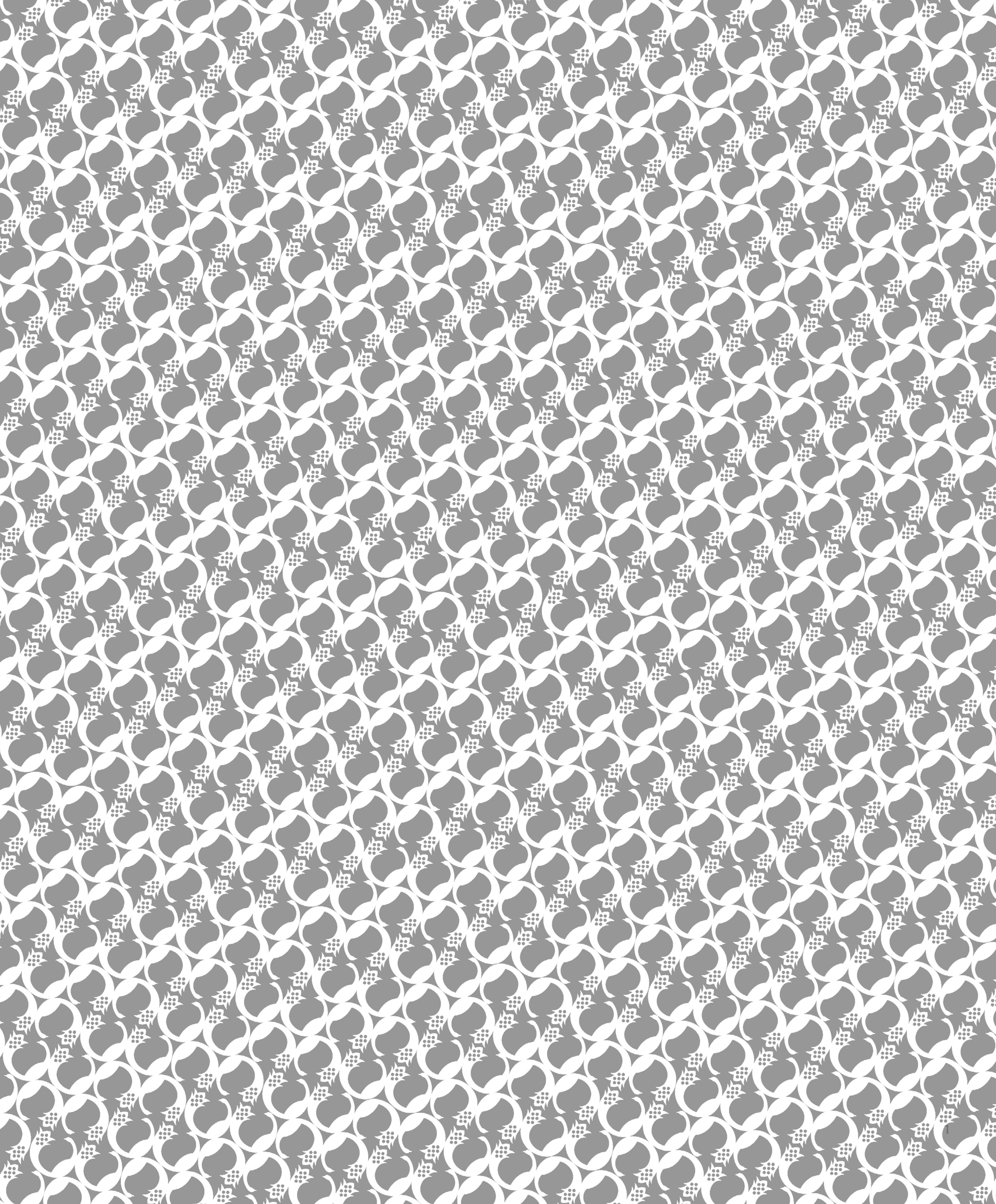

CONVIVIUM

Exchanges and Interactions in the Arts of Medieval Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean
Seminarium Kondakovianum, Series Nova

Université de Lausanne • Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic • Masaryk University •

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IX/1

Dynamics of Medieval Landscape

Cultural Shaping of the Environment

edited by **Ivan Foletti**, **Martin F. Lešák**, **Adrien Palladino**

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Dynamics of Medieval Landscape
Measure, Environment, Conversion

Adrien Palladino

Dedicating a thematic issue of *Convivium* to the topic of medieval landscape in 2022 appears almost natural. This is the case not only because of the particular infatuation of human sciences with the issue in recent years or because of the profound transformations in contemporary society's relationship to the environment, not least in the wake of the pandemic and its various lockdowns[1]. The main reasons for such a volume must, however, be found in its editors' background. It is during the conception and participation in the

1 The bibliography is ever-expanding. Seminal studies defining the notion of "landscape" in cultural environments of the past include Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, New York 1995; and John Wylie, *Landscape*, New York / London 2007. Only looking at some of the most important volumes published since 2010, see, e.g., Christopher Tilley, *Interpreting Landscapes. Geologies, Topographies, Identities*, London 2010; *Scale and Scale Change in the Early Middle Ages: Exploring Landscape, Local Society, and the World Beyond*, Julio Escalona ed., Turnhout 2011; *Sacred Sites and Holy Places. Exploring the Sacralization of Landscape through Time and Space*, Saebjørg W. Nordeide, Stefan Brink eds, Turnhout 2013; Ellen F. Arnold, *Negotiating the Landscape. Environment and Monastic Identity in the Medieval Ardennes*, Philadelphia 2013; *Early Medieval Stones Monuments: Materiality, Biography, Landscape*, Howard Williams, Joanne Kirton, Meggen Gondek eds, Woodbridge 2015; Sharon E. Gerstel, *Rural Lives and Landscapes in Late Byzantium: Art, Archaeology, and Ethnography*, Cambridge 2015; *Making Christian Landscapesin Atlantic Europe.*

experimental project *Migrating Art Historians* in 2017 that, alongside my co-editors Ivan Foletti and Martin F. Lešák and with a larger group of colleagues, we became aware of the immense importance of what can be called "landscape"[2]. While the term itself has only existed since the late fifteenth century to designate specifically the representation of the environment, in its broader sense, "landscape" is paramount for our understanding of premodern cultures. It is during *Migrating Art Historians* – which consisted of a scholarly and pedagogical "pilgrimage" from Lausanne Cathedral to Mont-Saint-Michel, passing through some of the most important pilgrimage sites of medieval France – that what we had suspected from theory and sources began to transform into an embodied experience[3]. Through our physical awareness of the measure of the world and through the mediation of our own bodies, we became fascinated by the relationship between space, body, and material culture. In turn, the practical experience informed and inspired theoretical reflections on the question of landscape, sacred space, and environment, published over the last few years[4].

