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CONFRONTI

MALIKA DEKKICHE

*New Diplomatic History and Mamluk Studies:
Challenges and Possibilities*

Abstract: While Mamluk scholars have increasingly studied on the diplomatic relations established between the sultanate and its various correspondents in both the Christian, Mongol and Muslim worlds, they have followed first the traditional diplomatic approach devoted to the study of peace and commercial treaties. More recently they have started distancing themselves from this approach to concentrate on questions of rituals, symbolic and non-verbal communication and various agents involved in the diplomatic process. This was however done without relating to broader methodological framework such as the one proposed by the New Diplomatic History (NDH). In this paper, I therefore would like to link those developments to the NDH and analyze what is, in that historiographic trend, relevant for the source material available in our field. Furthermore, I would like to link the NDH to another methodological approach that I see essential for our field, that of the connected history.

Keywords: *Mamluks, Islam, Connected History, Diplomacy*

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Introduction

In his most famous 2008 article “Toward a New Diplomatic history,” John Watkins highlighted and questioned one of the great biases of scholarship regarding non-European diplomacy in the premodern period, especially that of the Islamic world (“Arab and Ottoman powers”). Those “less important” or even “primitive” polities were barely in contact with their more advanced European counterparts, and were therefore less worth studying¹. This bias was not only spreading among Euro-

¹ J. Watkins, *Towards a New Diplomatic History of Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, «Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies», 38 (2008), pp. 1-14: partic. p. 4.

peanists, but was also highly supported by specialists of the region who advocated for the “isolationist” nature of Islamicate polities. This had obviously quite a harmful impact on the development of the field of premodern Islamic diplomacy.

This was however not the only bias. Another one has in fact influenced the field even more and with a much longstanding effect: the so-called Islamic conception of the world. In this view, the world is divided between the house of Islam and the house of war, and dominated by the jihad practice. Accordingly, the Islamic world had to spread to the entire world and therefore, could not live at peace with the non-Muslim world. In this context, diplomacy appears thus as a totally irrelevant means. This theory had not only a great impact on how Islamic polities supposedly interacted with their non-Muslim counterparts, but it also denied them any internal contact as, the Islamicate world is, according to this conception, one and unified. To make things worse, the extant of traditional diplomatic documents we have – as few as they are – strictly concerned contacts between Muslim polities and non-Muslim (mostly Christian) polities, and actually dealt with conflict resolutions (or commercial agreements). This thus only supported the bias further.

That is to say that in 2008, when Watkins article came out, his call to reappraise Islamic-European diplomacy nearly did not find any echo. Nearly, but not entirely, as there is indeed one field that took up the challenge, namely Ottoman studies. It seems in fact that the field of Ottoman studies in the Early Modern period is quite a prolific laboratory of diplomatic studies, one in which both Europeanists and Ottomanists could grow alongside and together². The Medieval period and its numerous Islamic powers however, has stayed deaf to the call. Or at least until recently.

² *Diplomatic Cultures at the Ottoman Court, c. 1500-1630*, cur. T. A. Sowerby, C. Markiewicz, New York - London 2021, is the latest and most updated example of the work that developed in the field.

Before moving to the recent development of the field, I would like first to briefly review the traditional trends and their limits, in order to highlight some of the reasons for this supposed disinterest for diplomatic history in the field of “Medieval” Islamic studies. I will then move to discuss some of the important debates and current evolutions within the field and finally, I will focus on the progress that have been made in Mamluk studies, which have shown promising avenues of inquiry and results.

Islamicate world and Diplomatic History: an overview

Before starting however, it is important to highlight one of the major problems regarding the study of the Islamicate world during the premodern period (pre-1500s), as it has a great impact not only on historical studies in general, but more importantly for us here, on diplomatic history too. It is indeed well known that the Islamicate world, before the rise of the Ottoman empire, has not left us any archives, similar to those we find in Europe in the same period. We have thus to rely mostly on chronicles, and other more normative sources to study the diplomatic exchanges that took place at the various Islamic courts. The historiography of the time knew itself many developments between the 10th and the 13th century, and the way authors have recorded and dealt with diplomatic contacts in not always regular, not uniform. More importantly even, this recording is only partial and highly bias. Next to the chronicles, there were also over time more and more normative works produced that also discussed diplomacy, or at least a type of “international” contacts and how those ought to be regulated. Despite this paucity of “traditional” diplomatic material however, scholars were nevertheless quite interested on studies on Diplomacy, and this from early on.

Diplomatic history of the Islamicate world has even been among the early field of study to develop, as it obviously involved the relationship of Islam with the outside world. That field, that should or could thus have a great legacy, developed

however as one of the most traditional and static discipline. One of the reasons for this is certainly the great focus devoted to the legal basis of the diplomatic contact as it was established based on the examples and precedents of the Prophet. Following that line, the study of diplomacy was understood as related to the spread of the divine mission (*risāla*) and the concept of mediation (*sifāra*). Both concepts are still associated to diplomacy until today, as the envoy (*rasul*) carrying the mission, is one of the most used terms to designate the messenger (not only the messenger of God, both also messenger of the kings), and *sifārah* designated nowadays the embassy. Given this somehow restrictive understanding of *diplomacy* thus, the field has developed as to focus mostly on the Law of War, and by extension, the Law of Peace as well. Following the model of the Classical Muslim jurists who have elaborated on that topic, scholars thus tend today to focus on specific aspects, such as the status of foreigners and non-Muslim communities (*dhimmīs*) in Islamic territory, treaty-making, commercial relations, and arbitration³.

The examples and precedents of the Prophet and the early caliphs represented thus the basis of Diplomatic studies from the origin, and accordingly, the field developed first as a history of the delegations exchanged by the Prophet and later on the caliphs, with non-Muslim powers, in order to primarily call them to Islam, to conclude treaties, pay tribute and ransom prisoners. That is to say, that the field strictly followed an understanding of diplomacy that is dictated by the so-called Islamic conception of the world, and that responds to the rule prescribed by the *Siyar* (commonly referred to as *Islamic International law*)⁴. Though more flexible than the Islamic Law (*shari‘a*)

³ See for example M. Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam*, Clark - New Jersey 2010; M. B. A. Ismail, *Islamic Law and Transnational Diplomatic Law. A Quest for Complementarity in Divergent Legal Theories*, London 2016.

⁴ L. A. Bsoul, *Islamic Diplomacy: Views of the Classical Jurists*, in *Islam and International Law. Engaging Self-Centrism from a Plurality of Perspectives*, cur. M. L. Frick, A. Th. Müller, Leiden - Boston 2013, pp. 127-145; M. Khad-

in term of its sources of interpretation – with for example a greater focus given to public interest and customs⁵, the *Siyar* nevertheless complies with the common understanding of a confessional borders between the two worlds, and is concerned that the interaction between the two conforms to that rule. Prime among those is of course the question of the immunity and inviolability of the messengers going from one world to the other, with a focus on the granting of *aman* or safe-conduct⁶.

What has attracted most scholarly attention however are the rules for treaty making, which is considered by Islamic jurists as the founding principle of diplomatic law in Islam. This tradition goes back to and, more importantly, is based on the precedent of the famous Treaty of Ḥudaybiyya that was concluded in 628 between the Prophet Muhammad and the Quraysh tribe of Mecca⁷. Among the major points of discussion are of course the duration of the treaty (as no permanent peace condition was legally possible in Islam), the status of the various parties involved, as well as the rules of reciprocity that underlined all diplomatic contacts⁸. The study of the treaties, of truce, but also increasingly of trade, is therefore dominant in the field, as it supposedly constituted the usual mode of interaction between a Muslim polity and a non-Muslim one. One would therefore not be surprised that Islamic diplomacy was thus for most of the time restricted to the study of those contacts. And of course, it is logically that scholars' attention soon moved to Islam's relation with its most imposing neighbor, the Byzantine empire.

duri, *The Islamic Law of Nations. Shaybānī's Siyar*, Baltimore 1966, p. 17; S. A. Romahi, *Studies in International Law and Diplomatic Practice with Introduction to Islamic Law*, Tokyo 1980; Khadduri, *War and Peace* cit.; Ismail, *Islamic Law* cit.; Y. Istanbuli, *Diplomacy and Diplomatic Practice in the Early Islamic Era*, Oxford 2001.

