DECLINE: All good things must come to an end?

Second Graduate Student Symposium Sponsored by the Graduate Students of the Department of Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology Bryn Mawr College

October 16, 1999

Since the beginning of history humans have expressed a longing for an ideal past. At the same time, they have lamented the causes for its disappearance: political and artistic oppression, invasion and influence of foreign cultures, luxury and laziness, famine and poverty, and the cycle of prosperity and decline. Archaeologists, art historians, classicists, anthropologists and historians have imposed theories of decline on the past: some ages are "golden" and others are "dark." What is the evidence for these theories and how is it used to support them? The goal of the second Graduate Student Symposium at Bryn Mawr College is to explore various questions related to the concept of decline.

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Department of Classical Studies, University of Michigan

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Alexander Ingle

Department of Classical Studies, University of Michigan

9:50-10:05 Progress and Decline: an Investigation into Urban Images in Tacitus

Maura Cleffi

Graduate Program in Art and Archaeology of the Mediterranean World, University of Pennsylvania

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Andrew Gallia

Graduate Group in Ancient History, University of Pennsylvania

10:30-10:45 <u>Bad Wine, Bad Barbarians or Bad Greeks? The Perceived Decline of the Nomads in the Greco-Roman World</u>

Juliana K. Sander

Graduate Program in Classical Studies, Bryn Mawr College

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Alexander A. Bauer

Department of Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania

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Omur Harmansah

Graduate Program in the History of Art, University of Pennsylvania

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Pennsylvania State University

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Christiane J. Gruber

University of Pennsylvania

12:40-12:55 The Period of Decline in Arab/Islamic Culture: Between 1250- 1850?

Akif Kirecci

Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Pennsylvania

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Michelle Lang

Department of the History of Art, Bryn Mawr College

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Tamara Sears

History of Art/ South Asian Regional Studies, University of Pennsylvania

3:10-3:25 Decline in Fin-de-Sicle Vienna: The Sensuality of Death

Eleanor Moseman

Department of the History of Art, Bryn Mawr College

3:30-3:50 Coffee Break - Quita Woodward Room

3:50-4:30 Session 4

3:50-4:05 This Too, Shall Pass: Emics, Etics and Heterarchy in the Rhetoric of Collapse

Paul Shen-Brown

Department of Anthropology, University of Colorado

4:10-4:25 <u>Origins of Contemporary Concepts of 'Decline' in the Lessons Learned by 18th Century</u>
<u>American Scholars from Cicero's Instruction on the Rule of Law as an Index of the Rise and Decline of Civilization</u>

Richard T. Robol

Columbus-America Discovery Group

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Faculty participants: Alice A. Donohue, Corey T. Brennan, Steven Levine

Student Participants: Dylan Bloy, Thomas Milbank, Leo R. Costello, Carolyn Aslan

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Paper Abstracts

Alexander A. Bauer

New Light on a "Dark" Age: the Continuation of Trade in the Iron Age of the Eastern Mediterranean

Scholarly biases which emphasize complex and state-level societies over decentralized forms of social organization have perpetuated the view of the ancient world as consisting of "golden ages" of prosperity and innovation, punctuated by "dark ages" of poverty and cultural stagnation or recession. Transitions from these "golden" to "dark" ages are accordingly considered moments of catastrophic cultural and social collapse, and the period is characterized as historically disjunctive rather than continuous. The transition from the Late Bronze to Iron Age in the eastern Mediterranean is one such period, conventionally marked by the collapse of the international trade network and the states which operated within it. Our "state" bias supports this notion of collapse and leads us to interpret this period as one of great social change. We have failed, however, to consider that other forms of trade, such as that conducted by freelance merchants, may have continued unaffected by the macro-level political changes of the time. Indeed, there is increasing evidence that this network involved more than just state level exchange systems, and new data relating to the Philistines, Phoenicians and other "maritime" peoples of the early Iron Age suggest that the trading network of the Late Bronze Age continued into the Iron Age, albeit at a reduced scale and intensity. It is the aim of the present paper to evaluate the evidence for trade in the early Iron Age of the eastern Mediterranean, and suggest that our characterization of the period should be one of continuity, rather than collapse.