Human impact on ecosystems and the environment itself is of primary importance in the study of past and present cultures. It is indeed always in the tension between their environment and their own bodies that humans physically and mentally define themselves within the space that they inhabit. This is perhaps all the more accurate in premodern societies, where most were living – unlike today's city dwellers – surrounded by and in constant relationship with nature[5]. The title of the present volume, *Dynamics of Medieval Landscape*, wishes to evoke precisely this tension and the dynamics, understood here as a process in constant change, that characterize the attitude of premodern humans to what surrounds them. This introduction by no means wishes to provide a debate on the notion of landscape and its use in art historical scholarship, nor to systematically present all the possible developments of the notion over the last ten years. Constructed around the concepts of "measure", "environment", and "conversion", I wish to outline new directions in which understandings of the dynamics of medieval landscape in art historical and visual studies can expand. These are, as the notion of landscape is, by essence interdisciplinary. The first axis interrogates the potential of "measure" as a heuristic tool for understanding nature and sacred space in the Middle Ages. The second returns to the notion of the environment within premodern cultures, situating it in tension with agricultural technologies, environmental perception, and landscape symbolism. Finally, the concluding axis questions the complex relationship between nature, human interactions, and religious conversion.

Measuring the world: the body as a tool

As mentioned above, it is during their own peregrinations that the editors of the present volume became more aware of the way in which most of our interactions with our surroundings are made intelligible only through the mediation of the body. Our body is, indeed, that which remembers not only the experience of distance but becomes itself a marker of quantification – that of aches and pains, scars, sensations, smells, temperature, and also the passing of time. In this optic, our body becomes a tool for measuring the reality that surrounds us, and even elaborate systems of measurement are based, within our anthropocentric perspective, on physicality[6]. Essentially, the role of the body in quantifying the world around us is retained in the name of certain units of measurement, some have disappeared, some are still in use today: fathoms, cubits, digits, spans, thumbs, inches, etc. In the same way, measuring shifts in scale through the body of individuals and communities is of fundamental importance for understanding premodern (and modern)

socio-spatial processes of legal, economic, or territorial nature[7]. One can recall just one custom which illustrates the importance of measure: the so-called perambulations which can still be observed around the world today. These involve members of a community walking the geographic boundaries of their locality to maintain a shared memory, or mental map, of its limits[8]. The bodies in collective movement forming a community are, in this case, circumnavigating the landscape to embed in it what was recently eloquently called a "dense local knowledge"[9]. These rituals remind us of the key role of pilgrimages as well as civic and religious processions in the ritualization of cityscapes and landscapes[10]. In such a way, people are able to transcend their terrestrial bodily boundaries through movement, thus forming a mental and communitarian image of a shared space.

Conversion and Consolidation in the Early Middle Ages, Tomás Ó Carragáin, Sam Turner eds, Cork 2016; Veronica Della Dora, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium*, Cambridge 2016; *Landscape and Space. Comparative Perspectives from Chinese, Mesoamerican, Ancient Greek, and Roman Art*, Jaś Elsner ed., Oxford 2022. I must also mention here the recent volume *Shifting Horizons. A Line and its Movement in Art, History, and Philosophy*, Lucas Burkart, Beate Fricke eds, Basel 2022, which touches on many questions related to imagined spaces and environments subject to historical changes.

2 *Migrating Art Historians on the Sacred Ways. Reconsidering Medieval French Art Through the Pilgrim's Body*, Ivan Foletti *et al.* eds, Brno/Rome 2018. See also Ivan Foletti, "Vivre le pèlerinage (médiéval): une expérience corporelle", *Convivium*, V/2 (2018), pp. 137–150; *idem*, "Experiencing the Present (and Past) Through the Body: Pilgrimage as a Tool for Transforming Time, and the Migrating Art Historians Project", in *Time and Presence in Art. Moments of Encounter (200–1600 CE)*, Armin Bergmeier, Andrew Griebeler eds, Berlin 2022, pp. 199–219; Ivan Foletti, Martin F. Lešák, "Reconsidering 'Romanesque' Art Through the Pilgrim's Body: The Migrating Art Historians Project Four Years Later", *Peregrinations*, VIII/2 (2022), forthcoming.

3 For a review of the project taking into consideration the entire scope of the project's scholarly and pedagogical activities, see Vincent Debiais, "Les moyens et la raison de l'art", *Blog Hypothèses – De visu: cultures visuelles du Moyen Âge en perspective*, (2020), online: https://devisu.hypotheses.org/1151 [last accessed 11.02.2022].

4 *Convivium*, VI/1 (2019; *Movement, Images, and Iconic Presence in the Medieval World*, Hans Belting, Ivan Foletti, Martin F. Lešák eds); Martin F. Lešák, "Sacred Architecture and the Voice of Bells in the Medieval Landscape: with the Case Study of Mont-Saint-Michel", *Convivium*, VI/1 (2019), pp. 48–67; *Step by Step Towards the Sacred. Ritual, Movement, and Visual Culture in the Middle Ages*, Martin F. Lešák, Sabina Rosenbergová, Veronika Tvrzníková eds, Rome 2020. Two of the volume's editors, Ivan Foletti and Martin F. Lešák, are pursuing their own studies on the notion here, with articles focused on the church and village of Conques – a site which they came to experience from a new perspective precisely during their peregrinations. Conques is also the subject of the H2020_MSCA-RISE project "Conques in the Global World. Transferring Knowledge: From Material to Immaterial Heritage" (grant agreement No 101007770), coordinated by Ivan Foletti. See https://conques.eu [last accessed 10.04.2022].

5 Maryanne Kowaleski, "Medieval People in Town and Country: New Perspectives from Demography and Bioarchaeology", *Speculum*, LXXXIX/3 (2014), pp. 573–600.

