



Workshop

Food and Society in Classical Antiquity

Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Tuesday, May 23, 2017

Program

14:00 PM Paul Halstead (Sheffield)

Human Diet & Living Standards in the Mediterranean

Longue Durée (7th mill. BC to present day)

coffeebreak

15:30 PM Frits Heinrich (Groningen)

Cereals and Ancient Malnutrition

Location: Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Campus Etterbeek,

Building E, Room E.0.06

Paul Halstead (Sheffield): Human diet & living standards in the Mediterranean *longue durée* (7th mill. BC to present day)

Abstract: The human communities of the Mediterranean have, since the 7th-millennium BC spread of farming, witnessed dramatic changes, with population aggregation, architecture, transport and craft technology, social and economic relations, and ideology increasingly approximating over time to forms that are familiar today. Against this backdrop of apparently progressive change it is perhaps tempting to perceive an improvement in human living conditions, as some ancient historians have recently argued in the context of debate over medium-term economic growth in Classical (Greco-Roman) antiquity. I will attempt to extend this debate to the long term (pre)history of Mediterranean agricultural societies over the past eight to nine millennia. I will argue that increasing inequality of opportunity may have played a more important role in apparent gains in farming productivity than have advances in knowhow or technology and that any improvements in 'average' living standards are difficult to disentangle from increasing inequality of consumption.

Paul Halstead is an archaeologist/zooarchaeologist who teaches at the University of Sheffield and has specialised in the later (Neolithic & Bronze Age) prehistory of Greece and in the prehistory and early history of farming and herding in the Mediterranean. His research draws heavily on first-hand oral history and ethnography of traditional farming and herding in the Mediterranean.

Frits Heinrich (Groningen): Cereals and Ancient Malnutrition

Abstract: Cereals generally receive a bad review from archaeologists and historians who model Roman diet and nutrition. Their alleged centrality in the diet, the absence of or deficiency in certain micronutrients (vitamin A, iron, zinc) and the abundance of antinutrients (e.g. phytate) gave them the reputation of inferior foodstuffs. Peter Garnsey, for instance, in his *Food and Society in Classical Antiquity*, implicitly painted the picture that the centrality of cereals in the ancient diet helped cause endemic, chronic malnutrition and a subsequent array of diseases (Garnsey, 1999). Those with a more optimistic view on Roman diet and nutrition, however, did nothing to exonerate cereals, but instead argued for a greater role for animal protein in the diet. This paper questions the validity of the negative appraisal of cereals. Using recent insights in cereal biochemistry and a critical assessment of the changes in cereal cultivation since the Green Revolution of the mid-20th century, it is argued that there are significant biochemical, and hence nutritional, differences between Ancient and Modern cereals. Furthermore, it is argued that changes in the economics of cereal production following the Green Revolution greatly affected their role in the diet. Therefore, the pessimistic assessment of the role of cereals in Roman diet and nutrition, on grounds of being at least in part anachronistic, needs to be re-evaluated.

Frits Heinrich studied History (BA, 2009) and Classical and Mediterranean Archaeology (BA, 2010, Research MA, 2011) at University of Groningen and obtained an MSc in Archaeological Science at the University of Oxford (Brasenose College) in 2012. Since 2012 he works at University of Groningen on his NWO-funded PhD project *Productive Landscapes: an interdisciplinary inquiry into the productivity of crop husbandry in the Roman Empire: 200 B.C. - A.D.500*. He also is an Adam Smith Fellow in Political Economy at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University. Frits' primary research interest is the Roman agricultural economy, a topic that he approaches through combining economics, archaeobotany, biochemistry and the written sources.