⁵ Ismail, *Islamic Law* cit., pp. 59-62.

⁶ Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-a'sbā*, 13:321. Also see J. Wansbrough, *The Safe-Conduct in Muslim Chancery*, «Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies», 34/1 (1971), pp. 20-35.

⁷ Ismail, *Islamic Law* cit., p. 98.

⁸ Ismail, *Islamic Law* cit., p. 75.

The study of the diplomatic contacts between the caliphates (Umayyad and Abbasid) and the Byzantine empire in fact represents another kind of precedent in the way diplomatic studies of the Islamic world developed. This history, mostly based on the investigation of the chronicles, is first and foremost on the model of a *histoire événementielle* of the contacts between the two polities.

The various embassies and their motives were cautiously recorded and organized in so-called phases of development of the relation⁹. Whereas the phases of conflicts and their resolutions through treaties are of course predominant, scholars increasingly observed and switched their focus to the peaceful contacts that took place on both side of the confrontation period. During those periods, many contacts took place, that had as primary goal the exchanges of prisoners, but that also progressively gave place to a peaceful mode of communication and interaction. It is during this period that some sort of *Cultural diplomacy* operated between the two courts, which is also viewed by scholars as another way to assess legitimacy and compete for supremacy over the region¹⁰. Now whereas we can question the true nature of those accounts found in chronicles, which often appeared to have been more *topoi*, used to address an internal audience, those accounts nevertheless show that diplomacy had an important role to play in authors' mind.

Be that as it may, what is for us here of the greatest importance is that through the switch of focus towards *Cultural Diplomacy*, instead of the traditional pair "Conflict/Diplomacy," scholars were able to focus on new themes and topics, not covered previously. Several important aspects of the diplomatic contact are then put into light. First and foremost are the ceremonial aspects and all their splendors, including the material

⁹ H. N. Kennedy, *Byzantine-Arab diplomacy in the Near East from the Islamic conquests to the mid eleventh century*, in *Byzantine Diplomacy*, cur. J. Shepard, S. Franklin, Aldershot 1992, pp. 133-143.

¹⁰ N. M. El-Cheikh, *Muhammad and Heraclius: a study in legitimacy*, «*Studia Islamica*», 89 (1999), pp. 5-21.

culture attached to it. Within the latter, the exchanges of gifts are particularly appealing¹¹. Next to the material aspect, the human component is also increasingly studied, especially the central figure of the exchanges, the ambassador. Next to the chronicles that of course mentioned him, his role within the mission and sometimes his excellent or poor qualities, we find around the 10th century in the Islamic world, various sources that deal partially or completely with that function. The *Book of the Messengers of the Kings* (*Kitāb rusul al-Mulūk*) by Ibn al-Farrā' is a famous – though unique – example¹². Other works belonging to this genre of *Advice literature* also increasingly include references to the ambassador and his important role as representative of his king abroad, attesting thus of the importance of the function by then¹³.

Through the study of Islamic powers' diplomatic relationship with the Byzantine Empire, the field of diplomatic studies has thus greatly expanded. From the mere studies of the treaties and negotiation at time of conflict, the field has switched to a peaceful mode of interaction, that is not only full of symbolic

¹¹ Anthony Cutler has been particularly active in that field, with original studies devoted to the gift culture involved among the two courts. Two most famous contributions are his *Gifts and gift exchange as aspects of the Byzantine, Arab, and related economies*, «Dumbarton Oaks Papers», 55 (2001), pp. 247-278, and *Significant gifts: patterns of exchange in Late Antique, Byzantine, and early Islamic diplomacy*, «Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies», 38/1 (2008), pp. 79-101.

¹² The importance of the work was first highlighted by the Syrian scholar Ṣalāh al-Dīn al-Munajjid who edited it in 1947 (reprinted in 1972). It was made known to an even broader public in 2015, through the translation (and annotation) done by M. Vaiou, *Diplomacy in the Early Islamic World A Tenth-Century Treatise on Arab-Byzantine Relations. The Book of Messengers of Kings (Kitāb Rusul al-Mulūk) of Ibn al-Farrā'*, London - New York 2015.

¹³ *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings. The Siyar al-Mulūk or Siyasat-nama of Niẓām al-Mulūk*, ed. H. Darke, London 2002; Al-ʿAbbāsī, *Athār al-uwal fi tartīb al-duwal*, Beyrouth 1989, pp. 191-195; Al-Qalqashandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aʿshā* 6, pp. 358-361.

communication and ceremonial, but that also supports the establishment of legitimacy and consequently ideologies. Next to the caliphs and emperors, other actors involved in the contacts are also given more and more attention, such as the ambassadors, but also increasingly, the merchants – though the latter are sadly less documented. These various lines of inquiry have thus set the trends for the study of diplomacy in the Islamic world, though they did not entirely get rid of the longstanding focus on the treaty making. This is particularly striking looking at yet another favorite subject of inquiry in the field of Islamic Diplomacy, namely the period of the Crusades.

Until the past decade, the period of Frankish venture in the Levant was mostly studied from the perspective of Holy War and the Jihad, with consequently a great focus the Law of War. The historiography of that period has in fact, from both sides, cultivated an antagonist narrative on the model of “We vs. Them” and more importantly “Christianity vs. Islam” that still resonates until today. Following that approach, previous scholarship has mostly focus on the study of the confrontations and the treaties¹⁴. We had to wait the year 2000’s with the increasing “pluralist” approach to Crusading studies, to observe not only a reintegration of the Islamic perspective within the greater narrative, but also for scholars to take some distance from the antagonist approach to focus on the mode of coexistence. That scholarship indeed pointed at a world, that was much more complex, and importantly, much more permeable to the Other than once thought. The study of diplomacy during that period has thus shown the development of complex mechanism that

¹⁴ Surprisingly Arabists are rather later comers in the field of Crusading studies, but they have generally followed the pattern established by “Europeanists”: Check Hamilton Gibb, Claude Cahen (and students), Lyons and Jackson (1982); Möhring (1980); Emmanuel Sivan (1968).

matches the *realpolitik* of the time, and that could be characterized of a sort of *Cross-cultural diplomacy*¹⁵.

The establishment of a *modus vivendi* between the Franks and Muslim polities in Syria and Egypt has thus demonstrated the open character of Islamic diplomacy. This has important consequences for the study of diplomacy. First of all, those studies have pointed at a much greater diversity of the diplomatic actors involved in Diplomacy. Whereas scholarship had previously mostly focused on the diplomatic contacts established by the caliphs, with foreign kings or emperors, the period of the Crusades revealed a much diverse palette of Islamic polities eligible to deal with the Frankish rulers. Furthermore, those studies have also showed the development of a shared culture of concluding and drafting treaties, that could be accepted and understood by both Islamic and Christian traditions. But the true legacy of the period resides in the increasing contact attested between the Islamic polities in Syria and Egypt with the Italian mercantile communities, which would truly set the basis of later contacts between the Islamic world and Latin Christian Europe.

If the 200 years of Frankish settlement in the Levant have had a great historiographic impact, that has shaped most of the bias of our perception of the relationship between Islam and Christianity, they however barely altered the Islamic world.

