

What can we learn on past weather and climate from documentary archives?

33. Minisymposium des Zentrums für Umweltgeschichte

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Past climate variations can be estimated from different kinds of proxy data. Besides several proxies from natural archives (tree rings, ice cores or lake sediments), valuable contributions to climate reconstruction can be found in documentary archives. Various sources of documentary evidence (e.g. narrative written reports, visual daily weather records, official economic records, pictorial documentation) are critically evaluated and interpreted at first. Subsequently these sources can be used to study past climates.

It will be demonstrated that documentary evidence can be utilized for quantitative climate reconstructions and can be useful also to study weather and climate extremes and their impacts to society. Reconstructions based on documentary evidence are comparable to other paleoclimatological climate reconstructions with regard to data quality and methods. Moreover, they add complementary information and help us to interpret the other data.

This public lecture is also the introductory lesson of the course “Historical climatology and climate reconstruction in Central Europe: An Introduction” that will be given during the next two days (January 19-20) at the Institute of Social Ecology.

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