

Pim de Klerk

Peatland prose from the past:
The indulgent and exorbitant mires of St. Ambrose
(340-397 CE)

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pages 2-3

„palus est luxuria, palus est intemperantia, palus est incontinentia, in qua uolutabra libidinum sunt, bestiarum murmura, latibula passionum, ubi mersantur quicumque inciderint et non emergunt, ubi labuntur pedum uestigia, fluitant singulorum incessus, ubi fulicae se dum lauant polluunt, ubi flebiles desuper gemitus columbarum, ubi pigra testudo caenoso haeret in gurgite; denique aper in palude, ceruus ad fontes. ex omni igitur palude, ubi quasi ranae ueterem canebant querellam, congregata est fides, congregata est puritas animi mentisque simplicitas.”



Peat extraction in southern Akanyaru River valley at the border of Rwanda and Burundi. Photo: Hans Joosten.

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**INTERNATIONAL MIRE
CONSERVATION GROUP**

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IMCG issues

Word from the Secretary-General

A new IMCG Bulletin covering April going into May 2019. Pim de Klerk continues his series of old - and I mean really old - texts and figures about peatlands, this time “only” 1600 years old. Future contributions – Pim already submitted texts for the next 12 Bulletins, will address sources that are even two millennia older.

Very fresh news also on peatland fires, haze, court cases and fines related to oil palm and pulpwood in SE Asia. The IMCG Bulletin compiles material from various sources and diverse opinions from all over the world. When – like in this Bulletin - substantiated criticism is ventilated on what is happening in Southeast-Asia, we should never forget that the efforts and achievements of our Indonesian colleagues are the largest and most important the World has ever seen with respect to the aimful conservation and restoration of peatlands.

Our peat extraction counterparts in and around IPS could use Indonesia as an inspiration and stop irresponsibly propagating the use of peat. Okay, the challenges of replacing fossil peat with renewable and ‘clean’ alternatives might seem enormous, but they have to be resolved, and they have to be resolved quickly by the specialists in this field!

We must go on. So keep sending news, photographs, papers and other contributions for the next Bulletin **by June 8, 2019** to Hans Joosten at joosten@uni-greifswald.de. The peatland world needs **you**, more than ever!

Mires and Peat

In April 2019 the following papers were published in Mires and Peat:

- Spatial potential for paludicultures to reduce agricultural greenhouse gas emissions: an analytic tool. [A. Schlattmann & M. Rode] Volume 25: Article 03 <http://mires-and-peat.net/pages/volumes/map25/map2503.php>
- Testing the three-phase technology for harvesting biomass from wetlands. [K. Zembrowski & A.P. Dubowski] Volume 25: Article 02 <http://mires-and-peat.net/pages/volumes/map25/map2502.php>
- Annual CO₂ fluxes from a cultivated fen with perennial grasses during two initial years of rewetting. [S. Karki, T.P. Kandel, L. Elsgaard, R. Labouriau & P.E. Lærke] Volume 25: Article 01 <http://mires-and-peat.net/pages/volumes/map25/map2501.php>
- Aapa mire on the southern limit: A case study in Vologda Region (north-western Russia). [S.A. Kutenkov & D.A. Philippov] Volume 24: Article 10 <http://mires-and-peat.net/pages/volumes/map24/map2410.php>
- Are point measurements in a bog representative of their surrounding area? [S.A. Howie & H.J. van Meerveld] Volume 24: Article 09 <http://mires-and-peat.net/pages/volumes/map24/map2409.php>

Find the journal online at <http://mires-and-peat.net/> Electronic submission is required using our dedicated electronic submission system. If you experience any problems please contact the Editor-in-Chief Olivia Bragg (o.m.bragg@dundee.ac.uk) who can offer alternative routes for electronic submission.

Papers

Peatland prose from the past:

The indulgent and exorbitant mires of St. Ambrose (340-397 CE)

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The Christian religion was initiated in the first century CE, but it took several centuries until an ‘official’ theological theory was established. The so-called church fathers - the early theologians who shaped the new religion – were very prolific in debating their respective views in their writings. One of them was St. Ambrose (340-397 CE), who became bishop of Milan after a career in Roman public services and who was one of the most influential Christian theorists. In his ‘Six days of creation’ he wrote about the opening of the Book of Genesis. In his comment on the third day he compared the separation of water and land and the regulation of water in different habitats with the development of the Christian religion. He used mires as metaphor:

„A swamp is indulgence, a swamp is exorbitance, a swamp is incontinence, in which there are places to wallow in lust, where there are howls of wild beasts, and lairs of passion. All who fall into the mire go down and do not get out, here the feet slip-away, and all who go there stagger. The waterfowl wash themselves dirty, the laments of doves wail from above, and the slow turtle sticks in the mud of the sludge. Hence the expressions ‘the swine in the swamp and the deer at the spring’. But from every swamp, where ancient laments were sung as by frogs, faith came together, and those of pure mind and candour souls came together.”

