

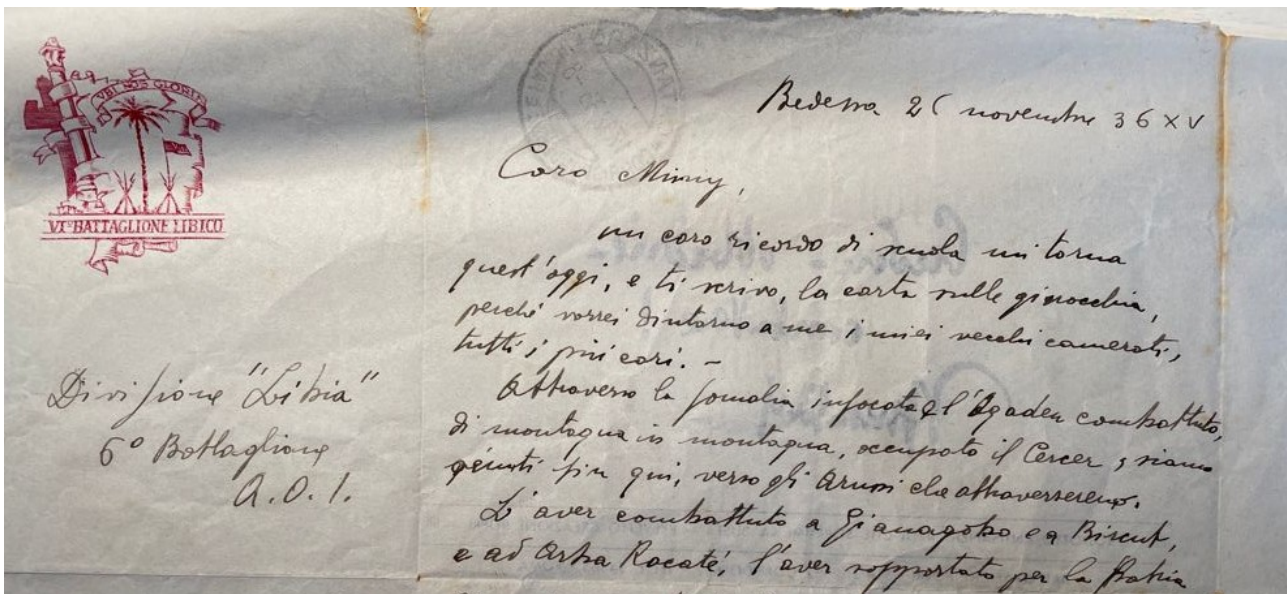
Historical Research and the Problem of Sources

Academic year 2022-2023

Syllabus

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(Letter by an official of the Italian Army during the Italo-Ethiopian War, Ethiopia, 26 November 1936)

I and II Semester: 2022/2023

Description

The course consists of a series of two-hour lessons. Each meeting is composed of two parts: the first part consists of seminar-type lessons during which instructors develop a series of arguments on the approach to historical sources and discuss with the students; in the second part, PhD students (and possibly undergraduates) discuss the suggested readings. In each lesson professors and researchers of the SSM will take on the question of historical sources starting from the perspective of their past and present researches.

General objectives: the course deals with historical sources, considering them in their variety and analyzing the possible interpretative problems their use raise. The main purpose of the course is to equip PhD students with a minimum "toolbox" to deal with the problems that the historian faces in identifying and interpreting the sources. General aim of the course is providing PhD students with a laboratory focused on the possibilities and risks of the historical work.

Readings: A few general readings are required for the course and some special readings are required for each lesson. Part of the materials is available online via the digital library or provided by the instructors in a shared SSM folder, or, in paper, at university libraries.

General readings:

1. Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire ou métier d'historien*, Paris: A. Colin, 1974
2. Richard Evans, *In defence of history*, London: Granta Books, 1997
3. Edward Carr, *What is history?* New York: Knopf, 1964.

These readings are required. Translations are admitted.

