



Past and Present of Groundwater Knowledge

An Interdisciplinary Workshop

Seminar für Zeitgeschichte | Department of Contemporary History

1–2 October 2026
Fürstenzimmer, Schloss Hohentübingen

Concept & Organisation: Robert Pursche

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If you are interested in participating, please send us an email:
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**Funded by the Program for the Promotion of Junior
Researchers, University of Tübingen**



Bundesministerium
für Forschung, Technologie
und Raumfahrt



Baden-Württemberg
Ministerium für Wissenschaft,
Forschung und Kunst



Project no. 54246738



1 October 2026

13.00: Arrival / Welcome

Panel 1: 14.00–15.30

Chair: Benedikt Rößler (History, Tübingen)

Carsten Leven-Pfister (Hydrogeology, Tübingen):

Making the invisible visible

Anne Springer (Geodesy, Bonn):

Seeing the Invisible: Geodetic Observations of Groundwater Change

Panel 2: 16.00–17.30

Chair: tba

Evans Manu (Hydrogeology, Accra/Ghana and Darmstadt):

Past and Present of Groundwater Knowledge in Ghana: A Journey Through Traditional, Geophysical, and Computational Methods

Sarah Hamilton (History, Bergen/Norway):
Governing Groundwater: Knowledge, Uncertainty, and the Politics of an Invisible Resource

18.30: Dinner

2 October 2026

Panel 3: 9.15–10.45

Chair: Heidi Megerle (Geography, Rottenburg)

Frerich Schön (Archeology, Tübingen):

Groundwater Knowledge and Use in the Central Mediterranean: A View from Classical Archaeology

Georg Houben (Hydrogeology, Hannover):

The Discovery of Groundwater for Public Water Supply in the German-speaking countries at the End of the 19th Century

Panel 4: 11.00–12.30

Chair: Sabine Hanke (History, Tübingen)

Robert Pursche (History, Tübingen):

Water Finding Machines in the Early 20th Century

Victor Jaeschke (History, Passau):

From Hype to Desiccation? Agricultural Drainage in Central Europe since the 19th Century

12.45: Lunch

14.00–15.00: Closing Discussion: Outlook and Future Projects

Groundwater is essential for the global drinking water supply. At the same time, reports of a groundwater crisis are ubiquitous—whether due to pollution, overuse, or a lack of knowledge about what lies beneath the surface. Although environmental history has long focused on water and infrastructure, groundwater has played a comparatively minor role. Building on these observations, this workshop explores the history of knowledge about and conceptions of groundwater from antiquity to the present.

Through a dialogue among scientists from various disciplines, such as hydrogeology, geodesy, archaeology, and history, we will discuss how this history continues to shape groundwater research today. Conversely, we will explore how contemporary methods for studying the subsurface—such as satellite technology—are changing our perspective on this history and raising new questions and possibilities for groundwater research.