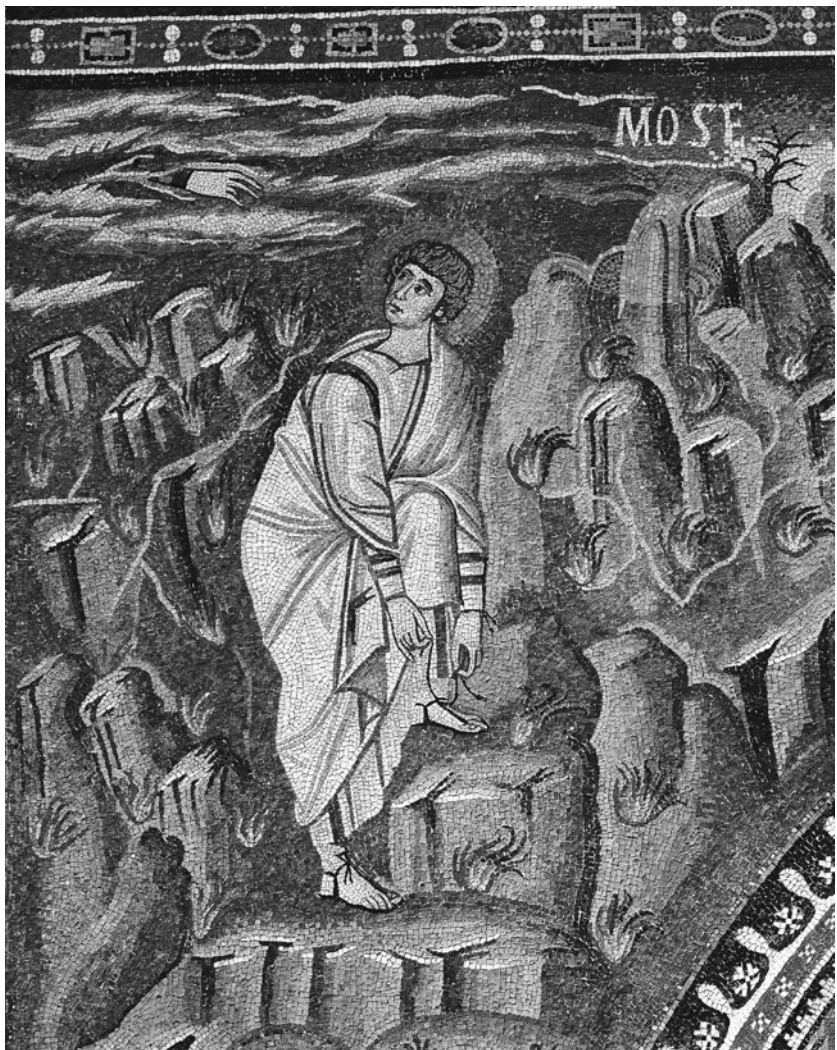


Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium

Nature is as much an idea as a physical reality. By ‘placing’ nature within Byzantine culture and within the discourse of Orthodox Christian thought and practice, *Landscape, Nature, and the Sacred in Byzantium* explores attitudes towards creation that are utterly and fascinatingly different from the modern. Drawing on patristic writing and on Byzantine literature and art, the book develops a fresh conceptual framework for approaching Byzantine perceptions of space and the environment. It takes readers on an imaginary flight over the earth and its varied topographies of gardens and wilderness, mountains and caves, rivers and seas, and invites them to shift from the linear time of history to the cyclical time and spaces of the sacred – the time and spaces of eternal returns and revelations.

VERONICA DELLA DORA is Professor of Human Geography at Royal Holloway, University of London. Her research interests and publications span historical and cultural geography, the history of cartography and Byzantine studies with a specific focus on sacred space and landscape. She is the author of *Imagining Mount Athos: Visions of a Holy Place from Homer to World War II* (2011, shortlisted for the Criticos Prize 2012) and *Mountain* (in press).



Frontispiece Detail from *Moses on Mount Sinai*. Ravenna, Church of San Vitale.

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*Τῇ ἀρωγῷ μου καὶ προστάτιδι
Κυρία Θεοτόκω τῇ Γοργοῦπηκόω
καὶ τοῖς διακονοῦσι καὶ ψάλλουσιν Αὐτῇ
πατράσι καὶ ἀδελφοῖς Δοχειαρίταις
τὸν κόπον καὶ τὸ προϊόν τοῦ κόπου μου
εὐλαβῶς ἀφιερῶ.*

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*Τὰ ὄρη καὶ οἱ βουνοί,
κοιλᾶδες, νάπαι καὶ φάραγγες,
σταλάξατε συμπαθῶς ἐπ' ἐμοὶ τῷ τάλανι
ἐκ τῶν δένδρων δάκρυα
καὶ τὸν Κτίστην πάντων
ἱκετεύσατε τοῦ σῶσαί με.*

