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## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

At first glance, the term “Wilderness” leaves us with the impression that it is just one of those popular, fashion driven terms of our times like so many other terms in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A term creating an artificial discourse in scholarship and in the public, to which everybody should express his or her thoughts on a regular professional or semi-professional basis, as if each word of the discourse would contribute substantially to new perceptions and results as well as influence existing cosmic order.

Our approach in the present edited volume entitled “Wilderness Revisited: Its Essence, Perception, Description and Image in Byzantium and Beyond” is a completely different one. It is a bottom-up endeavour based on actual, ongoing research in various academic fields providing expertise and new scholarly results and, thus, enabling meaningful comparisons between different countries, continents and cultures. It is by no means a preconceived concept imposed by somebody, but the embodiment of one of the core visions of the research initiative “Maps of Power”<sup>1</sup>.

Our starting point is twofold. On the one hand we have been inspired by an article of the geographer and environmental historian William Cronon with the title “The Trouble with Wilderness; Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature”<sup>2</sup>, who writes, amongst others, on the perception of “Wilderness”:

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<sup>1</sup> Maps of Power, <<https://maps-of-power.oeaw.ac.at/>>, 13.8.2025.

<sup>2</sup> Cronon, W., The Trouble with Wilderness; Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature. *Environmental History* 1/1 (1996) 7–28.

“In the wilderness the boundaries between human and nonhuman, between natural and supernatural, had always seemed less certain than elsewhere. [...] No mere mortal was meant to linger long in such a place [...] As more and more tourists sought out the wilderness as a spectacle to be looked at and enjoyed for its great beauty, the sublime effect became domesticated.”<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand the editor of this volume attended two workshops in Oxford in the years 2023 and 2024, namely on “A Special Relationship? Gender on Medieval Mount Athos” and “Mountains and the Historian”, where he became witness to inspiring papers and fruitful discussions, which spurred him to delve deeper into the topic.

Consequently, questions have arisen like: What kind of perception of “Wilderness” can be discerned in Byzantine and Latin hagiography? Are there similarities or differences? In which way are archaeology and architecture connected to “Wilderness”? What do we learn from the location and layout of hermitages? What is the meaning of the Greek “erēmos” and the Slavonic “pustinja”? Have these terms witnessed a change of meaning in the course of time and in which way? What is the interrelation between “Wilderness” and mountains as well as caves? How is “Wilderness” illustrated in Byzantine and Western medieval art? Are there any parallels in the perception of “Wilderness” in Europe, Africa and Asia respectively?

In our edited volume we have addressed most of these questions by covering a vast variety of topics. The volume’s aim is to spur further discussion in academia and to connect it to the public discourse in Central Europe (but also beyond), as for example represented by Mario F. Broggi<sup>4</sup>, leav-

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<sup>3</sup> Cronon 1996, 10–12.

<sup>4</sup> Broggi, M. F., Wie viel Wildnis für die Schweiz? Ein Diskussionsbeitrag (Essay). *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Forstwesen* 166/2 (2015) 60–66; Broggi, M. F., Hindenlang Clerc, K., Mehr Wildnis- wo und

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ing aside any exaggeration or misconception. As is often the case from our perspective as scholars, humankind can and should learn from history, which in this case would help to honestly raise awareness for Creation and nature. May this edited volume be an incentive in the right direction.

As editor I express my sincere gratitude to all contributors to this volume, who have shown great enthusiasm and made this publication possible by providing their rich knowledge and expertise. Moreover, I am indebted to the publishing house Akademska knjiga in Novi Sad (Serbia) and especially to its Director Mrs. Bora Babić for her incessant support.