(„palus est luxuria, palus est intemperantia, palus est incontinentia, in qua uolutabra libidinum sunt, bestiarum murmura, latibula passionum, ubi mersantur quicumque inciderint et non emergunt, ubi labuntur pedum uestigia, fluitant singulorum incessus, ubi fulicae se dum lauant polluunt, ubi flebiles desuper gemitus columbarum, ubi pigra testudo caenoso haeret in gurgite; denique aper in palude, ceruus ad fontes. ex omni igitur palude, ubi quasi ranae ueterem canebant querellam, congregata est fides, congregata est puritas animi mentisque simplicitas“). (‘Six days of creation’ 3rd day, chapter 1, paragraph 4).

Romans in general had a rather negative attitude towards mires and wetlands, which was inherited by the early Christians in the Roman Empire. Many authors used these landscape types as metaphors for despicable things, ranging from the chaos before the biblical creation to the burning hell of the afterlife. Often mires were seen as dwelling places of heathens, who frequently were compared with loud incoherently croaking frogs. The text of Ambrose fits in this latter category: to him, obviously, mires were the uttermost pinnacle of disgust and he deliberately composed a text that pictures them as the most desolate landscape type. The metaphors are rather clear: even typical wetland animals like water birds or turtles did not prosper in mires, and the only creatures that felt well were negatively viewed “wild beasts” and “swine”. He also connected lust and passion with mires conform the general disgust of Christianity towards sex and sexuality. However, Ambrose stated that from mires faith, pure souls, and frank minds could arise: although “mentis simplicitas” is translated as a “simple mind” in the consulted translations, “simplicitas” may also mean “frankness” or “candour” (Glare 2016) which would fit the religious context better. The “deer at the spring” is a reference to Psalm 42 (or 41 in the Septuagint and Vulgata) in which the longing of the deer for water is compared with the longing of the soul to the Hebrew/Christian god, which does not really fit the otherwise negative character of the quote. Ambrose probably referred to a proverb which pictures a pure deer and pure water as contrast to the swine in the dirty swamp. Although Ambrose quoted the complete proverb, he will have intended it for the swine-part only. Despite his absolute disgust for mires, Ambrose provided hope that in the end something good could come from them when the pure soul was separated from the heretic swamp, i.e. when the good was separated from the bad and the ugly.

I am grateful to Immanuel Musäus for his help with the translation.

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- St. Ambrose (Aurelius Ambrosius): Exameron (Six days of creation). – Original text: Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 32: S. Ambrosii Opera pars I, 1896: 1-261. – English translation by Savage, J.J.: Saint Ambrose: Exameron, paradise, and Cain and Abel. The fathers of the church, a new translation volume 42. Fathers of the church inc., New York, 1961: 3-283. - German translation by anonymous: Bibliothek der Kirchenväter, publishing Toronto, Toronto, 2017 (kindle edition).
- Book of Psalms. - Greek translation by anonymous and English translation by Brenton, L.C.L.: Septuagint. Delphi Classics, Hastings, 2016 (kindle edition). - Latin translation by Hieronymus and German translation by anonymous: Die parallele deutsch-lateinische Vulgata-Bibel. Bibel lernende Gesellschaft, Toronto, 2018 (kindle edition). – English translation by anonymous (standard text of 1769): Holy Bible / King James Bible with Apocrypha. Digital Bible Society, 2016 (kindle edition).
- Glare, P.G.W. (ed.) (2016): Oxford Latin dictionary. Oxford University press, Oxford.

The word¹

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It took a while before I could pronounce the word correctly. And sometimes it still doesn't work properly. The term we needed - we are talking about 1998 - did not yet exist; the word had to be created. Because only things with a name really exist.

Swamp cultivation? Swamp farming? ...Hardly convincing...From the beginning it was clear that the word had to be used and understood internationally. The farmers had their agri-culture, the gardeners their horti-culture,

¹ This is a translation of a short paper on the origin of the word “paludiculture” in the November 2010 Newsletter of the Vorpommern Initiative Paludiculture (VIP) project.