

BYZANTINE CULTURAL ENTOMOLOGY. TRANSFORMATION OF THE ANCIENT HERITAGE (5TH-15TH CENTURIES)

The “animal turn” has not been overlooked in Byzantine studies; it has undoubtedly not attracted the same level of attention there as it has in the fields of classics and western medieval studies. However, one group of living creatures remains unstudied and neglected by scholars: insects (though the Byzantine definition of an insect is not identical to ours). Even though, as confirmed by Byzantine writers throughout centuries, creepy-crawlers were (very much unwanted) part of everyday life, they did not attract the attention of scholars. Therefore, this project intends to explore Byzantine cultural entomology. Cultural entomology focuses on the influence of insects and other terrestrial arthropods in literature, language, music, the arts, history, etc. This project will explore a change in metaphorical meanings of insects as the Greek world shifted from a classical to a Christian worldview. In other words, it will investigate how Byzantine writers used insect imagery to promote their own, Christian agenda. For instance, leech could signify the Devil; silkworms were used as symbols of resurrection due to their ability to transform into moths; Ps.-Anastasios likened disembodied souls to insects. We also plan to prepare a first draft of the “insect dictionary” (ByzIns) which would record various instances of using insect imagery in Byzantine literature.