

Call for Papers

A World of Realms: A Long View of Diplomacy and Spatiality in the Premodern Islamic World.

Workshop

University of Antwerp – Belgium, May 20-21, 2021

Keynote speaker: Sanjay Subrahmanyam (UCLA/Collège de France)

Power in History: Centre for Political History invites papers that inquire into the spatial dimensions of diplomacy and their relation to conceptions of territoriality in the larger Islamic world, from the 7th to the early 19th century, as part of a two-day interdisciplinary workshop held at the University of Antwerp and hosted by the History Department on May 20-21, 2021.

Deadline for abstracts: August 15, 2020.

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Source: *Kharīdat al-'ajā'ib wa-farīdat al-gharā'ib*, attributed to the 15th-century writer Ibn al-Wardī. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2013415532/>.

Debates on the nature of the sovereign state as a territorially defined political entity are closely linked to discussions of “modernity” and to the development of the field of International Relations. While scholars from different disciplinary backgrounds have long questioned when and how conceptions of the “territorial state” emerged, rarely have they ventured outside the European context. A closer look at the premodern Islamic world, however, shows that “space” and “territoriality” mattered a great deal, informed interstate contacts and influenced the conduct and evolution of diplomacy. This is clear not only from one of the key concepts in Islamic law of a world divided in two *dārs* (‘territories’) – *dār al-Islām* and *dār al-ḥarb* –, but also from early developments in human and administrative geography, and, more broadly, from those variegated formal texts participating in the “discourse of place.” In these conceptions, space, real or imagined, carried great significance.

Since the collapse of the Abbasid Caliphate, if not earlier, ruling elites and intellectuals in the Islamic world recognized a collectivity of entities or realms (*mamālik*) that appear to have been territorially defined. Administrative manuals and diplomatic sources insist on a range of basic rules of respect for borders (however defined), security and immunities for emissaries (and traveling scholars, merchants and pilgrims), thus pointing to the importance attached to delineating and defining territory. Furthermore, possession of territory granted status to rulers and therefore appears as a prerequisite of the establishment of diplomatic contact, and this independently of any supposedly fixed norms of who was/could be considered ‘sovereign’ or not.

As both *territoriality* and *diplomacy* remain little studied in the context of the larger Islamic world, from the beginnings of Islam up to the early 1800s, this workshop invites papers that examine their connections from a spatial perspective. “Space” is key to understanding diplomacy in both a ‘high political’ sense – rulers formally recognizing one another (or not) and the making (and dissolution) of alliances – and as a *practice* through the dispatching or exchange of envoys. It operates on the premise that *distinct* entities exist and must be able to continue to exist alongside each other. Moreover, interpersonal diplomatic encounters, be they highly ritualized or informal, are always place-specific. The various qualities and functions of these (staged) sites may change over time, as do the social profiles of the actors who can enter and endow them with (new) meanings. Scholars have often emphasized the importance of asking who is allowed or barred access to the spaces of diplomacy and raised important questions as to the nature of power and domination. These questions, in turn, go to the heart of older but key issues in the historical scholarship on state-building and state-public relations.

In a world as mobile as the Islamic world, how did diplomatic practices take shape and, indeed, what meanings were ascribed to “territory” by rulers, administrators and the envoys who moved back and forth between different courts? We welcome papers dealing with the many spatial dimensions of interstate contact and particularly seek contributions that critically engage with one or more of the following themes:

- Conceptions of material space: what defined a territory and in which terminologies were they scripted (center vs frontier, city vs ‘hinterland,’ or geographic vs legal space)?

- Territory as spaces embedded in larger relational webs of territories (and related notions of boundary-making, 'types' of territories, shifting notions of 'extraterritoriality' or sovereignty)
- Perceptions and (metaphoric) representations of space (and how they changed through diplomatic contact): in cartography, manuscript illumination, prose, art, and architecture
- Imaginative space: the relevance of historical, mythical, metaphorical space
- Papers building on Lefebvre's seminal works on the social production of space and its relation with 'class' domination and struggle
- The various and evolving 'settings' of diplomatic encounter: near borders (for the exchange of prisoners), at sea, in 'neutral' places, in seats of power (palaces, frontier fortresses)
- Ritual places (shrines, mosques, burial places) and their often contested significance in interstate dealings

We welcome contributions by historians, art historians, literary scholars, political scientists, anthropologists, archeologists, archivists, and philologists on any subject that falls in the period between the 7th to the early 19th century, when Muslim polities increasingly reverted to resident diplomacy. We prefer papers that depart from the perspective of Muslim states (and draw on the sources they left behind) and investigate their interactions with either Muslim or non-Muslim polities (or both). Along with contributions on the various major Islamic states in the Maghreb, Western and Central Africa, Middle East, Europe, and Central, South and Southeast Asia – including, but not limited to the Umayyads, Abbasids, Nasrids, Mongols, Mamluks, Hafids, Mandinkas (Mali Empire), Kanembus (Bornu Empire), Ottomans, Safavids, and Mughals – we also encourage papers on pastoral nomad and peripheral groups and their interactions with Muslim polities.

The organizers will be able to cover part of the expenses of participants. An exception can be made for those whose institution does not provide any allowance for conference participation. As **papers** (in English and max. 8000 words) **will be pre-circulated**, selected speakers will have to submit their draft papers no later than mid-April 2021. They also commit to revise their papers for future inclusion in a peer-reviewed collective publication.

Submissions for papers should include: name, main affiliation, paper title, abstract (max. 250 words) and a short bio (max. 50 words).

Deadline: please send all proposals to malika.dekkiche@uantwerp.be and houssine.alloul@uantwerp.be no later than **August 15, 2020**.

Notifications of acceptance will be sent out by **late August 2020**.
