
CAMQUA

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EASTER TERM 2002

International Conference on Mediterranean Environmental History

Between the 24th and 26th of April, 2002, Dr Harriet Allen and William Fletcher travelled to Paris to attend an international conference on the theme of "Environmental Dynamics and History in Mediterranean Areas". The conference was the official meeting of a working group in Geoarchaeology sponsored by the International Association of Geomorphology, attracting participants from 19 countries in Europe, Africa and South America. The working group had been recently organised to provide a forum for researchers in Geoarchaeology, especially those working in the circum-Mediterranean countries, to share recent findings and compare perspectives. The working group will have a lifetime of five years, and discussion continues with regards to the crystallisation of a more permanent body.

Over 75 presentations were given in parallel sessions over three days. The presentations were given in the elegant lecture halls of the Sorbonne, where, from the walls, Racine and Descartes looked on sternly. The days were divided into themed sessions, with topics such as 'Mediterranean Instability', 'Dynamics of Wetland Zones', 'Environment, Representation and Myth', and 'Coastal Mobility and Ancient Harbours.' However, even within the sessions, the presentations were characterised by a tremendous variety in subject. Topics spanned Holocene stratigraphy and environmental reconstruction, fluvial geomorphology, archaeology of fluvial and coastal zones, historical approaches to recent anthropisation, cultural and natural heritage management and littoral defence. In addition to summaries of research projects and results, there were a number of interesting regional syntheses for the North African countries and Chile.

Dr Allen contributed to the session on wetland zones with a presentation on the Late Holocene history of the former estuary of Boca do Rio, 'A Portuguese wetland in

transition'. While the presentation was unique in exploiting dinoflagellate cysts for environmental reconstruction, the paper reinforced the recurring theme of the special status of Mediterranean wetland environments, and accompanied several presentations concerned with elaborating both the long-term, historical, environmental and economic histories of wetland environments.

A notable feature of the presentations relating to vegetation dynamics was the scarcity of pollen-based studies and the wealth of charcoal-based, or—to use the continental term—*anthracological* studies. (Indeed, presentations on mollusc research outnumbered new pollen evidence three to one.) Presentations about charcoal analysis included not only regional environmental histories, but one of the only presentations of the entire conference devoted to a new methodology. In this case, the paper dealt with a statistical approach to the measurement of ecologically-responsive cellular features in wood anatomy—*écoanatomie*—for the determination to species level of evergreen oaks (*Quercus ilex* and *Q. coccifera*) and montane pines (*Pinus sylvestris*, *P. mugo* and *Pinus nigra*) in the identification of fossil wood.

A second paper of interest, from the point of view of personalities as much as science, was given by J.L. Vernet, presenting the results of a programme of AMS carbon-isotope determinations on charcoal from modern and ancient soil profiles in Languedoc. Using carbon-13 as a proxy for humidity, the conclusion was that during the mid-Holocene (6000 to 4000 BP) an intense period of drier than present climate (une crise de sécheresse) was linked with vegetation changes. This was an especially telling result from a researcher, who with many others, notably P. Quezel, has long advocated anthropogenic activity as the primary cause of a widespread shift from deciduous to evergreen vegetation communities during

The very wide range of topics meant that despite themed sessions, discussion was often limited to clarification on methodological points, as opposed to more dynamic exchanges. In common with my previous experience of an international conference in France, the issue of language became, for some participants, gradually more volatile over the course of the conference. The response in French, for example, to a question posed in English by a speaker of a third language was guaranteed to raise comment afterward. Overall, however, interest is generally more of a barrier than language in academic exchange; where common interests are found the message generally gets through!

A highlight of the conference came after working hours. On the first evening, champagne and hors-d'oeuvres were served in the first-floor reception rooms of the Senate at the Palais de Luxembourg, providing a special opportunity not only to mingle with the conference participants but to admire the sumptuous interior of the Medici palace and to view the knot-work gardens from their intended aspect.

If anyone should wish to view the volume of abstracts please e-mail William Fletcher at wjf20@cam.ac.uk.

QUATERNARY DISCUSSION GROUP

'The oceanic circulation around Iceland: variations since 16,000 cal. BP'

Friday 7th June 2002

Professor Karen-Luise Knudsen
University of Aarhus

All meetings are held at 8.30pm at Clare Hall
West Court, at the far end of Herschel Road,
Cambridge.

For further details contact Richard Preece;
r.c.preece@zoo.cam.ac.uk

QRA FIELD MEETING

20th - 23rd September 2002

Short Field Meeting
The Quaternary of Southwest Ireland, Killarney

email: t.mighall@cov.ac.uk or
s.harrison@cov.ac.uk
www.qra.org.uk/ireland.pdf



Achievements in glacial palaeoclimatology, palaeoenvironmental studies and their impact on Palaeolithic archaeology

All information about this conference can be
found at the meeting's website:

www.the-conference.com/2002/stage3

The forms for registering for this conference,
and for booking accommodation are now
available from this site.

More about the Stage 3 Project and its members
can be found on its website:
**[www.esc.cam.ac.uk/oistage3/Details/
Homepage.html](http://www.esc.cam.ac.uk/oistage3/Details/Homepage.html)**

2nd - 7th September 2002

"Holocene environmental catastrophes and recovery"

Brunel University, West London

**[http://www.brunel.ac.uk/depts/geo/
Catastrophes/](http://www.brunel.ac.uk/depts/geo/Catastrophes/)**

Further details are available from Suzanne
Leroy at Brunel University, UK
(suzanne.leroy@brunel.ac.uk)

Deadlines

Copy for the next issue of *Camqua* should be submitted
by **25th September 2002** to the editors at the Geography
Department.

Credits

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