

The Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC)
cordially invites you to a Thursday Lecture by

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**Archive and Historical Memory:
The Arabic Manuscripts from Kairouan in Historical Context**

Thursday, 16 June 2022, 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm (CEST)

Hybrid Event

Registration: <https://www.csmc.uni-hamburg.de/en/register-lecture21>

Some of the world's oldest Islamic manuscripts are found in a single, intact collection in Kairouan, Tunisia, allowing for unparalleled analysis of the community of scholars that produced them. In this lecture, I will present a broad survey of these manuscripts and inquire into the selection process that resulted in the archive we find today.

We can uncover this process by analyzing both the manuscripts themselves and also historical texts about the Kairouan community. Written on the manuscripts, we find numerous remarks from students and owners that tell us who wrote these texts, who put them into the archive, and why. We can also analyze the materials – paper and parchment – on which these manuscripts were written for further clues. Historical texts refer to the archive only tangentially, but they offer valuable context for the establishment of a Muslim scholarly community in Kairouan.

Beyond this material, important information can be gleaned from parallel collections of Arabic manuscripts in Egypt, Morocco, and Spain. The scholars of all three of these locations were in constant contact with Kairouan, and archives there contain copies of Kairouan texts and vice versa. In other words, manuscripts in Kairouan were once quite mobile, travelling all over the Mediterranean. Particularly intriguing are the lost texts of other scholarly communities in Kairouan. Some of these, such as the medical, philosophical, and scientific texts from the 'House of Wisdom' are known only through references in other texts; others, such as the Ibadi Kharijite texts, have survived in substantial manuscript fragments. Recently, even manuscript fragments from the Jewish community of Kairouan have been found, partially preserved in the famous Geniza of the Ben Ezra synagogue in Egypt.

A final context is the much larger collection currently housed in the National Laboratory for the Preservation and Conservation of Parchment and Manuscripts (NLPCPM) in Raqqada, Kairouan. Here, we find the remains of the ancient mosque collection alongside thousands of other fragments, originally stored elsewhere in Kairouan. The full scope of the NLPCPM manuscripts is unknown, and in this talk, I will discuss the opportunities and perils of working with these old archives, especially when they seem to challenge our presumptions of the past. I will also argue that a comprehensive history of the collection is essential to fully appreciate the importance of these manuscripts and the contributions that they may make to the religious, political, and intellectual history of the Mediterranean world.