This was quite different from the most traumatic event experienced by the Muslim communities at the time at the hands of the Mongols. With the Mongol invasions of the early 13th century indeed, it is indeed an entirely new page that is turned for the Islamic world. This starts of course with the destruction of Baghdad and the collapse of the Abbasid caliphate, which put an end to six centuries of Islamic domination in the region. But it is also the subsequent opening of Asia to Latin

¹⁵ M. Köhler, *Alliances and Treaties between Frankish and Muslim Rulers in the Middle East: Cross-Cultural Diplomacy in the Period of the Crusades*, Leiden - Boston 2013.

Christian merchants and travelers, increasing mobility and contacts in the region tremendously. Within the Islamicate world itself, we enter a period of great institutional and socio-cultural transformations, as well as of great challenges and questioning. Surprisingly (or not), this period is also one of great opportunity for various groups and trends that were able to develop and spread, give rise to an extremely rich culture in many domains. This is during that time that the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt and Syria came to power (1250-1517). I will now turn to this power and its relevance for not only diplomatic studies, but more particularly for the New Diplomatic History (NDH).

Mamluk Studies

The presentation of the evolution of Diplomatic studies of the Islamicate world above has shown that that field of study has for the longest time followed the traditional path of the “Old” Diplomatic history. One that is concentrated on the re-constitution of a sort of national history, here under religious (i.e. Muslim vs. Christian) or regional (i.e. East vs. West) labels. Scholarship, be it the one supporting the conflict theory or the peaceful narrative, usually looks at the conclusion of treaties, negotiation process between political entities. Sometimes, when sources allow it, scholars expand towards a study of cultural diplomacy and of the actors, such as the ambassadors, that were involved in the diplomatic contacts. But even then, the material available stays quite limited and does not seem to have much to offer for the methodology promoted by the NDH. This however could theoretically change if we consider the period starting in the 13th century, and this particularly if we look at the Mamluk sultanate.

This power, that is in fact quite atypical even within the History of the Islamicate world, is exceptional in many aspects. First and foremost, the Sultanate was the only stable power in the region during some 250 years. Due to its famous victories against both the Crusaders and the Mongols, it acquired a certain prestige within the Islamicate world, both on the Eastern

and Western sides. Second, it was located in Egypt-Syria-Hijaz, and therefore not only dominated pilgrimage sites for both Muslim and Christian communities, but maybe more importantly, was as the crossroads of Indian and Mediterranean trades, which it dominated through the establishment of monopolies. Those two aspects of course demonstrate how the Mamluk Sultanate was an ideal diplomatic interlocutor for both Muslim and non-Muslim (i.e., Christian and Mongol) polities. But what makes it even more exceptional is that, unlike many of its predecessors or contemporaries, that power has produced an incredible number of sources, many of which have survived. Those sources mostly belong to historiography, but remarkably, we do possess for this rule many administrative sources as well, that are narrative, documentary and even archival. There are many reasons for the explosion of this source production, from a kind of “democratization” of knowledge to the encyclopedic trends of the time, but this should not occupy us here. What is however striking is that all those sources provide us with a very vivid picture of the diplomatic relations that were taking place in the Mamluk realm, especially in its capital, Cairo.

It is therefore not surprising that the field interested scholars from early on, though it was again in a more traditional way. Early research indeed tends to focus on the archival material kept in Europe, especially in Spain and Italy, and thus naturally look at the Mediterranean trade. Already in the late 1930s, Aziz Suryal Atiya published his *Egypt and Aragon: Embassies and diplomatic correspondence between 1300 and 1330 A.D.*, which was based on the Arabic documents kept in Barcelona in the Archives of the Crown of Aragon¹⁶. Thirty years later, it was the turn of the Italian archive of Venice to reveal its potential through John Wansbrough’s studies. In 1961, this scholar had submitted his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of London on the commercial relationship between Egypt and Venice in the 15th century,

¹⁶ A. S. Atiya, *Egypt and Aragon: Embassies and diplomatic correspondence between 1300 and 1330 A.D.*, Leipzig 1938.

which will lead to several publications on that theme during that decade. Those studies aimed first and foremost to present, edit, translate and study various documents, letters and treaties, that dealt with commerce and trade negotiation at the time¹⁷. Wansbrough was however more interest in diplomatics and trade, than in diplomacy itself, even though his article on a Mamluk ambassador in Venice, will have a great impact in the future, as we will see¹⁸.

Wansbrough's studies were emblematic of two trends. One related to an earlier interest at the time for diplomatics in the 1960s, especially in the field of Fatimid studies, which led to the publication of Fatimid decrees and petitions by Samuel M. Stern, followed by a couple of studies on Ayyubid and Mamluk documents¹⁹. The second trend concerns the increasing focus of scholars for Mediterranean trade, and consequently on the commercial relations that took place between the Mamluk sultans, Italians mercantile powers and the Crown of Aragon. Elyahu Ashtor's *Levant trade in the later Middle Age* is one of the

¹⁷ J. Wansbrough, *Documents for the History of Commercial Relations between Egypt and Venice, 1442-1512*, Ph.D. Dissertation University of London 1961; Id., *A Mamluk letter of 877/1473*, «Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies», 24/2 (1961), pp. 200-213; Id., *Venice and Florence in the Mamluk commercial privileges*, «Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies», 28/3 (1965), pp. 483-523. Id., *A Mamluk commercial treaty concluded with the republic of Florence, 894/1489*, in *Documents from Islamic chanceries*, cur. S. M. Stern, Oxford 1965, pp. 39-79.

¹⁸ J. Wansbrough, *A Mamluk ambassador to Venice in 913/1507*, «Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies», 26/3 (1963), pp. 503-530.

¹⁹ S. M. Stern, *A Fāṭimid Decree of the Year 524/1130*, «Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies», 23/3 (1960), pp. 439-455; Id., *Three Petitions of the Fatimid Period*, «Oriens», 15 (1962), pp. 172-209; Id., *Fāṭimid Decrees. Original Documents from the Fāṭimid Chancery*, London 1964; Id., *Two Ayyubid decrees from Sinai*, in *Documents From Islamic Chanceries*, cur. S. M. Stern, London 1965, pp. 9-38; Id., *Petitions from the Mamluk Period (Notes on the Mamluk Documents from Sinai)*, «Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies», 29/2 (1966), pp. 233-276.

famous large-scale examples of this trends²⁰, but there was in the 1980s and 1990s a consequent effort from scholars to publish and study most of the commercial treaties involved between those powers²¹. One way or the other however, we see in those studies a strict focus on the publication of the document and on the modalities that developed in the making of those commercial treaties, with only a minor concern for broader diplomatic aspects.

If trade was of course an important aspect of Mamluk contacts with Latin Christians, one should not forget that this period was also one of intense confrontation on the military field as well. This is obvious from scholarship from before the year 2000's, which follows the trends described earlier, namely the study of the treaties and peace resolution, and this primarily in the case of inter-confessional relations. The fact that the Mamluk Sultanate came to power while defeating the two major enemies of Islam at the time is of course not coincidental. Their victories in Mansura in 1250 against the Crusaders and 'Ayn Jālūt in 1260 against the Mongols were crucial to the establishment of their power respectively in Egypt and Greater Syria, and they were consequently being used as legitimizing principle for those slave-soldiers who had greatly benefits of these various external challenges to impose themselves above their patron through a military *coup*. It is thus logical that scholars have

²⁰ E. Ashtor, *Levant trade in the later middle ages*, Princeton 1983. This monograph was preceded by a collected essays volume on the same theme: Id., *Studies on the Levantine trade in the middle ages*, London 1978.

