Sources et méthodes interdisciplinaires pour l'étude des sociétés sans archives : Bagdad à l'époque prémoderne

Interdisciplinary Sources & Methods for the Study of Pre-Archival Societies: The Case of Baghdad

recherche

35— Baghdad. From the work by Matrakçı Nasuh called *Beyân-ı Menâzil-i Sefer-i Irakeyn*. İÜK T5964, fols. 47v–48r.

PROGRAM:

- Welcome to Participants (8:30 - 9 am)
- General Introduction (9 - 9:30 am) – Nassima Neggaz, Vanessa Van Renterghem

- Panel Session 1 (9:30 - 11 am) – **Historical Topography of a City with No Remnants** (moderator: Hugh Kennedy)

Alastair Northedge, « What archaeological evidence can teach us about the urban plan of Early Abbasid Baghdad »
The Baghdad of the early period has now entirely disappeared, or nearly entirely, as there have been few excavations under the medieval and modern city. The construction methods of Mesopotamia in fired and unfired brick made this disappearance inevitable. By contrast, the textual descriptions of Baghdad, in al-Yaʻqubi and the Khatib al-Baghdadi, are detailed, and scholars have been tempted to rely on them – Massignon, Herfeld, Creswell, Lassner and others. However the urbanism of Baghdad was very influential and the architecture was copied elsewhere, notably in Raqqa and Samarra. It is now possible to see on the ground what those textual descriptions meant, including what changes occurred at a later date, when the plan in Baghdad proved unsatisfactory.

Peter Verkinderen, « Reconstructing Historical Watercourses in Iraq: Combining Data Types »
In my PhD, published in 2015 under the hyperbolic title *Waterways of Iraq and Iran in the Early Islamic Period*, I made an attempt to trace the historical courses of the main rivers of the Lower Mesopotamiam Plain (Euphrates, Tigris, Karun, Karkheh and Jarrahi), and the canal systems derived from them. In this presentation, I will discuss the approach I took, combining data extracted from texts with data from archaeological surveys and excavations, satellite imagery and geological surveys. For the city of Baghdad itself, the textual data is extremely rich but the other types of data are mostly lacking. For its hinterland, we are much better equipped. I will give some examples and discuss methodological problems associated with this approach.

Coffee Break (11 am)

- Panel Session 2 (11:30 - 1 pm) – **Archives & Numismatics: Administrative Documents Within and Beyond Narrative Sources** (moderator: Letizia Osti)

Maaike van Berkel, « Reconstructing the archives of Baghdad »
The central administration in Abbasid Baghdad relied extensively on the use of written documents. Narrative sources testify to the production and spread as well as archiving of large numbers and types of written documents produced by the bureaus of the central administration. The preservation of (copies of) these documents, together with the storage of records produced by the provincial administrations which had been sent to Baghdad, must have generated some of the largest archives of the period. However, the archives of Baghdad did not stand the ravages of time and none of these documents have survived in their original form. Fortunately, the narrative sources contain quite a few references to the ways in which documents were preserved, stored and used. On the basis of these references we can try to (partly) reconstruct the functioning of the archives of the central administration in Baghdad during early fourth/tenth century, a period particularly rich in extant narratives on administrative practices. If and how such a reconstruction will be feasible will be the topic of discussion during this presentation.

Stefan Heidemann, « Cities as Agglomerations – Bagdad, al-Raqqa, and other places »
The large cities of the ʿAbbāsid empire, such as Baghdād, al-Rayy, or al-Raqqa, were not cities in the western (Max Weber's) sense, but rather have to be understood as agglomerations of cities.
In the twelfth century, the Ḥanafī scholar al-Kāsānī defines a city as where we find one single congregational mosque, reflecting earlier debates by Abū Yūsuf and Muḥammad al-Shaybānī.

