

Focus on Ancient Earthquakes

Chances, Problems and Methodologies in Dealing with Evidence for Natural Disasters in Antiquity



Digital Workshop 7 July 2023

Organizers: Sabine Neumann (Marburger Centrum Antike Welt, University of Marburg) – Andrew Lepke (University of Muenster)

Zoomlink: <https://www.zoom.us/j/61992545534>

Earthquake disasters strike the Mediterranean region today as they did in ancient times. The study of archaeologically and historically documented disasters are of great importance because they allow long-term analyses of the response to recurrent natural phenomena and offer insights into resilience of the population. In Archaeology, earthquakes have rarely been the focus of research, and specific investigations have only been conducted locally when explicit excavation evidence has come to light (e.g., in Pompeii, Kourion, Hierapolis). Historically documented earthquakes often served as unchallenged explanations for the redesign of cities, sanctuaries, and other public buildings. On the other hand, grand theories were developed that used natural events such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and floods as explanations for the demise of cities and economic centers, and for great migrations of peoples. These theories promoted a problematic catastrophism that served as a general explanatory model for the destruction of cities and entire civilizations.

During the last decades, however, the study of natural hazards as drivers for cultural change have gained close attention in the ancient Mediterranean History. Historical studies on earthquakes and Archaeoseismology are emerging fields of research that enable the identification of reliable data on ancient earthquakes. The potential of these new research approaches has, however, yet to be fully realized. For the ancient Mediterranean, there is a lack of systematic scientific analyses to identify earthquakes and human coping, as well on the evaluation of data in the larger context of the social, economic, and demographic processes of local regions.

In our workshop we cannot fully address this research desideratum. However, with a selection of contributions we would like to stimulate reflections on historical and archaeological methods of earthquake research. We will focus on the interrelationship of historic earthquakes - and their evidence - and the for the most part literary narratives they are embedded in. The complex dynamics by which ancient actors dealt with and responded to devastating earthquakes and how they remembered these events, led to conditions that (could) trigger changes in society. Therein lies the agency of natural phenomena. We understand earthquakes as one factor (among several) that has an agency or creates conditions that give room for changes on different levels, e.g., architectural design, urban planning, social order, economic developments, religious practices, etc.

We invite scholars to investigate the following topics:

- Seismic effects in the ground and in the built environment
- Human engagement and coping strategies
- Consequences for economy, social order, cityscapes, and religious behavior
- Preventions, establishment of security, and emergence of resilience
- Methodological reflections on Archaeoseismology and historical earthquake research

Program

9:00 Introduction (Andrew Lepke, Sabine Neumann)
(CEST)

(Moderation Andrew Lepke)

9:30 Stefan Schreiber, Leibniz-Zentrum für Archäologie (LEIZA), Mainz:
„Multiple Chronopolitik: Herausforderungen an bestehende Zeitregime der Resilienz bei Erdbeben“

10:15 Kaffeepause

10:30 Tomáš Glomb, Centre for the Digital Research of Religion, Masaryk University, Brno:
„Volcanoes as a re-occurring prompt to worship Poseidon: A spatial approach“

11:15 Sabine Neumann, Marburger Centrum Antike Welt, Philipps-Universität Marburg:
„Seismic Hazards and Divine Agency – Exploring Religious Coping in Response to Earthquakes“

12:00 Mittagspause

(Moderation Sabine Neumann)

13:00 Nils Heeßel, Altorientalistik, Centrum für Nah- und Mittelost-Studien, Philipps-Universität Marburg: „Erdbebenbewältigung im Alten Orient“

13:45 Stella Skaltsa, Saxo Institute, University of Copenhagen:
„Shaking the Peraia: earthquakes, religion and social dynamics in the Rhodian State“

14:30 Andrew Lepke, Forschungsstelle Asia Minor / Seminar für Alte Geschichte, Universität Münster:
„Destruction and Reconstruction - a new earthquake in Patara in the time of Trajan?“

15:15 Kaffeepause

(Moderation Stefan Schreiber)

15:30 Beate Böhlendorf-Arslan, Christliche Archäologie und Byzantinische Kunstgeschichte, Philipps-Universität Marburg: „Erdbeben und ihre Folgen in der spätantiken und frühbyzantinischen Zeit“

16:15 Matthias Sandberg, Seminar für Alte Geschichte, Universität Münster:
„Translocated Coping - Antioch, Constantinople and Christian Ritual in the 6th century“

17:00 Final Discussion