²¹ P. M. Holt, *Qalāwīn's treaty with Genoa in 1290*, «Der Islam», 57 (1980), pp. 101-108; Id., *al-Nāṣir Muḥammad's letter to a Spanish ruler in 699/1300*, «al-Masāq», 3 (1990), pp. 23-29; Id., *The Mamluk sultanate and Aragon: The treaties of 689/1290 and 692/1293*, «Tārīḥ», 2 (1992), pp. 105-118; D. Coulon, *Le Commerce barcelonais avec la Syrie et l'Égypte d'après les actes du notaire Tomàs de Bellmunt (1402-1416)*, in *Le Partage du monde: échanges et colonisation dans la Méditerranée médiévale*, cur. M. Ballard, A. Duccellier, Paris 1998, pp. 203-229; D. S. Richards, *A late Mamluk document concerning Frankish commercial practice at Tripoli*, «Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies», 62/1 (1999), pp. 21-35.

first concentrate on that aspect. It is however striking that save for Peter M. Holt's study *Early Mamluk Diplomacy* on Mamluk's treaties with the Franks during the reigns of the first two sultans Baybars and Qalāwūn²², that clearly refers to Diplomacy, studies of the late 1990's usually concentrate on the warlike aspect. This is for example the case of the classical Mongol-Mamluk study by Reuven Amitai, which is entitled *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Īlkhānid war, 1260-1281*²³, or Shai Har-El's study of Ottoman-Mamluk confrontation, *Struggle for Domination in the Middle East. The Ottoman-Mamluk War, 1485-91*²⁴. It seems thus that generally Diplomacy was not considered as a usual practice of the Sultanate, and when it was, it was seen from the rather limited perspective of treaty making.

If the Latin Christian powers and Mongols attracted the most scholarly attention, there was also very early on an interest

²² P. M. Holt, *Early Mamluk diplomacy (1260-1290): Treaties of Baybars and Qalāwūn with Christian Rulers*, Leiden 1995. This monograph was preceded by a series of articles on particular treaties: P. M. Holt, *Mamluk-Frankish diplomatic relations in the reign of Baybars (658-76/1260-77)*, «Nottingham Medieval Studies», 32 (1988), pp. 180-95; P. M. Holt, *Mamluk-Frankish diplomatic relations in the reign of Qalāwūn (678-89/1279-90)*, «Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society», 2 (1989), pp. 278-289; Id., *Qalāwūn's treaty with Acre in 1283*, «English Historical Review», 91 (1976), pp. 802-812; Id., *Qalāwūn's treaty with the Latin kingdom (682/1283): Negotiation and abrogation*, in *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk eras (Proceedings of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd International Colloquium, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, May, 1992, 1993, and 1994)*, cur. U. Vermeulen, D. De Smet, Leuven 1995, pp. 325-334; P. M. Holt, *The treaties of the early Mamluk sultans with the Frankish states*, «Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies», 43 (1980), pp. 67-76; Id., *Treaties between the Mamluk Sultans and the Frankish authorities*, in *XIX. Deutscher Orientalistentag: Vorträge, (Freiburg im Breisgau, 28 September-4 October 1975)*, cur. W. Voigt, Wiesbaden 1977, pp. 474-476.

²³ R. Amitai, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Īlkhānid war, 1260-1281*, Cambridge 1995.

²⁴ S. Har-El, *Struggle for Domination in the Middle East. The Ottoman-Mamluk War, 1485-91*, Leiden - New York 1995.

on the contacts with other realms, such as Armenia²⁵ and the Byzantines²⁶, but also western Islamic lands²⁷. Those studies, even though not based on archival materials but on copies of documents kept in chancery manuals or collections of letters nevertheless followed the trends described above. This was however going to change at the turn of the year 2000s, and this in several directions, as we will see²⁸.

NDH and Mamluk Diplomatic Studies: Parallel trajectories?

By the time of the publication of Watkins' article, the field of Medieval Islamic Diplomatic studies was in fact busy with its own set of challenges and internal transformation, one that was quite far from the guidelines promoted by the new discipline. Indeed, what was keeping scholars busy in 2007 was not so much the study of "Diplomacy," but rather another aspect of Diplomatic studies, namely *diplomatics*. For the first time since

²⁵ M. Canard, *Le Royaume d'Arménie-Cilicie et les Mamlouks jusqu'au traité de 1285*, «Revue des études arméniennes», 4 (1967), pp. 217-259.

²⁶ M. Canard, *Le Traité de 1281 entre Michel Paléologue et le Sultan Qalā' un, Qalqashandī, Ṣubḥ al-a'shā'*, «Byzantion», 10 (1935), pp. 669-680; Id., *Les Relations diplomatiques entre Byzance et l'Égypte dans le Ṣubḥ al-A'shā' de Qalqashandī*, in *Atti del XIX Congresso Internazionale degli Orientalisti* (Roma, 23-29 settembre 1935), Roma 1935, pp. 579-580.

²⁷ M. Canard, *Les Relations entre les Mérinides et les Mamelouks au xiv^e siècle*, «AIÉOA», 5 (1939-1941), pp. 41-81; M. Chapoutot-Remadi, *Les Relations entre l'Égypte et l'Ifrīqiya aux XIII^e et xiv^e siècle d'après les autres [sic] Mamlūks*, in *Actes du premier congrès d'histoire et de la civilisation du Maghreb/Ashghāl al-mu'tamar al-annwal li-tārikh al-Maghrib al-'arabi wa-ḥaḍāratih*, I, (Tunis, December 1974), Tunis 1979, pp. 139-159; G. S. Colin, *Contribution à l'étude des relations diplomatiques entre les musulmans d'Occident et l'Égypte au xv^e siècle*, in *Mélanges Maspero*, III, Le Caire 1940, pp. 197-206.

²⁸ On the latest developments of the field see M. Dekkiche, *Mamluk Diplomacy: the present state of Research*, in *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies. Studies in Diplomacy and Diplomatics*, cur. F. Bauden, M. Dekkiche, Leiden - Boston 2019, pp. 105-182, and more generally, the entire *Mamluk Cairo* volume.

Claude Cahen's 1963 call for the development of the field of Diplomatics in Arab-Islamic studies and the publication of Samuel M. Stern's *Fatimid Decrees*²⁹, a volume was published in the *Annales Islamologiques*, that was entirely devoted to that discipline and was calling for its (re-)establishment³⁰.

At the basis of the debate underlying this trend was of course the already mentioned problem of lack of original documents in the field of Medieval Islamic studies, which scholars started to question and nuance. According to them, the lack of archives did not equal the lack of documents, as there were plenty of documents available both in original form and through copies, which had a great value not only for the study of diplomacy, but even more importantly, for the study of diplomatics. Unsurprisingly, many of the scholars involved in this movement belonged to the field of Mamluk studies. As just mentioned, what set the Mamluk sultanate apart from previous or even contemporary realms, is indeed the source material available. Next to the classical chronicles – which constitute the primary sources for the study of diplomacy in the medieval Islamic world – we do possess for this power numerous archival sources kept in European lands, as well as many administrative sources – chancery manuals and *inshā'* collections – that have kept copies of original documents now lost.

If those concerns may seem odd to an external audience, one should never forget that the field of Islamic studies (previously better known as Oriental studies) developed first and foremost among philologists, who give a great attention to

²⁹ C. Cahen, *Notes de diplomatique arabo-musulmane*, «Journal Asiatique», 251 (1963), pp. 311-325. Efforts to develop Arabic Islamic diplomatics have been made within the Fatimid studies in the 1960s, especially by Samuel M. Stern. See for example his S. M. Stern, *Fatimid Decrees. Original Documents from the Fatimid Chancery*, London 1964.

³⁰ M. Favereau, *Dossier: Les Conventions diplomatiques dans le monde musulman. L'Umma en partage (1258-1517)*, «Annales Islamologiques», 41 (2007), pp. 11-20. This volume focuses on the diplomatic conventions, and thus the relation between diplomatics and diplomacy.

the edition and translation of texts. Documents however were traditionally not included into the philologists' tasks, but rather were the prerogative of the papyrologists³¹. Due to the increasing focus on copies of documents kept in manuscript collections however, but also the discovery of original chancery documents reused as draft paper in Arabic manuscripts, philologists and historians in the field realized the need to better understand diplomats' rule.

