



Historical Chronology: Truth or Fable?

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Hörsaal 3, JKU Linz

Schlüpfte Rom wirklich 753 aus dem Ei? Eher nicht, denn historische Zeitangaben wurden erst nach der Kalenderreform von Papst Gregor dem Großen einigermaßen sicher und global vergleichbar. Worauf ist nun Verlass, wenn sich das kollektive Gedächtnis als so unzureichend erweist?

Florin Diacu vom Department of Mathematics and Statistics der University of Victoria (Kanada) wird in seinem Vortrag herausarbeiten, welche Rolle Mathematik in der Geschichte spielt, und warum die Himmelsmechanik nach wie vor fundamental für die Datierung historischer Ereignisse ist.

Der Vortrag (in Englisch) findet im Rahmen des Special Semester 2014 des Radon Institute for Computational and Applied Mathematics (RICAM) statt: <http://www.ricam.oeaw.ac.at/specsem/specsem2014>.



ABSTRACT

We learn in school that Rome was founded in **753 BC**, that the Battle of Hastings took place in **1066**, and that the Turks reached the gates of Vienna in **1683**. While the last date in this sequence is most surely correct, the further we step back in time, the more likely it is that we deal with approximations. But how is this possible? Haven't historians always kept track of events? The answer is surprisingly "no." Historical chronology, as we know it today, was founded by the time of the Gregorian calendar reform, towards the end of the 16th century. Until then it was far from clear when the events depicted in documents had taken place. The reason is simple: documents describe events in terms of various calendars and relative to unknown dates, such as "the battle took place 32 years after the death of Alexander." Alexander who, and when did he die? Unfortunately, the span of our collective memory proves to be amazingly short.

In this talk we will discuss the intriguing aspects of how global historical chronology was created and the huge difficulties its founders encountered, how it survived in spite of ferocious opposition from historians and scientists, including Isaac Newton, and why it was and still is attacked by various figures, including cranks like Immanuel Velikovsky, and academics, such as the mathematician Anatoly Fomenko. We will emphasize the role mathematics and science play in historical chronology today, and why celestial mechanics was and remains fundamental in dating historical events.