

XVI Convegno SeSaMO

Università degli Studi di Cagliari
Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche e Sociali

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SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

TITOLO/TITLE: Urban Histories of Mobility in the MENA Region: Migrations, Ecologies, Spaces, Temporalities (XIX-XXI)

PROPONENTE/I – PROPONENT/S: LUCIA CARMINATI, GABRIELE MONTALBANO

ABSTRACT (1500 parole/words):

Despite the obvious importance of migration in the urban contexts of North Africa and the Middle East in the modern age, urban history and the history of mobility and migration have not always spoken to each other. An interest in the impact of colonial regimes in urban planning and social geography has often prevailed (Wright 1991; Piaton 2016; McLaren 2018; Dumasy 2022), in part neglecting the question of urban contexts as revealers and producers of both social and spatial mobility (Foucault 1984). Moreover, studies in the North African and Middle Eastern contexts have rarely been conceived within a unifying framework in spite of pleas to do so (Clancy-Smith 2011; Arsan, Karam, and Khater 2013).

A new historiographical interest, in which this panel fits, aims to propose a history of mobility by investigating the connection between migratory phenomena, urban spaces, ecologies, and regimes of historicity (Tabak 2008; Lafi 2023). From the 19th century onwards, urban areas in the MENA region have witnessed major changes related to mobility and to the presence of economic, social, and colonial marginalities (Biancani 2018; Fuhrmann 2020; Paonessa 2021; Montalbano 2023; Carminati 2023). The chosen chronology encompasses the era of political reforms (like Tanzimat in Ottoman areas), the implementation of colonial hierarchies in most of the MENA region up to the decolonization processes and the postcolonial political regimes. Through a perspective on mobility within the urban scale it is possible to analyze the different regimes, passages and changes that do not coincide necessarily with the classical chronology of the political and diplomatic history.

The interest is to investigate cities as nodes of national as well as transnational and global networks. It is in city neighbourhoods that communities, minorities and economic and social divisions take concrete shape. At the same time, it is within urban spaces where national, class, gender and racial categories can be subverted, criticised, reconfigured. The methodological approach of this panel is to avoid considering the relation of these categories as a simple interaction of undiscussed blocks but, on the contrary, it focuses on the mutual hybridization of the concepts of time, space, and (social, racial, gender) identities. Urban spaces are not here understood as a mere setting of historical and social events but as an active part of a complexity in which all the different elements are related and built together (Rau, Roger 2020).

The close-up on marginality and daily life is intended as a privileged perspective to underline the spatialized social practices of urban MENA contexts. Even though our main academic interest concerns history, this panel aims to be an open space of discussions and exchanges among scholars from different social sciences such as (but not exclusively): historians, anthropologists, geographers, sociologists.

We welcome papers (in Italian, English or French) that cover, study or deal with the following themes:

- Forms of urban marginality
- Relationship between urban neighbourhoods and the urban, national, global context
- (re)production of spatial and social boundaries and divisions
- impact of infrastructure and exploitation in urban social geography
- sites of hybridisation, conflict and subversion
- production of alternative urban geographies to institutional ones
- ecologies of urban spaces
- relationship between urban spaces and public health ideas or practices
- proposals or practices of urban modernisation
- regimes of historicity and temporality across urban contexts

ABSTRACTS :

**Migrant memories:
a historical ethnography of the *juderia* (Jewish quarter) of Rhodes**

Dario Miccoli

Nowadays, Rhodes is perceived as a tourist destination and an epitome of the Greek summer. However, this island became part of Greece only in 1947 after centuries of Ottoman (1522-1912) and then Italian rule (1912-1947). Moreover, until the 1940s Rhodes hosted a composite population of Greek Orthodox, Jews, Turkish-speaking Muslims, Italians and others. In this paper, I will focus on the Jews of Rhodes – a community of Sephardi origin, that in the 1940s counted c. 2,000 and that was almost entirely destroyed during the Holocaust – through a historical ethnography of the *juderia* (Jewish quarter) of the historical city of Rhodes where most lived until the 1940s. I will try to understand how, in the passage from Ottoman to Italian and Greek rule, the *juderia* depopulated and changed due to migration abroad – for example to Egypt and the Belgian Congo in the 1920s and 1930s – and then in the aftermath of the Holocaust. Nonetheless, this quarter continues to shape the identity of the Rhodes Jewish diasporas scattered between Israel, the US, South Africa and Italy. In the last two decades, different public and private actors also started to reconsider this largely vanished Jewish presence and heritage, through the opening of a museum and the organisation of cultural activities against the background of a very *touristified* island and a Dodecanese archipelago – mainly the island of Kos – that has become a door to Europe for many Middle Eastern migrants and refugees. The *juderia* can therefore serve as an example of the stratification of memories that haunt many urban contexts across the post-Ottoman world, and of how mobility and displacement have shaped – and continue to shape – their history.

