

# Identity and materiality in the Ottoman Empire

## Responsable

**Nolwenn Guedeau**

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Université)

**Jeudi 13 juillet 2023**  
**11h-13h**  
**Salle Déméter 019**

## Intervenants

**Nikolaus Hochstein Cox**

(University of Bonn)

**Lauren Erker**

(University of Bonn)

**Nolwenn Guedeau**

(University of Bonn, Aix-Marseille  
Université)

**Anastasia Thamnopoulou**

(University of Bonn)

## Résumé de l'atelier

While the Late Ottoman period (18<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries) was well documented and enveloped by contemporary writings, it is considered by many to be 'modern' and has historically been dismissed as not being worthy of archaeological attention. The written text indeed provides invaluable descriptions of material culture, but archaeology is a necessity for creating a truly holistic and widely informed understanding of the period and the people who lived at that time.

This panel explores the issue of identity and materiality through the lens of archaeology in a regionally comparative manner. Each panellist will present an engaging case study of a different part of the empire: but true recognition of the human experience in the service of the Sultan will be through the presentation of all four case studies.

The first session will discuss the ceramic material culture of the Sanjak of Tirhala, modern-day Greece, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Next, the impact of the empire shaking *Tanzimat* reforms on rural Transjordan will be examined. We will dedicate a panel to understanding the consumption of tobacco products and production of pipes in Iraqi Kurdistan, and finally, we will discuss the rapid rise and fiery fall of the Hijaz Railway, the Ottoman Empire's last great imperial and religious endeavour.

All case studies focus on frontiers of the empire, regions inhabited by populations who aspired for greater autonomy from the Ottoman Empire and involved in pivotal moments in those last centuries of Ottoman rule.

## Programme

**Nikolaus Hochstein Cox**

*The End of the Hijaz Railway: the evidence from al-'Ula Station*

The Hijaz Railway is one of the most-famous railway lines in the world. Its Ottoman-initiated construction was an inspired undertaking, funded chiefly through donations from the international Muslim community who recognised the importance of the line for supporting the Hajj: one of the key pillars of the Islamic faith. The speed of construction in the difficult Levantine and Arabian terrain made the railway a symbol of Muslim unity and modernization, while its existence forever changed the lives of the nomadic populations who had lived for centuries in relative obscurity in the path of the proposed line. As much as the railway gave to communities and to Islam, it also took away. It gained European and American notoriety during the Great War, when it was systematically attacked by a British and Arab force of which T.E. Lawrence – whose exploits as "Lawrence of Arabia" were lauded through wartime propaganda – was the most famous member. By the Great War's close

the Hijaz Railway was devastated. Plans to restore the line were abandoned when Saudi forces conquered the Hijaz in 1925. No longer the mechanised caravan of pilgrims, the railway became a source of material resources for the post-war community. Having been forced out of nomadism by the encroachment of Ottoman influence – ideologically and technologically – along the mechanised line of the railway, the populations of southern Jordan and northern Arabia now began to build new lives upon the back of the abandoned railroad. In al-‘Ula, one of the Arabian stations along the route, the railway sleepers and iron tracks were removed by locals who incorporated them into the foundations of new buildings. The railroad and what it represented was redefined. This presentation looks closer at al-‘Ula and the other fortresses and railways that once guarded the valuable railroad, and discusses how these sites were transformed by the cultures around them following the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Once the railroad changed communities: now it was communities who changed the railroad.

### **Lauren Erker**

#### *Identities in Vessels: Ceramics as a Reflection of Social Change in Jordan during the Late Ottoman Period*

The reintegration of Transjordan into the Ottoman empire in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century via the introduction of the *Tanzimat* reforms brought about substantial economic and social change for a region that had experienced relative autonomy for the first 300 years under the Ottomans. These changes are well documented historically, but their reflection in the material culture profiles of rural sites has yet to be systematically explored. This paper is an archaeological analysis of the impact of the *Tanzimat* reforms on the consumption and production of ceramics in rural Transjordan. With the state's attempt to 'modernize' the region, it was brought into direct contact with international trade on a massive scale. The widespread importation of ceramics from Europe and other regions in Asia initiated a shift in material culture preferences that would in part facilitate everlasting social and economic change in the region.

### **Nolwenn Guedeau**

#### *Identities and ottoman imperialism in iraqi Kurdistan*

The present-day Iraqi Kurdistan region had a special position in the Ottoman Empire. It enjoyed administrative autonomy and the region was for a long time the battleground for the border between the empire and the Persian Qadjar dynasty. Thus we are in a hybrid and eclectic region. To understand questions of identity in this context, we will use material culture, and particularly clay smoking pipes. Pipes are a quantitatively very important type of object on every Ottoman sites. Their use coincides with the appearance of tobacco in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, its consumption rapidly reaching all strata of the population (men, women, children, rich, poor). Pipes were produced in the large urban centers, such as Damascus, Cairo, or in the imperial workshops of Istanbul. However, each village had its own production for regional consumption. The aim of this paper will be to see how Kurdistan, and its multiple influences, is an interesting case study for understanding Ottoman imperialist economy over local communities.

### **Anastasia Thamnopoulou**

#### *Materiality of a frontier region; the first Ottoman-Greek border (19<sup>th</sup> century)*

The "centrality of the periphery" (as it was used by Florin Curta about al-Andalus) could describe the situation in the frontier region between the newly founded Greek Kingdom and the Ottoman Empire during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1833-1881). Written sources, like maps of the region, diplomatic archives about the decision of the placement of the border and historical research shade light on the political and economical situation of the region. However, how is a frontier region reflected in the archaeological record?

What are the material remains that could possibly reflect social structures, cultural interactions or comparisons of this borderland with the contemporary administration center of the Ottoman Empire? The current paper aims to take advantage of an interdisciplinary approach, while highlighting the importance of including the study of the material record in order to possibly reconstruct this short period of time that the region served in between two different states.