

Environmental History of Europe
DIS Spring 2012
EH 3-credit course
Tuesdays & Fridays 11:40 - 1:00 in Vestergade 10-B25

Instructor: *Dr.phil. Peter Christensen*

Research associate, Dept. of History (UC) 1979-83, senior research associate, Dept. of History (UC) 1983-86, Lecturer, Dept. of History (UC) 1987-89, with *DANIDA* (the Danish Development Agency) 1990-93. Currently Lecturer at the Dept. of History (UC). With DIS since 1992.

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Objectives

The individuality of Europe is the sum of its history, and this history is the result of the interacting of social processes and particular physical settings. The first objective of the course is, therefore, to provide the students with basic knowledge of this interacting, i.e. how the Europeans through time have successfully coerced and manipulated their environment to free themselves from hunger, to control epidemic disease, and to raise the level of material well-being. Obviously these processes cannot be covered in detail, and the course is consequently organized around certain key issues, e.g. demographic change, the evolution of methods of subsistence, the role of technology, the nature of environmental change.

The second objective of the course relates to the problems of *explaining* these changes. How can we account for the long-term trends of European history? Is it permissible to apply ecological and biological models and concepts to human history? How do we reconstruct environments of the past? In brief, the course also aims at clarifying some key theoretical issues of the emerging environmental history paradigm.

Contents

We always start with received ideas; none perhaps as deep-seated as our views of nature and humankind's place in the world. The course will present and examine some of these underlying assumptions and generalizations that condition our current world views. This will include the emergence of ecology as a paradigmatic science for understanding the place of humans in the natural order. The most important explanatory theories of environmental change will be introduced.

The discussion of theories and hypotheses will be based on concrete European history, from the Ice Age to the present day. The presentation of European history is organized chronologically around the two major environmental transformations: (1) The evolution of European agricultural systems and cultural landscapes; (2) the industrialization of Europe and the emergence of new methods of subsistence.

Requirements & course evaluation

1 short answer test: 5%
1 midterm test: 25%
1 term paper (10 pages). Due 5 May: 40%
1 extensive quiz at the end of the course: 10%
Participation: 20%

All coursework must be completed in order to pass this class.

Please hand in papers on time. Cf. *Writing Papers at DIS*.

DIS Contacts

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Readings

As yet (2010) there is no satisfactory textbook on Europe's environmental history. So as starting point we will use C. Ponting, *A New Green History of the World* (London 1991, revised ed. 2007). Though somewhat dated and on many points debatable, it provides a sustained argument for the historical importance of human interaction with the environment. Shifting disease patterns. In addition a number of articles and original sources (in English translations) will be used.

Appleby, A.B.

1980 "Epidemics and Famine in the Little Ice Age," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 10, pp. 643-663

Bailey, M.

1991 *Per impetum maris: natural disaster and economic decline in eastern England, 1275-1350*, B.M.S. Campbell (ed.), *Before the Black Death. Studies in the crisis of the fourteenth century*, pp. 185-208 (Manchester)

Braudel, F.

1973 *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400-1800*, pp. 37-54 (London)

Colinvaux, P.

1980 *Why Big Fierce Animals Are Rare*, pp. 188-204 (London).

Gottfried, R.S.

1983 *The Black Death. Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe* (London), pp. 129-160.

Grigg, D.

1974 *The Agricultural Systems of the World. An Evolutionary Approach* (Cambridge). pp. 123-147, 152-177.

Hobsbawm, E.J.

1968 *Industry and Empire*, pp. 34-55 (London)

Jones, E.L.

1981 *The European Miracle. Environments, economies and geopolitics in the history of Europe and Asia*, pp. 22-41 (Cambridge).

Lucas, H.S.

1930 "The Great European Famine of 1315, 1316 and 1317," *Speculum* 5; repr. E.M. Carus Wilson (ed.) : *Essays in Economic History* vol. 2 : 49-72 (London 1962)

McNeill, W.H.

1979 *Plagues and Peoples* (London), pp. 54-93.

Post, J.D.

1990 "The Mortality Crises of the Early 1770s and European Demographic Trends," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 21, pp. 29-62.

Worster, D.

1990 "Transformation of the Earth: Toward an Agroecological Perspective in History," *Journal of American History* 76, pp. 1087-1106.

Schedule

Introduction

Fri. Jan. 27 : Presentation of the course : what is environmental history?

Tue. Jan. 31 : Establishing some common ground: what you must know about European history.

Fri. Feb. 3 : "Nature's order disturbed" (1) - key concepts of environmental history (Ponting, 1-16)

CLIMATE CHANGE I

Tue. Feb. 7 : Hunters of the tundra - Europe at the end of the Ice Age.(Ponting, 17-35).

Agrarian Europe

Tue. Feb. 14 : The cultivation of Europe : climate change and the neolithic revolution. (Ponting, 36-66).

Fri. Feb. 17 : The evolution of the agricultural systems in South and Temperate Europe (Grigg, pp. 123-135, 152-160)

Tue. Feb. 21 : Population trends and the spreading of infectious disease. (McNeill).

Fri. Feb. 24 : Environmental theories of the fall of Rome and the end of Classical Antiquity. (Ponting, 67-86).

Tue. Feb. 28 : The "Dark Ages": population decline and "Justinian's Plague."

Fri. Mar. 2 : The expansion of the high Middle Ages and the formation of a new cultural landscape (Ponting, 93-108, Grigg, 135-139, 160-164).

CLIMATE CHANGE II

Tue. Mar. 13 : The Little Ice Age: climate fluctuations and famine in Medieval Europe (Lucas, Braudel).

Fri. Mar. 16 : Natural disasters: floods and quakes as historical factors (Bailey, Jones)

Tue. Mar. 20 : The great population decline: The Black Death and the plague cycle. (Gottfried, Ponting, 203-211, Braudel).

Fri. Mar. 23 : An environmental windfall: Europe's expansion overseas. (Ponting, 137-170).

Tue. Mar.27 : The end of subsistence crises: Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. The demographic transition and the beginning of sustained population growth. (Post, Ponting, 109-115, 231-239, Appleby).

The Industrialization of Europe

Fri. Mar. 30 : The second agricultural revolution.(Grigg, 139-147, 164-177, Ponting, 231-239).

Tue. April 17 : The industrial revolutions. (Hobsbawm, Ponting, 265-293).

CLIMATE CHANGE III

Fri. April 20 : Consequences - the polluting of Europe; resource scarcity. (Ponting, 342-379).

Tue. April 24 : Diverging environments: the problems of Eastern Europe. (Ponting, 342-379).

Fri. April 27 : The environmental issue vs the social issue : The welfare state and the environment. (Ponting, 314-341).

Summary and Review of Explanatory Themes

Tue. May 1 : The evolution of the Danish cultural landscape as an example of long-term developments.

Tue. May: Key environmental issues facing Europe today : why do climate conferences lead to nothing? (Ponting, 380-408).

Fri. May 11 : Nature's order disturbed (2): agents of long-term environmental change. (Ponting, 409-423, Worster, Colinvaux).