Dario Miccoli is *Ricercatore tdB* of Modern Hebrew and Jewish Studies at the Department of Asian and North African Studies at Ca' Foscari University. He has published and conducted research on the contemporary history and memory of the

Jews of the Arab world, notably Egypt, and of the Eastern Mediterranean and on Sephardi and Mizrahi literature. His latest monograph is *A Sephardi Sea: Jewish Memories across the Modern Mediterranean* (Indiana University Press, 2022).

Agents of Copyright, Censorship, and Circulation on the Tigris: A Transnational History Cinema in Twentieth Century Iraq

Pelle Valentin Olsen

Cinemagoing quickly became a popular form of leisure in Iraqi urban centers in the early twentieth century. By 1957, Iraqi cities had a total of 137 cinemas. Iraq's early cinema industry was situated simultaneously at the periphery and crossroads of Middle Eastern, South Asian, European, and US film production and distribution and was therefore transregional and transnational. As a result, importers, distributors, and entrepreneurs from the US, Europe, India, and the Middle East worked alongside, and sometimes against, each other in Iraq's emerging world of cinema. In the process, Iraqi urban spaces, and the ways in which these were inhabited, experienced, and designed changed dramatically. In addition, the emergence of cinemas in Iraq relied on the circulation of film canisters, the migration of technology, expertise, and capital across vast distances. In the process, the urban fabric and texture of Baghdad and other cities was further altered.

Moving beyond the screen and production and reception in specific national contexts, this paper highlights how technology, labour and film prints migrated, moved through, circumvented, and were delayed by private companies, state institutions, and competing legal geographies, including censorship offices, tax regulations, and shifting dollar allocations for imports. This paper examines the overlapping and at times competing interests and agendas of Iraqi cinema entrepreneurs and capitalist, Iraqi censors, US, European, and Indian distributors and production companies, and staff at the US embassy in Baghdad. It argues that they all contributed to establishing and shaping cinema as an urban form of leisure in Iraq. Adding to materially and archivally based histories of cinema, this paper relies on the archives of several Hollywood production and distribution companies, the US embassy in Baghdad, the Indian cinema press, as well as the Iraqi press, Iraqi police and censorship records, and the private collections of one of the Iraqi families involved in cinema the industry.

Pelle Valentin Olsen is a cultural and social historian of Iraq and the modern Middle East. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 2020. Pelle is at work on a book manuscript entitled *Idle Days and Nights: Leisure, Time, and Modernity in Iraq*. Currently, he is Associate Professor of Middle East History at the University of Bergen. His work has appeared in edited volumes as well as in *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, *Arab Studies Journal*, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, *Middle East Critique*, *Regards*, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, *Journal of Social History*, *IJMES*, and *MEJCC*. *Palestine in the World: International Solidarity with the Palestinian Liberation Movement*, co-edited with Sorcha Thompson, was published in 2023.

