

The Declinism Seminars



Declinism

14th December 2015
Engelsberg Ironworks, Sweden

A SEMINAR ARRANGED BY
AXEL AND MARGARET AX:SON JOHNSON FOUNDATION

Declinism

This seminar will examine how the concept of decline has helped to define and fashion a wide range of political, economic, social, cultural and religious entities including empires, nation states, commercial corporations, religious faiths and new political bodies such as market states. The specialist areas of our participants reflect the broad span of human history from the Assyrian Empire of the First Millennium BC to 21st Century America. Similarly the project has been designed to take a truly global perspective with papers examining decline across the Americas, Europe, Africa and Asia.

Our collective aim is to look beyond the simplistic model of decline as a fixed objective, i.e. 'reality', and instead to investigate the often conflicting strands of thought that lie behind such claims. Although a relatively recent invention the notion of declinism – a society's fixation on its own imminent decline – is particularly useful in this context. Yet, equally, what makes the study of 'declinism' so pertinent to contemporary events is that, although essentially impressionistic, it is always grounded in its protagonists' perceptions of their own circumstances and therefore has real consequences for the societies in which it exists.

Of particular note for our purposes is the prevalence of discussions about decline in societies that are in the throes of transition and/or are the locus for inter- and intra-community conflict. Similarly, in historiography the idea of perpetual decline is clearly a powerful tool for re-organizing competing visions of the past, present and future.

Monday 14th December

Declinism

1.00 p.m. **Welcome**
Introduction

Kurt Almqvist
Mattias Hessérus

1.05 p.m. **Peter Bedford**

Decline and the Ancient World

Before 'Decline': Threats to Social Order in the
Neo-Assyrian Empire

1.25 p.m. **Jon Hesk**

Inter-generational Rhetorics of Decline and Progress from
Homer to Hyperides

1.45 p.m. **María Fernanda**
Valencia Suárez

Decline and Fall of the Aztec Empire from the Perspective
of Early Modern Europeans

2.05 p.m. *Discussion*

2.25 p.m. *Coffee*

2.55 p.m. **Natalia Nowakowska**

Decline and Empires

The Jagiellonian Dynasty: Ideas of Decline and Rebirth
Decadence Critique and Reform in the 17th Century
Iberian World

3.15 p.m. **Igor Pérez Tostado**

3.35 p.m. **William Smiley**

Decline and its Uses: A Eurasian View from the Ottoman
and Russian Empires

3.55 p.m. **Martyn Rady**

Ideas of Decline in Central Europe

4.15 p.m. *Discussion*

4.35 p.m. *Break*

5.05 p.m. **Andreas Eckert**

Decline in the 20th Century and After

'Only Bad News on Radio Africa': Postcolonial Africa as
a History of Decline

5.25 p.m. **Andrew Preston**

American Hegemony and Its Discontents

5.45 p.m. **Franz Mauelshagen**

Environment and Societal Collapse in Human History

6.05 p.m. *Discussion*

6.25 p.m. **William O'Reilly**

Concluding Remarks

Summing-up

6.30 p.m. *DRINKS*

7.30 p.m. *DINNER*

Lecturers

Professor Peter Bedford

Wold Professor of Religious Studies. Director, Program in Religious Studies, Union College. USA.

Professor, Dr Andreas Eckert

Chair African History, Institute for Asian and African Studies, Humboldt University Berlin. Germany.

Dr Jon Hesk

School of Classics, University of St Andrews. UK.

Dr Franz Mauelshagen

Senior Fellow, Anthropocene/Sustainable Interactions with the Atmosphere, Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies. Germany.

Dr Natalia Nowakowska

History Faculty, University of Oxford. UK.

Dr William O'Reilly

Faculty of History, University of Cambridge. UK.

Dr Igor Pérez Tostado

Universidad Pablo de Olavide. Spain.

Professor Andrew Preston

Professor of American History, Clare College, University of Cambridge. UK.

Professor Martyn Rady

Professor of Central European History, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London. UK.

Assistant Professor William Smiley

Assistant Professor of History and Humanities, Reed College. USA.

Dr María Fernanda Valencia Suárez

National Autonomous University of Mexico. Mexico.

Organisation

President: Kurt Almqvist

Project Leaders: Mattias Hessérus, Richard Miles, William O'Reilly

Project Coordinators: Magdalena Bujak, Ella Shoshan

