

## Overview



This project aims to carry out a survey of information on the Qur'an and Islam contained in travel narratives of pilgrims, diplomats, merchants and other travellers who visited the Eastern Mediterranean in the Early Modern Period.

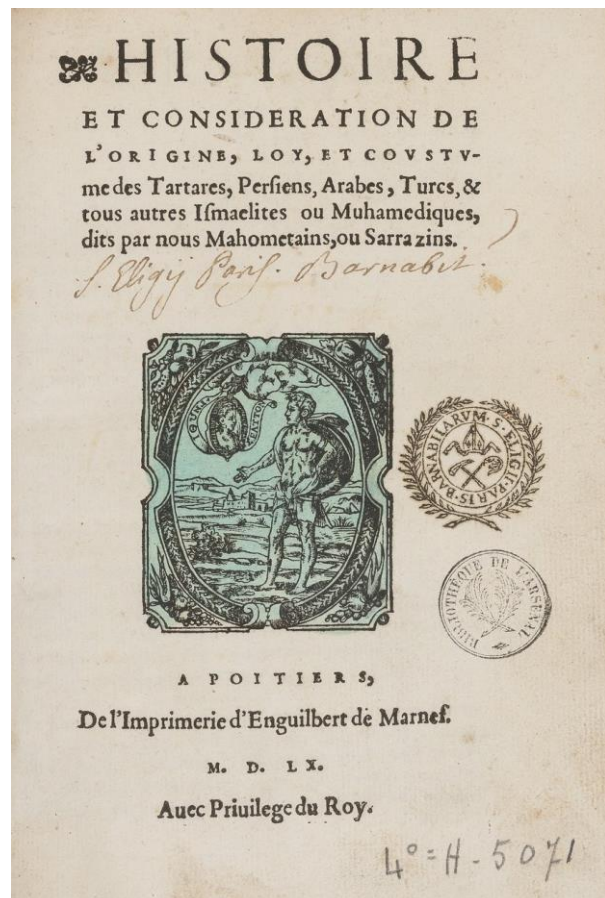
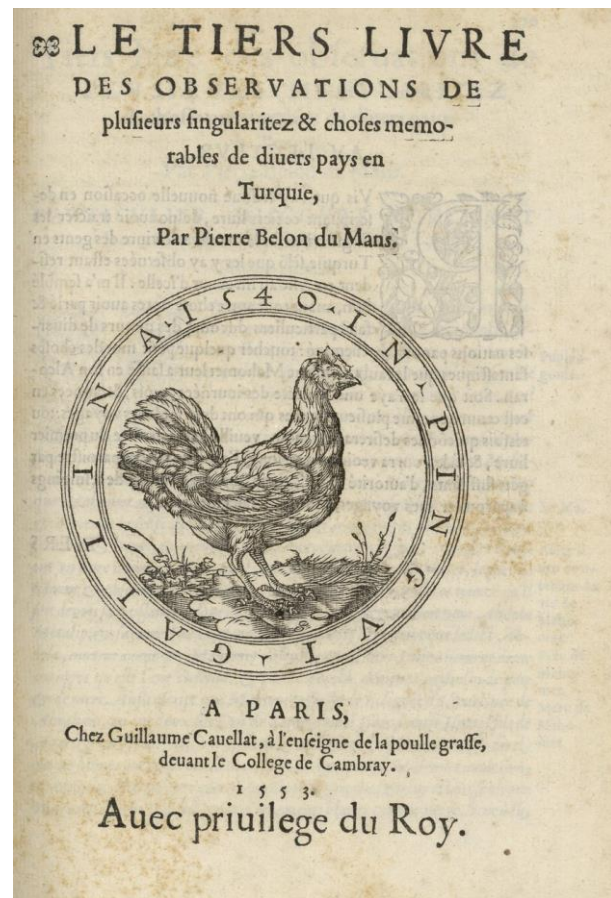
Until today, travel narratives have mainly been studied from the point of view of historical or literary analysis, neglecting the transmission of knowledge (or misinformation) about religious doctrine and practice. One of the reasons for this lack of interest is that the information provided on Islam by travellers is often compiled from historical, apologetic or polemical works. Nevertheless, as compiling is not a neutral operation, the compiling practices of an author can shed light on his intellectual framework, his auctorial project and his ideological motivations. Also, many travel narratives contain fresh information gathered “on the ground”, contradicting or adjusting data and narratives rooted in the European tradition. Moreover, some of these works had a wide circulation on a national or European scale, and were used as handbooks on the Saracens and the Turks, their culture and their religion. During the Early Modern period, travel narratives have thus played a significant role in the elaboration and dissemination of information on the Qur'an and Islam.

