This talk will analyze the impact of the Second plague pandemic in Egypt (1347-1844 CE). The Second plague pandemic refers to the long series of epidemics that struck the Middle East and Europe, starting with the Black Death, 1347-1351 CE. This pandemic generally lasted until the early 1700s in Europe, but longer in the Middle East. The First plague pandemic began with the plague of Justinian in the 500s CE - the Third plague pandemic began at the very end of the 1800s.

The talk will explore the dynamics of this long-term catastrophe by studying the mortality of the urban (Cairo, Alexandria, Qus, Asyut) and rural plague outbreaks in the Mamluk and Ottoman periods and into the modern period, 1347-1844, with a discussion of the viability and meaning of the demographic figures that we have from medieval and later sources. (Some comparative perspectives with Syrian population losses will be examined as well.)

Given the potential scale and scope of the loss, its severity and duration, the talk will also examine reasons why the Second plague pandemic may have been worse in Egypt than elsewhere, with attention to aspects of geography, flea and rat breeding cycles, domestic architectural considerations, and the quantitative study of Nile flood variations. Finally, attention will be directed to the overall impact of this loss on the economic and technological trajectory of Egypt in the long term (1300s to 1800s), and its role in the economic divergence between Europe and the Middle East in the 1700s.