Religious Plant Behavior
- or What Did Christian Trees Do in Byzantium?

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Our current time has been dubbed “the Anthropocene,” an era of vast human impact on the ecosystems of the earth, and our own kind has turned out to be an invasive species. While this development is biological, it is of course not unrelated to cultural and religious attitudes among human beings. Christianity, along with Islam and Judaism – especially in its modern receptions – tends to favor a relatively anthropocentric worldview. In this lecture I trace examples of religious plant behavior in the Byzantine world, suggesting that trees may have played (and may yet again play) a more active role in the Christian religion and its imaginaire than present-day catechisms allow for. What would it mean to take the plants’ part in religious life more seriously?

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