

War and peace in the medieval Near East, Xth to XVth century
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After a first conference (Damascus, 2010) dedicated to historiography, the team IFAO - IFPO organizes a second event about war and peace. They will be considered as cultural and social phenomena, and we will adopt a multidisciplinary approach (historical, archaeological, anthropological ...), the only way to help us to understand how these phenomena deeply modeled the Near Eastern societies, from the tenth to the fifteenth century.

Five themes were privileged:

1. Peace: an evolutionary process

In many ways, the study of peace is not privileged by contemporary historiography. It must be said that the concept is not easy to be defined. This is probably why most studies seek to define it or only to focus on the study of diplomatic relationships. These approaches can't be neglected; however, we would like to understand peace as an evolutionary process, in its permanent interaction with war.

Indeed, diplomatic relationships can't be opposed to war. Clausewitz used to highlight their complementary aspects, but we can go further: they have common objectives, and they are preparing each other. Outputs of war and their rituals show this constant interplay of peace and war. They also reveal one of the processes of construction of peace. But more broadly, we will focus on all stages of peace building. So, we will contribute to the elaboration of a "ritual grammar of peace" in the medieval Near East.

First of all, peace was the discourses of the sovereign. These discourses were propaganda aiming at glorifying him. He stood as the guarantor of the security that his citizen aspired to. Can't we also see, in these discourses, a more or less explicit formulation of a "thought of peace"?

But all the actors of the social field were concerned by peace. Sometimes, the sources give us the possibility to approach the efforts of people in peace or, in the contrary, in war. For some of them, peace was important (the merchants for example), while others wanted war (like the preachers); Even the behavior of the rulers can be questioned. When did they, on the one hand, show themselves as guarantors of peace? When did they, on the other hand, exacerbate hatred for the Other?

One may also wonder if there were special or even sacred places for peace. Did the people fight in these places, and what were the consequences? On the contrary, the military function of places *a priori* dedicated to war could disappear. Under the Ayyubids and the Mamluks, walls of fortresses and city walls were gradually dismantled. Thus, the walls could be transformed into places of peace, where life went on. Houses were built; men and women used to live and die there. Then, in these places, war was a far memory.

2. Fortifications, material culture and heritage

Fortifications are probably the most emblematic places of war. They are critical to the defense of the territory and populations. Forts, fortresses and city walls show locally the will of the central government to protect a road or a border. The fortifications were built in fundamental areas for the sovereign, where the risk was greater, or in strategically areas... They reflect existing powers and regional tensions.

Like weapons, they are related to the history of technology. In the long term, they were affected by technological changes that were decisive during the fights. We will go beyond the materiality of the object and will interest in know-how. This approach to the material culture of societies in war will lead us to adopt a perspective of “anthropology of techniques”.

Weapons are also “objects of memory”. They must be studied from the “active/passive attack/protection” point of view. Furthermore, we will see them as marks of the continuous adaptation of men to war. Adaptation is fundamental in the evolution of warfare techniques. Finally, everyone knows that nowadays, most of the fortifications are restored, in the Near East. We will wonder what issues are revealed by the enhancement of this heritage. Should they be considered as efforts to build a “national memory”?

3. Societies at war

It is well known that war is a social phenomenon which was pervasive in the medieval Near East. Near Eastern societies were largely organized by and for war. Without any doubt, we can speak of the slow diffusion of a culture of war in the whole society: a culture of war which was the one of the military elite and of the soldiers who were in the heart of social, administrative and economic organization, from the fifth/eleventh century.

War was very expensive; the budgets were strained; urban structures were disrupted. These changes, as well as the consequences of war on the development on rural areas are poorly known and require further analysis.

Sometimes, war took place in the heart of the cities. Then, inhabitants were privileged witnesses and often important actors. Indeed, war had its spectators, and its protagonists were conscious that it could be “a show” : it could develop the idea of power as drama. So, we will focus on the mobilization of troops, military reviews, returns (victorious or not) of the armies and exhibitions of military trophies, funeral processions after the fights, destruction and reconstructions which could deeply shape (or reshape) the urban space. Thus, war set the rhythm of life of the people and societies. It could even become a feast, when the people showed happiness or collective terrors before, after and during the fighting.

4. Women and war

These events altered the life of all the actors of the social field, particularly women. Indeed, fighting was a male business. Then, modern historiography tends to forget them or, at best, to give platitudes about them (ransom of captives, enslaving,

harems...). Of course, women didn't normally carry arms and armour; however, they could appear on the battlefield: they often took care of wounded and the body of the dead. They had also logistical activities. At the back, women had also specific roles in times of war. What about their specific functions in these troubled times?

Finally, the problem of the fate of the enemies' wives could be questioned. What kind of treatment did they undergo in war time? Was their body the *epitome* of the enemy? What about the outrages? Were they symbolic? Can we say that the rape of war symbolized what the soldiers wanted to inflict to all the enemies?

5. Body at war

More generally, thinking about the body at war will lead us to rethink the war experience as a "human experience". Indeed, the "Histoire-bataille" like the New Military History tended to promote a "war without the body".

This experience was a long-term experience for warriors whom bodies were patiently forged for war. The professionalization of the fighters was more and more important, from the tenth to the fifteenth century. It required extensive training for men who often repeated the same movements with a great efficiency. This training to fight, to suffering and to sacrifices have not really been questioned by analysts of war.

War was also an experience of violence for which the body was the privileged device. The injured, abused and sometimes mutilated body was turned into a trophy; the bodies of the fighters were one the better places to "find warfare again" (Stéphane Audouin Rouzeau) in all its crudeness.

Finally, this experience was a collective experience, which altered the civilians' life. Like the corpses of the enemies, on the battlefield, civilians' bodies could be abused. These outraged and torn, mutilated and also exposed bodies were a language in themselves that has to be deciphered.