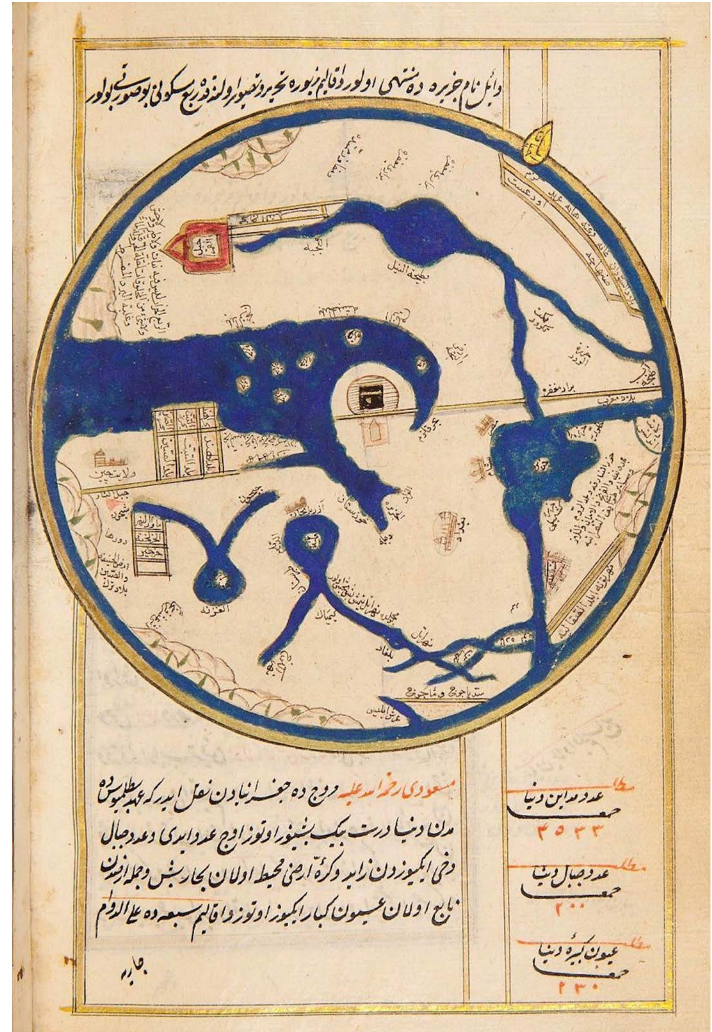
6 On the notion of measure, see Paul Zumthor, *La mesure du monde. Représentation de l'espace au Moyen Âge*, Paris 2014, sp. pp. 19–24; *La misura*, Clelia Arcelli ed., Florence 2011; Simon Schaffer, "Les cérémonies de la mesure. Repenser l'histoire mondiale des sciences", *Annales Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, II (2015), pp. 409–435; Emanuele Lugli, *The Making of Measure and the Promise of Sameness*, Chicago 2019. On modern systems of measurement and their implications, see Alfred W. Crosby, *The Measure of Reality: Quantification and Western Society, 1250–1600*, Cambridge 1997; H. Floris Cohen, *How Modern Science Came into the World: Four Civilizations, One 17th-Century Breakthrough*, Amsterdam 2010.

7 Julio Escalona, "The Early Middle Ages: A Scale-Based Approach", in *Scale and Scale Change* (n. 1), pp. 9–30; *idem*, "Dense Local Knowledge: Grounding Local to Supra-Local Relationships in Tenth-Century Castile", in *Polity and Neighbourhood in Early Medieval Europe*, Julio Escalona, Orri Vésteinsson, Stuart Brookes eds, Turnhout 2019, pp. 351–379. See also *Campagnes médiévales: l'homme et son espace. Etudes offertes à Robert Fossier*, Elisabeth Mornet ed., Paris 1995; *People and Space in the Middle Ages, 300–1300*, Wendy Davies, Guy Halsall, Andrew Reynolds eds, Turnhout 2006; *Les élites et leurs espaces: mobilité, rayonnement, domination (du VIe au XIe siècle)*, Philippe Depreux, François Bougard, Régine Le Jan eds, Turnhout 2007; *Construction de l'espace au Moyen Âge: pratiques et representations*, Régine Le Jan ed., Paris 2007; Arnold, *Negotiating the Landscape* (n. 1), *passim*.

8 Paul Oliver, "'Beating the Bounds': Switching Boundaries over Five Millennia", *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, XV/2 (2004), pp. 7–17. For historical predecessors of the modern customs, see Alexander J. Langlands, "Local Places and Local People: Peasant Agency and the Formation of the Anglo-Saxon State", in *Polity and Neighbourhood* (n. 7), pp. 381–405. See also Jean-Pierre Devroey, Michel Lauwers, "L''espace' des historiens médiévistes: quelques remarques en guise de conclusion", in *Construction de l'espace* (n. 7), pp. 435–453, sp. pp. 448–453.

9 Escalona, "Dense Local Knowledge" (n. 7); Emanuele Lugli, "Hidden in Plain Sight: The *Pietre di Paragone* and the Preeminence of Medieval Measurements in Communal Italy", *Gesta*, XLIX/2 (2010), pp. 77–95.

10 See, e.g., *Ritualizing the City: Collective Performances as Aspects of Urban Construction from Constantine to Mao*, Ivan Foletti, Adrien Palladino eds, Rome 2017; *Reliquie in processione nell'Europa medievale*, Vinni Lucherini ed., Rome 2018.



1 / Jerusalem-centered map of the world, so-called "Map Psalter", ca 1262–1300 / British Library, London, MS 28681, fol. 9r

2 / Mecca-centered map of the world, from the *Tarih-i Hind-i garbi* [History of the West Indies], 1650 / University Library, Leiden, MS Or. 12.365, fol. 90v

Both on a local and global scale, the idea of measure – beside that of time – takes on a special importance in the encounter with sacred geographies, sites, and bodies[11]. Particularly in the contexts of pilgrimages, measure becomes significant as a way of experiencing sacred landscapes: the distances between holy sites or even the bodily dimensions of Christ or saints are measured, compared, and carried by the faithful[12]. If Jerusalem or the Ka'ba at Mecca were conceived as ideal centers on world maps **[Figs 1–2]**, the concrete acts of measuring became a way for pilgrims to topographically chart the sites they knew from Holy Scripture or from other sources. This enabled them to enhance an experience of legendary or imagined topographies through a kinesthetic experience of scale and space. In doing so, they were confirming the "sensescape" they experienced and embedding it directly into the memory of their bodies[13]. Such tension between imagination and actual experience is paramount to understanding the dynamics at play around holy sites from Antiquity to the present day. In certain cases, the importance of measurement even led to the creation of metrical "relics" which were produced by measuring, with the devotee's body or with objects such as ropes or strings, the holy sites, monuments, or the imprints of bodies or bodily parts of holy figures – from Christ's tomb to the circumference of saints' shrines and tombs, with similar practices documented also at Islamic pilgrimage sites[14]. This not only effectively enabled the translocation of

locative memories to other spaces, once returned home from the pilgrimage, but shows us how measuring the environment itself becomes an act of devotion.

