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Panel 55

The medieval Sahara, a space of exchanges and circulation

The works on the medieval Sahara, as an object of study, have been relatively dynamic in recent years, despite the difficulties of access to the research field. The Emergence program «Rethinking the Medieval Sahara (13th-16th centuries): known documents, unpublished readings» aims to break down the barriers of the research on this area, which is still poorly known because it is often approached on an ad hoc basis or through contemporary geography that does not cover any historical reality. For a long time considered as an impassable barrier, the Sahara is today considered as a space of connectivity. More than a simple passage area, this workshop proposes to consider the Sahara as a dynamic space of circulation. Several axes of reflection will be developed: the diversity of actors (merchants, literate, Berbers); the structuring of this space of circulation around poles (commercial, religious) and networks that cross the Sahara and integrate it into dār al-Islam; or the representations of which it is the object (in Arab sources but also in Latin sources). Trade, pilgrimage, linguistics or the point of view of geographers will thus be taken into account in an attempt to shed light on the history of the medieval Sahara.

Person in charge : Jennifer Vanz (Associate Researcher, Medieval Islam, UMR 8167)

Discussant : Agnès Charpentier (CNRS, UMR 8167 Orient & Méditerranée)

Program

Lameen Souag (CNRS, Lacito, UMR 7107)

The circulation of languages in the Sahara

The Sahara is an important linguistic border, where Berber and Arabic from the North rub shoulders with the various languages of the Sahel in the South. Migration, trade, slavery have all led people to learn several languages according to their needs, and the resulting multilingualism has had an asymmetrical effect on the languages of the region. The enormous influence of Arabic on Berber is now relatively well described. On the other hand, several questions remain unanswered regarding the sub-practical influence of Berber on Arabic, and the influence of Sahelian languages on both Arabic and Berber is too often ignored. The deeper, standardising influence of Berber languages on each other is difficult to identify. The etymological study of borrowings and regular phonetic correspondences makes it possible to identify paths of influence which are sometimes not very visible in written sources.

Ingrid Houssaye Michienzi (CNRS, UMR 8167 Orient & Méditerranée)

The Touat in its medieval globality. The itinerary followed by a shipment of copper from the Kingdom of Hungary to the Sultanate of Mālī.

Commercial documents from the archives of Tuscan companies reveal the circulation of large shipments of copper mined in the kingdom of Hungary, transported to Venice, and shipped to northern

Africa via Mallorca, then to sub-Saharan Africa via the Touat, around 1400. This oasis archipelago appears to be a first-rate commercial platform at the heart of medieval globality. The purpose of this paper is thus to unveil the stakes and modalities of such a trade, by highlighting the routes and the actors.

Emmanuelle Vagnon (CNRS, LAMOP, UMR 8589)

Cartographing the desert: the Sahara in medieval nautical charts

Medieval nautical charts, from the 14th century onwards, are among the first Western maps to offer a detailed representation of North Africa. By definition, these maps, linked to navigational practices, essentially propose a nomenclature of coastlines, leaving the hinterland often blank. Is this «blank» on the map synonymous with terra incognita? On the most complete nautical charts, coastal toponyms are on the contrary associated with trade routes and inland localities.

The Saharan space, defined by common sense as a «desert», a geographical space of solitude and sand, is thus not represented as a «blank» on a number of medieval nautical charts. The purpose of this paper will first of all be to question the knowledge of the Sahara in Europe from the 14th century onwards and its representation by medieval cartographers. In particular, we will study the oldest maps, whether Italian or Majorcan, which depict this area, emphasising certain models, such as the map by Giovanni Carignagno (circa 1320) or the Pizzigani brothers (1367), which were copied and interpreted until the 16th century.

Youness Khalloufi (Univerity Paris I Panthéon Sorbonne)

Migrations, trade and pilgrimage: Figuig at a crossroads (13th-18th c.)

Mostly unknown at the time of Ibn Ḥaldūn, the oasis of Figuig became from the 15th century, an important step of the trans-Saharan commercial and scholarly networks. From different sources (notably riḥla-s), this communication will briefly present its central role in roads between Tlemcen and oasis of Touat, between Sijilmasa and Laghouat.