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Reviewed by Daniel König
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Mobilité(s). Pour une étude des sources et des méthodes d’approche

As part of the activities organized by the research group FranceMed, the German Historical Institute in Paris hosted the fourth and last conference of the cycle “Transferts culturels en Méditerranée médiévale”, sponsored by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) and the German Historical Institute. After having dealt with the historiographical construction of a Mediterranean historical entity, agents of cultural transfer as well as the role of objects and artistic production in intercultural exchange, this fourth conference was dedicated to presenting different methodological approaches to the phenomenon of ‘mobility’. In its call for papers the group had proposed a wider definition of the term, including geographical, temporal, social, but also other forms of mobility. In consequence, discussions about the applicability of the term to various phenomena such as ‘change’, ‘fluctuation’, ‘transformation’ etc. represented one aspect of the conference. Speakers from different fields of research (philology, social history, legal history, history of techniques and material culture, art history, numismatics, archaeology) approached the topic from various angles which can be classified into three groups:

In the first category – mobility of ideas –, MICHAEL MARX (Berlin) presented the research project "Corpus Coranicum" (Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften). Giving an overview on the hypotheses formulated by leading specialists in Coranic studies from the 19th century until today, Marx explained the project’s aim to understand the Qur’ān as a text which cannot be separated from its religious and cultural environment. Marx presented different examples which show how the Qur’ānic text adopted, adapted or actively rejected dogmatical formulations known from fundamental non-Muslim texts dating from the pre-Islamic period, thus reacting to the religious imagery of an audience that had been influenced by the metaphysical currents in the immediate environment of the late antique Arabian peninsula.

Taking the passages on Visigothic history in the work of the renowned Arab-Islamic historiographer Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233) as a starting point, DANIEL KÖNIG (Paris) explained how information about Visigothic history had reached the historiographer in Mosul by drawing parallels to other texts. Excluding that the information had travelled thanks to direct Gothic-Arabic contacts in the 4th–5th century or the Graeco-Arabic translation movement in the 9th–10th century, König pointed to Ibn al-Athīr’s reference to Andalusian sources, elaborating that the historiographer had had recourse to the earliest descriptions of conquest to depict the fall of the Visigothic kingdom and had drawn back on information available due to the translation of Latin sources into Arabic in Umayyad Spain of the 9th–10th century.

Three contributions stood at the intersection between the mobility of ideas and the mobility of persons. Dealing with representations of the Holy Sepulchre in medieval Western Europe, ELISABETH RUCHAUD (Paris) distinguished between three different forms of mobility between Jerusalem and the Latin West: a) The mobility of persons, most notably pilgrims and crusaders, which contributed to b) the transfer of information about the Holy Sepulchre, finally c) a third form of mobility as rep-
resented by the resulting fluctuations as regards the image of Jerusalem in Western European depictions, monuments, liturgy and exegesis. To illustrate these different levels of mobility, she presented the example of the mosaic apse of Santa Pudenziana in Rom where elements of the heavenly Jerusalem mingle with elements of the earthly one, namely the Constantinian complex of the Martyrium and the Anastasis.

GIUSEPPE MANDALÀ (Madrid) focussed on the intellectual contacts of Frederic II of Hohenstaufen with the Middle East. Tracing the emperor’s itinerary in the Holy Land, Mandalà recalled that detailed descriptions of the emperor in contemporary Arab-Islamic chronicles attest to the fact that the latter had been in touch with various representatives of the Muslim world. Prosopographical analysis of Arab-Islamic biographical dictionaries (tabaqāt) permits to reconstruct intellectual networks in Northern Syria and the region around Mosul, allowing to identify several scholars who had either been in direct contact with the emperor or had responded to different mathematical and philosophical questions presented by him. The intensity of this intellectual exchange is corroborated by Latin sources referring more than once to objects of scientific value which had been brought to Europe thanks to the emperor’s contacts. Frederic’s exchange of information with Muslim scholars in this region suggests that there is no reason to question the authenticity of the philosophical questions sent by the emperor to the Muslim mystic Ibn Sab’in of Ceuta.

