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## CONGRESS

Middle East and Muslim Worlds  
Studies

28 June - 2 July 2021



## Panel 25

## Diplomatic agents and practices in Medieval Islam

Although diplomatic exchanges in the Medieval Mediterranean world have generated numerous studies for the past years, the question of the diplomatic agents and practices have been mostly addressed in the Latin world ; Dār al-Islām was kept rather apart of this historiographical renewal, despite the publication of a few works on this thema. This observation in mind, the thematical workshop considers to open a new reflection on the scale of the Muslim world, including its relations with the outer world (Byzantine, Latin, Mongol).

We will question the statute of the ambassador/envoy/emissary (*safīr*, *rasūl*, *mab'ūt*) and the different facets of this character, who brings the voice of the muslim sovereign. In which milieu was he recruited ? On which criteria was he chosen : his proximity with the sovereign, the languages he is familiar with, his knowledge of the country he will be sent to, his networks ? Which are the limits of his power in the negotiations and the means at his disposal to conduct his mission ?

The reception of embassies is strictly settled by a protocol and a complex ceremonial ; it represents a great event in the life of a court, but also for the people who mass in front of the palace, trying to glimpse the messengers and the somptuous gifts they bring. Thus this occasion is often a way for the sovereign to affirm his legitimacy, to array his power and show his richness in front of his guests.

In other words, this workshop will reconsider the different fonctions of a central character of the diplomatic relations in the Medieval Muslim world.

**Convenor : Mohamed Ouerfelli (IREMAM, Université d'Aix-Marseille)**

**Discussant : Julien Loiseau (Université d'Aix-Marseille, IREMAM)**

### Program

**Farid Bouchiba (Université de Lyon II, IREMAM-UMR 7310)**

*Diplomatic Relations in the mirror of Muslim legal sources : embassies and ambassadors*

Very early on in the Arab-Muslim world, diplomatic relations experienced a notorious evolution through the multiplication of exchanges with neighboring empires. From the first centuries, diplomacy was structured with the stabilization of the Islamic empire during the Abbasid era, which exchanged envoys with foreign powers, in order to discuss, among other things, the conditions of war, peace, and occasionally to do intelligence. The intensification of these relations will strengthen the role of a now essential actor, that of the ambassador. Thus, the representation of the power of the sovereign is inseparable from that of the ambassador. In the framework of this communication, we will be particularly interested in the normative aspects of diplomatic relations through the figure of the ambassador, in the permanence and changes of this representation, from the beginnings of Islam to the pre-modern era. This presentation will seek to analyze in a diachronic mode this central figure of diplomacy, through the progressive codification of the legal rules contained in the works of *fiqh* (Muslim law).

## **David Bramoullé (Université Toulouse-Jean Jaurès, FRAMESPA-UMR 5136)**

### *Ceremonial and receptions of ambassadors at the Fatimid Court of Cairo*

During their ideological competition against the Umayyads and the Abbassids, the Fatimids tried to stand out by all possible ways. In particular, they used the richness and the splendour of their court to manifest the superiority of the ismaili imam-califs and their universal claim. Sources testify how they managed to use the propaganda, which became a real communication strategy to serve the ambition of the shiite dynasty. In this competitive context, Fatimids developed a set of ceremonies and processions directed to the general population. They enabled the calif to affirm his power and superiority. The documentation thus attests the progressive conception of a complex protocol for public audiences and receptions of foreign ambassadors. Fatimids resumed some aspects of protocol rules and practices existing in the Roman empire of Orient and the Abbassid court, in order to impose their singularity to their regular visitors and their distinguished guests, always eager to compare with what existed elsewhere. Thus we will try to enlighten the progressive conception of the Fatimid palatial protocol, distinguishing meanwhile the different forms of the ceremonies, their rituals and their necessary objects.

## **Mohamed Ouerfelli (IREMAM, Université d'Aix-Marseille)**

### *The figure of ambassador in Medieval Islam*

The agents of the diplomacy in Medieval Islam have not received all the interest they deserve, because of the disparity and indigence of sources. This paper thus try to renew the question, by examining the figure of the ambassador, who brings the voice of the sovereign to another power. I will analyse the terminology used to name these peace messengers and what imply the words used in the texts. Crossing diplomatic sources with narrative and juridical ones allows to enlighten grey areas about diplomatic practices and, in particular, about criteria for recruiting agents, their plurality and the conditions of the accomplishment of their missions.

## **Limor Yungman (EHESS, IMAF)**

### *Gifts and diplomatic relations in the Islamic World*

Gifts are an integral part of diplomatic protocols since Antiquity all around the Middle East and the Mediterranean since they are used to reinforce alliances and to manifest power and opulence in bilateral relations. Historically, diplomatic gifts allow the transfer and diffusion of objects, plants, animals, and knowledge. Practically, they were sent as gift packages that could be categorized into human gifts, vegetal products and extracts, exotic animals, perfumes, and expensive artisanal objects. The type of gift that could be qualified as "gastronomical" and that enhanced the transmission of food products and culinary knowledge, will stand at the center of the proposed paper. The large extent of this practice was not only geographical but also chronological. In fact, food-related gifts could be considered as early forms of "gastro-diplomacy," a trendy topic in international relations that is still little explored in the medieval Islamic context. Using various sources, and mainly Kitāb al-Hadāyā wa-l-tuḥaf (Book of Gifts and Rarities), the proposed paper will probe into the question of the diplomatic gift as a "total social fact," using Marcel Mauss's phrasing, from the perspective of