Anatolian opium in post-Ottoman Alexandria

Daniel Joseph MacArthur Seal

The Ottoman Empire's final decade saw unprecedented levels of outward migration that accompanied the violence and economic upheaval of revolution, war, and occupation. Given its proximity and long history of commercial and kinship connections with the Ottoman capital, Alexandria was among the most popular destinations for the Empire's final generation of emigrants. Despite these historical familiarities, finding sustenance in this new environment, often without access to resources that had been left behind, confiscated, or destroyed in their places of origin, was an immediate challenge for recent arrivals. In such a context, many emigres turned to smuggling, taking advantage of continued social and kinship connections with contacts who remained in the post-1923 Republic of Turkey, where a large and comparatively lightly regulated agriculture and commerce in opium provided an important source for narcotics across the Mediterranean and further afield. Access to narcotics could bring substantial profits and helped new arrivals to ascend local power structures, forming a less visible resource than the more widely studied evolution of humanitarian aid aimed at displaced persons from former Ottoman realms (Watenpaugh 2015). At the same time, police suppression, legal censure, and public opprobrium often resulted in the further marginalisation, impoverishment, and imprisonment of post-Ottoman emigres, presaging a dilemma that emerges from much contemporary criminological research on the smuggling strategies of urban migrants and minorities (Bucerius 2014). The paper makes use of Turkish, Greek, British, and French state archives and newspaper collections and the reports of the Alexandria police and Egyptian Central Narcotics Intelligence Bureau to examine the roles of post-Ottoman emigres in creating and catering to Alexandria's demand for opium and opiates in the interwar period. The rise of concerns around drug consumption in Egypt has been largely analysed endogenously, without due attention to the complex transnational migratory and commercial pathways that brought narcotics to the country's port cities and shaped their consumption and control (Kozma 2013). By examining the role played by post-Ottoman emigres at the intersection between these global illicit trades and patterns of local distribution within the urban locality of Alexandria, the paper hopes to contribute to the historicization and localization of Mediterranean smuggling, a subject largely investigated from an aggregating and ahistorical social sciences perspective (Gallien and Weigand, 2022). It further uses opium smuggling as a means of interrogating questions of the formation of post-Ottoman spaces and identities, examining how the legacies of cohabitation within the Ottoman empire shaped subjecthood beyond its collapse, a topic only now gaining traction in academic research on the 20th century eastern Mediterranean (Wigen 2019).

Daniel-Joseph MacArthur-Seal received his PhD from the University of Cambridge in 2014. His thesis comparing the military occupations of Alexandria, Thessaloniki and Istanbul during and after the First World War was published by Oxford University Press under the title *Britain's Levantine Empire, 1914-1923*. Daniel joined the British Institute at Ankara (BIAA) as a post-doctoral research fellow from 2014 to 2017. After working as Research Assistant Professor in Middle Eastern History at Hong Kong Baptist University from 2017 to 2019, he returned to the BIAA as Assistant Director from 2019 to 2023. He is currently a research fellow at the Scuola Superiore Meridionale.

Iranians in late Ottoman Istanbul: separation, hybridization, and political activism (1850s-1910s)

Sara Zanotta

In the late 19th and early 20th century, the Iranian community in Istanbul numbered approximately 16,000 individuals. This group included a significant portion of merchants and traders, intellectuals, publishers, political and religious dissidents, as well as an undetermined number of Iranian migrants not legally resident in the Ottoman empire. Together with Baku, it constituted one of the largest Iranian communities abroad. While the center of the community was located in the Büyük Valide Han (Khān-e Vāledeh in Persian), the Iranians were not an isolated minority, but interacted with other groups, both in everyday life and on special occasions, such as festivities and moments of protest.

Based on memoirs and correspondence of Iranians living in Istanbul, newspapers published in the Ottoman empire and European diplomatic sources reporting on the Iranian activities in the city, this paper aims to reconstruct the ambivalent relationship between the Iranian community and the rest of Istanbul. On the one hand, it will identify specific “Iranian” neighborhoods and buildings in Istanbul as spaces of separation from the rest of the city. On the other hand, it will show that over time these “Iranian” spaces became increasingly porous, welcoming non-Iranians from the rest of the city and - most importantly - allowing the Iranian minority to expand to other parts of Istanbul. In this context, political developments such as the Iranian constitutional revolution and the Young Turk revolution found themselves “connected” through the presence of the Iranian population in Istanbul. By mapping the location of political manifestations in favor of the Iranian constitutional revolution, I will demonstrate how the political use of urban space by the Iranian community in Istanbul increased as the two revolutions unfolded, going beyond specifically “Iranian” spaces and increasingly interacting with cosmopolitan ones.

Sara Zanotta is a PhD candidate in Asian History at the Department of Political and Social Sciences of the University of Pavia, Italy. Her PhD thesis examines the role of Iranian communities abroad in the Iranian constitutional movement between then 1850s and the 1910s. During her doctoral studies, she was a visiting PhD student at the Central European University in Vienna, at the Institute of Iranian Studies of the University of Bamberg and at the Berlin Graduate School Muslim Cultures and Societies. She holds a Master’s degree in International Relations from the University of Milan, where she still collaborates with the courses of History and Institutions of Muslim Countries and Comparative Constitutional Law. She is also the deputy chief of the editorial staff of “Nuovi Autoritarismi e Democrazie”.

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