FRÉDÉRIC HITZEL (Paris) dealt with the role of dragomans for the relations between Europe and the Ottoman Empire. Due to the latter’s multilingual situation, translating and interpreting played an important role for the empire’s administration. The need for reliable interpreters prompted the European powers, most notably the first European embassies in Istanbul, to found schools for interpreters. Within the empire, interpreters were also produced in other ways: The contribution of Greeks is manifested in several translations of Greek and Latin classics to Ottoman Turk. The integration of renegades, Iberian crypto-Jews and other persons from Europe promoted the translation of texts from other European languages as well, most notably French, Italian and Spanish. Medical and military treatises, historical texts, cartography and scores of musical works may be counted among the texts that were translated, while fiction and philosophy do not seem to have incited the same interest.

In the second category – mobility of persons – PHILIPPE DEPREUX (Limoges) approached the subject of mobility from the perspective of Carolingian administration of the late 8th to the early 9th century. On the basis of chronicles and charters, Depreux distinguished different types of mobile persons in an empire that was centred on the region between Seine and Rhine but maintained intensive relations with a ‘periphery’ situated on the Iberian peninsula, Saxony and Italy: Depreux recalled that the majority of illustrious intellectuals at the courts of Charlemagne and Louis the Pious were from abroad. Mentioning refugees from Spain, hostages educated and integrated within the empire, elites displaced for political reasons, petitioners travelling to the court at Aachen, diplomatic exchange with foreign powers, travelling administrators, political projects promoting the mobility of persons and ideas such as monastic reforms etc., he addressed important issues concerning the control, management and promotion of mobility by the ruling elite.

According to CHRISTIAN MÜLLER (Paris), Islamic juridical texts allow to reconstruct the role of mobility in everyday life and among social strata usually neglected by narrative and biographical sources concentrating on the travels of scholars and other illustrious persons. Giving an overview of the different kinds of legal sources and their respective value for the reconstruction of mobility, Müller presented various issues: Aside from referring to legal problems which arise from the loss of corporal mobility, Müller concentrated on juridical problems resulting from the mobility and ensuing absence of a certain person - the unknown whereabouts of a potential heir, the traveling husband not fulfilling the obligations due to his wife, the family needing to sell the goods of an absent person, the wife wishing to divorce an absent spouse, the non-availability of witnesses etc. confronted Muslim jurists with serious problems. Providing a detailed analysis of a document dealing with a case of inheritance, Müller systematically traced the possibilities of reconstructing the mobility of a deceased person’s family.

PHILIPPE BERNARDI (Paris) provided insight into notarial sources produced in Southern France of the 15th century. After giving an overview of the different types of documents concerning family, feudal and ecclesiastical issues, legal obligations, certificates, the regulation of disputes etc., he pointed to the frequency of migratory phenomena in this region, due among other things to demographical changes produced by the plague of the 14th century. The contribution then focussed on the case of the Piedmontese mason Barthélemy Guerci, referred to in around 350 notarial documents from his arrival in Aix-en-Provence to his death in the same city in the 15th century. Emphasizing that Guerci represents only one
of many documented migrants, Bernardi reconstructed the latter’s motivation to leave the Piedmont, his professional and civic integration into the region, his links to other fellow countrymen and his region of origin, the subsequent immigration of family members as well as the import of construction techniques (‘Piedmontese cellars’).

YASSIR BENHIMA (Paris) focussed on mobility as a structural element of the nomadic way of life. He recalled the diversity of nomadic forms to be found in the regions bordering the Mediterranean, including nomadism of a bedouin type, vertical transhumance relevant to the inhabitants of mountainous regions, horizontal transhumance concerning larger pastoral systems such as the Spanish mesta, finally the different varieties of semi-nomadism. Concentrating on the criteria to define different types of nomadism, Benhima included the period of mobility, the distance travelled, the motivation to move as well as the social organisation produced by mobility. He finally called for the necessity to analyse larger nomadic migrations in a comparatist approach which could serve to elaborate on the connections and parallels between the nomadic movements of Arabs, Berbers and Turks.

