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Photo: Olaf Tausch, The Aswan High Dam in Egypt (part.), 2009 (Wikimedia Commons)



Call for Papers
International Conference
**Water Management and Environmental Change
in Central Asia and the MENA Region**
Politics, society, and transnational connections since 1945
University of Padua, Italy | February 5th and 6th, 2026

The Department of Historical and Geographic Sciences and the Ancient World at the University of Padua invites proposals for papers and panels for an international conference to be held in Padua on 5–6 February 2026.

The conference will explore the history of water management and agricultural policies in the semi-arid macro-region encompassing Central Asia and the Middle East/North Africa (MENA), with a particular focus on transnational connections across this vast area.

In the wake of the Second World War, both Central Asia and the MENA region witnessed major development projects and policies related to water and land management. These initiatives led to significant economic and environmental transformations, reshaping local societies and influencing international relations.

Organized as part of the PRIN project *“Water Management and Environmental Change in Central Asia: Politics, Society and Transnational Connections (1948–2020s)”*, a collaboration between the University of Padua and the University of Naples “L’Orientale”, the conference seeks to bring together scholars from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds to examine the history, legacies, and current challenges of water management and land use in Central Asia and the MENA region.

A particular focus will be given to the multifaceted relationships between the socialist bloc and the Middle East. The Soviet Union pursued extensive development programs in Soviet Central Asia while also providing socialist “development aid” to Middle Eastern countries in the fields of agriculture and water policy. These efforts not only fostered new diplomatic ties but also enhanced economic cooperation between the USSR, Central and Eastern Europe, and parts of the Global South.

Deadline October 15th 2025

Organizers:

Dr. Niccolò Pianciola (niccolo.pianciola@unipd.it)

Dr. Mauro Primavera (mauro.primavera@unipd.it)

Call for Papers
International Conference

Water Management and Environmental Change in Central Asia and the MENA Region

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Topics of interest include, but are not limited to:

- Historical and contemporary practices of water management and land use in Central Asia and the MENA region
- Environmental history of water systems in these regions
- Transnational dimensions of Soviet and post-Soviet agricultural and environmental policies, from the late Stalin era to the present
- Export of infrastructural and development models (e.g., dams, irrigation systems) from Soviet Central Asia to the Middle East, Africa, South Asia, and Afghanistan, and their domestic and international implications
- Water management during post-Soviet decollectivization and economic crises of the 1990s–2000s
- Irrigation and water-related projects financed by international institutions such as the World Bank after 1991
- Production, circulation, and contestation of scientific knowledge on irrigation, environmental degradation, and soil salinization
- Interactions between local communities, state policies, and international institutions in the post-Soviet period
- Environmental deterioration in the Aral Sea basin and other aquatic and agro-ecosystems
- Shifting power dynamics among local administrators, scientists, and farmers across generations and gender lines
- Transcalar governance of water and its role in shaping territorial transformations, especially in the context of the ongoing climate crisis
- The historical, archaeological, and heritage aspects of canal systems
- Political and social dimensions of current water governance, including mitigation and adaptation strategies at the community level
- Archaeological investigations of historical water management systems in Central Asia and the MENA region, and their relevance for understanding present-day practices

Submission Guidelines:

We welcome submissions from scholars in History, Geography, Anthropology, Sociology, Political Science, Environmental Studies, Archaeology, and related fields.

English will be the working language of the conference.

Please submit a titled abstract of no more than 300 words, along with your name and institutional affiliation, to both organizers at the email addresses listed above by **15 October 2025**.

Panel proposals should include three individual paper abstracts (each no more than 300 words); the presenters' names, institutional affiliations and email addresses; and a 200-word statement outlining the panel's overall rationale.

Funding for travel and accommodation will be available for some or all participants, depending on overall costs. Priority will be given to scholars based in Central Asia and the Middle East/North Africa, as well as to early career researchers.

For any inquiries regarding the conference or your submission, feel free to contact the organizers.

We look forward to receiving your proposals and welcoming you to Padua.

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