


Universität
Basel

Departement
Altertumswissenschaften




The End of the Roman Climate Optimum and the Disintegration of the Roman Empire


International Conference, 29 Aug–1 Sep 2022 (Binn)

The Roman Egypt Laboratory: Climate Change, Societal Transformations, and the Transition to Late Antiquity


Institute of Ancient History, University of Basel




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Attendance via Zoom is possible, please register with sabine.huebner@unibas.ch to receive the link.

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University of Basel
Department of Ancient Civilizations
Institute of Ancient History
Petersgraben 51
4051 Basel
Switzerland

www.ancientclimate.philhist.unibas.ch

Conference Venue:
Hotel Ofenhorn
Ackerstrasse 1
3966 Binn
Switzerland
ofenhorn.ch

Day 1: August 29, 2022

Keynote Lectures

17:00–17:30	Welcome and Coffee
17:30–18:00	John Haldon (Princeton): Collapse, Complexity and Collaboration: How the East Was Not (Quite) Lost
18:00–18:30	Paul Erdkamp (Brussels): Climate, Population and Society in the Roman World from a Comparative Perspective
19:00	Dinner

Day 2: August 30, 2022

Panel 1: Climate Proxies for the RCO (chair: Sabine Huebner)

09:30–10:00	Markus Stoffel (Geneva) and Christophe Corona (Clermont-Ferrand): Potential and Limitations of Subfossil and Archaeological Wood Remains to Understand Temperature and Precipitation Changes in the Roman Period
10:00–10:30	Joe McConnell (Reno, NV): Indicators of Climate Drivers and Roman Economic Activity in Arctic Ice: 200 BCE to 600 CE
10:30–11:00	Coffee
11:00–11:30	Michael Sigl (Bern): New Insights on the Sources, Magnitudes and Climate Effects of Volcanic Eruptions During the Antiquity from Polar Ice Cores and Climate Model Simulations
11:30–12:00	Dominik Fleitmann (Basel): The End of the Roman Climate Optimum Recorded in Stalagmites from Central and South-East Europe and the Middle East
12:00	General Discussion
12:30	Lunch

Panel 2: The Roman West (chair: Brandon McDonald)

14:00–14:30	Annalisa Marzano (Reading/Bologna): Climate Change or Societal Factors? A View From Late-Imperial Roman Italy
14:30–15:00	Krešimir Vuković (Munich): The Floods of the Tiber in the Imperial Period and the Roman Climate Optimum
15:00–15:30	Juan Manuel Martín Casado (Málaga): Possible Relationship Between High-Energy Marine Events and Climate Change in Hispania During Late Antiquity
15:30–16:00	Coffee
16:00–16:30	Gabriele Cifani (Rome): Environmental History of Central Italy in the “Roman Climate Optimum” (200 BCE to 150 CE)
16:30	General Discussion
19:30	Dinner

Day 3: August 31, 2022

Panel 3: Roman Egypt (chair: Matthias Stern)

09:30–10:00	Sabine Huebner (Basel): The Unruly River: Historical and Paleoclimatic Nile Flood Proxies and the End of the Roman Climate Optimum in Egypt
10:00–10:30	François Blondel (Geneva): Mummy Labels From Roman Egypt: Dendrochronological Potential for a Climatic Reading
10:30–11:00	Brandon McDonald (Basel): Instability in the Western Desert of Egypt: Transitions in Climate, Environment and Settlement in the Roman Period
11:00–11:30	Coffee
11:30–12:00	Petra Vaiglova (Gold Coast): Building an Animal Stable Isotope Proxy for Inferring the End of the Roman Climate Optimum in Egypt
12:00	General Discussion
12:30	Lunch

Panel 4: The Roman East (chair: Markus Stoffel)	
14:00–14:30	Charlotte L. Pearson (Tucson): Tree-Ring Tales from the Theodocian Harbour, Istanbul
14:30–15:00	Paolo Cimadomo (Haifa): A View From the East: The Impact of Climate Change on the Life of the Roman Near East
15:00–15:30	Paolo Maranzana (Istanbul): Roman Cities in Times of Change: Environment and Urbanism in Western-Central Anatolia
15:30–16:00	Haggai Olshanetsky (Basel) and Lev Cosijns (Oxford) Understanding Trends and Climate in Late Antiquity: The Use of Settlement Patterns in Syria-Palestina as a Case Study
16:00	Coffee

Panel 5: Methodological Reflections (chair: Dominik Fleitmann)	
16:30–17:00	Timothy Newfield Washington, DC): What’s a Plague Without a Diagnosis? The Impulse to Diagnosis and the Influence of Diagnoses in Histories of Ancient Disease and Climate
17:00	Lee Mordechai (Jerusalem) Reflecting on Late Antique Climate Change: Seeking Causal Links, Evaluating Impacts, and Contextualizing Discourse
17:30	Final Discussion
19:30	Dinner

Program September 1, 2022

Departure Day

The End of the Roman Climate Optimum and the Disintegration of the Roman Empire

Palaeoclimatologists believe to have identified a period of unusually warm and humid weather in Europe and the Mediterranean that expanded from roughly 200 BCE to 150 CE, which they called the ‘Roman Climate Optimum’ or the ‘Roman warm period’. Some historians have linked this overall perseverance of unusually stable and favorable climatic conditions to the expansion of the Roman Empire to its greatest height, and argue that these predominantly warm and humid conditions in large parts of the Empire enabled the delivery of sufficient supply to the growing urban population around the Mediterranean and to the Roman army.

This international conference organized within the frame of the SNSF-Project «The Roman Egypt Laboratory: Climate, Change, Societal Transformations, and the Transition to Late Antiquity» (PI: Sabine Huebner) will be the first that is specifically devoted to the notion of a Roman Climate Optimum and its impact on the fate of the Roman Empire. The conference will examine the implications of a Roman Climate Optimum for writing Roman environmental, political, social and economic history, and will bring climate scientists, ancient historians and environmental archaeologists around one table. Special emphasis will be placed on the challenges of a collaboration between ancient historians, archaeologists and palaeoclimatologists, the methodological difficulties in distinguishing between correlation and causality, and methods of assessing the impact of climatic variability or change on ancient societies without oversimplifying causal connections.

Organization

Organizer:
 Sabine R. Huebner, Institute of Ancient History, Department of Ancient Civilizations, University of Basel (Switzerland)

SNSF-Project «The Roman Egypt Laboratory: Climate Change, Societal Transformations, and the Transition to Late Antiquity»
ancientclimate.philhist.unibas.ch

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