Those discussions concerning the development of diplomatics, far from being antiquarian, have had a great impact on two consequent developments in the Islamicate studies: one concerns the reappraisal of the concept of Archives and Archival practices in the Islamicate world, and more importantly for the subject of this paper, it created a new craze for diplomatic studies in general.

This not only led scholars to reevaluate the previous work done on documents, in a new and innovative way, but more importantly it opened the field to an entire new world of possibilities. One is of course the increasing efforts in developing studies in diplomatics, which not only contributed to a better understanding of chancery practices and rules for document writing³², but which also encouraged scholars to use copies of doc-

³¹ One of the most active scholar in that field is G. Khan, *A Copy of a Decree from the Archives of the Fāṭimid Chancery in Egypt*, «Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies», 49 (1986), pp. 439-453; Id., *The historical development of the Structure of the Medieval Arabic Petitions*, «Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies», 53/1 (1990), pp. 8-30; Id., *Bills, Letters and Deeds: Arabic papyri of the 7th to 11th centuries*, New York 1993; Id., *Arabic Papyri in The codicology of Islamic manuscripts: proceedings of the Second Conference of Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 4-5 December 1993*, cur. Y. Dutton, London 1995, pp. 1-16. Id., *Arabic Legal and Administrative Documents in the Cambridge Genizah Collections*, Cambridge 2006. But more generally on Arabic papyrology see the work of Andreas Kaplony, who also directs the Arabic Papyrology Database with Petra M. Sijpesteijn and other.

³² A pioneer in the study of Mamluk document and diplomatics is Donald S. Richards who published extensively in that field, especially for

uments kept in chancery manuals and collections of letters. The focus on the latter will help the field developing further as the material kept there mostly focused on intra-Muslim diplomatic exchanges, a field that was until then greatly neglected.

Following the *Annales Islamologiques* volume of 2007, the major line of inquiry thus was to try to establish what the diplomatic conventions of Islamic polities were. With the broadening of the source materials to copies of letters kept in chancery manuals and collection of letters, scholars were for once able to focus on the diplomatic exchanges taking place within the Islamic world itself, as those collections have predominantly kept copies of letters and documents exchanged between Islamic polities.

While those corpora have been known for a while already, they were mostly looked at from a literary perspective, or sometimes for their contents. But for the first time here, there were consistently looked at for their diplomatic features.

A year later, 2008, two other monographs were published that show some parallel developments of Islamic diplomatic studies. Adrian Gully's *The Culture of Letter-Writing*³³ and Anne F. Broadbridge's *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol World*³⁴, were indeed important contributions that set the basis for future research focus: the diplomatic correspondence and the use of diplomacy in Islam as a means to establish kingship and ideology.

internal documents: D. S. Richards, *Documents from Sinai Concerning Mainly Cairene Property*, «Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient», 28 (1985), pp. 225-293; Id., *A Mamlūk Emir's Square Decree*, «Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies», 54/1 (1991), pp. 63-67; Id., *A Late Mamluk Document Concerning Frankish Commercial Practice at Tripoli*, «Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies», 62/1 (1999), pp. 21-35; Id., *Mamluk Administrative Documents from St Catherine's Monastery*, Leuven - Paris - Walpole 2011.

³³ A. Gully, *The Culture of Letter Writing in Pre-Modern Islamic Society*, Edinburgh 2008.

³⁴ A. F. Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol Worlds*, Cambridge 2008.

Following those two trends, my own doctoral work at the time, developed further those lines in combination with a focus on diplomatic convention and diplomatics³⁵.

Since that period, studies on Islamicate diplomacy in the later Medieval period never ceased to expand, this especially in the field of Mamluk studies. Whereas the study of diplomacy was previously restricted to the study of the treaty of peace or of trade as we have seen, the new material investigated revealed a broader palette of themes and topics involved in the practice of diplomacy within the Islamicate world. The definition or the concept of diplomacy itself appears thus as a much broader process of elite communication, based on the exchanges of embassies and letters, than just merely a means to end or prevent conflict.

Its medium of communication, the letter, was thus central to the diplomatic contact, and became the center of attention of scholarship. With the increasing focus on diplomatics mentioned earlier, scholars started investigating the convention for drafting letters, and what those had to reveal regarding the dynamics of the contacts. My own research focused on the semi-otic value of the letters, has for example shown how the format of the letters was used by Islamic chanceries to establish a hierarchy of status among the correspondents³⁶. But more importantly, the study of diplomatics has demonstrated how letters contributed to the establishment of sovereignty³⁷, how they

³⁵ M. Dekkiche, *Le Caire, Carrefour des ambassades. Étude historique et diplomatique de la correspondance échangée entre les sultans mamlouks circassiens et les souverains timourides et turcomans (Qara Qoyunlu-Qaramanides) au XV^es. d'après le BnF ms. Ar. 4440*, 2 voll., Ph.D. dissertation, University of Liège (2011).

³⁶ M. Dekkiche, *Diplomatics, or another Way to See the World*, in *Mamluk Cairo* cit., pp. 185-213.

³⁷ L. Reinfandt, *Strong Letters at the Mamluk Court*, in *Mamluk Cairo* cit., pp. 214-237.

acted as legitimating means and how they supported the ideologies throughout the various courts³⁸.

With this craze for diplomatic studies within the Islamicate world and the new focus on the non-verbal communication, chronicles were also investigated anew. Scholars increasingly devoted their attention to the rich and complex ceremonial displayed during the reception of emissaries by the various court and the material culture, with a focus on the ambassador role, their lodgings, and the exchanges of gifts³⁹. While some of those developments surely resonate to specialists in the NDH, none of those studies and trends mentioned however make any reference to that field, nor do they attest of its existence, or at least not until recently. It is of course difficult to provide any concrete reason or explanation to these parallel trajectories, but we can only be glad the two have finally met as the field of Islamicate diplomacy has a lot to gain from this methodology, as I will now show.

NDH and Mamluk Diplomatic Studies: A Connected Approach

Putting the spotlight on non-European diplomacy can not only help us to understand intra-Asian or intra-African diplomacy in their own right but will also shed light on why Europe was anomalous too. Diplomacy also has much to offer global history and its methods. Global history tends to focus on empire, long-distance trade, migration, biological exchange, material culture and the globalization of knowledge but rarely looks at diplomatic interactions. Yet studies of diplomacy can offer important into global connectedness and information communities. Too often,

³⁸ Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology* cit.

³⁹ *La Correspondance entre souverains, princes et cites-États: Approches croisées en l'Orient musulman, l'Occident latin et Byzance (XIII^e-début XIV^e siècle)*, cur. D. Aigle, S. Péquignot, Turnhout 2013; D. Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising Diplomacy in the Mamluk Sultanate: Gifts and Material Culture in the medieval Islamic world*, London - New York 2014; *Mamluk Cairo* cit.; *Material Culture and diplomatic contacts between the Latin West, Byzance and the Islamic East (11th-15th cent.)*, cur. F. Bauden, Leiden - Boston 2021.

scholars analyse a diplomatic relationship by looking at it from one end of what was a two-way relationship. Analysing it from the point of view of both partners will produce a more sophisticated understanding of specific international relationships. Even more importantly, more comparative studies will help the field to advance by creating a body of work that permits scholars to draw conclusions about bigger patterns in diplomatic practice based on religion, the type of polity and the region(s) in which diplomatic relations were occurring⁴⁰.

Discussing the future of the NDH, Tracey A. Sowerby rightly pointed at the need to switch focus to non-European diplomacy, and to approach this from the perspective of global history. In what follows, I would like to develop that further, highlighting not only the great potential of intra-Muslim contacts from a global diplomatic perspective, but also more importantly I would like to propose a more promising methodology, than the comparative one mentioned in the quote, namely the Connected history.