The last category – mobility of objects – provided for a material approach to the subject. Addressing the phenomenon of architectural mobility, RANIA ABDELLATIF (Paris) not only dealt with the mobility of craftsmen as well as of architectural elements, but also analysed the social, religious and architectural transformation of the Great Umayyad mosque of Damascus. Briefly presenting the three major phases of the building’s transformation (pagan temple of Jupiter – church of Saint John – Umayyad mosque) and the motivations linked to it, she defined two different processes: The appropriation of the building by the new power, in this case the Umayyad caliph, on the one hand; the subsequent assimilation of the mosque by transforming it physically over the centuries on the other hand. In this way she equated the building’s ‘mobility’ with its physical, symbolical, religious and political transformation.

Referring to gold dinars and silver dirhams which corroborate the existence of economic ties between the Islamic world on the one hand, areas under Carolingian rule, Scandinavia and Eastern Europe on the other hand, MOHAMED ELHADRI (Lyon) dealt with different aspects of monetary contacts between the Maghreb and the medieval Latin West in the High Middle Ages. Pointing to the fact that European coins were also to be found in the Maghreb, Elhadri focussed on the diffusion of Maghrebin coins in Europe. This diffusion was mainly restricted to the Iberian peninsula and western France in the High Middle Ages as opposed to the Early Middle Ages when Maghrebin coins had also reached Scandinavia in large quantities. Elhadri illustrated that monetary contacts were not only limited to the exchange of coins by presenting other aspects of monetary mobility, i.e. the mobility of monetary models as reflected by the Castilian Maravedí (‘Morabitinus’) with its adoption of Almoravid standards, including Arabic inscriptions; cases of counterfeiting as represented by false dirhams coined in Genoa; finally the physical transformation, but also the simple exchange of ‘Muslim’ into ‘Christian’ coinage in trade between North Africa and Sicily.

HANNAH BAADER (Florence) proposed to analyse the liminal zones of Mediterranean mobility by focussing on the two bottlenecks connecting the Mediterranean sea with the Black sea and the Atlantic respectively. Reproducing the descriptions of Pliny the Elder and Herodotus concerning the Bosporus and the regions beyond it, she elaborated on the phenomenon of cultural transgression in cultural border zones. Recapitulating the mythology connected with the so-called ‘pillars of Hercules’, she reflected upon the symbolic shift concerning this important border of the classical world brought about by the discovery of the Americas as reflected in the treaty of Tordesillas (1494). The final part of her paper was dedicated to the imprints left by seafaring on Mediterranean architecture and architectural planning which she illustrated by comparing the architectural constellation of the Pisan Piazza dei Miracoli with the topography of Jerusalem.

The conference provided insight into different variants of mobility as well as into various methods of reconstructing it on the basis of diverse source material, successfully ending the cycle of conferences on “Processes of cultural transfer in the medieval Mediterranean”.

Conference Overview:

Introduction
FranceMed (Paris): Présentation du groupe de recherche

Michael Marx (Berlin): Le coran et la mobilité des textes: la transformation des traditions religieuses durant l’Antiquité tardif dans le texte de la revelation musulmane

Philippe Depreux (Limoges): Elites méridionales au service du souverain carolingien (vers 780-vers 840):
quelques études de cas

Giuseppe Mandalà (Madrid): A la cour des Hohenstaufen : échanges et mobilité entre Orient et Oc-cident (XIIIe siècle)

FranceMed (Paris): Quatre approches des mobilités en Méditerranée médiévale:
1. Rania Abdellatif: La mobilité des bâtiments: le cas de la mosquée
4. Elisabeth Ruchaud: De Jérusalem à l’Occident latin. Image et représentation de la cité sainte

Christian Müller (Paris): La mobilité des personnes dans la pratique juridique (XIe-XIVe s.)
Philippe Bernardi (Paris): Les actes notariés médiévaux: un point de vue sur la mobilité des hommes, des matériaux et des savoir-faire
Mohamed Elhadri (Lyon): Influences et contacts monétaires entre le Maghreb et l’Europe d’après la numismatique
Hannah Baader (Florence): Mobility and the Thalassic Imagination
Frédéric Hitzel (Paris): Connaissance de l’Europe occidentale par les Ottomans: le rôle des drogmans

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