

“What perspectives and methodologies can we engage with to develop a new environmental and multi-species history of the Mediterranean?”

Environmental history in the United States, with its heavy emphasis on the modern U.S., sets expectations and questions that do not fit the source materials of historians who study other times and places. The methodologies and theoretical frameworks that U.S. environmental historians have built around the concept of wilderness, for example, rarely reflect the perspectives of ancient or medieval Mediterranean sources. Interestingly, agricultural history in the modern U.S., which shares an interest in the natural world with environmental history, has far more room for ancient and medieval sources and questions. The history of agriculture, therefore, can provide a way to enter the modern field of environmental history. As Paolo Squatriti and Jamie Kreiner have shown, medieval sources have a broad definition of and sources for agriculture, agricultural products, and agricultural knowledge. These historians focused on one species to reveal the many ways plants, animals, and humans interacted in the western Mediterranean.

This position paper will take a similar approach with honeybees. Much work has been done to explore honeybees and their products in the Mediterranean and beyond. This position paper will add to that work by considering the complex relationships between bees, humans, and other animals in an agricultural setting. Honeybees also allow ancient and medieval historians of the Mediterranean to join and subtly shift perspectives on ideas of wilderness that are so foundational to modern environmental history.