As just stated above, what set the Mamluk sultanate apart from previous or even contemporary realms, is the number and variety of the source material available. Next to the chronicles, and documentary material available (both original or in copies), the Mamluk period also produced many other works that could be used to study diplomatic contacts, such as the so-called Advice and panegyric literature, Epic literature, topographical works, and last but not least, prosopographical works, such as the biographical dictionaries. Scholars have usually restricted themselves to the use of one or the other sources, leaving aside those that did not belong to the traditional diplomatic sources (i.e., documents, chronicles). Mamluk sources however have revealed the great potential of alternative sources, especially if one wishes to go beyond the traditional diplomatic approach. Finally, whereas Mamluk diplomatic study usually followed the unilateral trends –that is the study of the contacts based on

⁴⁰ T. A. Sowerby, *Early Modern Diplomatic History*, «History Compass», 14/9 (2016), pp. 448-449.

Mamluk sources only –, the switch of focus to copies of documents kept in chancery manuals and more importantly collection of letters, have open the way to new insights. Indeed, collection of letters have also kept copies of letters received by the sultans from foreign courts.

Given the lack of information and documentation we face for the contemporary Muslim dynasties, this is a very valuable material to be exploited. This also marks the start of more global, or connected, kind of study of Islamic diplomacy, as all those materials combined, from the various parties involved, shows a quite different picture of the diplomatic process in the Islamicate world. This approach is also most rewarding for the NDH as we will now see.

So those developments have had a major impact on the way Diplomatic studies has further developed as it not only expanded the scope of diplomacy beyond the strict war-peace framework, but it also broadened the themes and medias involved in diplomatic communication. More concretely, those developments created original contributions, which without recognizing or referring to the NDH, nevertheless touched similar theme, such as political culture and socio-political practice, and mode of communication and exchange.

One of the major contributions that best characterized that process is the already mentioned 2008 study by Anne Broadbridge, *Kingship and Ideology in the Islamic and Mongol worlds*, which was itself already building up on an ongoing trend of studies on legitimacy. In the past decade, scholars have followed that line of inquiry further and have used diplomatic studies to understand how Muslim powers first established their legitimacy and then how they communicated their claims to an external audience through the exchanges of embassies. The period considered is in fact one of great challenges, but also opportunities, in the Islamicate world. After the Mongol invasions in the region and the collapse of the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad, Islamic leadership was left with a vacuum soon to be competed for among rival contenders. An entirely new set of ideologies emerged among those various polities, which were mostly sup-

ported by newcomers in Islam and had therefore to find other ways to legitimize themselves. Diplomacy, through the exchanges of letters and messengers, appears thus during this period as the perfect medium to establish, communicate and test those new discourses and claims. Studies along those lines have focus on the Mamluk sultanate contacts with their major rival within the Islamic world, such as the Mongol Ilkhanids⁴¹, but also their post-Mongol successors in the East, such as the Timurids⁴² and the Turkmen dynasties (Qara Qoyunlu and Aq Qoyunlu)⁴³ and the Ottomans⁴⁴.

Those studies on legitimacy are however still very much based on cases of struggles between the Mamluk sultans and

⁴¹ R. Amitai, *Holy war and rapprochement: Studies in the relations between the Mamluk sultanate and the Mongol ilkhanate (1260-1335)*, Turnhout 2013; Id., *Muslim-Mongol diplomacy*, in *Medieval Islamic civilization: An encyclopedia*, I, cur. J. W. Meri, New York 2006, pp. 540-542; J. Pfeiffer, *Ahmad Tegüder's second letter to Qalā'ün (682/1283)*, in *History and historiography of post-Mongol Central Asia and the Middle East: Studies in honor of John E. Woods*, cur. J. Pfeiffer, S. A. Quinn, Wiesbaden 2006, pp. 167-202.

⁴² A. Darrāj, *L'Égypte sous le règne de Barsbay, 825-841/1422-1438*, Damascus 1961; M. Dekkiche, *New source, new debate: Re-evaluation of the Mamluk-Timurid struggle for religious supremacy in the Hijaz (Paris, BnF MS ar. 4440)*, «Mamluk Studies Review», 18 (2014-2015), pp. 247-271.

⁴³ Darrāj, *L'Égypte sous* cit.; M. Dekkiche, *The letter and its response: The exchanges between the Qara Qoyunlu and the Mamluk sultan: MS Arabe 4440 (BnF, Paris)*, «Arabica», 63/6 (2016), pp. 1-47; M. Melvin-Koushki, *The Delicate Art of Aggression: Uzun Hasan's fathnama to Qaytbay of 1469*, «Iranian Studies», 44/2, (2011), pp. 193-214; F. Bauden, *Diplomatic entanglements between Tabriz, Cairo, and Herat: A Reconstructed Qara Qoyunlu Letter Datable to 818/1415*, in *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies. Studies in Diplomacy and Diplomatics*, cur. F. Bauden, M. Dekkiche, Leiden - Boston 2019, pp. 410-483.

⁴⁴ C. Y. Muslu, *Ottomans and the Mamluks: Imperial diplomacy and warfare in the Islamic world*, London - New York 2014; K. D'Hulster, *Fixed rules to a changing game? Sultan Mehmed II's Realignment of Ottoman-Mamluk Diplomatic Conventions*, in *Mamluk Cairo, a Crossroads for Embassies. Studies in Diplomacy and Diplomatics*, cur. F. Bauden, M. Dekkiche, Leiden - Boston 2019, pp. 484-508.

their foreign counterparts, and greatly focus on the issue of sovereignty in a traditional way. This was however only one aspect of the contacts that were established among Muslim polities, as those also kept communication canals opened also in time of peace, this, through the intermediary of emissaries that were travelling from one court to another.

The diplomatic relationship established between the Mamluk Sultanate and other Muslim powers at time of peace have been increasingly investigated during the past decade. This switched focus was again greatly favored by the new interest in collection of letters kept in manuscripts mentioned earlier. While those copies of letters were previously seen as a mere exercise of good style and were thus greatly neglected, the new studies in diplomatics were able to demonstrate their value both for diplomatics, but also for the study of diplomacy more generally. As already mentioned, those collections are particularly interesting as they kept the copies of letters that were exchanged between Muslim powers, revealing a whole new aspect of internal Islamic diplomacy. This is of great relevance for our discussion of NDH and this for several reasons.

First and foremost, most of the copies kept in those collections were exchanged at time of peace and demonstrated an active use of diplomacy throughout the Islamicate world during that period. Based on this material, we can further develop a better definition of diplomacy, that is not restricted to prevent or end war, but as an important means of communication among Islamic polities broadly defined. Broadly defined indeed, as those letters do not only concern sultans and kings, but also members of their broader family or household. This has of course a major repercussion as for our understanding of the actors involved in the exchanges of embassies (the “right of embassy”), and more generally for our understanding of Islamic sovereignty and its nature. Until recently the study of Diplomacy in the Islamicate world was restricted to the study of the exchanges of embassies between caliphs and sultans or kings only. These collections show however the use of parallel diplomacy at stakes among various family members competing for some

kinds of external recognition and support. Furthermore, those letters also reveal an entire new set of nuances in the diplomatic convention in the establishment of hierarchies among correspondents.

We have already mentioned that the period represented a very fertile one as for the development of new ideologies and legitimizing tools and discourses. It was however not just a matter of gaining recognition by foreign peers, but more importantly to place oneself on the complex chessboard of power. The Islamic world that emerged at the time was a very hierarchical world with various centers that competed for supremacy, be it effective and/or symbolic. Following a longstanding geo-administrative tradition, the Mamluk chancery had developed very efficient means to textually organize the world around Cairo, creating thus a hierarchy among the correspondents, namely the various Islamic polities. This hierarchy was of course not outspoken but established throughout a complex system of rules applied to diplomatic conventions, that were shared by all Muslim powers as well attested in their exchange of letters.

