

## „A Daughter of the Rhine“: Rivers and Identity in Gallo-Roman Poetry

54<sup>th</sup> Minisymposium of the Centre for Environmental History

1<sup>st</sup> Rachel Carson Center Lecture

Presentation:

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This presentation will attempt to assess the "environmental imagination" of the early middle ages in Gaul by examining the poems, letters, and religious writings of three men. Ausonius, Sidonius Apollinaris, and Venantius Fortunatus. They were all active writers and also political and religious figures during the 300s-500s, and all members of what we now call the "Gallo-Roman elite." All three of these men lived for much or most of their adult lives in Gaul, and all found themselves at least partially pulled between the culture of distant Rome and the immediacy, vibrancy, and beauty of Gaul – the "New Frontier" of Late Antiquity. Finally, all three wrote poems, letters, and other works that explicitly describe, discuss, and praise the natural and built environments of Gaul, and especially its rivers.

I will discuss the ways in which the poets described and used rivers in their writings, and how rivers helped them to present and negotiate complex issues of ethnic, cultural, and political identity. The rivers of Gaul, on the one hand fixed and permanent, on the other always shifting and changing their courses, came to stand in for the problems of defining, marking, and bounding the many ethnicities of the Roman and post-Roman world.

**Ort / Place:** IFF, 1070 Wien, Schottenfeldgasse 29

**Zeit / Time:** Thursday, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2013, 18.00 c.t. – 20.00