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Turkey and Modernity Speaker Series

Alan Mikhail

“Unleashing the Beast: Animals, Energy, and the Economy of Labor in Ottoman Egypt”

Monday, April 8, 2013

12:30 p.m.

Mershon Center for International Security Studies

1501 Neil Ave., Columbus, OH 43201

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Alan Mikhail

Assistant Professor of

History

Yale University

Alan Mikhail is assistant professor of history at Yale University. His research and teaching focuses mostly on the nature of early modern imperial rule, peasant histories, environmental resource management, and science and medicine.

He is author of *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt: An Environmental History* (Cambridge University Press, 2011) and editor of *Water on Sand: Environmental Histories of the Middle East and North Africa* (Oxford University Press, 2013). *Nature and Empire in Ottoman Egypt* won the Roger Owen Book Award from the Middle East Studies Association, the Gustav Ranis International Book Prize from Yale's MacMillan Center, and Yale's Samuel and Ronnie Heyman Prize for Outstanding Scholarly Publication. It was also named a book of the year by *Ahram Online*. Mikhail's next book, *The Animal in Ottoman Egypt*, will be published by Oxford University Press in late 2013.

His articles have appeared in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, *History Compass*, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, *al-Ruznama*, *Akhbar al-Adab*, *Wijhat Nazar*, and elsewhere. His article in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* won the Ömer Lütfi Barkan Article Prize from the Turkish Studies Association. His next article will be published in the April 2013 issue of the *American Historical Review*.

From 2008 to 2010, he was a member of the Andrew W. Mellon

Fellowship of Scholars in the Humanities at Stanford University. His research has been supported by the Council of American Overseas Research Centers, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Fulbright-Hays Commission, the American Research Center in Egypt, the Institute of Turkish Studies, and Yale's MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies.

He received his PhD in 2008 from University of California, Berkeley, where his dissertation won the Malcolm H. Kerr Award from the Middle East Studies Association and the James H. Kettner Award from the University of California, Berkeley.

Abstract

In the land-based agrarian world of early modern Ottoman Egypt, animal wealth, labor, and movement were the bases of social and economic life. Animals were the trucks, motors, cranes, heaters, and gas stations of this early modern society. Interspecies relations between humans and various classes of animals were, however, radically altered at the end of the 18th century by a combination of climatic, epidemiological, political, and economic processes. The new human-animal world that resulted was one in which livestock were no longer a central pillar of economic, social, and political life in Ottoman Egypt. This diminished role of animals led, in turn, to a radical restructuring of the rural world as it transitioned away from animal labor, energy, and motor power. Thus, as Egypt moved from being the most lucrative province of the Ottoman Empire to a 19th-century centralizing state, human-animal relations changed more fundamentally between 1770 and 1830 than they had for millennia before that. This talk traces this change at the turn of the 19th century to understand the political, social, ecological, and economic history of the Ottoman Empire through one of the most basic of all human relationships -- those with other animals.

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