Vienna, in October 2025

*Mihailo St. Popović*



# I

HEE SOOK LEE-NIINIOJA

## MEDIEVAL MONASTIC SPACES

*Encountering God between the Inner and Outer  
Wilderness in Culture and Nature*

### 1. Notions of Wilderness

Several approaches to notions of wild spaces were attempted. Viewing wilderness as vacant or hostile, places considered “wild” are treated as disposable, undervalued, and inaccessible. In contrast, it gains worth and respect when the wild space is protected with empathy. The attributes of wilderness, intactness, and remoteness to “wild” are interpretative and contextual. Despite its ambiguity, it is not so obscure as to defy description. It is a place that has retained its natural ecosystem, while it is a legally safeguarded place accessible to native people with minimal effect. A characteristic is to foster the interaction between wilderness and humans, and it has iconic value as a place for recreational, spiritual, economic, social, and biological purposes.

If wilderness is an uninhabited space and architecture is a means of human occupation, there is a basic resemblance between them because of their reference to human relationships with the earth. Wilderness is a concept of human invention. The correlation between wilderness and culture can be viewed as follows:

- (i) dichotomy: the relationship between wilderness and humanity is common and apparent. Despite

their disposition shifting from the peaceful to the malevolent, their apartness remains;

- (ii) perception: wilderness is an artificial environment that exists only in human terms;
- (iii) language: humans articulate the relationship meaningfully by recognising both dichotomy and perception. Wilderness has a history of change and avoids details and implications<sup>1</sup>.

These contemporary definitions of landscape differ from earlier notions that prevailed until the 18th century. “Deserted,” “savage,” “desolate,” or “barren” were its characteristics, whose negative overtones caused humans to feel bewildered. Biblical passages illustrate remote areas as morally confused and hopeless, far from civilisation. According to the Old Testament (Exodus 14:3), the wilderness was where Moses and his people travelled for forty years and almost gave up on God in favour of worshipping a golden god<sup>2</sup>. In the New Testament (Mark 1:12–20), Christ fought the devil and resisted his temptations in the wilderness<sup>3</sup>.

John Milton, the author of *Paradise Lost* (1667), describes what surrounded the Garden of Eden for anyone who tried to enter. Being driven from the garden, Adam and Eve found themselves in a wilderness where only their labour and suffering could redeem them. They were forced to enter it against their will and quivered with fear. However, by the 18th century, the wilderness was loaded with

<sup>1</sup> Lepre 2019, V, 1–4.

<sup>2</sup> “For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are intangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in.” (Exodus 14:3), quoted based on: King James Bible Online, <[https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/1611\\_Exodus-Chapter-14/](https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/1611_Exodus-Chapter-14/)>, 14.8.2025.

<sup>3</sup> “And immediately the Spirit driueth him into the wilderness. And he was there in the wilderness fourtie daies tempted of Satan, and was with the wildbeasts, and the Angels ministred vnto him.” (Mark 1:12–13), quoted based on: King James Bible Online, <[https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/1611\\_Mark-Chapter-1/#12](https://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/1611_Mark-Chapter-1/#12)>, 14.8.2025.

cultural values and was invented to make it sacred. The blurred boundaries separating the natural and supernatural, or human and non-human, appeared less obvious. In this process, the doctrine of the sublime embodied the idea of the wilderness as a place where the supernatural existed under the surface. Sublime landscapes offered people emotional opportunities to discover and interact with God amid the vast, spectacular landscapes.

Moreover, the term “sublime” was not a joyous experience for Romantic writers and artists. William Wordsworth, in his autobiographical poem *The Prelude* (1798), depicts ascending the Alps and passing over the Simplon Pass. The poet experienced an almost terrifying feeling of being in the divine, surrounded by crags and waterfalls. Sharing with the Old Testament’s prophets, he had a religious experience of the wilderness as supernatural with awe.

During the second half of the 19th century, settlers in the wilderness domesticated the sublime by seeking it as a spectacle to appreciate its beauty. Travellers visited aban-



Fig. 1: *Tintern Abbey in a Bend of the Wye* (1804)  
painted by William Havell  
(Collection of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK)