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Declines and Falls. Perspectives in European History and Historiography. Twenty Years of the European Review of History / Revue européenne d'histoire: An Anniversary Conference. Department of History, Central European University, Budapest, 15.05.2013-17.05.2013.

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Declines and Falls. Perspectives in European History and Historiography. Twenty Years of the European Review of History / Revue européenne d'histoire: An Anniversary Conference

The conference addressed the venerable historiographical trope of âdeclines and fallsâ by challenging participants to historicize current experiences of âdeclineâ and question a whole array of accompanying concepts such as âcrisisâ, âdecayâ âcollapseâ and âmeltdownâ.

In his keynote, IAN WOOD (University of Leeds) chronicled changing interpretations of the most famous âdecline and fall,â that of the Roman Empire. Wood outlined several possible causes, each taking on different meanings in historical treatments over time: the theory that the empire crumbled from within as a result of moral and political corruption and economic dysfunction; the empire succumbed to destruction by barbarians; and its fall was connected to the rise of the church. Recently, a fourth cause has been identified, in line with present-day concerns about the environment and its impact on society and vice versa. In a magisterial overview, Wood explored the ways in which the story of the fall of Rome has been instrumentalized in the making of modern professional history as well as in national, regional, and European identity discourses during the last three centuries.

PHILIPP HABERKERN (Boston University) opened the first session arguing that Weberâs declinist notion of charisma succumbing to routinization has cast a long shadow over the historiography of the Lutheran reformation. In contrast to the image of a revolutionary founder, Luther actually valorised education and made concerted efforts to enforce dogma even in the 1520s. ALEXANDER HUTTON (University of Cambridge) charted reactions to Toynbeeâs civilizational histories. While Toynbeeâs âprovidentialâ views were criticised by the historical profession, they appealed to many readers in search of greater meaning in secularising Britain. SINKWAN CHENG (Chinese University of Hong Kong) ended with a theoretically wide-ranging discussion of the âdialectic without telos.â Drawing on Koselleck, Lacan, and Arendt, she argued that defeat and decline should be used as opportunities to âthink anew.â

Moving on to Enlightenment historiography, VLADIMIR RYZHKOV (St. Petersburg State University) analysed the intellectual output of a number of late eighteenth-century Russian thinkers who appropriated the legacy of Roman Stoicism in order to refresh and upgrade the vocabulary of the Russian nobility. THEO JUNG (Albert-Ludwigs-UniversitÃ¤t Freiburg) argued that Enlightenment thought proposed not merely the model for our contemporary theories of progress; it equally framed much grimmer historical narratives in the form of cultural criticism. BEN EARLEY (Bristol University) showed how the decline of Athens was a respectable topic of eighteenth-century political and historical thought, on a par with the much more celebrated decline of Rome.

FELIX WIEDEMANN (Freie UniversitÃ¤t Berlin) dis-

cussed narratives of migration in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century classicism, serving as explanatory frameworks for the beginnings and endings of nations. These narratives were conceived of as circular, an idea drawn from geological principles. HYUN JIN KIM (University of Melbourne) reassessed the decline and fall of the Roman West.The explanation for what he called âthe dissolution of the West Roman stateâ has to be sought in the conquests of the Huns who were organisationally more sophisticated than their critics have conceded. ERDAL KAYNAR (CNRS Paris/IFEA Istanbul) reclaimed the idea of the decline of the West as a global, rather than a European, concept, analysing the critiques of non-Western intellectuals that developed in response to fading liberal optimism.

The session dedicated to the twentieth century was opened by JOHN DEAK (University of Notre Dame), who took a biographical approach to the study of decline and salvation in the Habsburg Monarchy on the eve of the First World War by analysing unknown writings of the military and bureaucratic elite. VILMOS ERÅS (University of Debrecen) presented a dense and critical overview of the theme of decline in Hungarian historiography during the interwar period in particular, a time of tensions and contested notions of the national. ALISON CARROL (Brunel University) offered a new analysis of the interwar crisis in Alsace by way of a thorough rethinking of the regional, national, and international causes of the malaise.

FRÃDÃRIC HEURTEBIZE (UniversitÃ© Paris Ouest Nanterre) analysed responses to the European crisis of the 1970s. While Communists in Europe saw it as an opportunity to develop Eurocommunism, Americans were worried by the rise of communism. Both diagnoses, he argues, were ultimately mistaken. LORENZO FERRARI (IMT Institute for Advanced Studies, Lucca) showed how dÃ©tente and a rising global south threatened Europeâs place on the world stage. In response, the âold worldâ sought to promote multilateral cooperation and new forms of soft power diplomacy. AURÃLY ANDRY (European University Institute) examined how the economic crisis led to a âfundamental discussionâ on the concept of growth among MEPs, moving towards the acceptance of growth and stability as the main principles in social policies.

Concerning the central conceptual pair of twentieth-century European history, crisis and war, JAMES ROSLINGTON (University of Cambridge) tried to grasp the âworld crisisâ of the 1920s from the vantage point of the Rif War by analysing how this colonial war was perceived in France, Spain, Germany, and the Soviet Union. FLORIAN GREINER (University of Potsdam) argued that the grim opinions of intellectuals on the interwar European crisis were not shared by British, German, and American newspapers of the time. EMMA EDWARDS (Maynooth University) showed how the survival of the League of Nations during the Second World War proved crucial for the making of the post-war global order.

Furthermore, ALMUTH EBKE (University of Kassel) introduced the concept of âdeclinismâ as a general framework that politicians of all colours used to advocate radical solutions during the economic crisis in 1970s Britain. BARRY WHELAN (National University of Ireland) showed how the narrative of decline in postwar Ireland was strongly intertwined with the âproblem of emigration.â Contemporary critics fiercely addressed this âhuman drain,â leading to major reforms in the second half of the 1950s. PAUL CORTHORN (Queenâs University Belfast) posited âdeclinismâ as the key to understanding Enoch Powellâs seemingly contradictory points of view, reflecting perceptions of Britainâs economic, national, and international decline.

The middle session brought together a number of diverse, yet conceptually related papers. YASIR YILMAZ (Purdue University) brought a comparative perspective to declinist assumptions about the eighteenth-century Ottoman Empire, arguing that overly optimistic views about the Russian and Habsburg Empires created an exaggerated picture of Ottoman decline. JOACHIM WHALEY (University of Cambridge) questioned predominant narratives of the Holy Roman Empireâs decline by noting that even after the success of Napoleon's revolutionary state, many continued to discuss the possibility of imperial resurrection.

With the limelight shifted to East European history, PIOTRS WCIÅLIK (CEU) noted that despite mostly rhetorical sermons on âthe revolutions of 1989,â these events have yet to be investigated from the point of view of the lived temporality of the multitude that took part in them. EUGEN STANCU (Bucharest University) explored the posterity of communist historiography in Romania after 1989 by analysing the trajectory of one academically marginal historian who took it upon himself to demystify the historiographical legacy of the Ancien RÃ©gime.

HOPE WILLIARD (University of Leeds) analysed elite correspondence networks in Merovingian Gaul. She showed how aristocratic letters were written in the classical tradition as a response to perceived decline since the fall of Rome, demonstrating classical learning and culti-

vating an antique model of friendship in order to preserve traditions. STEPHEN J. KECK (American University of Sharjah) focused on Ruskinâs medievalist narratives of decline in Victorian Britain, a time of seemingly self-evident progress, to demonstrate the role of declinist narratives in times of progress.

PATRICIA BASS (Paris 3) explored fin-de-siÃ¨cle theories of degeneracy. She revealed the divergence and contestation surrounding such ideas by highlighting the differing assessments made by journalists, the courts, and criminology professionals in two French murder trials. NORMAN DOMEIER (UniversitÃ¤t Stuttgart/University of Cambridge) critically analyzed the discourses of decline, decadence, and homosexuality in commentaries on the Eulenberg scandal.

In her keynote, MARY GLUCK (Brown University) offered a positive interpretation of decadence by tracing the concept across time. Questioning existing interpretative frames such as the separation between high and low culture, GLUCK offered a new narrative of modernity based on exactly those elements feared by its critics, such as hysteria, instability, and nervousness. Together, these concepts form an âalternative modernityâ that places the urban landscape at its center. It is an interpretation opposed to enlightened narratives of modernity focused on progress and the evolution of the nation state.

In the last session AMANDA M. BRIAN (Coastal Carolina University) explored German âpopulation crises,â arguing that demographic fears also reflected concerns regarding womenâs roles. GYÃRGY KÃVÃR (ELTE) discussed crisis perception in relation to economic growth and decline in the historical memory of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Looking at the same region but focusing on the 1912 War Production Law, JOHN ROBERTSON (University of Chapel Hill) emphasized the difficulties regimes faced in trying to take the necessary action when a crisis loomed. In contrast, LINA WEBER (Ruprecht-Karls-UniversitÃ¤t) considered the aftermath of crisis. Her cultural history of the 1763 Dutch âfinancial disasterâ featured images heavily laden with allusions to the classical world.

MATTHIAS RIEDL (CEU) argued that apocalyptic narratives, always already pointing to universal destruction, were related to human agency during the late Middle Ages, contributing to the rise of ârevolutionary activism.â IOANNIS KYRIAKANTONAKIS (University of Athens) provided a rich argument about how an assembly of erudite prelates in sixteenth-century Constantinople worked out interpretations of ecclesiastical history in an effort to cope with experiences of decline. VERONIKA ÄAPSKÃ (Opava University) made use of literary theory in order to explore early modern representations of the confessional transformation of the Bohemian lands, a narrative framed by the tropes of tragedy and romance.

ZSUZSANNA ZARKA (Maynooth University) discussed changing Irish nationalist views of the historic compromise between Austria and Hungary. While the Irish saw hope in this example of self-government, it was at the same time also an extremely flexible image. CAIO SIMÃES DE ARAÃJO (Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies, Geneva) addressed concepts of time in relation to Portuguese decolonization. Drawing on Koselleck and Chakrabarty, he described a political mobilisation of time whereby the Portuguese used reactionary prediction and Salvationist expectations to counter change and decay. EVA MARLENE HAUSTEINER (Humboldt UniversitÃ¤t) considered uses of decline in Edwardian political thought. Emphasizing the traditional opposition between empire and liberty, she analyzed late nineteenth-century culturalist and efficiency arguments, noting the flexibility of concepts and the rhetorical power of declinism.

HELEN ROCHE (University of Cambridge) analysed discourses of decline in national-socialist textbooks on German history. She raised the question of the impact of the narrative of âracial mixtureâ as a cause of decline in the âracial frameworkâ that characterized the ideas of the German population in that period. This theme was further developed by AMY CARNEY (Pennsylvania State University), who confronted concerns about demographic decline in Nazi-Germany, focusing on the introduction of the âlarge familyâ ideology in the education of SS-soldiers. ÃRON SZELE (CEU) analysed the issue of demographic decline in Hungarian fascism of the 1920s and 1930s. Here, the narrative was placed within theories of a Jewish global conspiracy so as to provide explanations for the perceived decline of the Hungarian nation.

In his keynote, JÃRGEN KOCKA (Freie UniversitÃ¤t Berlin/Wissenschaftszentrum fÃ¼r Sozialforschung) assessed the prospects of historicizing capitalism. While the term itself was largely avoided by non-Marxist historians, recent economic developments have brought capitalism back into mainstream historiography. KOCKA identified three main reasons for engaging with capitalism: historians studying capitalism have the chance to militate against excessive specialization. Narratives of capitalism not only bring together elements of politics,

culture, economy, andsociety, but also encourage a dialogue between intellectual and social history; historians of capitalism benefit from approaches in the social sciences; and any history of capitalism should include the longer duration and global perspective. As capitalism overcomes limits and crosses borders, so should historians.

While the current economic situation continues to provide opportunities galore for the use of narratives of decline, participants would agree that these very narratives have a history of their own which we should always take into account. Consequently, the conference opened up possibilities for future research that would do well to trace back not only the origins of our present condition, but also the way in which we have conceptually tackled perceptions of decline.

Conference Overview:

Welcomes: John Shattuck (Rector and President, Central European University); Bertrand Taithe (University of Manchester and ERH); LÃ¡szlÃ³ Kontler (Central European University and ERH)

Session I

Chair: Stephen Hodkinson (University of Nottingham and ERH)
Keynote lecture: Ian Wood (University of Leeds): The Decline and Fall of Rome since before Gibbon

Session II

Panel 1: Theoretical approaches to the problem of decline
Chair: Bertrand Taithe (University of Manchester and ERH)

Phillip Haberkern (Boston University): Weberâs Long Shadow: Reformation, Routinization, and the Narrative of Decline

Alexander Hutton (University of Cambridge): Arnold J. Toynbeeâs A Study of History in a British Perspective