Maura Cleffi

Progress and Decline: an Investigation into Urban Images in Tacitus

This paper aims to investigate one aspect of views of decline in Roman historical writing. To do this, I will look at some passages in the work of Tacitus which focus on the concept of building and urbanism. Tacitus presents these concepts as intended to symbolize civilization and the benevolent spread of Roman amenities. Nevertheless there is a contradiction, as Tacitus points out by using various literary devices that include rumors and impersonal verbs. In reality, he shows that the imposition of buildings, laws, and urban plans on preexisting sites is artificial, especially in contrast to the organic development of cities, which had occurred for hundreds of years. In addition, buildings, roads, and institutions have the same status in Tacitus as words do - their meaning can become devalued. This concept is especially important in two works of Tacitus. The *Agricola* demonstrates some of the contradictions inherent in the process of empire building outside of Rome, while the *Annales* depicts decline both outside and within the city. In particular, I will look at the passage in book 15 of the *Annales* concerning the great fire during the reign of Nero and the organization of the subsequent rebuilding of Rome. I will discuss Tacitus' view on this disaster and comment on the relationship in his work between urban development and moral decline. I will set it against the backdrop of other devaluation in meaning in Tacitus, in particular the use of words and labels for obsolete governing institutions.

Rangar Cline

Decline of the Secular City and the Birth of Perfection:

Perceptions of Progress among Late Antique Desert Ascetics

In the late fourth century of Common Era, seven monks set off from Jerusalem to witness and record a flowering of monasticism in the Egyptian deserts. Their journey's record became the basis for Rufinus' *History of the Monks of Egypt*, one of our primary sources of information about asceticism in the Late Antique Egyptian desert. This paper will examine the way those monks and their contemporaries perceived a decline of the secular city to be coupled with the birth of a perfect and holy civilization in the desert.

The desert monks' perception of decline involved the birth of something new from the ashes of a civilization headed for destruction. Early Christians writing of the desert monks frequently described the secular world as fraught with injustice. They described a world where those unable to pay taxes were flogged, theft went unpunished, brigandage ran

rampant, and murderers practiced their skill at will. In the civilization without Christianity, the social fabric was rapidly unraveling. Against this background of decline, the desert ascetics made their appearance.

The monks lived in a new Eden protected by God, where man and animal lived side by side, the unjust were punished according to their crime, the sick were healed, murderers realized their folly, and the desire to steal was overcome. This paper will examine how the writings of the desert fathers presented their vision of the flowering ascetic community upon 6the ashes of the declining city and how archaeological evidence bears witness to the extent of early Christian desert monasticism in the wake of perceived decline.

Andrew Gallia

"Non possum ferre, Ouirites, Graecam urbem": Philhellenism and Moral Decline in Juvenal

Foremost among the targets of Juvenal's famous "savage indignation" was the rising influence of eastern Greeks at Rome and the general acceptance by Romans of Greek culture in the early second century CE. His poems constantly harp on the greed, dishonesty, perversion, and general moral degeneracy of wily *Graeculi*. These traits are usually set in contrast with the lost moral purity of old Rome, so as to demonstrate, both implicitly and explicitly, the cause-effect relationship between exposure to Greek decadence and Roman decline.

One approach to these complaints is to see in them a reflection of the poet's own prejudices and cast Juvenal as an unrelenting xenophobe who hated all non-Romans. However, recent scholarship has introduced the concept of a speaking *persona* who stands in between Juvenal and the text, allowing him to layer his diatribes with irony and subtle contradictions for the sake of a comic effect. Focusing primarily on the famous bigot Umbricius in *Satire* 3, I demonstrate how these subtle contradictions lead to a reading, which completely undermines the position of the anti-Greek speaker.

The final section of the paper goes beyond the literary analysis of the *Satires* into larger historical issues. I explore how this new reading of Juvenal reflects on the relationship between Roman anti-Hellenism and their belief in a historical decline from the days of the Republic. I suggest that the prevailing Roman conception of an "uncontaminated" heroic past depends, at least in part, upon contemporary ethnic and xenophobic concerns.

Christiane J. Gruber

Mamluk Metalware and its Role in al-Magrizi's Theory of Decline

Reconstructed historical models of Cultural decline and revival in the medieval Islamic world have been appropriated and reapplied to the study of Islamic art, in the belief that art and architecture are inherently reflexive of economic times. I will call into question and reassess this scholarly process by addressing a small sample of tinned copper Mamluk (15th century Egypt) metalwares in the Art Museum, Princeton University and the Islamic Art Museum in Cairo. I will address their lack of silver or gold inlay vis-a-vis the evidence which has so far been brought forth in scholarship. Such historical texts as al-Maqrizi's "Khitat" have been used sporadically to explain why these objects are "undecorated." He states: "Inlaid copper has become little used by People, and it is rare to find it. There are some people who for several years have applied themselves to buying such if it as is available on the market, and the removal of inlay from it is pursued for material gain." (Khitat, 2: 105).

This textual evidence is insufficient to account for the extant Mamluk metal pieces, and I will therefore argue that these cauldrons, bowls, canteens, and other domestic wares are, in fact, not representative of either a more orthodox outlook on luxury goods, nor even outcomes of recurrent economic crashes, plagues, and famines throughout the 15th century, but are rather quotidian, non-courtly pieces belonging to household inventories and women's personal trousseaus. I will

therefore examine issues of the growing merchant class, women's dowries and personal properties, and the rise of market-place metallurgy in order to redefine the value and role of these pieces within the larger scope of Islamic objects d'art.

Omur Harmansah

Limestone Hills of North Syria in Late Antiquity: Problems of Rural Decline

In late antiquity, the limestone hills of North Syria that stretch between Antioch, Aleppo and Apamea witnessed an unrivaled economic prosperity, similar to other marginal landscapes of the Mediterranean basin. From the second century AD on, the rugged landscape of the hills was embellished with sizable villages of rural communities, who prospered through olive and vine cultivation. These agrarian settlements incorporated distinctive stone masonry architecture and continued to expand until the sixth century. Regional surveys and archaeological excavations show that the region suffered a gradual decline and rural exodus through the late sixth and seventh centuries, at the end of which they were almost totally abandoned

This paper urges to investigate issues of rural decline in the North Syrian limestone massif as this time period. Functioning within the hinterland of Antioch, the decline of the area is often associated with the devastation of this major urban center by a series of catastrophes throughout the sixth century: Sasanian invasions, bubonic plague and violent earthquakes. Antioch could never recover afterwards, as the North Syrian trade collapsed eventually. The Arab invaders of late 630s must have seen little resistance in North Syria. The question should then be raised whether the decline of rural prosperity in the countryside of North Syria should be seen as a consequence of such natural disasters and political disturbances, or could one trace a malthusian type of crisis within the limits of this marginal zone, where a major demographic increase resulted in the overuse of agricultural resources.

Alexander Ingle

Necessity and Decline in the Roman Empire

This paper argues that decline may be viewed as a theoretical reflection of a social development that naturally arises from the objective socio-economic conditions that characterize a given society. The paper briefly reviews the category of necessity in history - the proposition championed by thinkers from Aristotle to Marx, that societies, by their own internal natures, tend toward a predictable and knowable end. The economic and social forms that characterize a society in its "rise" imply and determine the conditions of its "fall." That is, rise or fall are seen as organic features of the same objective development of socio-economic forms. I will discuss necessity with regard to the concept of accident in the historical process, but focus throughout on the inevitable tendencies latent in social development. The paper defends the proposition of necessity with reference to the development of Roman society in its passage from citizen republic based on extraction of social surplus from slave labor by the upper echelons of the society, at least, to Empire increasingly dependent on the economic exploitation of the provincial and Italian peasantry. The paper reviews the particular socio-economic conditions (e.g., economic, political, and military enfranchisement of a class of small farmers) that lead to the supremacy of the Roman state and the manner in which these same conditions created circumstances (e.g., Empire and the ruin of the peasant agriculture in Italy) that undermined the ability of the state to support itself under its own social assumptions.

