Visualising the Eastern Mediterranean Landscape (St Andrews, 10–11 Jun 27)

University of St Andrews, Scotland, Jun 10–11, 2027
Deadline: Sep 1, 2026

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During the long nineteenth century, the landscapes of the eastern Mediterranean were in transition. Inside and outside the shifting territories of the Ottoman Empire, urban areas and infrastructure expanded, networks of transport and travel grew, rural hinterlands were linked to global economies, and minerals and antiquities alike were extracted at a quickening pace. At the same time as these unevenly distributed changes, narratives of 'timeless' classical, Biblical or Oriental picturesque landscapes for tourist consumption persisted, often in contrast to local modes of landscape value or environmental knowledge. Foreign attempts to aestheticise landscapes were accompanied by criticisms of agroecological spaces as unproductive, 'degraded' or 'waste'. The resulting contradictory understandings of environmental change, continuity, and value created a dynamic of 'landscape dissonance', to adapt a term coined by Anna Stroulia and Susan Sutton (2008), between insiders and outsiders to the eastern Mediterranean. Many such nineteenth-century discourses continue to shape environmental imaginaries of the region to this day.

Art and visual culture have always had a particularly powerful part to play in perceptions of land and environment. Yet for all the blossoming interest in the environmental history of the eastern Mediterranean, images have not been a central concern. To this end, this conference invites contributions which explore how visual sources have shaped understandings of the physical spaces of the eastern Mediterranean. How did environmental change manifest (or fail to manifest) in visual representations by artists with varying senses of belonging or place attachment? As well as sources which fall in the western genre of landscape imagery, we welcome contributions which discuss local vernacular image-making traditions, or which complicate easy distinctions between the two. We invite papers focusing on the period 1750-1920 and exploring topics including but not limited to:

- Representations of urban and rural space
- Relations of agricultural production, consumption and 'improvement'
- Infrastructural/industrial impacts on landscape (e.g. railways, urbanisation)
- Intersections of extractive practices (e.g. mining, archaeology)
- State/private/common land ownership
- Territories contested by local/national/imperial actors
- Land, travel, tourism, and mobility
- Eastern Mediterranean climates, environmental Orientalism
- Landscapes as sites for mythology, stories, and memory
- (Dis)continuities between ancient/pre-modern and modern land use

- Geomorphological features such as rivers, coasts, deserts, mountains
- Images which conform or subvert pastoral/picturesque/sublime tropes

The conference will take place in person on Thursday 10 and Friday 11 June 2027 at the University of St Andrews in Scotland. We are pleased to share that Dr Onur İnal and Professor Elisabeth Fraser will provide keynote addresses on successive days. Limited funding is available to support travel to the conference for those without institutional support to do so, particularly for those based in the eastern Mediterranean.

Proposals for 20-minute papers (including a title and an abstract of 200–300 words, and a short bio) should be submitted by 01 September 2026 to Dr Alexandra Solovyev (alexandra.solovyev@sas.ac.uk) and Dr Sebastian Marshall (sam66@st-andrews.ac.uk). Notifications of acceptance will be sent by 01 October 2026.

Bibliography:

Fraser, E. A. (2017). Mediterranean Encounters: Artists between Europe and the Ottoman Empire, 1774-1839. Pennsylvania State University Press.

İnal, O. (2025). Gateway to the Mediterranean: An Environmental History of Late Ottoman Izmir. Cambridge University Press.

Stroulia, A., & Sutton, S. B. (2009). Archaeological Sites and Local Places: Connecting the Dots. Public Archaeology, 8(2–3), 124–140.

Reference:

CFP: Visualising the Eastern Mediterranean Landscape (St Andrews, 10-11 Jun 27). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 25, 2026 (accessed Nov 24, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/52803>.