Sinkwan Cheng (Chinese University of Hong Kong): Reassessing Decline through a Dialectical Standstill

Session III

Panel 2: The theme of decline in Enlightenment historiography
Chair: LÃ¡szlÃ³ Kontler (Central European University and ERH)

Vladimir Ryzhkov (St. Petersburg State University): The Perceptions of Decline and the Legacy of Stoicism in Late Eighteenth Century Russia

Theo Jung (Albert-Ludwigs-UniversitÃ¤t Freiburg): Progress and Decadence: Interconnections Between Two Historical Narratives During the Long 18th Century

Ben Early (Bristol): The Decline and Fall of Athens in Ancient Greek and Eighteenth-Century Historiography

Panel 3: âThe decline of the Westâ
Chair: Katalin Szende (Central European University

Felix Wiedemann (Freie UniversitÃ¤t Berlin): On wanderings and invasions. Migrations as explanation for declines and falls in European classical and ancient studies

Hyun Jin Kim (University of Melbourne): The âDeclineâ and âFallâ of the Roman West from a Eurasian Perspective

Erdal Kaynar (CNRS, Paris/IFEA, Istanbul): Before the Decline of the West: *Zivilisationskritik* from non-Western Intellectuals at the Beginning of the 20th Century

Session IV

Panel 4: Crisis and war: twentieth-century anxieties (1)
Chair: Ilse Josepha Lazaroms (Imre KertÃ©sz Kolleg, Jena and ERH)

John Deak (University of Notre Dame): The Politics of Impending Doom: Decline and Salvation in the Habsburg Monarchy on the Eve of the First World War

Vilmos ErÅs (University of Debrecen): The Theme of Decline in Hungarian Historiography and Historical Thinking in the First Half of the 20-th Century

Alison Carrol (Brunel University): The Interwar Crisis: Malaise Alsacien, malaise international

Panel 5: Decline and contemporary European history (1)
Chair: Susan Zimmermann (Central European University)

FrÃ©dÃ©ric Heurtebize (UniversitÃ© Paris Ouest Nanterre): Twilight of Capitalism or Decline of the West? Transatlantic Perceptions on the Crisis of the 1970s in Western Europe

Lorenzo Ferrari (IMT Institute for Advanced Studies,

Lucca):The Crisis of Western Europeâs Global Standing in the 1970s: ECâs Elites Perceptions of Decline and Strategies to Counter It

AurÃ©lie Andry (European University Institute, Florence): Shaping a European Social Model in the Ruins of the Golden Age: European Social Policy and Rising Unemployment in the 1970s and 1980s

Session V

Panel 6: Crisis and war: twentieth-century anxieties (2)
Chair: Jean-Marc Dreyfus (University of Manchester and ERH)

James Roslington (University of Cambridge): Colonial War / World Crisis

Florian Greiner (University of Augsburg): âUntergang des Abendlandesâ or Temporary Decline? The âEuropeanâ Crisis during the Second Thirty Years War in German, British and US American Print Media Coverage (1914-1945)

Emma Edwards (National University of Ireland, Maynooth): A Crisis for Eurocentrism: The Decline of the League of Nations, the Second World War and the Post-War Eclipse of Europe in the United Nations Organisation

Panel 7: Decline and contemporary European history (2)
Chair: Cornelius Torp (Martin-Luther-UniversitÃ¤t, Halle and ERH)

Almuth Ebke (University of Kassel): The Party is Over?â British Economic Policy and the Narrative of âBritish Declineâ, 1970â1976

Barry Whelan (National University of Ireland): âA Rising Tide Lifts All Boatsâ: Chartering Irelandâs Turbulent Voyage From Despair to Hope in the 1950s

Paul Corthorn (Queenâs University Belfast): Enoch Powell, British âDeclineâ and Opposition to the EEC

Session VI

Panel 8: Decline and/of empire (1)
Chair: Aziz Al-Azmeh (Central European University)

Julia Charlotte Hell (University of Michigan): Ruin Gazing: (Post-)Roman Empires and the Fall of Rome

Yasir Yilmaz (Purdue University, West Lafayette): Ottoman Decline Paradigm as Derivative of the Progressivism of the Habsburg and Russian Historiography

Joachim Whaley (University of Cambridge): Long Decline or Sudden Shock? The Holy Roman Empire from Middles Ages to 1806

