

Call for Papers

Interdisciplinary conference:

Human-environmental connectivity in pre-modern times of conflict.

Exploring environmental archives across disciplines, methods, and materials

Wednesday, October 7 to Friday, October 9, 2026 at Kiel University

This interdisciplinary conference will examine the complex relationship between war and the environment in the context of conflict. The event will focus on antiquity and is aimed at researchers in the fields of ancient history, classical philology, and archaeology. Contributions relating to other eras and from the natural sciences that open thematic, methodological, or theoretical connections to the topic are expressly welcome. We cordially invite you to submit proposals for contributions on one of the five main topics listed below:

1. Human reflection on environmental factors

This panel deals with the many ways in which environmental conditions shaped strategic thinking and operational planning of military campaigns. Commanders had to carefully consider the landscape when determining the most effective routes for their armies and weighing the advantages and disadvantages of terrain features such as mountains or rivers. How did seasonal changes and weather phenomena influence the course of a campaign? How were suitable battlefields selected, and to what extent were the division between naval and land forces and the choice of routes determined by environmental conditions?

2. The environment as a habitat

This panel examines the logistical dimension of warfare, focusing on how people used natural resources and adapted to their environment to sustain themselves during conflict. How was food supply organized, a critical factor that required careful planning and ingenuity? To what extent were armies dependent on proximity to the coast, and to what extent and by what means were local food sources exploited through hunting, fishing, trade, or looting? What role did the environment play in maintaining the health and morale of an army, and what natural refuges offered protection from the elements as well as from enemy attacks?

3. Environmental destruction through human activities

This panel deals with direct human intervention in the environment and its consequences. Here, the focus shifts to the direct effects of human activities on the environment because of warfare.

Military campaigns sometimes required large-scale construction projects such as the digging of canals, the building of bridges, and the erection of fortresses. How did these interventions change the landscape, and what lasting consequences can be identified that went beyond the immediate requirements of the conflict? Where and to what extent did this lead to environmental destruction, through the diversion of water sources, large-scale fires, or the depletion of vital resources? The focus here is on analysis that examine the legacy of war on the environment, considering both the intended and unintended consequences of military actions.

4. The environment as a formative force in pre-modern conflicts

This panel examines the environment not only as a passive backdrop, but as an active and (in)direct participant in conflicts. In narratives, forces of nature, such as river gods, could be personified as actors or interpreted as signs of the divine, such as solar eclipses. Environmental hazards such as storms, droughts, and earthquakes posed significant challenges to military operations and could influence the outcome of campaigns. Contributions to this panel should address the symbolic and practical role of environmental phenomena in warfare, as well as how pre-modern societies understood and responded to these forces.

5. Opportunities and Challenges: Insights from Natural Sciences and Literary Studies.

This panel explores the interdisciplinary potential of combining insights from the natural sciences and literary studies to deepen our understanding of human-environment connections in premodern times of conflict. This approach enables a more comprehensive analysis of ancient sources, incorporating archaeological, ecological, and textual evidence. Here, innovative methods and critical perspectives can be discussed and ideas presented to overcome disciplinary boundaries when working on common research interests.

Format: Presentations are scheduled to last **20 minutes**, followed by a 10-minute discussion. In Panel 5 on the connection between findings from the natural sciences and literary studies, there is the option of a short keynote presentation (**10 minutes**) or the presentation of an interdisciplinary project (**10 minutes**).

Proposals for presentations (max. 1 page as a PDF document, specifying the desired presentation language: English, German, or French and including a short biography) can be submitted by email to samantha.philips@email.uni-kiel.de by **Friday, April 17, 2026**. The accommodation costs of the speakers can be covered, and if necessary, a subsidy for travel expenses to Kiel can also be paid. A publication of the conference results is planned.