Akif Kirecci

The Period of decline in Arab/Islamic Culture: Between 1250 and 1850?

It is almost customary to allude to the long period of Arabic/Islamic culture, lasting from mid-12th to the end of the 18th century as a period of "decadence." Western scholarship on the period tends to claim that the golden age of the history of Islam came to an end with the Mongol invasion, and until the French invasion of Egypt there was nothing considerably important happening in terms of cultural vitality; nor was there any creativity in the region. This theory of decline became so dominant as it even produced a terminology of its own which reflects the Western nature of the framework.

That there was nothing produced to contribute to the scholarship and the intellectual life until the 18th century not only means European arrival provided the consciousness but also suggests a Western-centered approach to the history of the region. In my paper, I discuss the terminology, which is produced and applied to the period between 1250 and 1850. My paper also challenges the approaches of conventional Western scholarship on the period and argues that this approach of taking the 18th century as a starting point for the intellectual vitality of the region is a product of Orientalist agenda.

Michelle Lang

Late Mannerism or Early Baroque?: Adam Elsheimer and the Discourse of Decline

The paintings of Adam Elsheimer (1578-1610), a German artist working in Rome during the first decade of the seventeenth century, fall, in the history of the Western art, at the end of a problematic stylistic period known as Mannerism. Mannerist art is usually defined both temporally, as having been created from about 1525-1600, and stylistically, as being especially mannered or artificial. Implicit in this definition is a discourse of decline and its counterpoint, progress. Since the seventeenth century, the root term *maniera* has been understood in negative relation to Giorgio Vasari's heralded peak of art, the High Italian Renaissance. And even though the idea of stylistic progress has gradually lost its validity in the post-Romantic era, the general stigma of an artist working at the end of a stylistic period, and the specific stigma of Mannerism, have continued the structure Elsheimer studies. Since Elsheimer's contribution to the history of art has, until recently, centered on the artist's style, scholars have relied both on the relative differences in status between the labels "late Mannerism" and "early Baroque" and the lacuna that exists between these two categories to argue either that Elsheimer was an mannered, imitative artist working at the end of a long period lacking in innovation, or that he was a pioneer of early Baroque realism. Elsheimer studies that aim to move beyond this limited debate must be disengaged from this underlying but persistent discourse of decline.

Eleanor Moseman

Decline in Fin-de-Sicle Vienna: The Sensuality of Death

Anticipating the turn of the millennium, I am compelled to look back at the turn of the twentieth century to understand how a society evolves or devolves in a state of uneasy transition. As Andreas Huyssen states in his introduction to Twilight Memories, in our own culture of millennium obsession "comparisons are made with earlier ends of centuries, especially the last one with its sensibility of decadence, nostalgia, and loss that we deem symptomatic of fin de sicle (1). In my estimation, turn-of-the-century Vienna represents one of the better examples of this state of decline, marked by a profusion of decorative solutions to express a cultural preoccupation with death.

In turn-of-the-century Vienna, a feeling of anxiety invaded art and popular culture. While the Viennese sat in coffee houses to read the entertainment section of the daily newspaper, the city witnessed poverty which drove women to prostitution, and hopelessness which drove lovers to suicide. The artist Gustav Klimt devoted several years to painting images of women practically smothered by the ornate fabrics of a decadent style, their talon-like fingers curled with

implied aggression. Perhaps more evocative of decline are Klimt's canvases depicting the three ages of (wo)man, in some cases overtly including skulls or images of death which stand in direct contrast to the images of youth represented by figures of children or pregnant women.

The paper I wish to contribute to Bryn Mawr's Second Graduate Student Symposium will address specific issues pertaining to the sensuous portrayal of death in fin-de-sicle Viennese painting. By highlighting pictorial elements of anxiety in a set of works by Klimt, I hope to suggest that interest in mortality may correspond more generally with modern cultures in a state of decline.

