What is nature, and does it have a history? According to British philosopher Kate Soper, 'the
natural is both distinguished from the human and the cultural, but [is] also the concept through
which we pose questions about the more or less natural or artificial quality of our own
behaviour and cultural formations, about the existence and quality of human nature, and about the
respective roles of nature and culture in the formation of individuals and their social milieu. In
what ways, then, can nature be historicized? We invite graduate students working on any topic or period in European history and/or Europe in
the world to consider the place of ‘nature’ in their research. We define nature in the broadest
possible sense, including its material, social, political, and cultural dimensions.

This conference is open to all graduate students. We particularly encourage submissions from
those who have not presented their work at conferences before or are from underrepresented
regions and/or institutions. We hope to be able to support travel and/or accommodation for a
limited number of presenters without access to institutional funding.

Topics may include but are not limited to:

The relationship between nature and humans

How has nature shaped the existence of humans over the centuries? How have humans exploited
nature, and to what extent have natural forces been a hindrance or impetus for change? What is
the relationship between nature and power?

Topics could include: ecosystems and human economy, post-human and more-than-human
approaches to history, natural and supernatural forces and creatures, animal history

Environmental history

How has the environment shaped human societies throughout history and vice-versa? How have
humans responded to environmental crises? What is the present and future of environmental
history?

Topics could include: climate changes, environmentalism and environmental social movements,
concepts of the anthropocene, history of ecology

Seascapes and landscapes, ora and fauna

How has the natural world been experienced or described by both settled historical actors –
farmers, peasants, urban dwellers – and those ‘on the move’ – travelers, explorers, pilgrims,
convents, slaves? What meanings have cultures and social groups attached to landscapes and
seascapes, mountains and rivers, animals and plants?

Topics could include: natural and built environments, cultural representations of landscapes, ora or fauna, experiences and perceptions of landscapes/nature

Nature as metaphor

How have concepts of ‘nature’ (or ‘human nature’) informed culture, politics, and identity? What
compositional and decisional perspectives tell us about ‘natural’ and empire? What made certain
behaviours and norms ‘unnatural’? What didn’t remain, in elemental periods, its return to
nature?

Topics could include: human-nature and social-norms, gender and nature, concepts of nature in
social science, race and nature, the natural/social divide, civilization and barbarity, ideas of
nature in historical narratives, intellectual histories of nature

Nature in a global perspective

Studies of ‘nature’ address a variety of boundaries and oppositions, be they temporal,
geographical, biological (e.g., humans/non-human), or technological (natural/artificial). What global
boundaries exist in the study of nature throughout history? How have these boundaries been
challenged and changed? Are there internal spaces and/or inter-local/external spaces in a global
history of nature?

Topics could include: ‘natural’ vs ‘artificial’ or ‘artificial’ frontiers, environmental policy and politics,
natural resources, environmental movements, urbanization, globalization, imperial/configural
Please send an abstract of up to 300 words and a short biography of no more than 100 words to
GRACEH2022@history.ox.ac.uk by 15th December 2021.