

# Written culture in the Ottoman Balkans. Issues, approaches and perspectives

## Responsable

**Vincent Thérouin**  
(Sorbonne Université)

**Mardi 11 juillet 2023**  
**8h30-10h30**  
**Salle Déméter 019**

## Intervenants

**Rania Mohammad**  
(Faculty of Philosophy and Social  
Sciences, University of Zagreb)

**Tatjana Paić-Vukić**  
(Croatian Academy of Sciences  
and Arts)

**Silvana Rachieru**  
(Faculty of History, University of  
Bucharest)

**Vincent Thérouin**  
(Sorbonne Université)

## Résumé de l'atelier

The Balkans often appear as one of the numerous regions of the Ottoman realm: on the one hand, the history of Islamic art tends to focus on Ottoman areas that have been part of the Islamic world for a longer period of time (Arab provinces, Anatolia), as well as the flamboyant capital, Istanbul. On the other hand, text specialists relied on documents kept in contemporary Turkey's archives for a long period, tending to both neglect locally preserved collections and emphasize imperial discourses as well as centralizing interpretations.

In this context, and because they were constitutive elements of the development of the empire very early on, it could be understood that the Balkans were unified (politically, legally, economically, etc.) under the aegis of the Ottomans. However, this idea tends to be nuanced by a renewal of research, reassessing centre-periphery dynamics and focusing on local particularities. From this perspective, what can be said about materiality?

This panel will focus on one of the dimension intersecting various aspects of materiality in Islamic art, namely written culture. By bringing together four specialists of written productions - also familiar with the collections preserved by local institutions - this panel aims to offer an overview of recent research on the written culture of the Ottoman Balkans.

It will thus be a question of highlighting the local written productions and local writing practices, on different media (manuscripts and epigraphy as well as administrative documents and objects), without, however, decontextualizing: the links with the other parts of the Empire as well as with external areas are also a theme that will be addressed throughout the presentations, by investigating the circulation of objects and history of collections.

## Programme

### Rania Mohammad

*The Arabic documents at the Croatian archives (Dubrovnik and Zadar)*

There are several Arabic documents preserved in the archives of Dubrovnik and Zadar. These documents confirm the relationship between Dubrovnik (Ragusa) and the countries of North Africa, Egypt, Algeria, Libya and the Far Maghreb. These documents represent some aspects of diplomatic and commercial relations between the Republic of Dubrovnik and those countries. They were collected by the Bosnian researcher "Bassim Qarqut" between 1961 and 1969 AD, and it is important to analyze these documents and its information because they have not yet been fully studied, in order to know many aspects, including the political, social and economic aspects that these

documents dealt with, and how they respected and appreciated each other, as well as the way the rulers of those countries address him and what it reflects of the extent of cooperation between them.

Some of the documents sent from Egypt to the ruler of Dubrovnik during the time of the Mamluk and Ottoman sultans to support commercial relations and the establishment of a consulate for them in Alexandria and some rulings issued by the Sharia court in the Alexandrian port for reconciliation between some Egyptians and Dubrovnik merchants... Thus, among the issues that existed between the two parties, these documents are located between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.

As for the Tripoli documents, some of them are lease contracts for the Dubrovnik boat between two merchants and the owner of the boat in Tunisia, and it was terminated in Tripoli.

The Algerian documents are reconciliations between an Algerian merchant and the consul of Dubrovnik there, and the other is a certificate from a mother and her daughter that they received a sum of money from their slave to be free, which was paid for by the Dubrovnik consul there.

As for the Moroccan documents, the largest and the most numerous during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, they include the relations between Maghreb and Dubrovnik. They consisted of ten decrees and royal orders, seven letters between the sons of the sultans and their ambassadors, and six documents that were not issued by Morocco but related to the affairs of Morocco and the Republic of Dubrovnik, some of which are testimonies for pilgrims from Tunisia, Algeria and Tripoli, Morocco to praise the good treatment of Dubrovnik merchants during their return journey from the pilgrimage on the Dubrovnik ships from Alexandria to their countries at a time when the French ships did not treat them well and put them in the middle of the road... The people of Dubrovnik felt good towards the Muslims.

Therefore, it is important to republish these documents in detail with their analysis to support the good historical relations between Dubrovnik and its people and the countries of North Africa and to consolidate the relations between them in various aspects of life.

### **Tatjana Paić-Vukić**

*Personal notebooks from the Ottoman era in the Oriental Collection of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb*

In the Oriental Collection of the Archives of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts in Zagreb, which contains 2,100 manuscript books in Arabic, Ottoman Turkish and Persian, there are around 90 Ottoman personal notebooks (Tur. mecmua) of various contents. A precise number cannot be determined because the definition of personal notebook is quite fluid, and the criteria by which we distinguish a manuscript book from a notebook is mostly subjective.

Notebooks from the Oriental Collection come from the Balkans and date from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most of them are from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Some contain carelessly entered sporadic records, while others - fewer in number - are full of systematically written excerpts from readings, chronicle records, advice, sayings, records of events from family life, prayers, instructions for magical practices, etc. They comprise some local contents, from notes about events in the notebook owner's immediate surroundings to the local language, Bosnian, in which individual words and sometimes entire texts were written. These notebooks are valuable repositories of sources for the research into the history of the area where they were created, the history of mentality and the culture of reading and writing.

### **Silvana Rachieru**

*Adakale, the island between empires: archival collections and material culture for a regional history*

Adakale used to be an island on the Danube, at the border between Ottoman Empire, Habsburg Empire and Romanian Principalities. As a result of its

protection that has varied over time, Adakale was a political, military and cultural border and a meeting point of different cultures. Only in the past three centuries the island was an Austrian, then an Ottoman and finally a Romanian territory. Due to its unique character, as the only inhabited island on the Danube, and strategic location between different poles of power, Adakale determined the creation of an important archival collection, both produced on the island or in the main political centers from the neighbourhood.

After a general overview of Ottoman epigraphy in Romania, the presentation will focus on the collection of documents (18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century) from Adakale available in Romanian National Archives, both in Bucharest and departmental archives, as well as different examples of material culture available for research (dedicatory and funerary inscriptions, portable objects).

### **Vincent Thérouin**

#### *Monumental inscriptions in the Early Ottoman Balkans - preliminary considerations regarding the scripts and formal aspects*

By gaining an early foothold in Bulgaria, Macedonia and Northern Greece (during the 14<sup>th</sup> century), the Ottomans anchored the centre of the Balkan peninsula in a long-term relationship with the Islamicate world (and more precisely Anatolia), well before the establishment of their permanent authority over the neighbouring Balkan regions (Serbia, Albania, Greece, Bosnia). The 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, marked, from a political point of view, by challenges to the stability of the dynasty and, from a written point of view, by the canonization of practices and styles, will be materially marked in Bulgaria, Macedonia and Northern Greece by the emergence of prestigious constructions (mosques, zaviye-s, fortifications, among others) with numerous dedicatory inscriptions.

Many of these inscriptions have been inventoried and translated several times by different generations of researchers, generally in reaction to the destruction that characterised the history of these structures during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, few of them have been interested in the stylistic and formal aspects of the inscriptions, limiting themselves to the acquisition of factual data tracing the history of individuals or sites.

This presentation intends to offer preliminary considerations concerning a specific corpus of Ottoman inscriptions from Bulgaria, Macedonia and Northern Greece, studied through the prism of art history. It will look at the contexts of production and insertion within the structure, the used materials and techniques, and the formal examination of the texts. Finally, the shared characteristics and links with the other Ottoman peninsula, Anatolia, will be examined.