Large populated cities, such as Baghdād, are naturally structured by different urban entities each with a congregational mosque. These cities have thus their own legal quality as *miṣr* (pl. *amṣār*). Baghdād, consists of the palace city, Madīnat al-Salām, Karkh, al-Ruṣāfa, and other entities. Al-Raqqa, the residence city of Hārūn al-Rashīd, is an agglomeration of al-Raqqa proper, al-Rāfiqa, the garrison city, and of the palatial area in the north of both. For al-Rayy we have two names of al-Rayy and al-Muḥammadiyya. This list could be easily extended.
Numismatics can help us to understand those urban dynamics. As an extremely versatile material source, they can be used for more than economic and political history or for archaeological stratigraphy and settlement pattern. As a document with up to 150 words, there texts can offer us information about the legal and administrative structure of cities. Mint names used on coins are the contemporary official name of the place where the coin was issued. To corroborate the numismatic source with the literary sources for urban history, we have to decode the semantics of the naming of mint places on coins. Sometimes the mint of the provincial capital is identified by the name of the province as in the case of the mint *Ifrīqiya*, which is Qayrawān, or the mint of *Fārs* that is Shīrāz. We cannot always rule out the honorific use of a name for the entire urban agglomeration, for example *al-Mubāraka* for Tāhart in North Africa. However, we often get a precise name of an urban entity within larger urban agglomerations. These names reveal sometimes glimpses of the structure of that agglomeration. There is no mint called Baghdād before the Mongols. The main mint was established within a city of its own: the palace city of *Madīnat al-Salām*. We find also other names of locations within the agglomeration Baghdād on coins. We find two operating mints in the twin cities al-Raqqa and al-Rāfiqa, seemingly within each of the two cities. Based on these findings, it may be proposed that in the case of other cities, where we have less sufficient archaeological records, such as al-Rayy or Iṣfahān, but more than one mint name, the mint names denote urban entities within the agglomeration. The legal model for that can be found in Ḥanafī law, but usually the law reflects positively a reality. Here the city Ktesiphon or al-Madāʾin may offer a key for the understanding.

Lunch (1 pm - 2:30 pm)

- Panel Session 3 (2:30 - 4 pm) – **Neighborhoods and Urban Identities** (moderator: Maaike van Berkel)

Nassima Neggaz, « Documenting the Incubation of the Imāmī Movement in Karkh Baghdad: from Poetry to Shīʻī *Rijāl* Works »
When and how did Karkh Baghdad become a stronghold of Imāmī-Shīʻism? Secondary scholarship has tended to equate the rise of confessional violence in the city from the Būyid period onward with a new geographical distribution of religious communities in different areas across Baghdad. Was that the case? And how can we trace the Shīʻī-Imāmī movement in Karkh Baghdad?
This paper uses Shīʻī *Rijāl* works to identify the place of residence of Shīʻī-Imāmī scholars, showing how most of them deliberately chose to reside in al-Karkh from the early Abbasid period onward. These sources offer details that help us fill in the gaps in the Sunnī works of the period, in particular al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī's *Tārīkh Baghdād*, which affords little information on Shīʻī figures. At the level of the common people, the paper examines the usual chronicles of the period (al-Ṭabarī, for instance) and highlights expressions of sympathy to ʻAlīd movements in al-Karkh early in the Abbasid period. The paper combines other source materials from different genres to draw a precise picture of Karkh Baghdad, notably geography manuals, travelers' accounts, and collections of Shīʻī traditions.
The longue durée (from the foundation of Baghdad to the end of Buyīd rule) allows us to identify long term developments in al-Karkh, bringing out key moments in this evolution. For instance, the move of the first deputy of the Imām, ʻUthmān ibn Saʻīd al-Asadī, from Sāmarrāʾ to al-Karkh shortly after 260/874 symbolized the transfer of the Imāmī wikāla (network of deputies of the Imām) to Karkh Baghdad during the period of the minor occultation (*al-ghayba al-ṣughrā*).
Finally, the paper discusses the role of poetry - examined against the works of Arab and Persian geographers - in assessing the status of al-Karkh. "*Al-ashʻār fī l-Karkh kathīra jiddan*" (poetry composed regarding al-Karkh is very abundant), wrote Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī. This bulk of poetry written for al-Karkh is mostly of the *faḍāʾil* kind (laudatory odes). While there is a tradition of poetry being written for cities, Baghdad being a famous example of this, this is rarer for quarters, suburbs, districts, which further suggests that al-Karkh was perceived as an entity of its own.