Panel 9: Decline and contemporary European history (3)
Chair: Marsha Siefert (Central European University)

Piotr WciÅlik(Central European University, Budapest): Making Time During Communismâs Demise: 1989 and its temporality

Eugen Stancu (Bucharest University): Demythologization of the Romanian Historical Discourse after 1989. Intellectual Origins, Arguments and Critics

Session VII

Panel 10: Decline and the Middle Ages
Chair: Karin Tilmans (European University Institute, Florence and ERH

Hope Williard (University of Leeds):Letter-Writing as a Response to Intellectual Decline in Merovingian Gaul

Stephen L. Keck (American University of Sharjah): Medievalism in the Age of âProgressâ

Panel 11: The body and the theme of decline
Chair: Rachel Ritchie (Brunel University and ERH)

Patricia Bass (Paris 3: La Sorbonne Nouvelle): Concrete Degeneration: The Birth of the âCriminal Appearanceâ in 19th century France

Norman Domeier (UniversitÃ¤t Stuttgart / University of Cambridge): Empire of Decadence. The Masculinisation of German Politics before the First World War

Session VIII

Chair: Nadia Al-Bagdadi (Central European University)
Keynote lecture: Mary Gluck (Brown University, Providence): The Discourse of Decadence as Historical Metaphor and Cultural Criticism in the European Fin de SiÃ¨cle

Session IX

Panel 12: Financial â economic - demographic decline
Chair: Victor Karady (Central European University)

Lina Weber (Ruprecht-Karls-UniversitÃ¤t, Heidelberg): âOp de Dood en Begraving van het Creditâ? Contemporary Reactions to the âFinancial Disasterâ of 1763

in the Dutch Republic

Amanda M. Brian (Coastal Carolina University, Conway): The Creation of Population Crises in Modern Germany

GyÃ¶rgy KÃ¶vÃ©r (EÃ¶tvÃ¶s University, Budapest): Take Off and Kondratieff Down: Economic growth and decline in the historical memory of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy

John Robertson (University of Chapel Hill, North Carolina): Gut und Blut fÃ¼râs Vaterland: The Austro-Hungarian War Production Law of 1912

Panel 13: Theological approaches, religion and decline
Chair: GÃ¡bor Klaniczay (Central European University)

Matthias Riedl (Central European University, Budapest): Ultimate Decline, Universal Destruction, and Radical Reform â Late Medieval and Early Modern Transformations of the Apocalyptic Narrative

Ioannis Kyriakantonakis (Centre of Asia Minor Studies, Athens): Making Sense of the Fall: Historical Interpretations in Early Modern Constantinople

Veronika ÄapskÃ¡ (Silesian University, Opava): Between the Tragic Decline and the Romantic Golden Age. Re-interpreting the Early Modern Confessional Transformation of the Lands of the Bohemian Crown

Session X

Panel 14: Decline and/of empire (2)
Chair: Alfred Rieber (Central European University)

Zsuzsanna Zarka (National University of Ireland, Maynooth): Foreshadowing the Doom of Imperial Compromise? Irish Perceptions of the Decline and Fall of Austria-Hungary

Caio SimÃµes de AraÃºjo (Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies, Geneva): Imperial Fall, Southern Emergence: Decolonization, History and North-South Disjunction

Eva Marlene Hausteiner (Humboldt UniversitÃ¤t, Berlin): Republican Decadence or Imperial Decline? The Optimism of British Edwardian Pessimism

Panel 15: The discourse of decline on the interwar extreme right
Chair: BalÃ¡zs TrencsÃ©nyi (Central European University)

Helen Roche (University of Cambridge): âBlÃ¼te und Zerfallâ?: âSchematic Narrative Templatesâ of Decline and Fall in National Socialist Racial Ideology

Amy Carney (Pennsylvania State University): Racial Education for the Nazi Elite: The Discourse over Demographic Decline in the SS

Ãron Szele (Central European University, Budapest): To Wither or to be Reborn. The Historical Weltanschauung of Hungarian Fascism in the 1930-40âs

Session XI

Chair: Constantin Iordachi (Central European University)
Keynote lecture: JÃ¼rgen Kocka (Freie UniversitÃ¤t, Berlin / Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin fÃ¼r Sozialforschung): RiseandDecline in theHistoryofCapitalismanditsCritiqueâ

Conclusion, farewell

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

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