

The FWF-Wittgenstein-Prize Project “*Moving Byzantium*”
and the Complexity Science Hub Vienna (Research Group “*Social Complexity and Collapse*”)

would like to announce a public lecture on

“Resilience” or “Fragility”?

Reconsidering Climate and Historical Civilizations

by Prof. Ronnie ELLENBLUM, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem



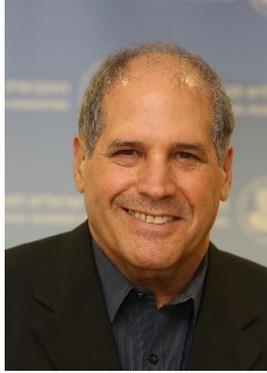
Remains of a Byzantine farm from the 6th century CE near Shivta in the Negev Desert (Israel,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org>)

Time: Wednesday, 11 March 2020, 15:00-16:30

Venue: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Hollandstraße 11-13/1, 1020 Vienna

The lecture will be followed by a wine reception.

Contact: Dr. Paraskevi Sykopetritou, Institut für Byzantinistik und Neogräzistik der Univ. Wien,
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Ronnie Ellenblum is Professor of Historical Geography and Environmental History at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is the author of *Frankish Rural Settlement in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), *Crusader Castles and Modern Histories* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), and *The Collapse of the Eastern Mediterranean: Climate Change and the Decline of the East, 950–1072* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), see <https://en.geography.huji.ac.il/people/ronnie-ellenblum>.

In his lecture, Ronnie Ellenblum will suggest a new theoretical paradigm of “fragility” to replace or supplement the hegemonic discourse of “resilience”, which claims that humanity is capable of using its technological, organizational and political capabilities to cope with any climatic challenge that nature might place in its path. He will explain the decline in the interest of the humanistic sciences in climate history and the parallel rise of experimental climate sciences and their development into a global science of immense power (perhaps the first global science), which argues that humanity has the power to influence nature and the climate. Ellenblum claims that climate affects the stability of civilizations mainly through the availability of food, and that a crisis affecting food provision that lasts only one or two decades is enough to bring a society to the brink of its resilience, beyond which it begins to collapse. The concept of “fragility” emanates from the existential dependence of human civilizations on the steady provision of food. All the food we consume, its quantity and quality, is affected by the climate. This dependence is accompanied by constant anxiety, by a feeling of helplessness due to our inability to know what climatic conditions will prevail this year or the next. The helplessness and anxiety that accompany this existential dependence are the reasons for the state of fragility that has characterized human culture since the dawn of history. He will also claim that affluence and collapse are in fact the

two sides of the single entangled phenomenon of fragility, and that affluence, stability, and the feeling of security produced by years of stable climate are components of no less important than the fear of collapse. Ellenblum will suggest a humanistic definition of the concept of affluence, which will be presented not as a datum but as a continuous process that creates a dynamic “state of mind” of plenty. During this process, goods, services, institutions and even feelings are transformed from “luxuries” into “everyday consumer goods”, finally to become basic and indispensable needs. Civilizations and individuals are constantly occupied with their fragility, with their desire and hope for their welfare and affluence to keep growing, or with their fears of losing them.

The **FWF-Project “Moving Byzantium”** is funded by the Wittgenstein-Prize awarded to Prof. Claudia Rapp in 2015 and hosted at the **Austrian Academy of Sciences** and the **University of Vienna**, promoting a new approach to Byzantine history, see: <https://rapp.univie.ac.at/>.

The **Research Group “Social Complexity and Collapse”** was established at the **Complexity Science Hub Vienna** in 2019 by Prof. Peter Turchin (University of Connecticut) to use the tools of complexity science and cultural evolution for the study of the human past, see: <https://www.csh.ac.at/>.

The lecture continues an already existing cooperation between the two research groups.