Vanessa Van Renterghem, « The Districts of Baghdad: forging collective identities in the 11th and 12th centuries »
From its foundation, Baghdad was built as an ensemble of districts, from the imperial compound of Madīnat al-Manṣūr to the concessions (*qaṭāʾiʿ*) meant to be built by officials or relatives of the caliph. The urban growth of Madīnat al-Salām led to new areas being developed on both sides of the Tigris. Urban shrinking then resulted in the separation of many districts from one another. The discontinuity of the urban landscape has been noted and commented on by medieval as well as modern historians, to the point that Jacob Lassner called Baghdad 'a city of cities', or more precisely 'a series of municipal entities clustered within a greater metropolitan area'. Lassner argued that such entities had an institutional basis, since Baghdad was divided in a plurality of judicial circumscriptions and had up to six *jāmiʿ*-mosques. But he did not study the way Baghdadis did consider these presumed entities and what consequences the division of the city in multiple districts could have on social and urban life.
Along the 11th and 12th centuries, the fragmentation of Baghdad between distinct neighborhoods is an obvious fact. This communication will investigate the meaning it had for Baghdadi residents to belong to one or another of these districts and the way they forged - or not - their identities upon the feeling of belonging to a specific neighborhood. Crucial moments of urban life, such as festivals, social events, funeral processions and riots, will be considered as occasions to forge and renegotiate collective identities in 11th and 12th-centuries Baghdad.

Tea Break (4 pm)

- Panel Session 4 (4:30 - 6 pm) – **Digital Humanities and New Research Perspectives** (moderator: Michal Biran)

Peter Verkinderen, « Leveraging Digital Text Corpora: Search and Text Reuse Analysis »
The digital era has profoundly changed the way we (can) do research on Arabic texts. Libraries of digitized texts have put at any individual researcher's fingertips vast amounts of texts that only very few physical libraries in the world could offer at any moment in the past. Many researchers are now regularly using the search function of al-Maktaba al-Shāmila and others to locate passages relevant to their research. But search is only the tip of the iceberg of what can be done with these texts. In this presentation, I will present a number of digital methods that I, and the teams I have worked in, have used in the last couple of years. I will discuss the OpenITI corpus, currently the largest available corpus of (mostly pre-modern) Islamicate texts and analyze how its early Islamic contents compare with the list of books known to Baghdād's most famous book seller / stationer, Ibn al-Nadīm. Finally, I will discuss how the KITAB project uses an algorithm called «passim» to detect cases of «text reuse» between the digital texts in the OpenITI corpus; I will show a number of possible use cases of this data for the study of the history of pre-Ottoman Baghdād.

Jan Jelinowski, « Historical Writing and Social Structures in the Huleguid Period: Proposition for a New Reading of 'Atā Malik Juvaynī's *Tārīkh-i Jahāngushā* »
À l'aune des travaux récents sur la riche tradition historiographique gengiskhanide, je présenterai quelques propositions pour une lecture renouvelée de l'œuvre du célèbre historien d'expression persane, 'Aṭā Malik Juvaynī. Le choix d'un paradigme archivistique, couplé à l'usage des outils de l'Analyse des Données Textuelles (ADT) permettra d'interroger les moyens employés et les objectifs poursuivis par Juvaynī dans son acte d'écriture. Enfin, je présenterai quelques pistes permettant de rapporter les questions ainsi soulevées à la situation institutionnelle de Bagdad à la période hülegüide.

