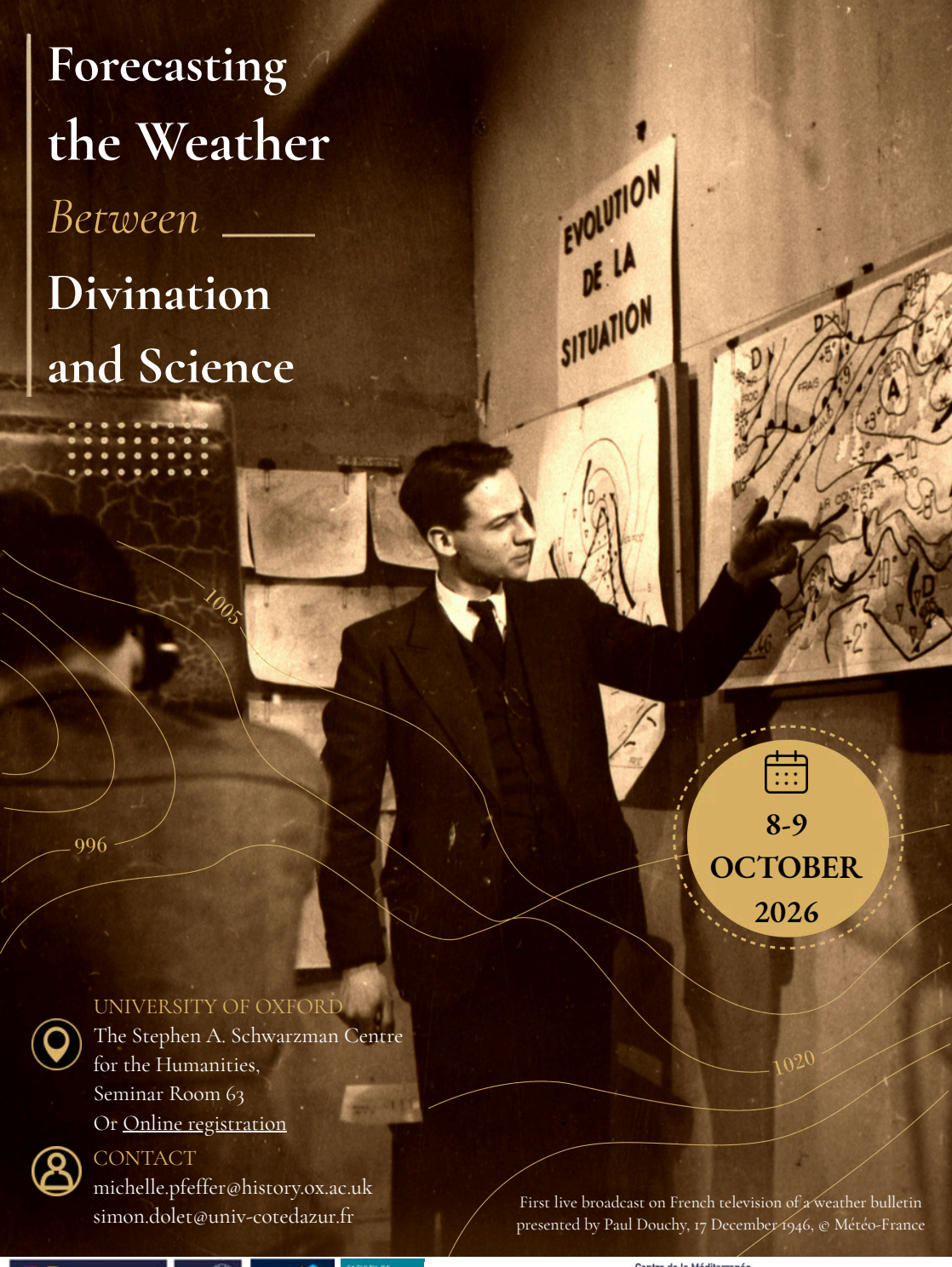
Forecasting the Weather *Between* Divination and Science



8-9 OCTOBER 2026

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
The Stephen A. Schwarzman Centre for the Humanities,
Seminar Room 63
Or Online registration

CONTACT
michelle.pfeffer@history.ox.ac.uk
simon.dolet@univ-cotedazur.fr

First live broadcast on French television of a weather bulletin presented by Paul Douchy, 17 December 1946, © Météo-France

TORCH THE OXFORD RESEARCH CENTRE IN THE HUMANITIES · University of Oxford · Centre for Intellectual History · Faculty of History · Université Côte d'Azur · Centre de la Méditerranée Moderne et Contemporaine UMR 7303 Nice · IUF institut universitaire de France

Satire op een ballonvaarder, Anonymous, 1784 - 1785, © Rijksmuseum

Thursday 8 October
Morning Sessions

8:45 : Welcome (Coffee/Tea)

9:00 : Introduction

9:15–10:15 : Interpreting Astral Signs (Antiquity)

Willis Monroe (University of New Brunswick),
« Innovation and Weather Prediction in Mesopotamia: The Invention of the Zodiac ».