The arrival of a Venetian pilgrim ship in the port of Jaffa (in the upper right-hand corner, the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem)  
Bernhard von Breydenbach, *Opusculum sanctorum peregrinationum*, Mainz, Erhard Reuwich, 1486.

## Corpus

The main corpus is composed of all the French and Neolatin travel narratives (pilgrimage accounts, Oriental history books, geographical works...) written and/or published in France in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Studying this corpus in a systematical way will allow to analyze the dynamics of circulation of information on Islam in a specific cultural and linguistic area. A certain number of works composed in other European countries will nevertheless be taken also into account.



A few specimina:

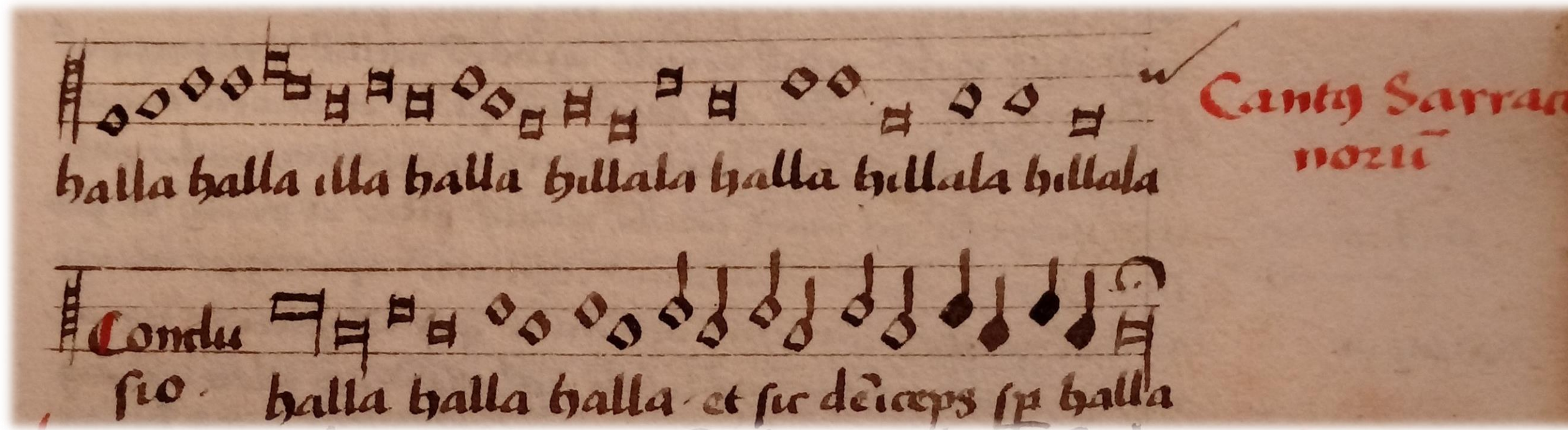
- *Le Voyage de la sainte cité de Hierusalem [...] fait lan 1480*, Paris, Chrestien, 1508;

- Pierre Belon, *Le tiers livre des observations de plusieurs singularitez [...]*, Paris, Cavellat, 1553;

- Guillaume Postel, *Histoire et consideration de l'origine, loy, et costumes des Tartares [...]*, Poitiers, Marnef, 1560.

## The travellers' Qur'an(s)

The diversity of intellectual horizons and motivations of the various travellers is reflected in the extreme variety of approaches to the treatment of religious matters, ranging from the polemical to the ethnographic. In some cases, only a few lines are devoted to the presentation of Islam and its holy book; in other cases, dozens of pages concern the history of Islam, the life of Muhammad and the Qur'an. The type of information provided is also very uneven: medieval and contemporary European sources are most often used, yet many travellers integrate, modify or refute them; and when devotional practices or traditions unknown to the Christian *auctoritates* are observed, they are willingly related.



