



*Conference*

# **Contextualising the earthquake of 749 CE**

**From high definition archaeology to global history**

*23-24 November 2020*

*The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters  
Copenhagen, Denmark*





## Conference abstract

The earthquake, which hit parts of the Levant on the morning of 18th January 749 CE devastated vast parts of the region, including the former Umayyad capital, Damascus. It affected parts of modern-day central and northern Jordan, Israel, Lebanon and Southern Syria. The region that for more than a millennium had been deeply entangled with the Greco-Roman cultural spheres had, at this point in time, been under Islamic rule for more than a century. In 745 CE, The Umayyad Dynasty had moved its capital of the empire from Damascus to Harran, a city that was not destroyed by the earthquake. However, the move of the capital was done in a period when political upheaval and military unrest already was a factor in the region. Cultural and religious changes have often been investigated for the period between the 6th and 8th centuries. Seldom, however, has this period been viewed in the light of the impact that the earthquake had and the plentiful evidence it has left as well as the event which before the earthquake might have impacted the state of the region and therefore the possibilities for the societies to re-establish themselves. Settlements and the economy of the region are often said to have declined under the new Abbasid rulers compared to the prosperity, the region had encountered under the Umayyads. Although material evidence for Abbasid settlement in the region has been unearthed in recent years, underlining that presence might have been larger than thought, it still needs to be asked, why the effect of the earthquake seems to have had so profound impact and why the region lacked resources and resilience for rebuilding and regeneration. It is therefore crucial to look at evidence for earlier impactful earthquakes in the region – in particular the 363 CE earthquake and societal responses to this – as well as the question of slow climate change (the little ice age) and the regional impact this might have had.

The question of reasons for the end of the Umayyad dynasty and transition to the Abbasid dynasty, which significantly changed the region and indeed with impacts that culturally and religiously have influenced the Mediterranean world and regions beyond until today, in such a light remains understudied. Therefore, the aim of this conference and the following publication is to revisit earthquake evidences from a number of sites across the region and to reassess the history of the region in the light of what the earthquake evidences tell us about the region. Furthermore, a number of papers will focus on the history – local and global – and seismology of the region as well as the sources telling us about the earthquake in order to contextualize this period as solidly as possible within world history.



## Confirmed invited speakers

- Dr. Julien Aliquot, University of Lyon
- Dr. Louise Blanke, University of Edinburgh
- Dr. Katia Cytryn-Silverman, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
- Prof. Dr. Hendrik Dey, Hunter College (joint lecture with Beverly Goodman, Haifa University)
- Dr. Michael Eisenberg, Haifa University
- Dr. Beverly Goodman, Haifa University (joint lecture with Hendrik Dey, Hunter College)
- Prof. Dr. Stefan Heidemann, University of Hamburg
- Prof. Dr. Achim Lichtenberger, Münster University (joint lecture with Rubina Raja, Aarhus University)
- Prof. Dr. Shmuel Marco, Tel Aviv University
- Dr. Gaby Mazor, Israel Antiquities Authority
- Dr. Lee Mordechai, Hebrew University of Jerusalem
- Prof. Dr. Tina Niemi, University of Missouri
- Prof. Dr. Jordan Pickett, University of Georgia
- Dr. Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, University of Vienna
- Prof. Dr. Rubina Raja, Aarhus University (joint lecture with Achim Lichtenberger, Münster University)
- Dr. Jacques Seigne, University of Tours
- Prof. Dr. Ian R. Simpson, Leiden University
- Prof. Dr. Walter D. Ward, University of Alabama
- Dr. Elena Xoplaki, University of Giessen

## Organisers

Achim Lichtenberger (Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster)

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