David D. Phillips

Democracy and Decline in Isocrates 7

In oration 7, the *Areopagiticus*, Isocrates imagines himself addressing the Athenian *ekklesia* on a matter of public safety (§1). Athens' democratic constitution, he claims, is corrupt and must be remedied by a return to the older and truer democracy of Solon and Cleisthenes (§§16-7). This paper examines how Isocrates interweaves the concepts of democracy and decline in presenting his own political philosophy.

Isocrates' vision of democracy has much more in common with "democracy" in the former East Germany that with "democracy" in America: it is a system under which individuals know their place and public offices are held by the greatest supporters of the *status quo*. Sortition, the hallmark of fourth-century Athenian democracy, is portrayed as less democratic than election, to which Isocrates urges the Athenians to return (§§21-3). To the average fourth-century Athenian, the orator's words smacked of oligarchy; Isocrates takes great pains to counter this objection (§57) but is ultimately usuccessful.

Isocrates criticizes the current government's mismanagement of both internal and external affairs. As the guardian of *eukosmia* (cf. Aeschines 1.8; and the famous Spartan *eunomia*, Plut. *Lycurgus* 30), the Areopagus inspired such respect that men avoided the agora and despised humor (§§46-9). Its laws were composed with an eye to justice rather than accuracy (cf. Isoc. 4.78; [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 9.2). Athens was blessed with peace and prosperity, in contrast to the peculation and penury of Isocrates' day (§§25, 54).

Isocrates cloaks his critique of Athens' recent failures abroad in nostalgia. In the spirit of the funeral oration (cf. esp. Lys. 2), he reviews the city's past triumphs, culminating with the defeat of the Mede. In contrast, Athens now relies on mercenaries, and citizens must be paid to serve (§82). The implied comparison of the "Peace of Callias" (§80) with the humiliating "Peace of Antalcidas" (cf. Isoc. 4.118) epitomizes for Isocrates the incompetence of the new democracy and the need to return to the old.

In the *Areopagiticus* Isocrates manipulates not only the concept of democracy but the chronology of events. Athens' mythological victories over the Amazons and Thracians occurred long before the establishment of democracy, yet they are mentioned alongside *ta Persika* (§75). By placing the blame for Athens' decline on "those who governed the city a little before us" (§50), Isocrates avoids mentioning Ephialtes and thus can place the "Peace of Callias" - arguably an Isocratean invention - in the glory days of the old democracy.

Richard T. Robol

Origins of Contemporary Concepts of 'Decline' in the Lessons Learned by the 18th Century American Scholars from Cicero's Instruction on the Rule of Law as an Index of the Rise and Decline of Civilization

There is a dearth of rigorous scholarship about how contemporary concepts of "decline" have been influenced by the

governmental, legal and economic context within which "decline" is studied by historians and archaeologists.

This Paper helps remedy that deficiency by tracing certain contemporary definitions and criteria for the concept of "decline" to American scholarship during the latter half of the 18th century. This Paper focuses on how contemporary definitions of "decline" have been affected by the 18th century scholarship, which, in turn, drew lessons from the causative definition of "decline" propounded by Marcus Tullius Cicero.

Tracing the origin of certain contemporary concepts of "decline" to scholarship during the foundation of the American Republic, the Paper explores the influence of Cicero's focus o the Rule of Law as an index of the rise and decline of societies. The scholars and leaders who founded the American Republic studied history with a view to the social and political turmoil of their day and found useful Cicero's causative analysis of the "rise" and "decline" of great civilizations.

Based on this analysis, the Paper concludes that certain contemporary definitions and criteria for "decline" may be a reflection of existing legal, economic and political values, rather than a pristine "objective" definition based on immutable scientific criteria. Therefore, in analyzing the "decline" of ancient civilizations, historians, archaeologists and scholars must take account of the extent to which their analysis may be influenced by the systems with which they are comfortable or familiar.

