

Call for Papers
Waterways and Literary Channels of the Pre-Modern World
Ghent University, 4-5 April 2024

“The literature of ‘modern’ Europe is as intermingled with that of the Mediterranean as if the Rhine had received the waters of the Tiber.”

E.R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*

Waterways, from great seas to local lakes and much in-between, played a tremendously important role in pre-modern literary cultures, as facilitators, actants and backdrops. Within pre-modern narratives themselves, waterways can be found as visible metaphors and structuring devices, eliciting a range of emotional and creative responses from authors and readers alike. For instance, water can be associated with both directionality (transitions) and circularity (endlessness). It can be both a barrier and catalyst, both constructive and destructive. Water also enables the movement of ideas, texts, and people. It acts as physical markers in the geographic landscape, and as recognisable landmarks of regional cultures and urban centres; it can be a natural, imagined or imposed boundary separating ethnic groups or social identities. Waterways thus function as contact zones, while also helping to delineate one’s sense of location and space. The relationships between waterways, societies and individuals within our current ecological and political contexts have an immediate urgency too, which should encourage us to reflect on the fundamental importance of these connections.

What role, then, did the geography of waterways play in the transregional movement of authors, texts, styles, and poetics of pre-modern literary cultures? What commonalities and differences can we identify across pre-modern literary canons, including those in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, and other vernaculars? How does water function as a literary motif and/or device in various traditions, that is: how is it described? Which (metaphorical) meanings are attached to it? How does water function as a ‘character’ at different levels, controlling movement of people both inside and outside texts? And what light can our understanding of pre-modern human-nature relationships shine on modern-day ecological concerns? The aim of this workshop is to explore these questions through a variety of disciplinary, literary, and linguistic contexts and approaches. In doing so, it seeks to build on a growing body of scholarship that turns the critical lens onto water.

The workshop consists of three elements:

- panels with 20-minute presentations by the participants, followed by ample time for discussion
- two round table discussions of 1.5 hours each, introduced by short 10-minutes pitches by the participants
- a round of poster-presentations

In addition, we are happy to announce a **keynote lecture by Prof. Dr. Albrecht Classen** on ‘Bodies of Water as Epistemological Challenges in Medieval European Literature’.

We invite proposals for 20-minute presentations, round table contributions or poster presentations addressing the overall theme of the workshop and its research question(s). The aim is to publish the papers in a themed issue. Proposals for papers/round table contributions/posters (max. 250 words) and any questions or queries can be sent to info@relicsresearch.com by the 11th of December 2023.

The workshop is organized within the framework of the Scientific Research Network 'Literatures without Borders' (<https://literatureswithoutborders.com>). The network is funded by the Flemish Research Fund-FWO. The workshop is organized by Robert Gallagher (Kent University), Jeroen De Gussem (Ghent University), Klazina Staat (VU University Amsterdam), and Dinah Wouters (Huygens Institute, Amsterdam).