The Graduate College announces a doctoral oral examination

Candidate: Jack Goodman
For the degree of: Doctor of Philosophy
Department: History
Title: Slavery and Manumission in Fourteenth-Century Palermo

Committee: Dr. Larry Simon, Chair
Dr. James Palmitessa
Dr. Eve Salisbury
Dr. Steven Epstein

Time/Place: Wednesday, April 19, 2017
1 to 3 p.m.
4413 Friedmann Hall

Fourteenth-century Palermo provides an important setting for the examination of slave populations in the urban Mediterranean world. The large-scale use of slaves in the Middle Ages was a Mediterranean phenomenon. Slaves, drawn from all corners of this ancient sea, formed an integral part of trade and life in the Mediterranean environment. These slaves—Muslims, Greeks, and Tartars—were investments in capital, objects of sexual exploitation by masters, and unfortunate individuals torn from the regions and societies of their birth to become possessions in foreign lands. The dissertation, utilizing a variety of source types including unpublished notarial registers from the State Archives of Palermo, analyzes slave-holding, manumission, and the lives of freed persons in this important city and places
Palermitan slavery among other case studies of medieval Mediterranean slavery.

The study tests and argues against an interpretation of medieval slavery which treats these individuals as cherished household servants in a system that was more familial than mercenary, and replaces it with one that acknowledges the difficulties and hardships that slaves endured. Slaves proved themselves to be valuable investments in labor and capital, and should not be considered solely in terms of luxury markets and status symbols. Manumission, fundamental to any slave system, came in two forms: conditional and unconditional. Despite common assumptions about the spiritual benefit of manumission, a majority of Palermitan masters used the conditional liberation of slaves to further their financial and personal needs, in addition to potential spiritual rewards. The manumission process reveals many other aspects of the slave experience, including loose ties to former masters and efforts by members of the same ethnic and religious populations to provide assistance to those like themselves. Finally, freed persons, often neglected in studies of medieval slavery, receive substantial coverage which provides understanding to the opportunities and constraints placed upon former slaves by Palermitan society due to their freed status and geographic and ethnic origins.