

Interactive comment on “Documentary data and the study of the past droughts: an overview of the state of the art worldwide” by Rudolf Brázdil et al.

Anonymous Referee #2

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This extensive manuscript provides a thorough overview of historical drought studies based on documentary evidence for most of the world. The focus is more on Europe and Africa than other areas, but that makes sense given the author list. The article is very long but well written, and I recommend that it be published once the authors have considered the following points:

Major comments: - There's no real discussion in this article about the limitations of documentary sources when it comes to climatological analysis - the impact of non-climatic elements in many of the evidence types mentioned in section 2, and the subjective nature of human memory. Will this be covered in a separate article in the special issue? If not, I think it is worth adding a paragraph or two about it in the discussion. If there will be another article focussed on this, please mention it.

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- It's not clear to me why the Americas and Australia are grouped together in section 4.1 and 4.3. Drought responses there are almost anti correlated, particularly rainfall variability driven by ENSO. Is it for colonial reasons, or because similar methods are used? If so, please state that explicitly. You also mention New Zealand in section 4.4.3 (page 26), but this is not included elsewhere. It would be better to split America and Australia into two separate parts: The Americas, and the South Pacific, including Australia, NZ and possibly Pacific Island studies (if there are any).

-Somewhere in section 2, I wonder if you could mention information that falls between documentary and instrumental. Things like counts of rain days derived from weather journals and newspapers, or crop yield totals. I don't think this needs its own section, but could be slotted into others to show that it's not only words that can be useful.

-Section 4.2 confused me a bit. Are these the biggest events to be found in the many paper listed in section 4.1, or large overarching droughts that affected many countries? I think it's the latter, but this could be clarified with an introductory sentence or two, or by reshaping the section to focus on the timing of events. You could even tighten this section, removing reference to droughts that only occur in one country.

Minor things: -Page 2, line 38: I don't think you need 'the' before Climate of the Past

-Page 4, line 32: 'Related legal trials' instead of 'Legal trials related'

-Page 4, line 33: 'fashions' rather than 'fashion' I think

-Page 9, line 27: using numbers, hyphens and minus signs together is confusing, can you use an equal sign or colon instead?

-Page 13, line 9: As above

-Page 13, line 27: 'Droughts were more extreme in these centuries than in the 20th century'. This sentence could be clarified.

-Section 4.1.2: No mention of Japan?

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- Page 15, line 6: The term Nilometer could be explained better
- Page 18, line 21: 'most severe' rather than 'severest' I think
- Page 20, line 32: 'above effects' is unclear to me
- Page 22, line 27: 'Ashcroft' rather than 'Aschcroft'
- Page 23, line 14: thank you for teaching me the word 'transhumant', I've never seen it before
- Page 24, line 12: add 'the' before 'instrumental period'
- Section 4.4.1, final paragraph: I like this qualifier, and am sure there are many other sources of information about the pros and cons of environmental determinism. Perhaps the authors could provide another overarching reference to this topic?
- Page 25, line 13: errant bracket
- Page 25, line 36: 'most immediate impact' on what?
- Page 28, line 21-22: this sentence is a bit clunky and could be rearranged
- Page 28, line 24: add 'well' before correlated
- Page 31, line 23: remove the 's' from sources
- Section 6: it sounds like another area for concerted effort is cross regional comparisons of historical droughts.

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