Particularly relevant when thinking about the impact of such practices on natural environments is the notion of the translation or replication – expanding on the fruitful Krautheimerian notion of "copy"– of holy sites and sacred topographies[15]. This concerns primarily the de-centering and evocation of the sacred topography of Jerusalem in other cities or environments[16]. The phenomenon, explored for tenth-century Georgia by Michele Bacci in the present volume, is fascinating since it does not concern only the replication of built structures, but also the selection of natural sites which are carefully chosen to evoke other environments in a topomimetic fashion[17]. Through such a symbolic worldview, surrounding mountains, rivers, trees, and natural sites are directly associated with places mentioned in the holy scriptures and traditions of various religions, testifying to a sacralization of the local landscape. Because of these associations or their potential for being associated with other stories, natural holy sites are often able to survive cultural developments over long periods of time[18]. As Manuela Studer-Karlen and Alberto Virdis also explore in the present volume, this sacralization of the environment did not only concern large-scale buildings or natural places, but also smaller markers of space

11 Zur Shalev, "Christian Pilgrimage and Ritual Measurement in Jerusalem", *Micrologus*, XIX (2011), pp. 131–150; Finbarr Barry Flood, *Technologies de dévotion dans les arts de l'Islam. Pèlerins, reliques et copies*, Paris 2019, pp. 29–71. On the question of space/time, John Helgeland, "Time and Space: Christian and Roman", in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, *Teil 2: Principat*, Hildegard Temporini *et al*. eds, Berlin / New York 1980, pp. 1285–1305.

12 Xavier Barbier de Montault, "Les mesures de dévotion", *Revue de l'art chrétien*, XV (1881), pp. 360–416; Adolf Jacoby, "Heilige Längenmasse: Eine Untersuchung zur Geschichte der Amulette", *Schweizerisches Archiv für Volkskunde*, XXIX (1929), pp. 1–17, 181–216; Elisée Legros, "La mesure de Jésus et autres saintes mesures", *Enquêtes du Musée de la vie wallonne*, LX (1962), pp. 313–317; Werner Heinz, "Heilige Längen. Zu den Maßen des Christus- und des Mariengrabes in Bebenhausen", *Mediävistik*, XXVIII (2015), pp. 297–324. See also Flood, *Technologies de dévotion* (n. 11), pp. 48–53 and Lugli, *The Making of Measure* (n. 6), pp. 145–152.

13 Shalev, "Christian Pilgrimage" (n. 11). For the notion of "sensescapes", see Edmunds V. Bunkše, "Sensescapes: or a Paradigm Shift from Words and Images to All Human Senses in Creating Feelings of Home in Landscapes", in *Landscape, Architecture and Art. Proceedings of the Latvia University of Agriculture*, Jelgava 2012, vol. I/1, pp. 10–15; Franz A. Bauer, "Zu schön, um wahr zu sein. Von der Überwältigung, das Heilige Land zu erleben", in *Imaginum Orbis. Bilderwelten zwischen Antike und Byzanz. Festschrift für Johannes G. Deckers*, Markos Giannoulis, Markus Löx, Alexis Oepen eds, Wiesbaden 2021, pp. 203–228.

14 See Flood, *Technologies de dévotion* (n. 11), pp. 35–47, 141–171.

15 Richard Krautheimer, "Introduction to an 'Iconography of Mediaeval Architecture'", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, V (1942), pp. 1–33.

16 *Novye Ierusalimy. Ierotopija i ikonografija sakral'nyx prostranstv / New Jerusalems, Hierotopy and Iconography of Sacred Spaces*, Alexei Lidov ed., Moscow 2009. See also, for local contexts ranging from Ethiopia to the Caucasus: Marilyn E. Heldman, "Architectural Symbolism, Sacred Geography and the Ethiopian Church", *Journal of Religion in Africa*, XXIII/3 (1992), pp. 222–241; Nazénie Garibian de Vartavan, *La Jérusalem nouvelle et les premiers sanctuaires chrétiens de l'Arménie. Méthode pour l'étude de l'église comme temple de Dieu*, Yerevan 2009, pp. 205ff; Klára Benešovská, "De la circulation des 'locis sanctis': le Mons Sion à Prague", *Convivium*, I/1 (2014), pp. 50–62; Ivan Foletti, "Germigny-des-Prés, il Santo Sepolcro e la Gerusalemme celeste", *Convivium*, I/1 (2014), pp. 32–49; Tamila Mgaloblishvili, "How Mtskheta turned into the Georgian's New Jerusalem", in *Visual Constructs of Jerusalem*, Bianca Kühnel, Galit Noga-Banai, Hanna Vorholt eds, Turnhout 2014, pp. 59–66; Anthony Eastmond, "Jerusalems in the Caucasus?", in *Tomb & Temple. Re-Imagining the Sacred Buildings of Jerusalem*, Robin Griffith-Jones, Eric Fernie eds, Woodbridge 2018, pp. 211–232; Henriette Hofmann, Gerhard Wolf, "Licht und Landschaft: zur Sakraltopographie Mzchetas in Georgien", in *Inszenierung von Sichtbarkeit in mittelalterlichen Bildkulturen. Prof. Dr. Barbara Schellewald zum 65. Geburtstag*, Henriette Hofmann, Caroline Schärli, Sophie Schweinfurth eds, Berlin 2018, pp. 21–47; Harald Buchinger, "Liturgy and Topography in Late Antique Jerusalem", in *Jerusalem II. Jerusalem in Roman-Byzantine Times*, Katharina Heyden, Maria Lissek eds, Tübingen 2021, pp. 117–188.

17 See also previously Michele Bacci, "Performed Topographies and Topomimetic Piety. Imaginative Sacred Spaces in Medieval Italy", in *Spatial Icons. Performativity in Byzantium and Medieval Russia*, Alexei Lidov ed., Moscow 2011, pp. 101–118; *idem*, "Santitad localizada: percepciones de los loca sancta de Palestina en la Edad Media", *Codex Aquilarensis*, XXX (2014), pp. 109–131; *idem*, "Site-Worship and the Iconopoietic Power of Kinetic Devotion", *Convivium*, VI/1 (2019), pp. 20–47.

18 On this idea, with the example of sites related to springs and miraculous fountains, see *idem*, "Liquid Holy Sites", *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, LXXV–LXXVI (2021), pp. 101–113.

such as stelae, crosses, and standing stones which visualized the boundaries and measures of the land[19]. These objects which become visual markers of the landscape enable us to understand how, in premodern societies, measure transcends its understanding as a merely "mathematical" notion and becomes an all-encompassing phenomenon. This directly informs us about the worldview of medieval persons, in which bodies – in motion, in measure, and in replication – become integral to the experience of the environment. Through measure, replication, and imagination, "landscape" thus becomes the sacred space itself, and the boundaries between environment and built sacred spaces are blurred. When, indeed – and this is a question also thematized in Ivan Foletti's article on the shrine of St Foy –, is one entering sacred space? When inside the shrine of the saint and in front of its image or reliquary? When crossing the doors of a church or a cathedral? When entering a valley? When crossing a river?

