Ahmed Shams (Durham University): “150-year in the Making”: Historic Geography and Cartographic Archaeology in Sinai Peninsula

Knowledge-making and cartographic data was defined in Sinai Peninsula (and still is) by place-names assigned on maps between mid-19th and mid-20th centuries. The map-series ‘Ordnance Survey of the Peninsula of Sinai’ in 1868/69 and the 1:100,000 map-series between mid-1930s and early 1940s (by the British Royal Engineers) reflect the transition from individuality (e.g. Heinrich Kiepert in 1841, Frederick Holland in 1868, and Alfred Kaiser in 1886-1927) to institutionalisation (survey authorities: British, US, Soviet, Egyptian and Israeli) in mapping and mapmaking across the peninsula. Much of Sinai’s landscape knowledge is claimed through scholarly studies and visual material which are limited to the historic and/or conventional accessibility patterns. Moreover, the transformation from historic south (Biblical puzzle) to geo-political north had a formative impact on mapping and map-making patterns, and thus, knowledge-making in 20th century. Archaeology as a cartographic practice assigned place-names, undocumented on the German, French and British maps. Drawing on 18-year field survey by Sinai Peninsula Research and Oxford’s SinaiArchaeoWater project, this talk discusses the described transitions and formative transformations. Also, it reflects on the compilation of the historic geography and cartographic archaeology data, aided with satellite imagery and aerial photography, to identify, re-use and safeguard local heritage.

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