

“Bathing and Descent in *De balneis Puteolanis*”

My dissertation traces images of bathing in the Phlegraean Fields in Southern Italy, beginning with illuminations from the most well-known late medieval bathing text, Peter of Eboli's Latin verse poem *De balneis Puteolanis* (*On the Baths of Pozzuoli*, written c. 1200), and ending with maps and diagrams from sixteenth century printed medical treatises. Drawing on a rich variety of material—archeological remains, illuminated manuscripts, printed maps, and illustrated books—my interdisciplinary project traces a chronological arc of bathing imagery, claiming that this longstanding pictorial tradition reveals changing attitudes towards the landscape between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries in southern Italy.

For Images & Ascent, I propose to examine the early Renaissance illuminations of Peter of Eboli's bathing poem for how they figure human relationship to the bowels of the earth—not what was at the top of mountains, but what was inside them. In these remarkable images, bathers descend hillsides to partake in hydrotherapy, dig land to form pools, and tap volcanoes to harness thermal power. Passing through or down a mountain, healing waters absorbed their unique therapeutic identities from the particularities of this volcanic terrain. Such an active landscape poses a challenge for historians—a 1538 eruption created an entire mountain, the aptly-named “Monte Nuovo” (New Mountain), which still holds, buried within it, one of the main bathing establishments mentioned in Eboli's poem. My paper will also address the methodological challenges of writing about a landscape undergoing continuous, dramatic change up to the present day.

Diana Mellon, Columbia University