

XI Conference on Classical Philology

in honorem Jorge Rojas Otálora

Man-made Environmental Impact in Antiquity



November 5 - 7, 2025 | Bogotá, Colombia

 Universidad de
los Andes
Facultad de Artes y Humanidades

 Universidad de
La Sabana

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Call for Papers

In Book XXI of the *Iliad* (214-221), Homer recounts how the Scamander river reproaches Achilles for filling its waters with corpses, disrupting its natural course to the sea. In Book II of the *Aeneid* (622-633), the fall of Troy is compared to the felling of an ash tree at the hands of lumberjacks that collapses, but not without emitting a final groan. Beyond the ravages caused by wars, human activities such as pastoralism, agriculture, and urbanization have significantly accelerated environmental transformation since humans began forming larger communities, because these practices require deforestation, river diversion, and slash-burning of the countryside (cf. Hesd. *Op.*; Pl. *Cri.* 110c-111e; Virg. *G.* 1; Ondřej Mottl *et al.*, "Global acceleration in rates of vegetation change over the past 18,000 years"). The impact of these and other actions transformed landscapes, as evidenced by the remains of the ancient Roman open-pit mine at Las Médulas (Spain). Even today, erosion reveals the lasting effects of *ruina montium*, a mining technique described by Pliny the Elder (*NH* 33.21.66-78). This mining process involved collapsing mountains through excavations and channeling water to wash away debris and extract gold. Expressions such as "*tanto nocentiores fecimus terras!*" and "*spectant victores ruinam naturae*" reflect amazement at environmental devastation, from which Italy, according to a decree mentioned by Pliny, was spared.



In addition, an anthropocentric view of animals as existing solely for the benefit of humans is articulated in Aristotle's *Politics* (1256b). The philosopher argues that both domestic and wild animals serve humanity by providing services, food, clothing, and tools. Aristotle further contends that the art of hunting is part of the art of war, to be used against wild animals and humans who, despite being born to obey, refuse to submit. He justifies this superiority even in his bodily disposition, since, once developed, the head of the human being is lodged in the upper part, aligning with the upper part of the universe (*HA*, 494b). The Romans extended animal exploitation even further. They transported animals from different regions for their circus spectacles that reached legendary levels of cruelty. Perhaps the most remembered episode occurred during the inauguration of Pompey's Theater in 55 B.C. Sources report that a group of elephants were tortured in such a way that the spectators went so far as to curse Pompey for it (*Cic. Fam.* 7.3.1; *Sen. Brev. Vit.* 13.6-7; *Plin. HN* 8.7.20-21). In contrast, we find rejection of animal torture in Plutarch's work (*De esu carniū* I.7, II.1; *Mor.* 996a-b, 996f-997a) and different positions regarding the very nature of animals in the work *On abstinence from animal consumption* by Porphyrius. The Neoplatonic philosopher argues that justice should be extended to animals as rational beings. His argument is based on the principle of metempsychosis or transmigration of souls and their immortality, according to which human souls inhabit animals, which justifies the rejection of their sacrifice and of the consumption of their meat.



From these references, we can discern that there was a degree of awareness in Antiquity regarding human impact on the environment and other living beings. Therefore, the **XI Conference on Classical Philology** will focus on the study of the complex relationship between humans and nature in Antiquity. We invite specialists from different areas of study related to Antiquity to analyze and discuss sources that shed light on the following topics (the list is not exhaustive):

- Awareness of human impact on nature in Antiquity
- Nature's impact on humanity
- Relationships between humans and other living beings
- Ethical considerations in human-animal interactions
- Humanity's connection to its own nature
- Exploitation of natural resources in ancient times
- Landscape transformation during warfare
- Environmental laws and regulations in Antiquity
- Ecocriticism and ancient literature's perspective on nature

The aim is to enrich contemporary discussions with insights from Antiquity.



Thematic panels

The thematic panels will consist of papers addressing the same thematic axis, a research question, or a specific author. Each panel will feature 3 to 5 speakers and last a maximum of 2 hours, including audience discussion. A coordinator will oversee each panel and submit a brief description of the proposed panel (max. 100 words) along with abstracts for each paper (150-300 words). These sessions are ideal for presenting the work of early career researchers or research groups.

Papers

Individual paper submissions are also welcome. Abstracts (max. 300 words) should outline a 20-minute presentation, followed by a 10-minute discussion.

Timetable

Submission period: January 31 - July 31 2025

Proposal evaluation: August

Notification of results: 29 August 2025

All proposals will undergo anonymous evaluation by a committee.

The event will take place in person, any virtual presentations will be scheduled for **Thursday, November 6.**

Requirements

The topics of both thematic panels and individual papers must relate to Greek and Roman cultures (Classical Philology, Linguistics, Literature, History, Art History, Philosophy, Classical Tradition, Rhetoric, Archaeology, Epigraphy, Law, etc.).

All abstracts (in Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French or English) must include the author's full name and institutional affiliation (if applicable).

Proposals must be submitted using the following forms:

Thematic panels: <https://forms.gle/m6fiV3J86FPySw1NA>

Papers: <https://forms.gle/tXF1FXuQKVfT9W878>

Scientific Committee

Isabella Tardin Cardoso, Universidade Estadual de Campinas

Marcela Alejandra Suárez, Universidad de Buenos Aires

Marcos Carmignani, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba

Martin Dinter, King's College of London

Organizers

Gemma Bernadó Ferrer, Universidad de los Andes

Juan Felipe González Calderón, Universidad Nacional de Colombia

Ronald Forero Álvarez, Universidad de La Sabana

Andrea Lozano-Vásquez, Universidad de los Andes

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