Γέρων Θεόκτιστος Δοχειαρίτης

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Preface

Classical antiquity and the western Middle Ages have found, however marginal, a place in contemporary geography's historiographies and spatial histories, while the culture of Byzantium has long been excluded from these narratives and from the discipline in general. This is surely due, at least in part, to the orientalist perceptions that populate the geographical imagination of many non-specialists, including cultural and historical geographers. For the latter, Byzantium, at its best, is generally envisaged as a conduit for ancient Greek ideas to the West; at its worst, Byzantium is a closed, static culture, incapable of competing with the 'dynamic West'. When viewed according to western canons, the heavy reliance of Byzantine literature and art on existing prototypes and rhetorical conventions is usually perceived and judged in negative, as it were, that is as lacking originality, dynamism, accuracy, technique, and so on, and therefore not worth seriously engaging.

Likewise, studies of Byzantine environmental perceptions by historians, art historians, and historians of science have seldom critically engaged with spatial concepts. Territory and Byzantine art have generally remained disconnected. The reason is that the latter does not approach the world in the western naturalistic sense. Topographic elements depicted in icons body forth and create a peculiar type of spatiality, or 'hierotopy', but are usually by no means central to the composition in the same way they are in western Renaissance painting, for instance. The function of these spatial forms is designed to help the viewer focus on the figures of saints depicted on the icon, to evoke the wider cosmos, or visually echo other scenes. Unlike western paintings, icons (and Byzantine art in general) cannot therefore be used, nor are they meant, as sources of topographic information. Yet, alongside Byzantine religious literature, medieval hagiographical accounts, and poems, they unveil spatial perceptions and perceptions of nature and the cosmos utterly and fascinatingly different from the modern.

Nature is an idea as much as it is a physical reality. It is intrinsically tied to culturally specific ways of seeing, as much as to the dark materials of which the earth is made. Our understanding of the world is entangled with our own values to such an extent that the two can never be fully divorced. By 'placing nature' within Byzantine culture and within the discourse of

Orthodox Christian thought and practice, this book explores and offers the reader an alternative way of seeing and perceiving the interconnections of place, space, and the world – the way of seeing of a society that never experienced the economic revolution and environmental change of medieval western Europe, nor the speculative theology of medieval scholasticism, nor the western Renaissance transition from a theocentric to an anthropocentric universe, and certainly not the dubious achievements of the industrial and scientific revolutions of modernity.

The intention of the book is not to provide a review of shifting environmental perceptions in Byzantium, but to investigate the principles that underpin such perceptions and their representations. In what follows, I am not offering a catalogue of Byzantine ‘landscape typologies,’ but an exploration of recurring images and imaginations. The focus of the book is not on ‘built’ *topoi*, such as Byzantine cities, villas, farms, churches, monasteries, aqueducts, and so on, but instead is linked with the theology of nature of the Orthodox Church, in which Byzantine world views were grounded. Finally, the argument of this book rests on the assumption that territory is not a blank canvas waiting to be inscribed with meaning. Instead, I believe that the land and its features speak back to the viewer: they capture attention; they channel imagination; and they evoke and anchor myths. *Topoi* utter stories.

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Abbreviations

AB	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
Bas. Caes.	Basil of Caesarea
BDEC	<i>The Blackwell Dictionary of Eastern Christianity</i> (ed. K. Parry et al., Oxford, 2001)
BEI	<i>Bibliothēkē Ellēnikōn Paterōn kai Ekklesiastikōn Syggrapheōn</i>
BHG	<i>Bibliotheca hagiographica graeca</i>
Dion. Ar.	Dionysios the Areopagite
DOHD	Dumbarton Oaks Hagiography Database
Eg.	Egeria
Greg. Naz.	Gregory of Nazianzus
Greg. Nys.	Gregory of Nyssa
Jer.	Jerome
John Chr.	John Chrysostom
John Dam.	John of Damascus
L–S (1977)	Liddell, H., and R. Scott, <i>Lexikou tēs Ellēnikēs glōssēs</i> (Athens, 1977)
L–S (1996)	Liddell, H. and R. Scott, <i>A Greek–English Lexicon</i> (Oxford, 1996)
Max. Conf.	Maximos the Confessor
<i>Mēnaia</i>	<i>Mēnaia tēs Apostolikēs Diakonias Ekklēsiās tēs Ellados</i> (Athens, 1959–66)
MWD	<i>Merriam–Webster Dictionary</i> (Dallas, 1995)
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (translation series)
ODB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i> (ed. A. Kazhdan, Oxford, 2005)
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
PG	<i>Patrologia graeca</i> , ed. J. P. Migne (Paris, 1857–66)
Ptol.	Ptolemy
<i>Vita Moys.</i>	<i>On the Life of Moses</i> (by Gregory of Nyssa)