Dinner (8 pm)

- Guided Tour of the IAS Hotel de Lauzun (8:15 - 9 am) – optional

- Panel Session 5 (9 - 10:30 am) – **Economic, Demographic, and Sanitary Questions: interrogating the Narrative Sources** (moderator: Stefan Heidemann)

Hugh Kennedy, « The food supply of Baghdad in the early Abbasid period (762-c.950) »
Estimates of the population of Baghdad in the period 762 to c.950 vary between a quarter and half a million and sometimes higher. The feeding of a population of this size must have been a major undertaking, the biggest commercial activity in Western Eurasia in the period, but compared with the research on the food supply of Rome or Constantinople, there has been virtually no research on the subject. In my joint conference with Maaike van Berkel, I shall suggest the importance of water transport in physically moving the large quantities of grain and other foodstuffs which must have been required. In this paper I shall look at the market mechanisms which allowed this to happen. What, if any, was the role of the sultān in the sense of the state, in organizing this? What was the role of the market and the merchants who serviced it? Where did the demand come from and what was its effect on the wider economy of Greater Mesopotamia? And, finally, why did this system break down during the fourth/tenth century?

Michal Biran, « Did the Black Death hurt Baghdad in 1258? Multi-lingual sources for the study of Ilkhanid Baghdad (1258-1335) »
Monica Green recently argued that a crucial reason for the collapse of Muslim resistance to the Mongol conquerors in 1258 was the outbreak of Plague among the defenders. She also claimed that further outbreaks of this disease followed Mongol sieges in Iran and Iraq, as the Plague advanced from Central Asia with Hulegu's troops, preceding the better-recorded outbreak of the Black Death in the 14th century by almost a century. Green's articles combine genetic information about the origin of the Y P, the micro-organism that causes the Plague, with various literary sources, yet her reconstruction of the Plague dissemination into Baghdad is based solely on medieval chronicles in Persian, Arabic and Syrian, all of them she read in scholarly translations. Going back to the original sources, however, calls into question the role of Plague in the Mongol conquest of Baghdad and its immediate aftermath, and suggests that the so called Plague was actually regular epidemics caused by the siege that most probably has nothing to do with the Black Death. This example (based on a short article that Jonathan Brack, Reuven Amitai and I submitted to *Medical History* in response to the 2021 article), is a good starting point for discussing two methodological issues: First, the increasing cooperation of textual historians with natural scientists and scientifically informed historians in creating a richer and more nuanced picture of the human past, which has an enormous potential but has to be taken with care. And second, the diverse literary sources for the study of the Mongol conquest of Baghdad and the city under Ilkhanid rule, and their interconnections. These sources include mainly Ikhanid work - in Persian, Arabic (mainly from Iraq) and Syrian (as well as Armenian and Georgian); Arabic sources from the Mamluk Sultanate (1250-1517) and a plethora of other compilations - from Europe to China.

Coffee Break (10:30 am)

Panel Session 6 (11 am - 12:30 pm) – **From Poets to Thugs: The City and its Social Imaginary** (moderator: Mathieu Tillier)

Mathias Hoorelbeke, « Baghdad and the Circulation of Poets at the Start of the Abbasid Period according to the *Book of Songs* »
Le Livre des chansons contient de nombreuses informations qui permettent d'inscrire les poètes et les chanteurs dans leur espace géographique: lieu de naissance, identité des patrons, charges exercées - pour certains d'entre eux. Outre ces toponymes bien répertoriés, la vie des poètes et des chanteurs s'organise autour de lieux moins clairement identifiables: la porte du patron, le palais, la taverne, le marché. Quelle est la place de Bagdad, de ses quartiers et de ses lieux dans cette géographie qu'en donne le *Livre des chansons*? C'est ce que cette intervention s'emploiera à déterminer en s'appuyant sur les notices des poètes et chanteurs actifs entre 750 et 809.

Eugénie Rébillard, « Exceptional or exemplary? Narratives on crime and criminals in Baghdad (IX-XI) »
During the Abbasid period, crime and the world of criminality aroused the interest of Muslim scholars who devoted several books to thieves and thievery. The question of crime in Baghdad highlights the question of the representativeness of sources. Crime remains a reality that is difficult to objectify: it is a complex social construction that produces and shapes « a social imaginary » (D. Kalifa). Therefore, we cannot consider writing the history of crime without writing the history of its representations, regardless of the period or the location. Furthermore, neither serious crime nor delinquency in the Abbasid period is a measurable phenomenon. It is impossible to establish trends or even less to establish statistics. Writing a history of criminality Baghdad and its perceptions encounters several difficulties linked to the nature of the corpus at our disposal. A wide range of narrative and normative material, both prose, and verse, needs to be explored. We will examine the place and value that authors give to crime and criminals in a corpus characterized by a strong generic diversity.

