

"WARNING: Storm Approaching"

Weather, the Environment, and Natural Disasters in the Ancient Mediterranean

24th Annual Classics Graduate Student Colloquium, University of Virginia

March 21, 2020

Keynote Paper by Clara Bosak-Schroeder (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign):
"Academia in the Climate Emergency"

Scientific, aesthetic, and religious conceptions of weather events appear throughout Classical antiquity, as the Greeks and Romans attempted to make sense of environmental phenomena. Often, these events were explained as expressions of divine wrath or favor. Storms and natural disasters figured as literary devices, for example to delay narrative action or as metaphors for the cyclic nature of human life. Climate, broadly defined, was thought to determine national character, and weather played a critical role in military expeditions. Recently, scholars have made considerable advances in applying principles of bioarchaeology to the study of the ancient world. Hand in hand with these, theorists working with the tools of ecocriticism envision a humanities broader than humans, accounting for the whole natural world.

The study of weather and its public is particularly relevant today, as the severity of natural disasters increases annually. We face dramatic changes to the environment on a global scale, and the global response to these changes is a contentious and urgent matter. For this conference, we seek academic papers exploring natural disasters and environmental change in ancient Greece and Rome. We also welcome submissions from scholars whose work deals with the broader Mediterranean world, which includes but is not limited to Mesopotamia, the Levant, Anatolia, Egypt, Ethiopia, and North Africa. Some possible topics are:

- Storms and natural phenomena as literary motifs, metaphors, and/or similes
- Archaeological evidence for natural disasters or climate change
- Conceptions of environmental determinism
- The depiction of weather events in visual art
- The role of the gods in determining the weather and cult activity seeking to affect the weather or environment
- Historical consequences of weather and climate
- The relationship of ancient studies to the environmental humanities
- The present legacies of ancient environments

Each presenter will have 15-20 minutes to speak. Please send abstracts of no more than 300 words (not counting notes or bibliography) to Stephen Hill (rsh7bu@virginia.edu) no later than 5pm EST on January 31, 2020. This colloquium intends to be accessible to all, including those with physical disabilities, mental illness, and/or chronic illness. Any questions may be addressed to colloquium organizers Joseph Zehner (jbz9fa@virginia.edu) and Vergil Parson (vgp6fe@virginia.edu).