



32rd DOT, Münster, International Panel:

New Methods in the History and Geography of the Near East

Thursday, 26 September 2013, 09.00–12.30

This panel is staged by an upcoming project of the Orient Institute Beirut to deal with social space and spatial comprehensions during the Islamic Middle Period. In the study of Near Eastern political, economic and intellectual history, awareness is rising that while spatial settings co-determine historical developments, human mind-sets have always conceptualised spaces, and human agency has interfered with landscapes. Accordingly, researchers assess sources anew, asking for the authors' perceptions of, and the actors' impact on spatial conditions. At the same time, novel analytical paths are being taken through the use of information technology. Thus, the 'spatial turn', which was otherwise much-heralded, but largely rolled off the study of the regions' history, now seems to finally enter its various fields. The panel is committed to making this development visible and promote interdisciplinary exchange on relevant themes and methods, bringing together Islamic Studies, Oriens Christianus, Ottoman Studies and Archaeology.

PROGRAMME

- 09.00–09.30 Hugh Kennedy (London)
The strange story of the melons of Merv: alternative sources for writing the history of the early Islamic economy
- 09.30–10.00 Cinzia Tavernari (Paris)
Connecting caravanserais: a new framework for inquiry
- 10.00–10.30 Kurt Franz (Beirut)
Koptos to Berenike, Qift to 'Aydhāb: why track Hajj roads in a GIS?
- 11.00–11.30 Dorothea Weltecke (Konstanz)
On Christians in Cities
- 11.30–12.00 Andrew Peacock (St Andrews)
The Islamisation of Anatolia: understanding Cultural change through manuscript studies
- 12.00–12.30 Astrid Meier (Halle)
The void of the rural – reading *waqf* documents for understanding non-urban spaces: the case of Ottoman Damascus

ABSTRACTS

Hugh Kennedy (London)

The strange story of the melons of Merv: alternative sources for writing the history of the early Islamic economy.

This paper examines the problems of writing the economic history of the Fertile Crescent in the first three centuries of Islamic. In the almost absence of statistical or documentary evidence, the would-be historian needs to develop other strategies. In this paper I will discuss the use of anecdotal evidence from historical and geographical text (the melons of Merv being a classic example of a discretionary good which was much appreciated by the inhabitants of Baghdad with sufficient disposable income to purchase such luxuries). It will be shown how such anecdotes provide important evidence for the complexity of the early Islamic economy.

The second alternative source of evidence is archaeological. This is not, of course, entirely new but in this paper it will be shown how the foundation of large cities in Iraq in the early Islamic period, Kufa, Basra and above all Baghdad, generated a demand and market for foodstuffs which had a profound effect on the agricultural landscapes of the whole of Mesopotamia. Finally I will introduce a discussion of the Belitung shipwreck and the ceramics it contained to show, from a newly available source, the scale of the demand for high-quality imported table ware and the way in which this demand shaped the maritime trade of the Indian Ocean area in Abbasid times.

hk1@soas.ac.uk

Cinzia Tavernari (Paris)

Connecting caravanserais: a new framework for inquiry

Spreading throughout the lands of Islam on a vast geographic and temporal scale, wayside caravanserais have faithfully sheltered travellers and traders for many centuries. The impressive diffusion of this institution and its characteristics, original to the Islamic world, clearly shows that caravanserais fulfilled a key role in society, in relation both to the physical act of travelling and to the notion of travel as the expression of cultural values. Caravanserais can thus be considered a complex and multifactorial phenomenon combining different levels of religious, economic and political motivations; its study could significantly deepen our understanding of Islamic civilization. Notwithstanding the potential of such a research, it is striking to observe that a comprehensive study taking into account the spatial dimension of this phenomenon is still lacking.

This contribution aims at exploring the spatial dimension of wayside caravanserais in order to understand the distribution pattern of these edifices, their relation to the other settlements and to the road network. I shall address this question using the medieval Syrian road caravanserais as a case study, and I will integrate the use of textual and archaeological sources with GIS analysis. To conclude my analysis, I will try to lead a theoretical reflection on the use of GIS as a tool allowing an enhanced comprehension of the spatial dynamics of the caravanserais phenomenon.

c.tavernari@gmail.com

Kurt Franz (Beirut)

Koptos to Berenike, Qift to ʿAydhāb: why track Hajj roads in a GIS?

Continuity from ancient times weighs heavy in the geography of the Muslim Near East. Also, Classical and Ancient Studies have advanced considerably further than Islamic Studies in grasping the spatial dimension of historical developments. This has resulted e.g. in web-based finding tools that link textual, archaeological and geo-spatial evidence. In this paper, I shall make use of such expertise and tools on the example of a little known section of the Hajj roads network, paying special attention to the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods.

Typically, the aim is to reconstruct the major routes between the Nile and the Red Sea, asking what measure of continuity and change in communications took effect since Roman times. The picture so far is vague and mainly seems to support a decline story. I shall argue that understanding routings and wayside localities in greater detail is suitable to show more facets. In fact, a wealth of relevant sources

is available. Methodically, a Geographic Information System will be introduced in order to allow the integration of diverse geo-data: travelogues and geographies, administration manuals, field surveys, cartography, and satellite imagery.

franz@orient-institut.org

Dorothee Weltecke (Konstanz)

On Christians in Cities

Where did Syriac-Orthodox Christians live? Where did speakers of Aramaic live? These questions are not answered by far for the medieval period. For practical purposes the paper concentrates on the cities as a first step. Are there structural patterns in Christian life in different kinds of cities? What do we know about the Christians' share in politics, economy and social life? Especially the large cities under Muslim rule are characterised by an extremely multi-denominational and multi-religious situation. What did this socio-religious frame mean for the Christians? Rather than answering questions the paper will point towards new research avenues.

dorothea.weltecke@uni-konstanz.de

Andrew Peacock (St. Andrews)

The Islamisation of Anatolia: understanding Cultural change through manuscript studies

This paper introduces a new methodology for understanding cultural and social change in Islamic studies, the use of codicological information from manuscripts. The details of place and date of copying of Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts, as well as ownership marks and *ijāzas* (authorisations for transmission) offer the opportunity to understand the circulation of texts in a manuscript culture. This can then help us answer questions about intellectual history, but allowing us to pinpoint specific centres of production of given texts – sometimes even down to the precise building in a city where they were copied – as well as broader trends in the intellectual and cultural history of a region. These methods are being applied to the study of the spread of Islamic culture in Anatolia over the period c. 1100–1500, allowing us to trace the intellectual trajectory of a society undergoing profound change as the dominant culture switched from Christian to Islamic.

acsp@st-andrews.ac.uk

Astrid Meier (Halle)

The void of the rural – reading *waqf* documents for understanding non-urban spaces: the case of Ottoman Damascus

For the Ottoman world, cityscapes and their trajectories have constituted a lively field of interdisciplinary debate for some time now. In contrast, the structuration of rural spaces and their history seem a field of enquiry which has not solicited much interest. In my contribution, I would like to point to the potential value of the Ottoman archives, *waqf* documents in particular, for an enquiry into the interconnectedness of urban and rural spaces. My contribution is based on my work in the context of an ongoing cooperative research project related to the early Ottoman copy of a late Mamluk document listing the landed properties of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. The text is however also a pertinent example of how difficult it is for historians to fill the void of the rural spaces, starting with the basic problem of identifying locations and place names and their development over time. Having worked with a simple database until now, I am much interested to discuss the advantages that advanced technological methods, prospects for cooperative projects, but also novel theoretical approaches can bring to this field of enquiry.

astrid.meier@orientphil.uni-halle.de

Kurt Franz, 22.07.2013