Monsters and Marvels of Anatolia (Ankara, 14-16 Apr 27)

Ankara, Apr 14–16, 2027
Deadline: Nov 6, 2026

Brian McPhee

Bilkent University and Social Sciences University of Ankara gladly invite you to the inaugural meeting of the international and multidisciplinary conference series “Anatolian Civilizations in Dialogue.” This first conference, which shall take place in Ankara, Türkiye, on 14–16 April 2027, is dedicated to the theme of “Monsters and Marvels of Anatolia.”

Conference Theme. Why do so many monsters haunt Anatolia? From the astonishing hybrids depicted on the Neo-Hittite reliefs from Carchemish and Melid to the demons and jinn of Byzantine and Islamic hagiography right down to the otherworldly spirits of contemporary folk tradition, the Anatolian peninsula has always been home to a wide array of monstrous and marvelous beings. Uncanny geological wonders and mysterious ruins have given rise to tales of fire-breathing chimeras and of giants specializing in megalithic construction. From the perspective of outsiders, the unknown reaches of Asia Minor were sufficiently remote and exotic to populate with fabulous races, as witness the Greek myth of the Amazon warrior women or the Mesopotamian siting of the raven-faced Umman-manda deep in the Anatolian mountains. As a cultural crossroads and frontier space contested between countless empires, Anatolia has stimulated the construction of many a monstrous “Other” in the process of articulating the lines that divide “us” from “them,” the familiar from the foreign, civilization from chaos. And in the rich palimpsest that is contemporary Türkiye, creatures like the Snake Queen Shahmaran and the Lake Van Monster still function as emblems of regional identity and touristic enticement.

For this conference, we invite papers that explore how Anatolia, as culturally-constructed place, generates and reshapes stories and images of monstrosity across time. What is it about this land that has made it such a successful breeding ground for hybrids and giants, miracles and marvels? How have different cultures and communities—prehistoric, Hittite, Phrygian, Persian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Islamic, Ottoman, Turkish, Circassian, Jewish, Arab, Armenian, Kurdish, Laz, Syriac, and many more—placed their fears and fantasies into the landscapes and monuments of Anatolia?

Possible topics for papers include, but are not limited to:

- Features of Anatolian geology and topography connected with the monstrous
- The role of the monster in foundation myths and in forging local identities
- The monstrous “Other” in the context of intergroup conflict
- The outsiders’ perspective on Anatolia as a monstriferous terra incognita

 The marvelous in Anatolian geographical and travel writing
 The reuse and reception of monster motifs in different Anatolian cultures
 The place of monsters in contemporary Turkish literature, popular culture, and tourism

Three keynote addresses will help to frame our exploration of these themes: one by the noted Ottomanist Prof. Dr. Marinos Sariyannis (Research Director, Institute for Mediterranean Studies/-FORTH, Rethymno); another by Prof. Dr. Mary R. Bachvarova (Lindsay and Corinne Stewart Professor in the Humanities, Williamette University), an expert on comparative religion and literature in the ancient East Mediterranean; and a thrid by Prof. Dr. Ian Rutherford (Professor of Classics, University of Reading), an authority on ancient religion and on early Greco-Anatolian interactions.

Submission Guidelines. Please submit an anonymized, English-language abstract of no more than 500 words (excluding title and bibliography) to anatoliancivsindialogue@gmail.com by 23:59 (Turkey Time) on 6 Nov. 2026. In your email, please include your name, institutional affiliation, and contact information. We anticipate announcing the accepted abstracts before the end of the year.

We welcome submissions from scholars at all career stages and from all parts of the world, working across diverse disciplines, methodologies, and theoretical perspectives. We especially encourage participation from women and from members of historically underrepresented or minoritized communities. The conference venues are fully accessible, and we are committed to accommodating participants with a range of access needs.

Speakers will be allotted twenty minutes to present their papers followed by ten minutes for discussion. The language of the conference is English. Selected papers may be considered for publication in an international, peer-reviewed venue, such as an edited volume or a special issue of a journal.

Conference Details. The conference will be hosted jointly by Bilkent University and Social Sciences University of Ankara. Our schedule will include a visit to Ankara’s award-winning Museum of Anatolian Civilizations as well as an optional excursion to the archaeological site of Hattuşa (Boğazköy), capital of the Hittite Empire, on Saturday 17 April.

A limited number of participants will be able to stay free of charge in Bilkent’s on-campus accommodations. We also hope to be able to offer a select number of modest bursaries to assist scholars without institutional support with their travel expenses.

If you have any questions, you can write to us at anatoliancivsindialogue@gmail.com.

Organizing and Scientific Committee

 Dr. Brian McPhee (Bilkent University, Program in Cultures, Civilizations, and Ideas)
 Prof. Dr. Selim Ferruh Adalı (Social Sciences University of Ankara, Department of History)
 Dr. İlgi Nebahat Gerçek (Bilkent University, Department of Archaeology)
 Dr. Hüseyin Alhas (Social Sciences University of Ankara, Department of English Language and Literature)
 Dr. Mehmet Ali Çelik (Bilkent University, Department of History)
 Prof. Dr. Luca Zavagno (Bilkent University, Department of Archaeology)
 Prof. Dr. Selim Tezcan (Social Sciences University of Ankara, Department of History)

- Assoc. Dr. Nathan Leidholm (Bilkent University, Program in Cultures, Civilizations, and Ideas)
- Dr. Aslı Menevşe (Bilkent University, Program in Cultures, Civilizations, and Ideas)

Reference:

CFP: Monsters and Marvels of Anatolia (Ankara, 14-16 Apr 27). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 28, 2026 (accessed Nov 24, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/54443>.