It is indeed within the correspondences that we can find the witness of this implicit hierarchies. The recent studies in diplomatics have indeed been able to reconstitute a hierarchical chart of the correspondents of the Mamluk sultanate, based on various diplomatic features of the letters. The format of the papers and its size, the space between the lines, the opening formulae of the letters and the honorific titles, as well as the type of signature added on the document, were all effective means to establish and communicate the hierarchy of the correspondents. This was mostly a type of non-verbal communication that illustrated the semiotics value of the documents⁴⁵. Chancery manuals of the Mamluk period detail at length those rules and pro-

⁴⁵ The first extended study on the semiotic value of document was certainly John Wansbrough's seminal study, J. Wansbrough, *Lingua Franca in the Mediterranean*, Richmond 1996. Building up on this theory see Dekkiche, *Diplomatics, or Another Way* cit., pp. 185-213.

vided concrete examples of copies of letters. Next to those, letters kept in collections can also be added to this material to provide more nuance to this hierarchy, since they concern actors not always mentioned in the manuals. If the establishment of hierarchy was thus first and foremost established and developed within the chancery, their medium – the letter – circulated to foreign court so that this system progressively spread to and was adopted by a broader audience.

If the rule pertaining to the establishment of hierarchies thus first developed at the chancery for the drafting of documents, they were soon to spread to other diplomatic conventions. The most obvious and public one was of course the arrival and reception of ambassadors in the Mamluk capital. Be at war or at peace, exchanges of embassies have been extensively recorded in the rich Mamluk sources mentioned above. Chronicles provided the daily events taking place in the capital, among which of course the arrival and reception of foreign ambassadors. Though those records are not uniform – some embassies are mentioned with more or less details, from one sentence to several pages depending on the importance of the sending power – the average ones follow a same structure of narrative that aims to imply the “hierarchy” mentioned before. Concretely, each mission was received with a ceremonial that matches with the status of the sending rulers. Chroniclers seemed to have understood this rule of status quite well, as their narrations of the arrival and reception of ambassadors display a specific structure that relates to this status. They start with the mention of the sending ruler, they list the members of the welcoming delegations (in hierarchical order), they indicate the lodging for the ambassador (also matching his status), and then move to the reception that usually took place several days after arrival in Cairo. The account of the reception also focuses on several ceremonial aspects, indicative of the status, such as the location of the reception, the members of the elite that were present at the public audience, and the details of the gifts that were given to the sultan (with value). If more detailed, chroniclers also refer to the various activities offered to the members

of the embassies until their departure. Finally, ambassadors of high status also see their departure ceremony recorded, with the list of the gifts (and their value) that were sent with the Mamluk ambassador that was designated to accompany the mission back home.

The reception of the embassies was the most public part of the diplomatic exchanges and of course the one that interested the chroniclers the most. Whereas scholars have been often using those accounts in chronicles as a factual data there have been in the recent past increasing effort to go beyond that. The ceremonial ritual and its symbolic are now increasingly considered as part of the non-verbal type of communication that was deployed at the occasion of the diplomatic encounter and that represented the application of the rule of hierarchy described above⁴⁶. Studies have thus attempted to establish a typology of those contacts between the Mamluk sultanate and their foreign counterparts based on those implicit rules displayed through the ceremonial and the reception of the embassies in Cairo⁴⁷. Another line of inquiry linked to the ceremonial is of course the material culture linked to it. The materiality of diplomatic contacts is indeed predominant in our sources. There are of course the material features of the documents themselves which we have already mentioned, but also the accounts of the reception of embassies are also full of material references.

Those can be divided in three categories. To start with there are the references to the buildings involved in both the lodging and the reception of the ambassadors. While most of them are not extant anymore, the various topographical works we have for Mamluk Cairo, and even some later representations, allow

⁴⁶ M. Dekkiche, *Diplomacy at Its Zenith: Agreement between the Mamluks and the Timurids for the sending of the Kiswah*, in *Material Culture and diplomatic contacts between the Latin West, Byzance and the Islamic East (11th-15th cent.)*, cur. F. Bauden, Leiden 2021, pp. 115-142.

⁴⁷ Dekkiche, *Diplomacy at Its Zenith* cit.; Muslu, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks* cit.; *Mamluk Cairo* cit. (especially the chapters by Yehoshua Frenkel, Marie Favereau, Kristof D'Hulster and Rémi Dewière).

us to identify many of those buildings. The lodgings of ambassadors, often mentioned, have however not been studied systematically, especially in regards with the hierarchical typology of the correspondents. Indeed, when ambassadors were not lodged in the ambassadorial house, they were given residency in the houses of important emirs in specific part of the city, such as the famous *Bayn al-Qaṣrayn*⁴⁸. The relations between those emirs and the ambassadors or their mission has not yet been investigated either. I will come back to that point later. If the lodgings of the ambassadors still have to be studied further, the places linked to the reception, the citadel and the famous *Īwān*, however have attracted most scholarly attention⁴⁹. Finally, the last category of material references concerns the gifts that were exchanged during the arrival and the departure receptions. We have already seen that this aspect of the diplomatic exchange was already a common topic in Muslim-Byzantine diplomacy, and thus has a longstanding tradition. Surprisingly, it is only in 2014 that a monograph was devoted to the topic gift-giving within the field of Mamluk diplomacy⁵⁰. Doris Behrens-Abouseif's study mostly focus on the listing of the various gifts exchanged with the Sultans over time and still leave much place

⁴⁸ On the emir's house, see J. Loiseau, *Reconstruire la Maison du Sultan: Ruine et recomposition de l'ordre urbain au Caire (1350-1450)*, 2 voll, Cairo 2010; and on the *Bayn al-Qaṣrayn*, see J. Van Steenberghe, *Ritual, Politics and the City in Mamluk Cairo: the Bayna'l-Qaṣrayn as a dynamic 'lieu de mémoire', 1250-1382*, in *Court ceremonies and rituals of power in Byzantium and the Medieval Mediterranean: comparative perspectives*, cur. A. Beihammer, S. Constantinou, M. Parani, Leiden - Boston 2013, pp. 227-276.

⁴⁹ D. Behrens-Abouseif, *The citadel of Cairo: Stage for Mamluk ceremonial*, «Annales Islamologiques», 24 (1988), pp. 25-79; N. O. Rabbat, *The citadel of Cairo: A new interpretation of royal Mamluk architecture*, Leiden - New York - Cologne 1995.

⁵⁰ D. Behrens-Abouseif, *Practising diplomacy in the Mamluk sultanate: Gifts and material culture in the medieval Islamic world*, London 2014. Before her, E. I. Muhanna, *The sultan's new clothes: Ottoman-Mamluk gift exchange in the fifteenth century*, «Muqarnas», 27 (2010), pp. 189-207, had already tackles that topic briefly.

to the study of the significance of those gifts. More recently, the material culture of the diplomatic contact within the Mamluk sultanate more broadly defined has been tackled more systematically in a volume edited by Frédéric Bauden entirely devoted to the Material culture and diplomatic contacts⁵¹.

Finally, a last aspect of diplomacy has recently increasingly been put into light, namely the diplomatic agents. We have already mentioned earlier the figure of the ambassador, as the key figure of the diplomatic exchanges. Due to its role and its strong association to kingship, it was since the 10th century his role and description was included in various works belonging to the Advice literature. Chronicles, especially in earlier period, also often described at length conversations that supposedly took place between rulers and ambassadors on various topic associated to the rule or religion. This stereotypical material however usually tends to focus on either the “good” or “bad” ambassador, or described the ideal figure of the envoy, but has in fact little to say about the reality of the function. The historiographical and administrative materials we possess for the Mamluk period however started adding to our knowledge. Since envoys are often mentioned by name and/or function, they can better be identified throughout the proposographical works of the period, which comes to greatly nuance the theoretical picture found in normative source. Scholars have now started investigating the reality of the embassy more closely, but there still reminds much to do in that area⁵².

