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CONGRESS

Middle East and Muslim Worlds
Studies

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Panel 28

The writing(s) of history in medieval Western Islam: problems and strategies

Discussing the project of a collective book: Sébastien Garnier et Josef Ženka (dir.), *The Forms of History in the Medieval Maghreb*.

This project gathers eighteen contributors coming from the international academic field to address the historiographical issues of the medieval Maghreb. Three main parts organize the whole contents according to a periodization based on the "imperial" impulses that sketch the regional evolutions: the Conquests, the Fatimid-Umayyad dynamics, the Almoravid-Almohad wave. A general conclusion aims at bringing some reflection and results in the long term. At the heart of our common approach lie the hows and whys behind the narratives of political pasts.

The comparatist undertaking dwells on detailed states of research. Each chapter deals with one of the selected polities, from the expansion of Islam until the arrival of the Ottomans. Confronting internal and external sources — be they rich or poor — and contrasting the available genres, allow us to contemplate a general picture of the materials employed and their uses. In that respect, the formal features receive special attention, but also the motivations acting during the recording of official or contending memories. The workshop will present three insights, each one illustrating some of the historiographical problems that arise under the different phases considered: the Aghlabids, the Fatimids (of Ifrīqiya) and the Abdelwadids. The last contribution will examine the centuries-old evolution of the narrative strategies in use at the Hafsid court.

People in charge and disussants : Garnier Sébastien (Centre Jean Pépin CNRS, UMR 8230) and Montel Aurélien (CIHAM- UMR 5648)

Program

Montel Aurélien (CIHAM-UMR 5648)

Writing the history of the Aghlabids: historiographical filters and competing memories

It is well established that the Aghlabid dynasty, which ruled Ifrīqiya during the 3rd/9th century, elaborated a specific historiographical discourse, involving blood princes as well as Islamic scholars. However, this tradition has not reached us, except shattered fragments that were quoted in later texts. As a consequence, the Aghlabid emirs are known only through a corpus written after their fall (297/909), where we encounter very contrasted —even contradictories— portraits of these sovereigns.

Bramoullé David (Université Toulouse 2, FRAMESPA)

The history of Ifrīqiyan Fatimids: narratives bearing ideological marks

The sixty-four-year presence of the Fatimids in North Africa (909-973) gave birth to a rather polarized historical account. The medieval authors aimed to highlight either the legitimacy of the Ismaili imams or, on the contrary, to discredit them. Contemporary narrative sources are few, but they provide a better understanding of how the Fatimids themselves narrated their history and built their legitimacy. Even sources written in North Africa or in the East several centuries after the Fatimid era sometimes bear this ideological struggle that animated the contemporary authors of the Fatimid imams. Surprisingly, sometimes, the late sources written in North African, when the whole area had become predominantly Sunni but was plagued by anarchy, take a more favorable view of the Fatimids, who were considered guarantors of the established order. Finally, their location of the North African soil, with their palaces has also given birth to numerous and very helpful artifacts which usefully supplement the traditional sources.

Vanz Jennifer (Orient et Méditerranée-UMR 8167)

Writing the history of the Abdelwadid sultanate

The Abdelwadid dynasty is the least well-known of the post-Almohad dynasties. Analyzing how the Abdelwadid sultanate's history was written makes it possible to question the representations that were forged about this dynasty, which was perceived as weak and then, has been reduced to a dynasty subjected alternatively to its competitors, the Merinids and the Hafsid. This image is largely dependent on a major source for the history of medieval Maghreb: Ibn Ḥaldūn's Kitāb al-ʿIbar. However, other ways of narrating this polity existed, notably in the entourage of the Abdelwadid rulers. After presenting an overview of the available sources on Abdelwadids' history, we will discuss the different periods of writing about the dynasty's history and finally examine the narrative strategies that have been mobilized.

Garnier Sébastien (Centre Jean Pépin CNRS, UMR 8230)

When and how is the Hafsid history written?

The Hafsid sultanate (ca 603/1207 or 625/1228-982/1574) is reminded of its long-lasting resilience. However we must wait until the 8th/14th century to have three successive dynastic histories at our disposal (Ibn Qunfuḍ, scr. 806/1404; Ibn al-Šammāʿ, scr. 861/1457; al-Zarkašī, scr. 882/1477). The Restoration (a term coined by Brunschvig; from 772/1370 onwards) might have breathed some kind of memorial impetus that sounds like a swan song retrospectively. After sketching in the introduction a schematic periodization of the Hafsid polity, we try to reconstruct the steps and forms taken by the elaboration of this historiographical venture.