Lunch (12:45 - 1:45 pm)

- Panel Session 7 (1:45 - 3:15 pm) – **Knowledge and Power: Baghdad, a Universal Center?** (moderator : Vanessa Van Renterghem)

Françoise Micheau, « Baghdad at the time of Sāmarrā' : some questions »
Le calife al-Muʿtaṣim décida en 221/836 de fonder une nouvelle ville destinée au casernement de ses troupes de mercenaires turcs, recrutés en Asie centrale et fraîchement arrivés à Bagdad, où elles avaient suscité l'hostilité de la population et généré de violents troubles. Ce fut Sāmarrāʾ à une centaine de kilomètres au nord où il se transféra avec sa cour et toute son administration, entraînant l'émigration d'une large partie de l'élite bagdadienne, ainsi que l'écrit al-Yaʿqūbī : « Notables, élites, officiers et autres personnages en vue se transportèrent avec al-Muʿtaṣim à Sāmarrāʾ en 223/838 et y demeurèrent sous les règnes d'al-Wāṯiq et d'al-Mutawakkil. » Quelles ont été, pour Bagdad, les conséquences politiques, économiques, culturelles de ce déplacement ? Je me propose de réfléchir à ces questions peu abordées par l'historiographie qui, le plus souvent, continue à parler, même au temps de Sāmarrāʾ, de Bagdad comme capitale et à y situer toutes les activités qui en avaient fait auparavant le dynamisme et la célébrité.

Rémy Gareil, « Baghdad, universal center of knowledge »
I will talk about the construction and evolution of representations of Baghdad, especially those linking the city with intellectual activities, and picturing it as a universal center of knowledge. My presentation will rely on both historical, geographical and literary sources, and will address more broadly the intellectual and political history of medieval Baghdad, focusing on Abbasid and Buyid periods.

Tea Break (3:15 pm)

- Panel Session 8 (3:45 - 5:15 pm) – **Writing in Baghdad, Writing About Baghdad: Two Case Studies and Their Horizons** (moderator: Mathias Hoorelbeke)

Mathieu Tillier, « Muhammad b. Khalaf Wakīʿ, Historian of Baghdad »
Muhammad b. Ḫalaf al-Ḍabbī, dit Wakīʿ (m. 306/918), est un savant et cadi bagdadien auteur de plusieurs ouvrages relevant de disciplines diverses, dont un seul nous est parvenu à travers un manuscrit unicum : les *Aḫbār al-quḍāt*, une des plus anciennes sources permettant aujourd'hui d'écrire l'histoire de la justice en terre d'Islam, et notamment de reconstituer celle de la judicature de Bagdad. Pourtant, l'auteur et son œuvre demeurent peu étudiés pour eux-mêmes. Je me propose d'analyser la place de Bagdad dans son ouvrage afin de mieux comprendre, en lien avec la carrière et la formation de l'auteur, le regard que celui-ci portait sur la capitale abbasside. Cette étude se donne notamment pour objectif de réévaluer les récentes interprétations considérant le retour du califat à Bagdad en 892 comme un tournant de l'historiographie islamique.

Laetizia Osti, « Looking Things Up and Writing Things Down: Networks and Notebooks in 10th Century Baghdad »
Whatever their methodology, investigations on cultural milieus draw from a similar mix of materials: anagraphical information from biographical profiles (dates and places of residence, lists of teachers and students, known associates); narrative accounts from biographical profiles, chronicles, or *adab* works, describing interactions between contemporaries; and the names of the individuals who are the sources for said accounts. In this paper, I shall describe my recent work on reconstructing the intersecting networks of Baghdad's cultural and political life through these sources, focussing on the use of books and notebooks as tools for the dissemination of culture in the fourth/tenth century.

