

**Third Conference of the International Society for
Arabic Papyrology (ISAP)
Documents and the History of the Early Islamic World**

23–26 March 2006

Bibliotheca Alexandrina Auditorium

*Hosted and Co-organized by the Bibliotheca Alexandrina in
co-operation with the Netherlands–Flemish Institute in Cairo*

*Sponsored by the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, British Academy, Egypt Exploration Society, Royal
Netherlands Embassy, Centre d'Etudes Alexandrines, Swedish Institute in Alexandria and
Princeton University*

Conference background

Scholars working on the medieval Islamic world are often heard to lament the lack of contemporary documentary evidence for this period. This issue, however, has less to do with survival of documents and archives from early Islam, than with the difficulties in accessing them. Yet the benefits are potentially immense. Early Islamic documents, written in Arabic, Greek and Coptic, on papyrus, parchment, cloth, bone, leather potsherds and paper, include every kind of document imaginable: tax receipts, government edicts, marriage contracts, shopping lists, personal letters, passports, religious texts, magic spells, bills of lading, house deeds, even school exercises. Together, these documents have the potential to shed a vivid and detailed new light on Islamic Mediterranean culture and society. As new documents are brought to light, adding to the tens of thousands that already exist in collections throughout the Middle East, Europe and North America, the challenge of ensuring that this incomparable resource is properly accounted for and accessible to the larger scholarly community becomes even greater and more critical. This Conference has been organized as a key step in this direction.

The Alexandria Conference has been preceded by two ISAP conferences, during March 2002 in Cairo, Egypt, and during March 2004 in Granada, Spain. Attended by more than fifty scholars from around the world, these conferences provided an invaluable opportunity to stimulate discussion on, and research into the use of documentary evidence and the early Islamic history of Egypt and on the technical challenges to administer document collections and make them available to the scholarly community. The Alexandria Conference builds on this success, while expanding its aims to include training sessions alongside scholarly presentations.

The *aims* of this Conference include:

- Encourage current research and new initiatives and facilitate collaboration on the co-operative projects vital for the future advancement of documentary studies.
- Provide an opportunity to create scholarly networks which bring together Middle Eastern, European and North American scholars doing important work in the field and to build fruitful relations for future research and ongoing cooperation.
- Provide workshops in which the techniques of documentary textual criticism can be demonstrated and acquired.
- Initiate discussion on the standardization of notation and descriptive apparatuses.
- Share knowledge about recent developments in Internet technology and its potential for the field, including digitalized and photographed images published on worldwide media such as the Internet.
- Explore possibilities to include Egyptian collections in international cataloguing and digitalization projects.
- Bring Egyptian collections and academic institutions to the attention of scholars and to facilitate their research.