Even authors who are fiercely polemical towards Islam sometimes provide valuable information on the devotional practices observed. Georgius Gemnicensis († 1541), for instance, a German cleric who visited the Holy Land in 1507-1508, describes the course of a *dhikr*, transcribing also its words and melody.

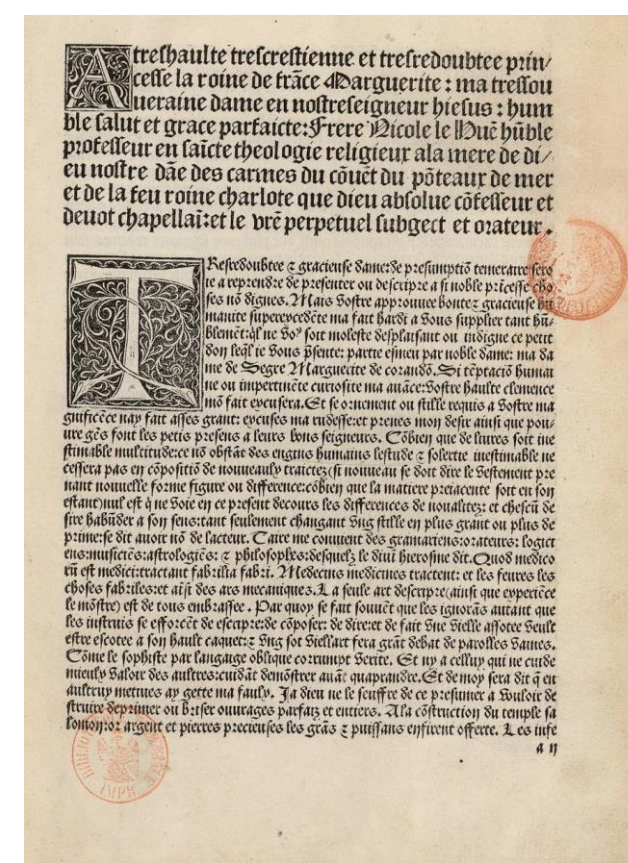
Georgius Gemnicensis, *Ephemeris*, ms. ThULB Prov. o. 310, fol. 29r.

## Methodology

- Identification and cataloguing of information on the Qur'an and on Islam provided by the works of the corpus:
  - transcribing each passage dealing with religious issues;
  - associating each passage with codicological or typographical information and with a code indicating the type of data contained.
- Constitution of a digital library for lexical and thematic research:
  - encoding the selected excerpts in XML-TEI;
  - associating these excerpts with tags corresponding to the established category codes.
- Study of the intertextual relationships between these texts and their sources:
  - identifying direct dependencies or plagiarisms;
  - grouping texts together on the basis of the congruence of the information provided;
  - identifying works containing unique data.
- Establishment of a French and Neo-latin lexicon of Islam:
  - recording all the words designating objects, customs, places and people related to the Muslim world;
  - creating a French and Neo-Latin lexicon of the words and proper names of Islam, taking into account synchronic and diachronic variations as well as graphic oscillations.

## Perspectives

Travel narratives are both witnesses and actors of the profound transformations in the social, cultural, religious and literary fields that occur in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. This project aims to investigate their role as knowledge vectors through the analysis of the information they contain, but also to study their reception. Indeed, some works were of particular interest at certain times, being considered as reference texts on the religion, culture or geography of the Eastern Mediterranean. A significant example is Nicole Le Huen's *Sainctes peregrinations* (1488), which was —partially or entirely— reprinted several times between 1517 and 1525 as a pro-crusade pamphlet.



- Nicole Le Huen [B. von Breydenbach], *Des sainctes peregrinations iherusalem*, Lyon, Topié and Herenberck, 1488;

- Sébastien Mamerot, *Les passages douloureux iherusalem*, Paris, Le Noir, 1518, a history of the crusades containing chapters of Le Huen's *Peregrinations* devoted to Islam, Muhammad's life and the Qur'an.



The project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (grant agreement no. 810141)