area Bombing as systems of deliberate annihilation;
- Destructions and rebirths of cities due to natural events;
- Theology and religious imagery of urbicide: from Sodom and Gomorrah to the Mahābhārata;
- Representations and imagery of urbicide and ecocide (art, cinema, literature, etc.);
- Anthropology, sociology, and psychology of urbicide and ecocide;
- Pollution as an agent of ecocide.

Paper proposals, accompanied by a short abstract in Italian or English (250 words max) and a brief CV (50 words max), must be sent exclusively by email to [rivista@ateneoveneto.org](mailto:rivista@ateneoveneto.org) by October 15, 2025. Speakers will be notified of the selection results by November 15, 2025. The deadline for submitting texts is June 1, 2026. The texts, which will undergo a double-blind peer review process, will be published by December 2026.

The journal "Ateneo Veneto," now available in open access (<https://ateneoveneto.org/it/pubblicazioni/rivista-ateneo-veneto/>), has been published continuously since 1812, the year the Ateneo was founded: it also constitutes the memory and historical testimony of the institution. Of the two issues published each year, the first comes out in December and is monographic, always characterized by a strongly multidisciplinary approach; the second comes out in July of the following year and is miscellaneous, including the annual report of the academy's activities.

Reference:

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