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Mountains Re-Imagined: from Topographic Tropes to Creative Communities and Vibrant Relations

Mountain environments have tended to be characterised by ancient and modern observers as marginal and precarious, and their human inhabitants as uncivilised, bellicose, and backward. Such socio-political orogeneses can be linked quite unambiguously to lowland state- and boundary-making from Bronze Age Mesopotamia to imperial Rome and China on the one hand, and to ancient and modern versions of environmental determinism and social evolutionism on the other. Recent mountain archaeologies and histories reject such stereotyped representations of mountain lives and environments, focusing efforts on their empirical falsification. While this presents an important step in the development of critical and reflexive mountain-centred research practice, it also unwittingly cements further the very imageries such work aims to challenge, and leaves other, arguably far more interesting and important, stories of upland life untold. In this lecture, I will trace the development and transmission of key mountain tropes from antiquity to the present. Drawing on examples from Southwest Asia and from across the globe, I will explore how the construction of mountain Others shapes archaeological and historical research, bleeds into policy-making, and impacts present-day mountain lifeways, before considering alternative frameworks for the narration of mountain pasts and how they might contribute to addressing the pressing environmental and social issues facing mountain regions today.

Biography

Claudia Glatz is Professor of Archaeology at the University of Glasgow. Her research interests revolve around how human societies organise themselves, especially how political formations such as states and empires develop, are experienced, and resisted at both the landscape scale and through material culture. Mountains and mountain societies present particularly interesting socio-ecological laboratories in this regard and much of her work has focused on highland and transitional highland-lowland regions in Southwest Asia. She is the author of numerous journal articles on Bronze Age Anatolia as well as the monograph *The Making of Empire in Bronze Age Anatolia* (CUP, 2020). To reveal the long-term histories of upland and transitional regions and their human inhabitants, she has carried out archaeological surveys and excavations in the Pontic mountains of Türkiye as part of the Cide Archaeological Project, and in the western Zagros piedmonts of the Kurdistan Region of north-east Iraq, where she directs the ongoing Sirwan Regional Project. Resulting publications include *Kinetic Landscapes: The Cide Archaeological Project 2009-2011 - Surveying the Western Turkish Black Sea Region* (2015, De Gruyter) and *Place, Encounter, and the Making of Communities: The Lower Sirwan/Upper Diyala River Valley from Prehistory to the Iron Age* (2024, Sidestone). She is currently working on a monograph on the long-term history of mountain societies with the working title *Wild Mountains – A Human History*.

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