

BCHIS5 Humans and Nature in History

Module Coordinator: Dr Katja Bruisch

Duration: Hilary Term

Contact hours: 1 lectures p/w, 4 tutorials

Maximum capacity: none

Assessment: Continuous assessment (100%): 1 essay and tutorial assignments

Date of essay submission: Monday of eleventh teaching week (to be confirmed)

Description: The idea that humans are distinct from or superior to nature has a long history, and can even be seen in ancient texts including the Bible. But the idea has become ever more influential since the Enlightenment. It has spurred and justified intense efforts to shape almost all aspects of the natural world in accordance with human needs and desires, and paved the way for thinking of nature and culture as a dichotomy, just one consequence of which is the strict distinction now made between natural sciences and the humanities. Yet despite the many attempts to overcome the constraints imposed by the physical and living environment and establish themselves as masters of the world, humans have always been and still remain dependent on their natural environment, while at the same time constantly changing it without full understanding of the consequences. Natural disasters, conflicts over resources, climate change or nature conservation initiatives are only some examples illustrating that, alongside power, economy and culture, what has happened in and to the natural environment is an inseparable part of our history. In this module, we will introduce key approaches to the exciting study of environmental history, and present concrete case studies from the Ancient and Medieval Worlds to recent times that exemplify the broad range of ways that humans have influenced, and in turn been influenced by, the natural world, as well as the different sources and methods used to discover and study these.

Learning outcomes

On successful completion of this module students should be able to:

- Outline and explain key developments in human engagement with the natural world
- Assess the impact of these developments on human history
- Search for, and critically appraise, relevant literature
- Undertake an analysis of selected source materials
- Communicate analysis and argument in written and verbal format