Premodern environments and the shaping of the world

The reliefs of luxurious gardens and orchards which surround the palace of the Neo-Assyrian ruler Ashurbanipal are perhaps one of the most remarkable visualizations of the human role in the shaping of nature and landscape around the middle of the seventh century BCE[20]. Taken from the North Palace at Nineveh, the wall panel reproduced here would have originally been animated by polychrome, highlighting the way in which the water distributed through the channels from an aqueduct – possibly the one built by Ashurbanipal's grandfather, Sennacherib – irrigated the surrounding gardens and terraces [Fig. 3][21]. The presence of Sennacherib's canals can still be assessed by aerial photography and satellite imagery, showing how centuries-old man-made agricultural structures have durably impacted the topography[22]. If the figure standing within the palace could be interpreted as the stele of a king, nothing indicates that this is not an image of Ashurbanipal himself, surveying and gazing at the marvels of his idyllic gardens[23]. If this is indeed the ruler himself, then we are also in front of one of the earliest representations which illustrate a "landscape" and an individual conscious of his potential in shaping the environment: the gardens are an image of Ashurbanipal's capacity to impose, through human engineering, peace and order to nature. In sum, this relief displays a "landscape thinking" capable of turning nature itself into manicured landscape[24]. Possessing plants from all parts of the world becomes a sign of the ruler's power and of his successful conquest of the surrounding lands: thus, a real landscape is transformed into what scholars such as John Howe or Veronica Della Dora have thematized as "symbolic landscape"[25].

The imagery brought about by the gardens of ancient Mesopotamia still resonates strongly today, partly because of the lasting popular fascination for the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, partly because of their elusive presence in the literary and visual imagination of the Bible[26]. Gardens are not only the ultimate places of the cultivation of nature by humans, but also of a reflection on nature idealized by human action, thus mirroring the ideal shaping of nature by the gods, or God's hand. Such an idea is pervasive in the Middle Ages, when gardens, described by Della Dora as "harmonious microcosms which constantly re-enact the story of creation" frequently appear both as theological and literary concepts (the *locus amoenus*, the *hortus conclusus* or *deliciarum*) and as material reality[27]. It is not by chance, in the medieval Christian world, that gardens were usually established early on in newly founded monasteries, as ways to mark the transition from wilderness to civilization. Such acts of landscape shaping to make them fit archetypes have sometimes had a direct impact on biospheres and environments today, which new studies on

3 / Relief with gardens of Ashurbanipal's Palace with irrigation canals and aqueduct, from the North Palace, Nineveh (Iraq), gypsum, ca 645– 635 BCE / British Museum, London, No. 124939,b

19 See Sipana Tchakerian, "Toward a Detailed Typology: Four-Sided Stelae in Early Christian South Caucasus", *Convivium. Supplementum,* (2016; *The Medieval South Caucasus. Artistic Cultures of Albania, Armenia, and Georgia*, Ivan Foletti, Erik Thunø eds), pp. 124–143.

20 See *Landscapes: Territorires, Frontiers, and Horizons in the Ancient Near East*, Stefano De Martino *et al.* eds, Padua 2000. On Neo-Assyrian landscapes, see specifically Allison Karmel Thomason, "Representations of the North Syrian Landscape in Neo-Assyrian Art", *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, CCCXXIII (2001), pp. 63–96; Paul Collins, "The Symbolic Landscape of Ashurbanipal", *Sources: Notes in the History of Art*, XXIII/3 (2004), pp. 1–6.

21 British Museum, Inv. No. 124939. See Richard D. Barnett, *Sculptures from the North Palace of Ashurbanipal at Nineveh (668–627 B.C.)*, London 1976, pl. 23; Stephanie Dalley, *The Mystery of the Hanging Garden of Babylon. An Elusive World Wonder Traced*, Oxford 2013, pp. 51–53.

22 Jason Ur, "Sennacherib's Northern Assyrian Canals: New Insights from Satellite Imagery and Aerial Photography", *Iraq*, LXVII/1 (2005), pp. 317–345. See also Julian Reade, Jason Ur, "The Hydraulic Landscape of Nimrud", *Mesopotamia*, L (2015), pp. 25–51.

23 Paul Collins, "Life at Court", in *I am Ashurbanipal: King of the World, King of Assyria*, Gareth Brereton ed., London 2018, pp. 34–51, sp. pp. 49–50, no. 55. See also Marlene Kristensen, "Illustration or Reality: How Should Depictions of Gardens in Ancient Egyptian Tomb Paintings be Perceived?", in *Current Research in Egyptology 2014*, Massimiliano S. Pinarello *et al*. eds, London 2014, pp. 229–238.

24 On the idea of "landscape thinking", see Augustin Berque, *Thinking Through Landscape*, Anne-Marie Feenberg-Dibon transl., Abingdon/Oxon 2013 [2008].

25 John Howe, "Creating Symbolic Landscapes: Medieval Development of Sacred Space", in *Inventing Medieval Landscapes: Senses of Place in Western Europe*, John Howe, Michael Wolfe eds, Gainesville, FL 2002, pp. 208–223; Jacqueline Simpson, "God's Visible Judgements: The Christian Dimension of Landscape Legends", *Landscape History*, VIII (1986), pp. 53–58; Denis Cosgrove, "Geography is Everywhere: Culture and Symbolism in Human Landscapes", in *Horizons in Human Geography*, Derek Gregory, Rex Walford eds, London 1989, pp. 118–135; as well as Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (n. 1).

26 Dalley, *The Mystery* (n. 21).

27 Della Dora, *Landscape, Nature* (n. 1), pp. 93–117, sp. p. 95; Zumthor, *La mesure du monde* (n. 6), pp. 106–110. See also *Gardens in the Time of the Great Muslim Empires: Theory and Design*, Attilio Petruccioli ed., Leiden / New York 1997; *Byzantine Gardens and Beyond*, Helena Bodin, Ragnar Hedlund eds, Uppsala 2013; William Tronzo, *Petrarch's Two Gardens: Landscape and the Image of Movement*, New York 2014; Liz McAvoy, *The Enclosed Garden and the Medieval Religious Imaginary*, Woodbridge/Suffolk/Cologne 2021.

4/ Rocco Lentini, Ideal View of Cuba, oil on canvas, 1922 / Soprintendenza per i beni culturali, Palermo

5/ Detail of an illumination with the Genoard, garden of the Norman king William II in Palermo, from Petrus de Ebulo, *Liber ad honorem Augusti*, 1195–1197 / Burgerbibliothek, Bern, Cod. 120.II, fol. 98r

agricultural technologies, environmental history, historical ecology, and landscape archaeology can reveal. These studies – often backed up by new technologies and interdisciplinary teams – are able to dramatically change the ways in which we can read the question of environment in premodern visual and material sources. As shown notably by Alessandra Panicco in this volume, the crossing of sources, maps, and technology often reveals how landscape transformations directly coincided with cultural developments in given areas[28].

