

Preface

Dealing with the interdependent relationship between society and the environment has never been so urgent. Although there were already cases of ruthless exploitation of resources in antiquity, such as the deforestation of coastal woodlands for shipbuilding, this was limited – from a global perspective – to a tiny area. However, with the development of sea routes to America, around Africa and to South East Asia, a militarily superior Europe could grab the natural resources there, among which was the guano that since the 19th century has been shipped overseas in vast quantities, mainly from Peru and Chile. The industrialisation of the 19th century brought smoking chimneys and contaminated rivers. Only in the 70s of the 20th century were we able to gain control of this problem; in many other parts of the world, air and water pollution are still serious problems.

In our highly industrialised countries, the majority of the population is now well satisfied. The cities are no longer as overtly odoriferous as in the 1960s, and the rivers and lakes are almost clean. And yet the world is on the brink. But the warnings of a climate catastrophe affecting all of humanity no longer seem to have an impact. Although there are complaints about the trains' lack of punctuality and excessive ticket prices, the endless traffic jams on the highways and the scams of many major car brands, most people seem to take climate change in stride. And this despite the fact that our security and culture are greatly threatened by increasingly frequent heat waves and the melting of the glaciers, torrential rains, floods and hurricanes. The harm already caused and the economic damage to come are mentioned only in passing.

In recent years, the triumphal procession of SUVs – »Sport Utility Vehicles« – on our roads is an impressive example, on the one hand, of government's reluctance to set firm limits on industry. On the other hand, it shows how little the decades of publicly conducted environmental discussions have been internalised by the citizenry. What we observe here is that fundamental human characteristic, so often described in detail by the social sciences: the tendency to maintain one's habitual way of life as long as possible, contrary to all knowledge and logic.

The natural sciences adopted the subject at an early stage, addressing it as often as possible; nonetheless, the mobilisation of a substantial part of the population, sufficient to induce legislators to undertake far-reaching measures, has so far failed to occur. But in the humanities and cultural studies, the subject is still not well established, despite the threat of a global collapse of many societies and their unique cultures. To »nature«, flooded cities, devastated landscapes and famine are all the same. The plant and animal world gradually adapts to the changed conditions, while Hamburg and Venice, or more precisely their downfall, play no role from this perspective.

If therefore, there is an urgent need for an intensified, and also political commitment by the humanities and cultural studies, this is especially true of archaeology. As early as the 19th century, the field was dealing with environmental reconstructions in an effort to delineate the framework for human existence. The history of the environment, the original American approach to »Environmental History«, goes far beyond that. The question of how humans interact with the environment, how they value it and how they make their decisions, especially concerning the use of resources, can be raised in all areas of interdisciplinary research. In contrast to the social sciences, only historians and archaeologists can pursue long-term developments in the exchange between society and the environment. That is why it is all the more vital to provide in an advisory capacity the synthesised results of our research to the political world, and also to address the public directly.

Many years ago, specific efforts were already being made to explore the relationship of the Byzantines to their environment. Henriette Baron introduces some pioneering projects in the following introduction. Ephesus is also a forerunner¹, where the handling of the progressive silting of the bay and the port entrance has been studied over a long period of time. The RGZM, too, has produced quite a bit in this respect: a seminar with Verena Winiwarter in 2008 led to an initial broad-based environmental conference². Soon the topic was also taken up in the *Byzantinische Archäologie Mainz*, and –

1 Most recently S. Ladstätter, 8.12. Ephesos. In: F. Daim (ed.), *Byzanz. Historisch-kulturwissenschaftliches Handbuch. Der Neue Pauly Supplemente 11* (Stuttgart 2016) 678-685.

2 F. Daim / D. Gronenborn / R. Schreg (eds), *Strategien zum Überleben. Umweltkrisen und ihre Bewältigung. RGZM – Tagungen 11* (Mainz 2011).

from 2011 – in the *WissenschaftsCampus Mainz: Byzanz zwischen Orient und Okzident*. Henriette Baron (at that time still Kroll) summarised the hitherto existing archaeozoological findings³. Anna Elena Reuter joined a little later. She has been involved in the Caričin Grad project since 2014 and is breaking new ground in many ways⁴. As was previously done in Ephesos, the Ainos Port project is also exploring, with the help of core drilling, changes in the surface relief and bays around the important city⁵.

The articles presented here follow another conference, arranged on 17/18 November 2011 by the *WissenschaftsCampus Mainz: Byzanz zwischen Orient und Okzident*, with the specific theme of the human-environmental relationship in the Byzantine world:

**A wonderful aspect and of abundant avail?
Man and his Environment in the Byzantine Empire**

**Wundervoller Anblick und überreicher Nutzen?
Der Byzantiner und seine Umwelt.**

Excellent presentations showed great successes in individual projects, but also made clear how incomplete our knowledge in this regard still is. Thus, it became apparent where research must be intensified to obtain a reliable and reasonably uniform database. The historical sciences will explore together how man changes his environment and how this, in turn, affects human society. The reconstruction of decisions taken as well as the aesthetic representation of the environment and nature in poetry and the fine arts will show how the Byzantines acted, thought and felt in their very different regions. The result is a mirror in which we see both ourselves and our society.

I wish to thank Mrs Henriette Baron for the organisation of the conference and the compilation and editing of the present volume, the authors for their valuable articles, as well as the publishing house of the RGZM for the additional editing and printing.

Given the enormity of the problem facing our earth, our conference and the present volume are only tiny parts in the greater image, but in concert with the other sciences, it may contribute to a change of thought in our society and politics.

Mainz, October 2017
Falko Daim

3 H. Kroll, Tiere im Byzantinischen Reich. Archäozoologische Forschungen im Überblick. Monographien des RGZM 87 (Mainz 2010).

4 In this volume pp. 149-170.

5 H. Brückner / Th. Schmidts / H. Bücherl / A. Pint / M. Seeliger, Zur Frage der Häfen von Ainos – eine Zwischenbilanz. In: Th. Schmidts / M. M. Vučetić (Hrsg.), Häfen

im 1. Millennium AD: bauliche Konzepte, herrschaftliche und religiöse Einflüsse. Interdisziplinäre Forschungen zu Häfen von der Römischen Kaiserzeit bis zum Mittelalter 1. RGZM – Tagungen 22 (Mainz 2015) 53-76.