But more recently, scholars have also started to investigate other agents involved in the diplomacy, such as the various sec-

⁵¹ *Material Culture and diplomatic contacts between the Latin West, Byzance and the Islamic East (11th-15th cent.)*, cur. F. Bauden, Leiden 2021.

⁵² Since Wansbrough study of the Mamluk ambassador in Venice, Wansbrough, *A Mamluk ambassador* cit., pp. 503-530, not much was done around that topic until Broadbridge’s recent study, A. F. Broadbridge, *Careers in Diplomacy among Mamluk and Mongols, 658-741/1260-1341*, in *Mamluk Cairo* cit., pp. 263-301.

retaries involved either in the drafting of the documents⁵³, or in the reception, the military elite that also filled in diplomatic tasks from Cairo⁵⁴, the great translators who served as intermediaries especially with the Latin and Greek Christians⁵⁵, and finally the European consuls and notaries⁵⁶. Those studies show not only a greater plurality of the agents involved in the diplomatic process, but also the openness of the system who allowed the agents to fill in various roles, this across various borders. I will come back to this point.

Though many of the themes just presented may sound familiar to an audience involved in the NDH, – such as the mode of communication, cultural exchanges, plurality of the agents involved, and so on –, it is striking that nearly none of those studies mentioned make references to the NDH. Knowing now the general state-of-the art in premodern Islamic diplomacy, we can more easily understand how the new discipline may have gone unnoticed. However, next to the old-fashioned character of the field, one can legitimately wonder whether a New Diplomatic History of the Islamicate world is possible. While I have argued that the period of the Mamluk sultanate in Cairo represented a good case to start with, I also recognize that the exceptionality of that field of study. Periods that preceded it, or even some contemporary rulers, are indeed much less documented, or at least, the types of sources available can more difficulty apply the methodology proposed by the NDH. There

⁵³ Dekkiche, *Le Caire* cit., pp. 276-287; M. Walravens, *A Networked Diplomacy: Maḥmūd Gāwān's Bahmani Sultanate and the fifteenth-century Islamic World*, Ph.D. thesis, University of Antwerp, defended in 2022.

⁵⁴ Dekkiche, *Le Caire* cit., pp. 276-287.

⁵⁵ K. Yosef, *Mamluks of Jewish Origin in the Mamluk Sultanate*, «Mamlūk Studies Review», 22 (2019), pp. 49-95.

⁵⁶ F. J. Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance en Méditerranée pré-moderne: Le deuxième état mamelouk et le commerce des épices (1382-1517)*, Madrid 2009; G. Christ, *Trading conflicts: Venetian merchants and Mamluk officials in late medieval Alexandria*, Leiden 2012; A. Rizzo, *Le Lys et le Lion: Diplomatie et échanges entre Florence et le sultanat mamelouk (début XV^e-début XVI^e s.)*, 3 voll., Ph.D dissertation, Université de Liège and Aix-Marseille Université 2017.

are however certainly ways to remedy to this, especially if we focus on the cultural and social components of the research lines promoted by NDH. Be that as it may, even the field of Mamluk study and Mamluk diplomacy has so far developed far from the NDH, even if many of the studies mentioned earlier actually share similar interest and methods with it. While it will of course be irrelevant to go back to those to label them *de facto* under that stamp, I would like to directly propose new lines of inquiry to push the field further.

The field of Mamluk Diplomacy has so far show most potential in the field of intra-Muslim diplomacy, as those are the contacts that Arabic sources have the most recorded and detailed. Therefore, the field of inter-confessional/cultural diplomacy has stayed somehow in the margin. This is in fact quite surprising when one knows how much interests has been given in the past the Mamluk commercial relations. While scholars have stayed so far attached to the history of the treaties and negotiations between the European mercantile powers and the Mamluks, there has been recently an important step taken in the direction of a renewal. Not surprisingly, this switch of focus has come from the “Italian” side, from scholars working on the commercial relations between the Mamluk sultanate and the Venetians, and more recently the Florentines⁵⁷. Unlike most previous studies on the commercial relations, those have concentrated on the sources produced by the notaries and the consuls, and not merely the treaties or the end product of the diplomatic mission, shedding thus light not only on the mechanism of negotiation but also more importantly on the integration of the foreign officials into the Mamluk system, and on the consequent creation of a kind of shared diplomatic culture among those agents. This line was even developed further by Francisco Apellániz’s latest book, *Breaching the Bronze wall*.

⁵⁷ Apellániz, *Pouvoir et finance* cit.; Christ, *Trading conflicts* cit.; Rizzo, *Le Lys et le Lion* cit.

Those studies are obviously important for what they can reveal of the commercial relationship between the Mamluks and the Italians and other Franks, but what is I think even more interesting is their insight into Mamluk diplomacy and Mamluk diplomatic apparatus – something Arabic sources have been describing but mostly theoretically. What those European/Italians sources show on the other hand is a system way much open than as once thought, even in the case of the contacts between Muslim and non-Muslim. Those sources also pointed further to the hybrid character of many diplomatic officials who seem to have been acting as both Venetian and Mamluk agents. While the history of the contacts between Mamluk/Muslim power and Christian powers have so far been written from the “state actor”-perspective, and mostly focus on the treaties, the switch to the level of the “agents” perspective seems very promising to better understand the dynamics that developed on the ground. This change in perspective seem in fact to indicate a much-shared culture, which goes against the common antagonist discourse that usually characterize Muslim-Christian relation. This hybrid, or trans-imperial character of the go-betweens have already been pointed out by scholars working on the Early Modern period, especially in the case of the dragoman and venetian intermediaries⁵⁸.

While the NDH can here clearly bring a relevant methodology to the study of the Muslim-Christian relation, it would also gain a lot if combined with yet another methodology, one promoted by the Connected history. Unlike Comparative history that tends to focus on what differs between societies, Connected history, on the contrary, tries to reconnect the pieces that have been put apart by nationalistic trends. Most research in that field has so far concentrated on the Early Modern studies, which is seen as a period of intense connectedness on a global

⁵⁸ N. E. Rothman, *Brokering Empire, Trans-Imperial subjects between Venice and Istanbul*, Ithaca - New York 2012; Id., *The Dragoman Renaissance. Diplomatic Interpreters and the Routes of Orientalism*, Ithaca - New York 2021.

scale. The same argument is, I believe, also valid for the late Medieval period, especially during the time of Mamluk sultanate rule, when polities from all Afro-Eurasia region were in constant contacts and exchanges. Instead of looking at the particular archives or documentary production of those polities and diplomatic agents in parallel, such as most studies currently do, the Connected history promotes to include them all in one single study. Whereas this approach may be difficult to follow if we stay attached to the state level, the switch of focus towards the other agents, on lower level, may prove much rewarding. As already mentioned, recent research has pointed to the openness of the diplomatic system within the Islamic world, which integrated various hybrid agents, creating on the ground a much more mixed, or connected, world, than once thought. The documentary production as well should be questioned anew, as those hybrid agents seemed to have worked together with Islamic chanceries and notaries or judges to establish documents understood and accepted by all traditions. The study of intra-Muslim diplomacy mentioned earlier has already started applying this methodology, and has shown promising results as we have seen. Such methodology however will certainly have an even much greater impact when applied to inter-confessional diplomacy in the Mediterranean region⁵⁹.

⁵⁹ This however is obviously not the work of one single scholar, and should instead be developed collaboratively, on a big scale. In 2023 such enterprise has started with the *DiplomatiCon* project which I direct together with Isabella Lazzarini, Frédéric Bauden and Roser Sallicru. The project aims not only to recreate a connected archive of the Diplomatic contact between the Mamluk Sultanate, the Italian and Iberian polities in the Mediterranean, but also to highlight the diplomatic networks of the agents involved in diplomacy and to map the various spaces used and produced. Finally, the project also studies the common/shared chancery practice that developed along the way.

