

Red Sea Lecture Series

„The Maritime Edge: Marine Harvests, Subsistence and Mobility in the Premodern Red Sea“

Wednesday, 27 October 2021, 5.30 pm

Lecture by Dr. Roxani Margariti (Emory University)

Ancient accounts of the Red Sea include the figure of the ichthyofagi, the “fish-eaters” inhabiting the Sea’s shores and islands. This vaguely defined people are often (though not always) portrayed as primitive and impoverished both culturally and materially, a correlate of the alterity assigned to them. The construct in its variations across Greek and Roman sources has received a lot of scholarly attention and is to be compared and contrasted with descriptions of maritime harvesters in the region by medieval authors. These portrayals also raise a host of questions about the realities of subsistence and the dynamics of resource exploitation and mobility in this generally arid and eminently maritime region in pre-modern times. What was the nature, extent and impact of exploitation of marine resources in the southern Red Sea? How long-lived and continuous were practices such as fishing, pearl-diving, and the harvesting of other luxury marine goods (ambergris, tortoiseshell) and what shifted in the geographies of exploitation of such resources through time? What can we learn from instances of competition and conflict over maritime space and its potential? What drove mobility and circulation across Red Sea shores and islands before modernity? Focusing primarily on the case of the Dahlak Archipelago, this paper addresses these questions and seeks to contribute to a periodization of poverty, violence, and migration in the Red Sea region.

Roxani Eleni Margariti is an Associate Professor of Middle Eastern Studies at Emory University’s Department of Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies. Her research focuses on medieval maritime history, economic and social networks, and the material culture of maritime societies of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. She is the author of *Aden and the Indian Ocean Trade: 150 Years in the Life of a Medieval Arabian Port* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), a study of urban topography and commercial institutions at the Yemeni port from the 11th to the 13th century, based primarily on Arabic and Judaeo-Arabic sources and archaeological and environmental data. She is currently completing a monograph entitled *Insular Crossroads: the Dahlak Archipelago, the Red Sea and Indian Ocean History*, in which she examines the biography of a maritime polity located at the margins of larger states of the medieval and early modern Middle East and East Africa.

The event will be held online, please register in advance:

<https://tinyurl.com/5xswd368>