As in Nineveh centuries before, the suburban palaces surrounded by gardens and hunting parks of the Norman kings of Sicily in the twelfth century reflect an ideal of domination of nature[29]. Rocco Lentini's view of the Cuba from 1922 shows us how we can imagine – in ways idealized and fantasized by the painter – these palaces that were literally surrounded by vast gardens and hunting grounds **[Fig. 4]**. These lost gardens, now known only from descriptions and rare depictions, were directly inspired by the so-called gardens of delights of the Islamic world, which possibly drew precisely on technological innovations developed in the ancient Near East[30]. In such a way, as centuries before in Nineveh, agricultural technologies become ways of transforming "wilderness" into "artifice"[31]. More than mere symbolic images of the "earthly paradise", these gardens were also actual microcosms, which developed their own botanical and taxonomic diversity, as illustrated in the well-known twelfth-century *Liber ad honorem Augusti* **[Fig. 5]**[32]. What these gardens display is an actual interest in the diversity of nature which must be understood as a tension between the "anthropocentric" capacity of powerful rulers and the aesthetics of landscape. In turn, these gardens provided reservoirs for artistic creativity, purveying colors, forms, and patterns which were spread across the Mediterranean space and beyond[33].

28 See, e.g., Filippo Brandolini, *Tecniche digitali e geoarcheologia per lo studio del paesaggio medievale: uno studio interdisciplinare in Pianura Padana centrale*, Oxford 2021; Andrea Augenti *et al.*, "Archeologia dei Paesaggi nel territorio ravennate: il Progetto Cervia", *Archeologia medievale*, XLVII (2020), pp. 115–139; Scott. A. Mensing *et al.*, "Historical Ecology Reveals Landscape Transformation Coincident with Cultural Development in Central Italy Since the Roman

Period", *Scientific Reports*, VIII/1 (2018), pp. 1–9; *Medieval Archaeology: Critical Concepts in Archaeology*. *II: The Medieval Landscape*, Roberta Gilchrist, Gemma L. Watson eds, 4 vols, London / New York 2017; Ellen F. Arnold, "An Introduction to Medieval Environmental History", *History Compass*, VI/3 (2008), pp. 898–916.

29 Tronzo, *Petrarch's Two Gardens* (n. 27), pp. 25–40; *idem*, "The Royal Gardens of Medieval Palermo: Landscape Experiences, Landscape as Metaphor", in *Le vie del Medioevo*, Arturo C. Quintavalle ed., Milan 2000, pp. 362–373. On the palaces, Christine Ungruh, "Die normannischen Gartenpaläste in Palermo: Aneignung einer mittelmeerischen Koiné im 12. Jahrhundert", *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, LI/1–2 (2007), pp. 1–44.

30 León Rodríguez Zahar, "Imágenes del paraíso en los jardines islámicos", *Estudios de Asia y África*, XXXIV/2 (1999), pp. 361–378. On ancient hydraulic technologies and their later use, see Hugh Kennedy, "The Feeding of the Five Hundred Thousand: Cities and Agriculture in Early Islamic Mesopotamia", *Iraq*, LXXIII (2011), pp. 177–199.

31 Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (n. 1). On agricultural innovations, see, e.g., Andrew Watson, *Agricultural Innovation in the Early Islamic World: the Diffusion of Crops and Farming Techniques*, Cambridge 1982; *Working with Water in Medieval Europe: Technology and Resource Use*, Paolo Squatriti ed., Leiden 2000, pp. 104–117. See also, linking technology and conversion practices, Ellen F. Arnold, "Engineering Miracles: Water Control, Conversion and the Creation of a Religious Landscape in the Medieval Ardennes", *Environment and History*, XIII (2007), pp. 477–502.

32 Marco Masseti, "In the Gardens of Norman Palermo, Sicily (Twelfth Century A.D.)", *Anthropozoologica*, XLIV (2009), pp. 7–34.

33 Olga Bush, "The Date Palm: Botanical and Artistic Migrations from the Medieval Gardens of Syria and Al-Andalus to Manuscript Illumination in the Iberian Monasteries", in *Le migrazioni nell'Alto Medioevo*, 2 vols, Spoleto 2019, vol II, pp. 1059–1090.

As such – and this is a topic explored by Luca Capriotti and Fabio Mari in their articles in this volume – throughout premodern societies, understanding the shaping of nature through technologies together with changing cultural contexts becomes a way for us to bridge the gap between real environments and their visual representation.

Destroying and converting

Similarly close to the idea of the "representation" of nature is the symbolic use which can be made of own's own, or another's nature. What Ellen F. Arnold has termed the "landscape of conversion" is to be understood as "a series of places that were associated with a new, Christian, and particularly, monastic identity"[34]. But her definition can actually be broadened to include all environments which pass – through human action – from one set of cultural and religious rules to another.

One of the most eloquent examples of such "affirmation of authority over the local environment" is the act of cutting down trees or forests which were associated with former beliefs. Groves and trees are of course amongst the most venerated natural objects in plenty of premodern civilizations. In several cultures, the tree became a microcosmic representation of the *axis mundi*, a widespread archetype which notably gave way to the biblical Tree of Life[35]. In a rhetoric of conversion, the vanishing of forests and groves is, however, commonly presented as the immediate result of a process of domination and organization frequently called "civilizing" (often Christianizing), as opposed to the uncivilized (usually pagan) forces inhabiting woodlands and forests. Deforestation, in such a perspective, is seen as part of an extensive process of civilization, which is recurrent in a variety of cultural contexts. Far from the ideal of "wilderness" promoted by modern thinkers such as Henry D. Thoreau (1817–1862), we must recall that the myth of the barbaric tribes inhabiting the wildlands and forests was already vivid in Roman historiography, and that much later, the savage Saxon leader who opposed Charlemagne in the eighth century was still known as Widukind – "child of the wood". It is also Charlemagne, the legendary emperor, who ordered the cutting down of an Irminsul, an ancient erected sacred tree trunk worshipped by the Saxons, perhaps not far from the Teutoburg forest, an infamous site in Roman historiography[36]. The destruction of a natural idol and landmark linked with "pagan" worship by the legendary Christian emperor is mirrored in the eighth-century episode of the life of St Boniface, in which he cut down Donar's Oak, a sacred tree of the Saxons[37]. Drawing on a famous trope, in St Boniface's story, the wood from the sacred oak is even used to build the pillars of the Christian oratory which was to be erected atop the site of the sacred tree. We find a similar story in Sulpicius Severus' *Vita Martini*, possibly the textual basis for similar later stories, where the following miracle is told:

> "Likewise, when he [Martin] had destroyed an ancient temple in a village, and was about to hew down a pine-tree next to the shrine, the local priest and the rest of the pagan crew tried to obstruct him. […] they would not endure the tree to be hewn down. Martin earnestly reminded them that there was no divinity in a mere stock. […] it was only proper that that tree should be hewn down, seeing as it was dedicated to a demon. Then one of the pagans, more venturesome than his fellows, said, 'If you have any trust in the God whom you say you worship, we will cut down the tree and you can catch it as it falls. And if your God is, as you say, with you, you will escape'. Then Martin, trusting in the Lord, fearlessly promised to do so. […] Then with great joy and gladness they themselves began to cut down their own sacred pine. The pine-tree creaked as it fell, and even as it toppled down and swept upon him, Martin raised his hand to meet it with the sign of salvation. But then, as if driven back by a whirlwind, the tree fell in another direction, almost crushing the heathen who had taken their stand there. Then the pagans were amazed at the miracle, and raised a cry to heaven […]"[38].

6/ A group of pagans crushed by a tree, scene from the Life of St Martin, stained glass window, ambulatory, bay 20, fourth register, right panel, Chartres, 1215–1225

In these cases, the cutting down of a sacred tree, an act which is both idoloclastic and environment-shaping, is directly linked with the conversion of a community. Such a narrative is still present in later depictions of the scene: on a stained-glass window of Chartres depicting St Martin's Life, the tree is depicted in yellow – the usual color of idols – and is shown crushing the pagans standing behind it **[Fig. 6]**[39]. What seems to be suggested in St Martin's story is that, beyond the actual act of shaping and carving a new Christian landscape, the collapse could be seen as a metaphor for the "breakdown of the traditional religion in the Gallic countryside"[40]. Such an association between the tree and the body

34 Arnold, *Negotiating the Landscape* (n. 1), pp. 178–186, sp. p. 178. See also Nancy Edward, "Christianising the Landscape: the Archaeology of the Early Medieval Church in Wales", in *Places of Worship in Britain and Ireland, 300–950*, Paul S. Barnwell ed., Donington 2015, pp. 33–55; *Churches in the Irish Landscape, AD 400–1100*, Tomás Ó Carragáin, Paul MacCotter, Nick Hogan eds, Cork 2021.

35 See Henri Leclercq, "Arbres", in DACL, Fernand Cabrol, Henri Leclercq eds, Paris 1907, vol. I/2; Pamela R. Frese, S.J.M. Gray, "Trees", in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade ed., New York 1995, vol. XV, pp. 26–33. For an overview, see Carole M. Cusack, *The Sacred Tree. Ancient and Medieval Manifestations*, Newcastle upon Tyne 2011.

36 The story is told in the *Royal Frankish Annals* of 772, see Cusack, *The Sacred Tree* (n. 35), pp. 101–105; Stephan Winkler, "Die Zerstörung der Irminsul und der Feldzug der christlichen Franken gegen die heidnischen Sachsen im Jahr 772", in *805, Liudger wird Bischof: Spuren eines Heiligen zwischen York, Rom und Münster*, Gabriele Isenberg, Barbara Rommé eds, Mainz 2005, pp. 63–70. For a link between the Irminsul, Bernward's column, and the rhetoric of conversion, see Ittai Weinryb, "Hildesheim Avant-Garde: Bronze, Columns, and Colonialism", *Speculum*, XCIII/3 (2018), pp. 728–782, sp. pp. 758–769.

37 See Cusack, *The Sacred Tree* (n. 35), pp. 94–101.

38 Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini*, Philip Burton ed., Oxford 2017, pp. 108–111 (with Latin text).

39 Michel Pastoureau, *Jaune: Histoire d'une couleur*, Paris 2019.

40 Philip Burton, "Commentary on Chapter 13", in Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* (n.38), p. 214.

7/ Detail of an illumination with Khālid ibn al-Walīd cutting down a sacred tree, from a manuscript of the *'Aǧayib al-maḫlūqāt va ǧarayib al-mawǧūdāṭ`* [Wonders of Creation], Baghdad, 1388 / BNF, Paris, Supplément Persan 332, fol. 219v

of the pagan religion, or even the eradication of the actual worshippers, was possibly strengthened by the fact that it is "easy for human beings to ascribe meaning to trees because they are satisfyingly homologous with people" – standing, bleeding, being alive[41]. The idea of civilizing an environment both physically – acting directly on the landscape – but also spiritually is closely touched upon also in this volume by Martin F. Lešák, who thematizes the transformation of Conques' "desertic" and uncivilized landscape into an ideal *locus amoenus* for the monks and pilgrims. Conversion becomes, as such, an active factor in the physical and symbolic transformation of a given environment.

In a similar way, the *Vita Martini* tells us that trees and groves – and remote nature more generally – are problematic because they could become the abode of demons. This is by no means a phenomenon peculiar to the Latin West, but one that can also be found in medieval Byzantium and in the Islamic world, too[42]. In one of the founding acts of the cleansing of the Wādī Nakhlah, a site located between Mecca and Ta'if in the Hijaz, from the "idols" of the Pre-Islamic Arabian religions in the seventh century, Khālid ibn al-Walīd – commander of the Quraysh tribe and companion of Prophet Muhammad – is described as tasked by the Prophet with cutting down a sacred tree which was associated with an idol of the goddess al-'Uzzā:

> "Al-Uzza was a she-devil which used to frequent three trees in the valley of Nakhla. When the Prophet captured Mecca he despatched Khalid ibn al-Walid saying, 'go to the valley of Nakhla; there you will find three trees. Cut down the first one.' Khalid went and cut it down. On his return to report, the Prophet asked him, 'Have you seen anything there?' Khalid replied, 'No.' The Prophet ordered him to return and cut down the second tree. He went and cut it down. On his return to

> report the Prophet asked him a second time, 'Have you seen anything there?' Khalid replied, 'No.' Thereupon the Prophet ordered him to return and cut down the third tree. When Khalid arrived on the scene he found an Abyssinian woman with dishevelled hair and her hands placed on her shoulders, gnashing and grating her teeth. Behind her stood Dubayya al-Sulami who was then the warden of al-Uzza […]. Turning to the woman Khalid dealt her a blow which severed her head in two, and behold, she crumbled into ashes. He then cut down the tree and killed Dubayya the warden, after which he returned to the Prophet and reported to him his exploit. Thereupon the Prophet said, 'That was al-Uzza. But she is no more. The Arabs shall have none after her. Verily she shall never be worshipped again'"[43].