Calendar

1. 18 November: Alessandro Bonvini (SSM), *Global lives in global history: approaches, methodologies, and sources*
2. 2 December: Orçun Kan Okan (SSM), *First-Person Narratives and Histories of Political Transition*
3. 16 December: Marie Bossaert (SSM), *Reading the letters: how to deal with epistolary sources*
4. 13 January: Suzanne Levin (SSM), *Political History and its Sources: the Example of the French Revolution*
5. 17 January: Andrea Graziosi (Università Federico II), *Assessing the Soviet Sources' Characteristics, Riches and Biases*
6. 20 January: Ana Belem Fernandez Castro (SSM), *Lawsuits as documentary sources for legal and cultural history*
7. 27 January: Mohamed-Ali Adraoui (SSM), *Using Diplomatic Archives: The Case of the United States*
8. 10 February: Olindo De Napoli (Università Federico II), *Critique of the sources: general remarks*
9. 17 February: Olindo De Napoli (Università Federico II), *History as a discipline of the context*
10. 3 March: Thaïs Gendry (SSM), *Judicial colonial sources: the power within*
11. 14 April: Niccolò Pianciola (Università di Padova), *Using State Sources to Study Borderland Shadow Economies*
12. 28 April: Carmine Pinto (Università di Salerno), *Revolution, warfare, and political nationalism in the sources for the history of Risorgimento*
13. 5 May: Simone A. Bellezza (Università di Napoli Federico II), *Diasporas as a Global Phenomenon: A Reflection on Method and Sources in the Wake of the Ukrainian Case*
14. 12 May: Elisabetta Bini (Università di Napoli Federico II), *The History of Energy: Sources,*

Archives, Methodologies

15. 19 May: Suzanne Levin (SSM), *Political History and its Sources: the Example of the French Revolution*
16. 26 May: Riccardo Rosolino (Università L'Orientale), *tbd*

18 November

Alessandro Bonvini, *Global lives in global history: approaches, methodologies, and sources*

At first glance, life history seems to clash with the approach and goals of global history. Global historians usually adopt long-term or macro-scale perspectives to study the exchanges, interconnections and relationships between different regions of the world. However, as a growing body of scholarship demonstrates, individual and collective lives are useful tools for exploring the local, micro, and the contextualized into the global framework, analyzing the impact of global trends on real people, and revising elitist or Euro-centric visions of history. This seminar will discuss methodological and theoretical assumptions, by focusing on the the global period par excellence: the long nineteenth-century.

Topics:

1. global lives in the age of revolutions;
2. global lives and the rise of modern nationalism;
3. global lives in the extra-European empires;

Suggested readings:

1. Jeremy Adelman, "What is Global History now?", *Aeon.com*, March 2, 2017;
2. Tonio Andrade, "A Chinese Farmer, Two African Boys, and a Warlord: Toward a Global Microhistory," *Journal of World History*, 21, 2010, p. 573-591;
3. Christopher A. Bayly, Sven Beckert, Matthew Connelly, Isabel Hofmeyr, Wendy Kozol and Patricia Seed, "AHR conversation: on transnational history," *The American Historical Review*, 111, 2006, p. 1441-1464.

2 December

Orçun Kan Okan (SSM), *First-Person Narratives and Histories of Political Transition*

From memoirs to petitions, there is a vast range of first-person narratives in which historical actors describe their experiences and raise claims about the past, present, and future. These narratives represent precious sources for historians interested in unpacking multifaceted political transitions with large scopes. Our aim in this meeting is to discuss which kinds of first-person narratives can be particularly useful for addressing which kinds of research questions; how we can construct explanatory contexts for these narratives in retrospect; and how our engagement with these sources can facilitate more inclusive perspectives on "makers" of history.

