The beginnings of Islamic glazed ceramics have long been attributed to the opaque white glazed wares made in Iraq in the 9th century in response to imported Chinese porcelain. These glazes were known to have been opacified by tin-oxide and much work has been undertaken to characterise their development and spread. Despite the wealth of research on these wares, little has been done to explain the origins of this technology and its rather sudden invention in Iraq. In this talk, I will revisit the old theories on the origins of Islamic ceramics and present the results of my recent project focused on the technical aspects of 7th- to 10th-century AD glazed ceramics from the Eastern Mediterranean to Central Asia. Using a Scanning Electron Microscope with Energy Dispersive Spectroscopy (SEM-EDS), nearly 150 sherds covered with opaque white and yellow glazes from Fustat, Aqaba, Al-Mina, Raqqa, Samarra, Basra, Kish, Susa, Nishapur, Merv and Samarqand were studied for their chemical composition and microstructure. Experimental replications were also performed to assess various aspects of production. The results have helped change the way the beginnings of Islamic ceramics are viewed: origins in the 7th/8th century AD rather than the 9th century AD, first developed in Egypt rather than Iraq, and indigenous rather than Chinese-inspired. The eastward spread of Islamic glazed wares to Iraq in the 9th century follows the move of the Islamic capital from Damascus, Syria, to Baghdad, Iraq, and the further spread of this technology east and west can now be traced.

Dr. Moujan Matin
Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford
Tuesday April 18th, 12:00pm (all are welcome)
Archaeology Centre, U of T (St. George Campus)
Room 140, 19 Russell Street

Accessible entrance and washrooms are available. If you have an accommodation need please contact stanley.klassen@utoronto.ca directly and we will do our best to make appropriate arrangements.