
8.5 Egyptian rural history

Room 203

Chair: TBA

8.51 Yossef Rapoport – Peasants and landlords in thirteenth-century Egypt: a comparative perspective based on ‘the History of the Fayyum’

The ‘History of the Fayyum’, written in Egypt in 1243 AD, is the most detailed cadastral survey to have survived for any region of the medieval Islamic world. It is a first-hand account of the agricultural conditions in the province of the Fayyum in Middle Egypt, providing wealth of detail for over 100 villages. It is currently the focus of an AHRC-funded project, aimed at a translation and quantitative analysis of the Arabic text.

The proposed paper will present some of the fruits of this research. Specifically, it will address the rights and duties of the village communities under the system of *iqta* – the Middle Eastern counterpart to European Feudalism. Unlike European Feudalism, the military officer holding an *iqta* had only fiscal and temporary rights over the village assigned to him. The ‘History of the Fayyum’, however, demonstrates that the *iqta* ‘holders contributed to the local economy through irrigation works, seeds and other forms of investment, and were not merely urban *rentiers* uninterested in local production. Due to the nature of the text, the value of the investments in seeds and repair works can be measured and mapped, showing that the level of investment depended on local variables.

Yossef Rapoport has a BA from Tel Aviv University (1995) and a PhD from Princeton University (2002). His current position is Lecturer, History Department, Queen Mary University of London. He is principal investigator on a project with an AHRC early career research grant: ‘Rural society in medieval Islam: Translation and study of “The History of the Fayyum”’ (April 2009–March 2011). His publications include *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society* (2005); (with Emilie Savage-Smith), *The Book of Curiosities: A critical edition* (www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/bookofcuriosities, 2007); (with Shahab Ahmad), *Ibn Taymiyya and His Times, Proceedings of a conference held at Princeton University, 8-10 April 2005* (2010); and ‘The View from the South: The Maps of the Book of Curiosities and the Commercial Revolution of the Eleventh Century’, in R. Margariti, A. Sabra and P. Sijpesteijn (eds.), *Histories of the Middle East: Studies in Middle Eastern Society, Economy, and Law in Honor of A.L. Udovitch* (forthcoming).