- Final Panel Session (5:15 - 5:45 pm)
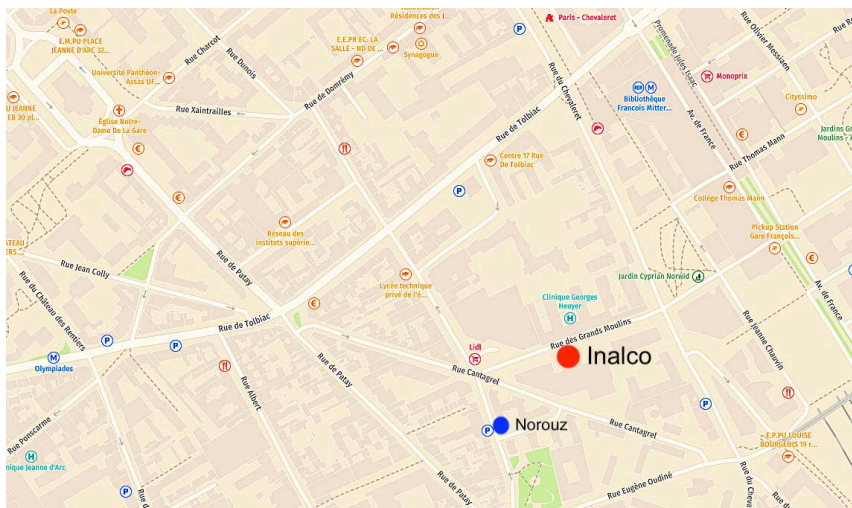- **Concluding Synthesis:** Sylvie Denoix
- **General Conclusion** – Nassima Neggaz, Vanessa Van Renterghem
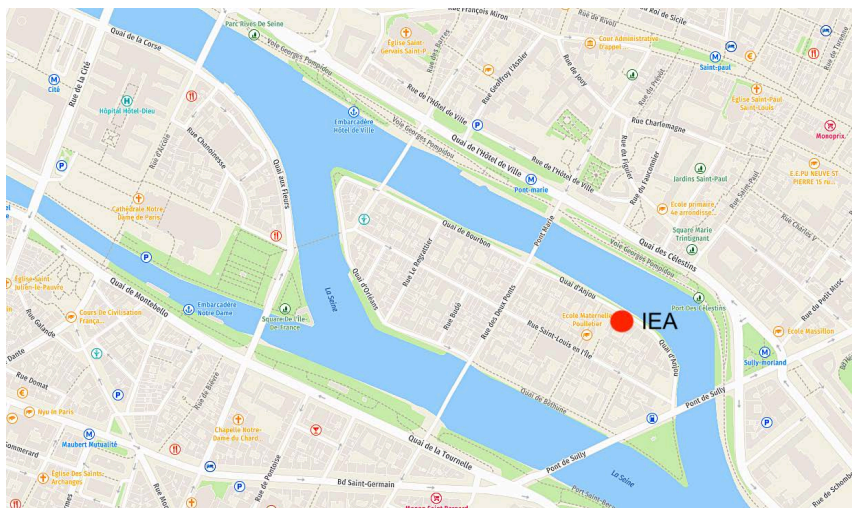
5:45 pm - End of the Workshop

- 6 pm – Conference Open to the Public at the IAS (Hôtel de Lauzun, Salle des Gardes, 1st floor):
« Sources of Life. Food and water for the inhabitants of Abbasid Baghdad» (Hugh Kennedy and Maaike van Berkel)
Managing access to clean water and large quantities of grain and other foodstuffs was essential for the development of an exceedingly large city such as Baghdad under the Abbasids. With half a million or more inhabitants this was not an easy task. Still we do not fully understand how this was achieved. Existing historical approaches still often frame the institutional arrangements of Middle Eastern cities in relation to the premodern European city and emphasize the institutional weakness of the former. Yet how, then, did these cities support their numerous populations under challenging circumstances? In this combined presentation Hugh Kennedy will discuss the availability of river transport while Maaike van Berkel investigates the multiple water systems that functioned in Abbasid Baghdad and the source(s) of their sustainability.

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