Lecture Series

The 2016 Spring term was a busy and productive one for the Climate Change and History Research Initiative (CCHRI). In February, Dr. Adam Izdebski of Jagiellonian and Princeton Universities delivered the first of three CCHRI lectures. His talk ‘Climate and Rural Society in the Eastern Mediterranean, ca.300-1000’ was a deeply interdisciplinary exploration of landscape change in the early Byzantine Empire. Dr. Inga Labuhn of the University of Lund followed up the palaeoclimatic aspects of Adam’s lecture in March with an exceptionally useful introduction to the uses of tree rings and speleothems for reconstructing past climate. Rounding out the Spring lectures, in April Dr. Johannes Preiser-Kapeller of Austrian Academy of Sciences presented a reassessment of the evidence for the so-called ‘collapse’ of Eastern Mediterranean societies ca.1000-1200. Drawing on a wide range of data, Johannes, like Adam and Inga, emphasized that climatic and environmental histories should ideally be assembled region-by-region and that scholars should pay close attention to what independent lines of data from both written and natural archives, can and cannot tell us. Also in March, Professor John Haldon presented a CCHRI paper to the Princeton Environmental Institute, ‘Goldilocks in Byzantium’, which investigated the role of precipitation in the Eastern Roman survival of the Arab-Islamic conquests. The lecture can be watched here.

Spring Colloquium

The annual CCHRI Colloquium in May on the subject of resilience to climatic and environmental change of pre-modern populations in the Eastern Mediterranean and elsewhere was a great success. The one-day event saw anthropologists, archaeologists, historians, palaeoclimatologists and palynologists from the Princeton community and beyond present a series of case studies addressing the ways in which premodern societies buffered and absorbed changes in the natural world, from agrarian reforms in medieval Islamic Jordan through the rising dominance of rye in postclassical Italy to the vulnerability of the early ninth-century Uyghurs on the Central Asian Steppe to some weather extremes but not others.

Looking Ahead, the Fall 2016 Workshop

Applications are in and acceptance letters sent out: 20 young scholars (graduate students, postdocs and assistant professors) are set to arrive in Princeton in September for a three-day palaeoclimate-palynology workshop led by Professors Neil Roberts, Plymouth University, and Warren Eastwood, University of Birmingham. Leading palaeoclimatologists, Neil and Warren will introduce attendees to the art of palynology. Young scholars will examine pollen specimens, do some counting, chronology development (age-depth modeling), and investigate climate changes and vegetation responses visible in the data. Like last year following the palaeoclimate-dendroclimate workshop, attendees will receive good grounding in palaeoenvironmental research, an ability to better appreciate what goes into palynological research and how to incorporate it into their own work.

Looking Ahead, the Fall 2016-17 Lecture Series

We are proud to announce five lectures investigating premodern Mediterranean-European climate change and resilience have been booked for 2016-17 academic year: Alan Mikhail, Yale University, 10 November; Hendrik Dey, Hunter College, 30 November; Dagomar Degroot, Georgetown University, 15 February; Nükhet Varlık, Rutgers University, 15 March; and Richard Hoffmann, York University, 26 April. All lectures will be at 4:30 in Dickinson Hall Room 211. See you there!

The Project

The CCHRI aims to integrate the research of scholars in all relevant social and natural scientific disciplines in order to evaluate and interpret the evidence for societal resilience to environmental stress and change. The focus is premodern with case studies on the Eastern Mediterranean and Eastern Eurasia with plans to provide comparisons with additional regions. The project has already contributed to several publications by its members, while a special issue of Human Ecology is currently in the making. The CCHRI has been funded generously by the Princeton Institute for Interregional and Regional Studies, with additional support from the Center for Collaborative History, the Princeton Environmental Institute, the Program in the Ancient World, The M. Munir Ertegun Foundation for Turkish Studies at Princeton, the Council for the Humanities, and the Seeger Center for Hellenic Studies, with the support of the Stanley J. Seeger Hellenic Fund. For more, visit chri.princeton.edu.

Have a Wonderful Summer!
John Haldon, Lee Mordechai and Tim Newfield