Topics:

1. Memoirs and scholarly efforts to move beyond national(ist) frameworks of historical significance
2. Tracing transition from empire to nation(-state) by way of focusing on shifting/competing loyalties and affiliations
3. Petitions (and other requests and letters submitted to officials) as key sources for shifts in method and approach
4. Questions of sampling; constructing context(s) and representativeness
5. Questions of agency; narratives by whom, written for which purposes and audiences

Suggested Readings:

1. Selim Deringil, *The Ottoman Twilight in the Arab Lands: Turkish Memoirs and Testimonies of the Great War* (Brighton: Academic Studies Press, 2018), introduction (x-lxviii);
2. Fruma Zachs and Yuval Ben-Bassat, "Women's Visibility in Petitions from Greater Syria during the Late Ottoman Period", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 47 (2015): 765-781;
3. Natasha Wheatley, "Mandatory Interpretation: Legal Hermeneutics and the New International Order in Arab and Jewish Petitions to the League of Nations," *Past & Present*, 227 (2015): 205-248.

16 December

Marie Bossaert (SSM), *Reading the letters: how to deal with epistolary sources*

The course deals with the correspondence as a source for different types of historiographical research, such as history of science and knowledge, social history or colonial history. It relies on the archives of a prominent French scholar, the Orientalist René Basset, based in Algiers from 1880 to 1924. The course will focus on the content of the letters and methods to exploit it, as well as epistolary forms and practices.

Topics:

1. Correspondence and history of science and knowledge
2. Networks and letters
3. Quantitative analysis of correspondences
4. Intimate and history; family and history

Readings:

1. Ann L. Stoler, "Chapter Seven: Imperial Dispositions of Disregard", in *Along the archival grain. Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Commonsense*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2009, pp. 237-278;
2. Roger Chartier, "Introduction", in Roger Chartier, Alain Boureau and Cécile Dauphin (eds), *Correspondence: Models of Letter-writing from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997, pp. 1-23.

17 January

Andrea Graziosi (Università di Napoli Federico II), *Assessing the Soviet Sources' Characteristics, Riches and Biases*

The seminar aims at assessing the nature, the value, and the peculiar biases of Soviet sources, trying at the same time to understand what they tell us about the regime and the groups that produced them, as well as about the population that these sources "observed".

Topics:

1. Soviet sources and Soviet history
2. What the Soviet sources tell about, and how they reflect the Soviet system's peculiarities
3. Soviet sources' characteristics
4. How Soviet sources changed our vision of Soviet history

Reading:

1. A. Graziosi, "The New Soviet Archival Sources. Hypotheses for a Critical Assessment", in *Cahiers du Monde russe*, Vol. 40, no. 1/2, 1999, *Archives et nouvelles sources de l'histoire soviétique, une réévaluation / Assessing the New Soviet Archival Sources*, pp. 13-63.

20 January

Ana Belem Fernandez Castro (SSM), *Lawsuits as documentary sources for legal and cultural history*

This seminar seeks to explore the documentary value of judicial processes as sources for historical research, highlighting their potential usefulness to reconstruct the social and cultural scenarios that frame litigation and that are essential to understand the development and outcome of the judgment. Starting from a preliminary explanation of the general structure of lawsuits, we will explore the type of information that can be extracted from these sources, presenting some strategies as well to complete or contrast the data with other documentary resources when these are fragmentary or uncertain.

Topics:

1. A historiographical perspective on the use of lawsuits as sources for historical research
2. How to work with judicial processes? An overview of the court records' structure
3. What to do when a lawsuit is incomplete? Discussion around the limits of judicial sources and how to interpret lawsuits incompleteness
4. Where to find judicial sources? Strategies to track court records in other documentary collections besides judicial archives.

Readings:

1. KAGAN, R., *Lawsuits and Litigants in Castile. 1500-1700*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1981, pp. XVII-XXIV
2. CAMPHUIJSEN, F., PAGE, J., "Introduction: New Approaches to Late Medieval Court Records" in *Open Library of Humanities* 69/5 (2019), pp. 1-26.

27 January

Mohamed-Ali Adraoui (SSM), *Using Diplomatic Archives: The Case of the United States*

How to determine a corpus of relevant sources and how to work on them when doing international and diplomatic history? Based on the study of the history of American policy towards Islamist movements in the Middle East, taking the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood as a specific case, my presentation will address the tricks of the historian's trade when working on the issue of foreign policy. By focusing on the articulation of the diplomatic archives of the US State Department, interviews with political leaders and official documents related to decision-making in the field of American foreign policy, I will try to show the necessary inventiveness that the historian must show when trying to construct an original object of study such as the link between a major state in the international system and a transnational political-religious movement.