Angelo Gargiulo (University of Ghent),
« Useful Forecasts? John Lydus, Parapegmata, and Meteorological Practice in Late Antiquity ».

10:15 : Break

10:30–12:00 : Interpreting Astral and Natural Signs (Middle Ages, Early Modern Period)

Razieh Mousavi (FAU Erlangen Nürnberg),
« Weather Predictions through the Rising of Sirius in Pre-modern Arabic Malḥama Manuals ».

Mustafa Yildiz (University of California, Berkeley),
« Physician's forecast: Weather prediction and medicine in Byzantium ».

Andrew Campbell (University College London),
« Signs of the Time: The New Meteorological Corpus in Early Modern Europe ».

12:00 : Lunch

Thursday 8 October
Afternoon Sessions (1)

12:50–14:20 : Early Modern Almanacs, Astrology and Environment

Sergio H. Orozco-Echeverri (Universidad de Antioquia),
« Forecasting for an Unseen World: Weather Prediction as Licit Judgement in Iberian Almanacs ».

Anne Lawrence-Mathers (Univeristy of Reading),
« Astrometeorology and the Little Ice Age ».

Jakub Ochocinski (European University Institute, Florence),
« Testing the Stars, Noting the Heavens: Almanac Prognostications and Weather Annotation in Early Eighteenth-Century Poland-Lithuania ».

14:20 : Break

14:30–16:00 : Scientific Authority (1)
Dominant European and Chinese Paradigms

Barbora Kocánová (Czech Academy of Sciences),
« Can Comets be Trusted? Medieval Debates on Cometary Weather Predictions between Astrology and Meteorology ».

Wilson Chan (Hong Kong Chu Hai College),
« Knowledge of Wind as Statecraft: Imperial Meteorology and the Astronomical Bureau in Ming China (1368-1644) ».

Caterina Schürch (Technische Universität Berlin),
« 'Stammering' Conjectures and High Hopes for Insights through Observation ».

Thursday 8 October
Afternoon Sessions (2)

16:00 : Break

17:30–18:30 : Plenary at Grove Auditorium, Magdalen College

Catherine Ross (Met Office),
« The D-Day Forecast – from synoptic charts to silver screen ».

Satire op een ballonvaarder, Anonymous, 1784 - 1785, © Rijksmuseum

Friday 9 October
Morning Sessions

8:45 : Welcome (Coffee/Tea)

9:00–9:30 : Scientific Authority (2) From Astrology to Cyclical Prediction in the Enlightenment

Simon Dolet (Université Côte d'Azur), « Predicting the Cyclical Return of Weather: From a Crisis of Legitimacy to the Construction of Scientific Authority (1660s–1810s)».

9:30–10:30 : Forecasting and Materiality

Brant Vogel (Independent Scholar, Treasurer ICHM), « A Brass Weather-Glass ».

Valentine Delrue (Ghent University), « Barometers of All Kinds: Linking Living and Mechanical Weather Instruments, 1770–1870 ».

10:30 : Break

10:45–12:15 : From Divination to Forecasting: Building a New Authority

David Baneke (Utrecht University), « Prediction, forecast or warning? The epistemological diversity of storm warnings ».

Svetlana Hey (Independent Researcher), « Predicting the Elements for the Socialist State: Soviet Anti-Religious Propaganda, 'Peasant Superstitions', and the Scientification of Weather in Ukraine (1920–1930s) ».

Yifan Song (Durham) , «Predicting Weather Rhythms: Long-Range Forecasting, Soviet Synoptics, and Hybrid Knowledge in 1950s China ».

12:15 : Lunch

Friday 9 October
Afternoon Sessions (1)

13:30–14:30 : Imperialism and Colonialism

Mathieu Huyez (CNRS/GDR Omer, La Rochelle Université/LIENSs),
« The Desire Path Taken by the Meteorological Forecast Service in Madagascar: Intertwining Governance's Scales for the Secularisation of the Weather Office in the Colonial Context ».

