

LECTURE SERIES - AFGHAN HISTORY: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE



Writing and History in Medieval Afghanistan: The Material Turn in Afghanistan Studies

Dr. Arezou Azad, *Lecturer in Medieval History, University of Birmingham*

Multilingual and culturally diverse adaptations – not doctrinal uniformity or Arabisation – have allowed Islam to dominate the eastern Islamic lands in what is today Afghanistan, Iran and Central Asia. It remains unclear when and how such forms of adaptation arose. Previous research has argued that caliphal and sultanid authority determined local realities in the pre-Mongol Islamicate world. More recently, the material turn has brought into sharper focus documentary practices as a lens through which the medieval history of the western parts of the Islamic world are studied. The appearance of medieval documents from Afghanistan in recent years opens up new opportunities for research based on local sources that shed light on the social, economic and religio-legal history of medieval Afghanistan. In this talk, we will consider the historiography of medieval Afghanistan and the contributions that Afghan documents can make in understanding the daily realities of people.

Arezou Azad is Lecturer in Medieval History at the University of Birmingham. She was the founder and co-Director of the Balkh Art and Cultural Heritage project at the University of Oxford where she received her Ph.D. in 2010 in Oriental Studies. Her book, *Sacred Landscape in Medieval Afghanistan*, was published by Oxford University Press in 2013 and is based on a medieval local history of Balkh in northern Afghanistan called *Faza'il-i Balkh*. Her new book, a co-edited, two-volume revised critical edition and first-time translation into English of *Faza'il-i Balkh*, is currently in press with the Gibb Memorial Trust Series in Persian, Arabic and Turkish books. Arezou has published peer-reviewed articles on female Islamic scholars in medieval Khurasan, the local historiography of Khurasan, sacred landscape, and marriage practices. She is currently a Humboldt Fellow at the Freie University of Berlin, and her new project, starting later this year, will be a study of Islamisation and Muslim-Jewish relations in medieval Afghanistan's Bamiyan region.

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