Juliana K. Sander

Bad Wine, Bad Barbarians or Bad Greeks? The Perceived Decline of Nomads in the Greco-Roman World

In his *Lives of the Sophists*, the third-century AD sophist Philostratus reveals that just before his lifetime there was a set speech on the topic of "how the Scythians are losing their health in the cities and need to resume their nomadic life" (Philostr. *VS* 572). This was not a topic peculiar to the author's place or time. Despite the fact that the Greeks sometimes spoke of nomads and other "barbarians" in derogatory terms, at various points in their history they also praised them. In fact, according to some Greco-Roman authors, the ideal life of the nomads was destroyed only by the influence of Greek "civilization."

Wine is one aspect of Greek Civilization that seems to have been viewed as a corrupting influence. According to ancient literary accounts, in the hands of the barbaric nomads, wine becomes a dangerous substance. Foreign peoples drink inappropriately: unmixed, in large quantities, and in large cups. The ancient texts suggest that debased drinking practices are one element of "civilization" that can erode the lives of the barbarian nomads. This idea, however, may be as much a criticism of the Greek world as it is of the barbarian.

Wine can be the drink of civilized peoples; it can also be the opposite. Ancient authors assert that the improper drinking of wine among barbarian is an indication of the presence of the corrupting influence of the "civilized" Greeks. But it is questionable whose cultural practices are being criticized in these texts.

Tamara I. Sears

Questioning the Colonial Construction of Decline: Wiliam Hodges' 18th Century Landscapes of India

This paper analyzes the trope of "decline" as it functions in two late 18th century architectural landscapes of North India by William Hodges, the first British professional artist to travel to India and disseminate representations of the newly colonized subcontinent. Published in conjunction with a pamphlet entitled *A Dissertation on the Prototypes of Architecture: Hindoo, Moorish and Gothic* (1787), these landscapes depict the overgrown remains of two 16th century Muslim tombs, one of the famous ruler Sher Shan and the other of the great Mughal emperor Akbar. As such, the

images strongly suggest the notion of decline, made all the more relevant by the rec4nt breakdown of the Mughal Empire.

Although scholars have often seen such representations of decline as complicit with the objectives of British imperialism in establishing hierarchical relationships between colonizer and colonized, Hodges' landscape prints and accompanying text forces us to question the efficacy of this framework. Rather than articulating the inherent superiority of European standards, Hodges emphasizes the grandeur of Indian cultural achievement in his writings through a passionate argument for the acceptance of Indian architecture into canons of Classical perfection. A careful comparison of these representations with the works of artists like Richard Wilson and William Turner, further indicates that Hodges is not creating an explicitly new type of image for the colony, but rather is transcribing the Indian landscape into contemporary aesthetic traditions in England. Therefore, we must reevaluate the colonial construction of decline by recognizing the tensions embedded in these images.

Paul Shen-Brown

This Too, Shall Pass: Emics, Etics and Heterarchy in the Rhetoric of Collapse

It has been argued that the idea of collapse has no place in the discourse on cultural evolution, or in the social sciences generally. Notions of rise and fall invoke unconscious models of social evolution, models imbued with Nineteenth Century assumptions about unilinear movement, or 'progress' toward a Western ideal. If we excise these unilinear fallacies from the study of cultural evolution, words like rise and collapse have no meaning - not at least from a purely etic standpoint. But from an emic viewpoint these words can have great meaning, and so can tell us much about how past and present societies view themselves, their histories and even their futures. The use of these terms in the creation of general theories or concepts of social change may be an inappropriate result of our own intellectual heritage, our emic viewpoint. Recent theories in anthropological archaeology, such as Crumley's (1995) concept of heterarchy, have been put forward to counteract the use of inappropriate terms and concepts in theories of social complexity. The heterarchy concept will be examined with reference to social complexity and the idea of collapse. It is suggested that collapse be retained as a concept in the discourse on social change only as an emic concept. As such it can play a role in tracking the behaviors of social actors under specific social circumstances, but has no taxonomic or systemic meaning for studies of social change.

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