The scene is represented in a fourteenth-century manuscript probably made in Baghdad: there, the downed tree already lies next to al-Walīd who carries an oversized axe. Al-Walīd holds his finger to his mouth in an expression of awe as, behind the uprooted tree, a female figure with disheveled hair, commonly interpreted as the jinn, emerges **[Fig. 7]**[44]. The parallels with Martin's or Boniface's story are striking, but here the cutting down of the trees is only a first step towards an actual eradication of the idol living within. In both cases, however, they speak about the destruction of natural landmarks to convert or cleanse the lands. In the case of Martin, the destruction of a tree which had most likely been associated with Celtic tree-worship, in the case of al-Walīd, three trees were associated with al-'Uzzā, one of the most important divinities of pre-Islamic Arabia. In al-Walīd's story, the tree is not only a focus of wrongful worship – an idol itself – but also the abode of a demon, a problem as we have seen that was also encountered by the Christian missionaries. Besides the far-ranging cultural implications of trees as inanimate but living things carrying cultural significance, what emerges here is an "ecology of conversion" in which landmarks that, in these cases, also served as devotional foci, thus had to be altered, reshaped, or destroyed in order to leave space for the development of a new cultural and sacred environment.

A luckier fate befell some of the trees which could still be seen some years ago, such as a cypress overlooking one of the holy circuits of Mount Sinai, preserved in a photograph of the late nineteenth century **[Fig. 8]**. In this case, as in others, pilgrims could – thanks to the perseverance of nature – feel a link with past generations of pilgrims, or even with biblical times. In such a way, the experience of nature – measured, shaped, or sometimes altered – retains a potential for us, art historians, to reinterpret sources outside of the libraries, in the light of the environment that surrounded them. Adjacent to studies on the senses, such reinterpretation can happen only in dialogue with visual, literary sources but also goes hand-in-hand with disciplines and emerging technologies that allow us to go far beyond our understanding of the role of landscape in shaping premodern cultures.

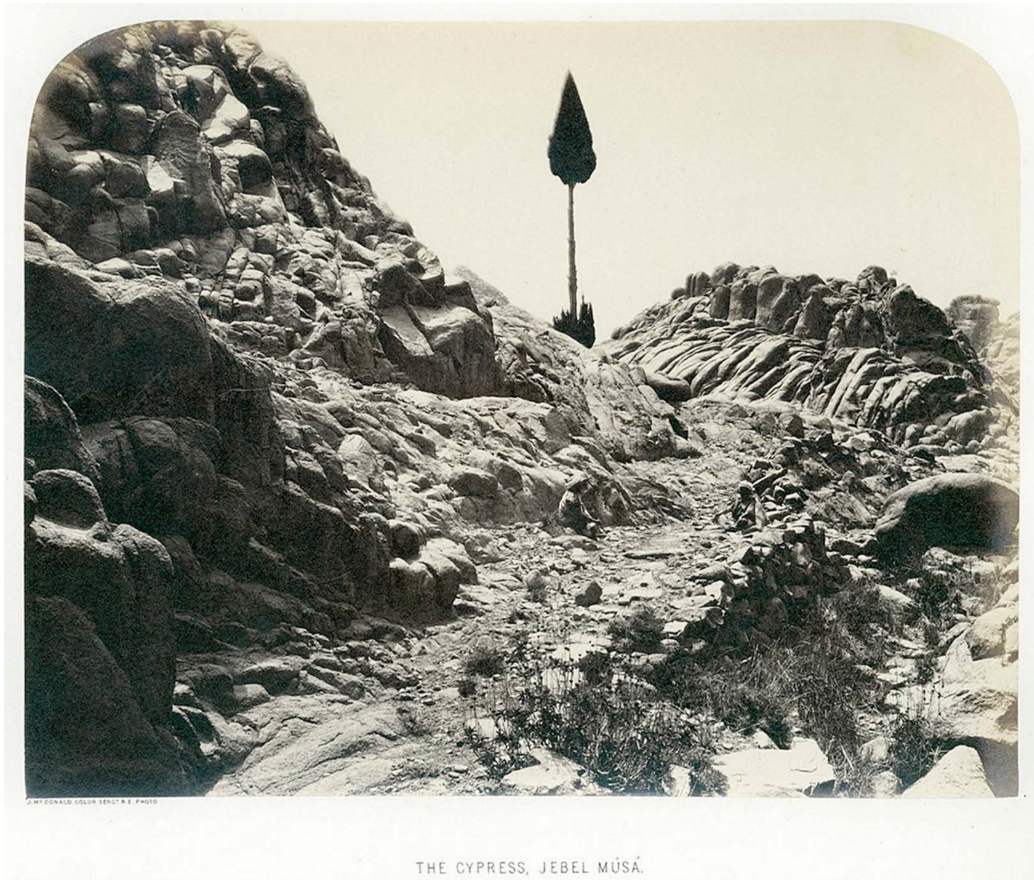
At the end of this introduction, thus, it appears clearly that "landscape" itself is a dynamic term, which must be seen at the crossroads of disciplines. But it is also a term which belongs to art history. However, it applies not only to the representation of environment, as was long the case, but expands to a broader understanding: looking at "landscape" becomes a way to look at transformations of the environment, at a place in which imagination, stories, cultural and religious practices, bodies, and communities are merging and interacting constantly. The theme of landscape thus undoubtedly invites us to dynamically rethink our relationship with our own field and with other disciplines.

41 Cusack, *The Sacred Tree* (n. 35), p. XIV.

42 For the Eastern Roman Empire, see Cyril Mango, "Diabolus Byzantinus", in *Homo Byzantinus*, Anthony Cutler, Simon Franklin eds, Washington, D.C. 1992, pp. 215–223.

43 Ibn al-Kalbi, *Book of Idols*, transl. from Nabih Faris, *Ibn al Kalbi's Book of Idols*, Princeton, NJ 1952, pp. 21–22.

44 I would like to thank Finbarr Barry Flood for his insightful comments on this manuscript.



8/ James M. McDonald, Cypress Tree on Jebel Musa (Mount Sinai, Egypt), albumen silver print, ca 1868–1869

The preliminary questions posed here lead to a collection of articles that propose some solutions to engage with this broad definition of medieval landscape, while simultaneously opening additional lines of inquiry. Alongside my co-editors, I hope that this volume will provide – using the platform *Convivium* and its interdisciplinary spectrum – an impetus to study images, texts, built and natural environments as part of a nexus of exchanges and interactions across the Afro-Eurasian space of the long Middle Ages.

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