

## BEYOND THE SACRED. THE CONCEPTIONS OF NATURE IN BYZANTIUM (4<sup>TH</sup> – 15<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES)

Byzantium was considered the new Israel, with its inhabitants being chosen people. The Empire was replete with churches, icons, and liturgical singing.

However, this viewpoint presents a simplistic perspective of the Eastern Roman Empire, firmly rooted in the modern imagination. While there is some truth to these conceptions, they are also a result of the fact that what remains of Byzantine culture is primarily its secular architecture, icons, and its intangible heritage, which is predominantly encapsulated in the liturgy and theology of the Orthodox Church.

This project proposes a different perspective. Although the Byzantines certainly acknowledged the world as the *opus Dei* (or perhaps it would be more fitting to say *ktema tou theou*), and while their existing scientific knowledge seems to be rooted in (ancient) texts rather than empirical evidence, they still recognized that the natural world extended far beyond merely considering it as God's playground. Furthermore, the Byzantines demonstrated a clear interest in understanding various natural phenomena around them.

The objective of this project is to utilize the available sources, primarily literary but also visual and zooarchaeological, to craft a different *biography* of the Empire. It will focus on three key areas: the understanding of the natural world as expressed in scientific treatises and texts that intertwine Christian (religious) and secular perspectives, Constantinople as a city not only for humans but also non-human animals, and lastly, the sea and wilderness as two significant *topoi* (places) within the Byzantine natural environment.