Topics:

1. US foreign policy;

2. Middle East;
3. Political Islam;
4. Diplomatic Archives

Readings:

1. <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2019/05/09/egyptian-muslim-brotherhood-part-i/>
2. <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2019/05/12/egyptian-muslim-brotherhood-part-ii/>

10 February

Olindo De Napoli (Università di Napoli Federico II), *Critique of the sources: general remarks*

The first seminar aims at introducing the problem of historical critique and critique of sources. Through concrete examples, some classical historiographical reflections will be proposed on the problem of the relationship between the historian and the sources.

Topics:

- what is a historical source? From positivism to the criticism of the twentieth century
- branches of history/plurality and identification of sources
- question a source: the questionnaire
- the relationship between the historian and the sources
- the intertwining of different sources
- what is an anachronism?

Readings:

1. G. Monod, "Du progrès des études historiques en France", in *Revue historique*, 1876 (excerpt), <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1po6IncKpug-JMna9vPS-oFFWaaVPvF7Y6Gm3dGfuG6U/edit?usp=sharing> ;
2. C.-V. Langlois, G. Seignobos, *Introduction aux études historiques*, Paris, Editions Kimé, 1992 (or. ed.: Paris, 1898), pp. 1-26, http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/langlois_charles_victor/intro_etudes_historiques/seignobos_etudhisto.pdf ;
3. M. Bloch, "Critica storica e critica della testimonianza" in *Storici e storia*, Einaudi, Torino, 1977, pp. 11 ff., <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1W6PLQGpYW0jqeQLdQ7GL1u-msZ41hGSHs9dSnCmgFvo/edit?usp=sharing> ;

17 February

Olindo De Napoli, *History as a discipline of the context*

The seminar focuses on the relationship between history and other disciplines, the possible different use of sources, and, in particular, the idea of history as a discipline of the context.

Topics:

1. trends in social history and cultural history
2. a story of continuity?
3. relations with other disciplines: enrichments and problems
4. context as the lens to understand the documents
5. history as a discipline of the context

Readings:

1. E.P. Thompson, "Rough Music: Le Charivari anglais", in *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 27e Année, no. 2, 1972, pp. 285-312;
2. R. Darnton, "Peasants Tell Tales: The Meaning of Mother Goose", in Id, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes of French cultural history*, New York, Basic Books, 1984, pp. 9-73.

3 March

Thaïs Gendry (SSM), *Judicial colonial sources: the power within*

In this seminar, we will dive into the judicial archives of the French colonial state in French West Africa in the 1920s and 1930s. In doing so, we will read colonial sources in ways that shed light on different and complementary levels: interpersonal local conflict and major political trends within the French empire.

Topics:

1. Colonial sources: what is omitted/what is celebrated, which voices are heard/which are silenced
2. The politics of sanction: the evolution of criminal offenses in French colonies
3. Quantitative analysis for local and imperial history

Readings:

1. Ann Laura Stoler, "Introduction", in *Along the Archival Grain, Epistemic anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2009
2. Michel Rolph-Trouillot, *Silencing the Past, Power and the Production of history*, chapter TBD

14 April

Niccolò Pianciola (Università di Padova)

Using State Sources to Study Borderland Shadow Economies

Focusing on the opium economy in the Asian borderlands of the Tsarist Empire and the USSR (late 19th-early 20th century), the seminar will discuss how sources produced by state administrations can be used to study a borderland society characterised by cross-border migrations and diffuse illegality, especially during periods of state collapse and reconstruction.

