



Francqui Foundation Conference

Long-Term Quantification in Ancient Mediterranean History

Walter Scheidel (Stanford University), *4,000 years of wages and well-being*

Real incomes are a critical measure of human well-being. In recent years, historians have made considerable progress in the comparative study of real wages around the world. As a result, for the period from the thirteenth century CE onward, we are now in a position to compare real wages in a number of European countries as well as in Turkey, India, China, and Japan. Only small and frequently deficient samples of usable evidence have survived from earlier periods, mostly in the Near East. However, despite their various shortcomings, these sources are often sufficient to support rough estimates of real wages. In my paper, I draw on my ongoing collection and analysis of pertinent data from antiquity and the early and high Middle Ages in an attempt order to extend the chronological scope of the historical study of real incomes back to the late third millennium BCE. In some cases, this approach enables us to trace contours of change in the very long run. With only very few apparent exceptions, the available data are consistent with a Malthusian interpretation of pre-modern economic development.