

Monday, 13.06.2022; 4:15 - 6:00 pm CEST

Finnbar Barry Flood, New York University:

### **Asymmetrical Dependencies in a Maritime Cosmopolis: Reading a Medieval Iraqi Image Cycle**

Abstract:

One of the most celebrated extant medieval Arabic manuscripts is an illustrated copy of the *Maqāmāt* (Assemblies) of Abu Muhammad al-Qasim ibn 'Ali al-Hariri (d. 516H/1122 CE), a popular text subject to frequent copying. The manuscript in question was produced in 634H/1237 CE, probably in Baghdad. It is often considered the cynosure of a tradition of book painting that flourished in Iraq and Syria during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It is also the most frequently discussed in modern scholarship, for the aesthetic virtue and emotional complexity of its images, the insights they provide into contemporary social life, and for its illustrious afterlife as a source of inspiration for modernists in the Arab lands.

Many of the images in the 634/1237 copy of the *Maqāmāt* exceed its specifications, extending the purview of the text in ways that reflect the impact of oral and textual lore concerning the Indian Ocean. My talk will focus on the most extensive image cycle within the manuscript, which narrates a sea voyage and shipwreck on a mysterious island. It will explore the ways in which various kinds of asymmetrical dependencies are depicted in the images and demonstrate their relation to traditions regarding the littoral societies of East Africa and western India that are not present in the text but are instead mediated by the images of this manuscript.

Bio:

Finbarr Barry Flood is director of *Silsila*: Center for Material Histories (<https://as.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/as/research-centers/silsila.html>) and William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of the Humanities at the Institute of Fine Arts and Department of Art History, New York University. He teaches and publishes on devotional art, iconoclasm, image theory, technologies of representation, modernity and Orientalism. Among his publications are *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter* (Princeton UP, 2009) and *Technologies de dévotion dans les arts de l'Islam: pèlerins, reliques, copies* (Musée du Louvre/Hazan, 2019). He has just co-written with Beate Fricke, University of Bern, a book entitled *Archives of Flotsam – Objects and Early Globalism*, to be published by Princeton University Press.