



Series of Hybrid Seminars



Architectural Conceptualizations of a Mediterranean Borderland: The Blank Spaces of Spanish Tunis, 1573-1574

Prof. Toby Yuen-Gen Liang
(Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan)

Thursday, Dec. 07, 2023, 14:30 (GMT+1:00), Dar Ben-Gacem Kahia
الخميس 07 ديسمبر 2023 على الساعة 14:30 بتوقيت تونس، دار بن قاسم كاهية

Talk in hybrid (Zoom Registration required)
المحاضرة ستكون حضورية وعلى تطبيق زووم (يجب التسجيل مسبقاً)

Moderator: Dr. Housseem Eddine Chachia
مُيسر: د. حسام الدين شاشية





Title: Architectural Conceptualizations of a Mediterranean Borderland: The Blank Spaces of Spanish Tunis, 1573-1574.

Speaker: Toby Yuen-Gen Liang (Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan)

Date and place: Thursday, Dec. 07, 2023, 14:30 (GMT+1:00), Dar Ben-Gacem Kahia.

Register for in-person attendance via email at: contact@nadwaseminar.org

Register for the Zoom session via this link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZUuf-yvrTMvE9GxZbcWn00QC1zWLogb9SZS>

This series of hybrid seminars is organized as part of the *Nadwa Seminar: Tunisia, Mediterranean, and Beyond*, which serves as an independent academic and scientific platform designed to foster a prominent environment for the exchange of ideas and knowledge among researchers from various geographical areas and research fields.

Abstract: In the medieval and modern periods, Tunis was a critical node at the center of both the Mediterranean Sea basin and the northern African landmass. The city arbitrated relations between eastern and western halves of the sea basins and facilitated exchanges between Sahel-Saharan and Sicily-Europe. Helping shape regional dynamics, Tunis was also an ally, target, and prize of competing powers, both Christian and Muslim.

In 1573, the Spanish Habsburg monarchy conquered Tunis for the second time. On this occasion, Don Juan de Austria, the head of the invasion force, decided to occupy the North African metropolis. Indeed, until Napoleon's foray into Alexandria and Cairo in the late eighteenth century, Tunis was the largest Muslim population center that Christian Europeans controlled. The centerpiece of the Habsburg occupation was a new fortress, often called the Nova Arx. Though the fortress was conquered by the Ottomans in 1574 and archaeological remains have yet to be uncovered in contemporary Tunis, architectural plans preserve a testament to the structure. These schematic plans reveal that Habsburg military engineers were applying the technology of Renaissance star-shaped bastions to Tunis at the same time that this technology and principles of urban planning were being developed in places like Turin and Antwerp in Europe. The co-mingling of Renaissance scientific techniques with local North African topography and epistemology are an important new field of research. What is also remarkable about the fortress plans are the blank spaces that predominate over the delimited sets of lines that articulate structures. Put in other words: architectural technology and principles were abstracting a space that was represented as a blank, removing the teeming lives and subjectivities of the Islamic city from sight. Often overlooked by visual perception, blank spaces deserve to be highlighted in order to better understand their deliberate and active participation in the conception of the borderland between Christian-European and Muslim-North African Tunis. This talk will advance a new methodology to understand blank spaces and the argumentative purpose they served in the construction of Spanish Tunis.



Toby Yuen-Gen Liang is an associate research professor at the Institute of History and Philology of Academia Sinica, Taiwan's national academy of sciences. He was previously associate professor at National Taiwan University and at Wheaton College, Massachusetts. Liang specializes on Spanish-Mediterranean history and currently researches northern Africa as a subject of European visual media during the Age of Exploration from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. He is the author of *Family and Empire: The Fernández de Córdoba and the Spanish Realm* (University of Pennsylvania Press) and the co-editor of three collections of essays (Routledge and Brill). Liang is the founder of the Spain-North Africa Project and co-founder of the Wheaton Institute of the Interdisciplinary Humanities. He is a founding member and current president of the Asian Federation of Mediterranean Studies Institutes. He is also a founding member and serves on the editorial board of *The Medieval Globe* journal. Liang's work has been funded by Newberry Library, John Carter Brown Library, Taiwan's National Science and Technology Council, the Fulbright Foundation, National Endowment for the Humanities, and Social Science Research Council, and Spain's Ministry of Culture. He earned his Ph.D. at Princeton University. His life has spanned Taiwan, the United States, Spain, and Syria.

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PS: The talk will be in English, but the questions can be in Spanish, French, or Arabic.