Yolun Murat (Adıyaman University/Türkiye),
« Weather Forecasting, Shaykh al-Islam, and War: Contesting Meteorological Authority in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War ».

14:30 : Break

14h:45–15:45 : Tropical Forecasting

Fiona Williamson (Singapore Management University),
« Searching through the Fog: The Problem of Forecasting in the Tropics, c. 1929–1957 ».

Benjamin Frust (CNRS) and Renaud Meltz (UHA),
« 'Studies of the wind regime have led to a relatively favourable conclusion': Meteorological Forecast in the Service of the First Nuclear Tests in French Polynesia, Rationalisation of the World or Magical Thinking? ».

15:45 : Break

Friday 9 October
Afternoon Sessions (2)

16:00–17:00 : Vernacular Knowledge: From Historical to Anthropological Perspectives

Tinashe Takuva (University of Nottingham),
« 'When mount Mberengwa burns, we know the rains are upon us!' Vernacular Ecological Knowledge and Traditional Weather Forecasting Practices in Mberengwa, Zimbabwe, 1930s to 2000s ».

Alice Millington (University of Oxford),
« Seeing with the Stars: Forecasting Future Climates with the Tibetan lotho (almanac) ».

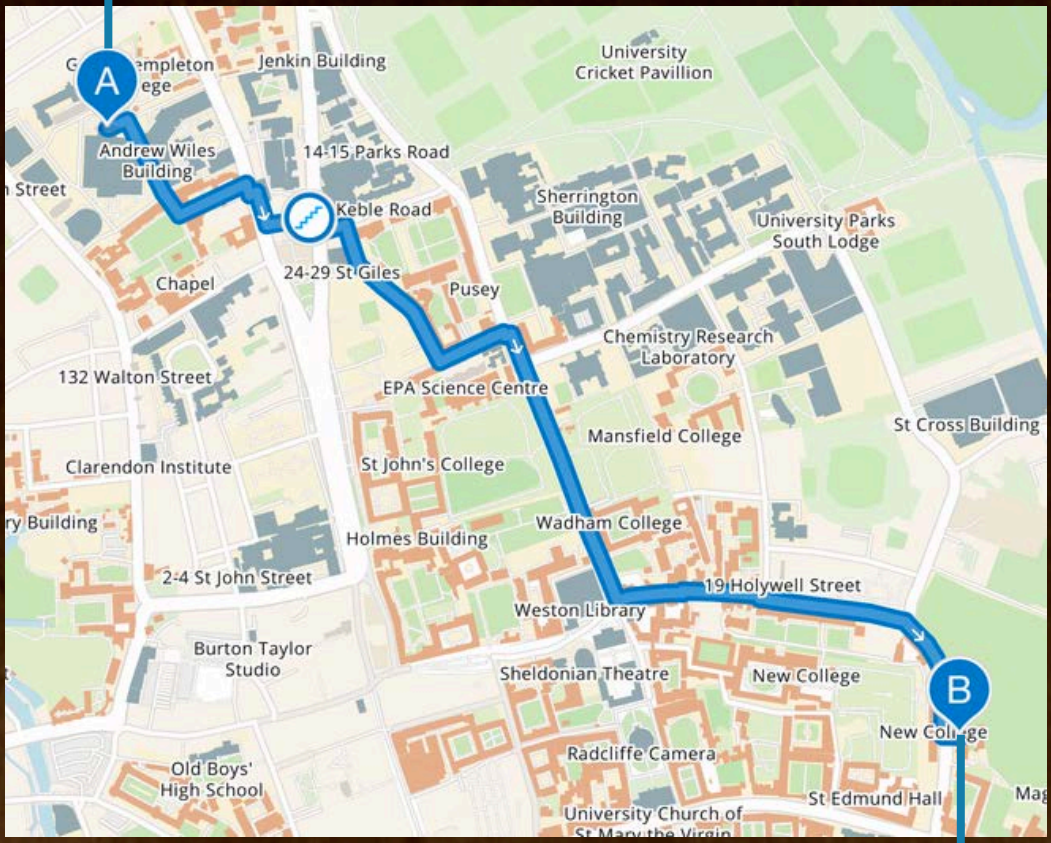
17:00 : Break

17:30–18:30 : Plenary

Louisiane Ferlier (Royal Society, London),
« Before the Forecast: The Royal Society's Meteorological Archive as Prelude to the Met Office ».

Room change for Thursday's plenary session
20-minute walk

The Stephen A. Schwarzman Centre,
Seminar Room 63



Magdalen College,
Grove Auditorium