Topics:

1. Shadow economies and state sources
2. Sources for the study of societies intersecting two different imperial/state formations
3. Administrative sources and "gray areas" in state policies
4. Political transitions and sources for social history in colonial situations: from tsarist to Soviet sources

Readings:

- N. Pianciola, "Opium Regimes of Imperial Collapse: The Russian Far East during the Civil War (1917-1922)," *Ab Imperio* 3 (2021): 111-135.
- N. Pianciola, "Illegal Markets and the Formation of a Central Asian Borderland: the Turkestan-Xinjiang Opium Trade (1881-1917)," *Modern Asian Studies* 54/6 (2020): 1828-1875.

28 April

Carmine Pinto (Università di Salerno), *Revolution, warfare, and political nationalism in the sources for the history of Risorgimento*

The seminar aims to present a set of both new and traditional sources concerning the history of armed conflicts and political struggle during the Risorgimento. It will analyse what they can tell us about operational practices, the making of political groups and traditions, and the rise of the Italian liberalism and nationalism.

1. Sources and history of the Risorgimento
2. Analyzing fighting practices and the dynamics of political processes
3. Overview of sources for the history of Risorgimento
4. How sources can enrich and renew the historical study of Risorgimento

Readings:

- C. Pinto, Pedro Rujula Lopez, introduzione a La monarchia dopo la rivoluzione. Europa e America Latina tra restaurazione borbonica e guerre civili (1814-1867), in *Memoria e Ricerca*, n. 62, 3/2019
- C. Pinto, La campagna per la popolazione. Vittime civili e mobilitazione politica nella guerra al brigantaggio (1863-1868), in «*Rivista Storica Italiana*», vol. 3, 2015

5 May

Simone A. Bellezza (Università di Napoli Federico II)

Diasporas as a Global Phenomenon: A Reflection on Method and Sources in the Wake of the Ukrainian Case

The lecture will start by reflecting on the concept of diaspora: in the last two decades this concept has undergone considerable expansion, which has profoundly altered its meaning. After the theoretical reflection, some concrete problems of how to make history of a diaspora will be analyzed, taking the Ukrainian case as a starting point.

Readings:

1. W. Safram, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 1, 1, 1991, pp. 83-99;
2. R. Brubaker, "The Diaspora Diaspora," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28, 1, 2005, pp. 1-19.

Documents:

1. Lev Dobriansky, "Ukrainian Rivulets in the Stream of American Culture," *The Ukrainian Quarterly*, 4, 1 (1947), pp. 55-61;
2. John H. Synchron, *My Credo*, Toronto, 1974;
3. *New Directions*, 1, 1 (December 1968), pp. 1-5.

12 May

Elisabetta Bini (Università di Napoli Federico II), *The History of Energy: Sources, Archives, Methodologies*

The seminar aims at presenting and discussing the archives and sources used to study the history of energy. By examining their characteristics and peculiarities, we will highlight the ways in which energy history sources change our understanding of the international history of the twentieth century.

Topics:

1. Archival resources on the history of energy: characteristics and peculiarities;
2. The specificity of corporate archives;
3. Reading against the grain: unconventional sources on the history of energy;
4. How energy history sources shed new light on the economic, social and cultural history of the twentieth century.

Reading:

- Alain Beltran, "Energy in history, the history of energy", in *Journal of Energy History/Revue d'histoire de l'énergie*, 1, 2018
(http://www.energyhistory.eu/sites/default/files/pdf/04_Introduction.%20Energy%20in%20history%2C%20history%20of%20energy.pdf)

19 May

Suzanne Levin (SSM), *Political History and its Sources: the Example of the French Revolution*
This session will examine how different types of sources can be combined in order to write a multidimensional political history, taking various actors and approaches into account, using the French Revolution as an example.

Topics:

1. Reconstituting public and parliamentary debate
2. Political biography and prosopography
3. (Political) history from below
4. Administrative sources: putting policy into practice

Readings (students can choose 1 or 2):

1. Micah Alpaugh, *Non-Violence and the French Revolution*, 2015, ch. 3
2. Jean-Pierre Gross, *Fair Shares for All: Jacobin Egalitarianism in Practice*, 1997, ch. 6
3. Timothy Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary*, 1996, ch. 5

26 May

Riccardo Rosolino (Università l'Orientale), *tbd*