**Description of Research**

When surveying the chronicles that refer to Baghdad during the Abbasid era, it is impossible to miss the masses. Be it in long disquisitions regarding the civil war, or terse comments that mention that one group burnt the other’s neighborhood, there are hundreds of reports that address the lower strata’s activism. Due to the masses’ broad participation in the public sphere, it is necessary to read through thousands of pages, in order to collect the relevant information, arrange it in a meaningful way and identify patterns of social, religious and political behavior.

The main source of information about the masses in the public sphere are chronicles such as Tabari, Ya`qubi, Mas`udi, Miskawayh and others. These sources approach history from a variety of different angles: political, cultural, and administrative. They cover political and military confrontations, religious controversies and cultural tensions, caliphal court politics, popular protests, etc. Although they focus on high politics (the caliphal court) they often write about the masses when the latter confront rulers, as in the case of rebellions, protests and instances of popular resistance against caliphal policies.

Another genre that on occasion addresses the lower strata of society are biographical dictionaries, which can shed light on individuals, networks and their views and actions. They are of particular importance in the case of ideological and scholarly groups such as the Hanabila.

A third genre that is helpful on occasion, is geographic texts. These chronicle various sites that witnessed protests and in some cases (such as mosques, officials’ homes, palaces) were subjected to violence.

 Lastly, there is *adab* literature, which mentions a variety of events, and in some instances mention the lower strata, particularly their religious and cultural inadequacies.

The first task of this research project is to assemble all the references to the masses that appear in the numerous sources, in an intelligible manner. Since the anecdotes and reports pertaining to the wide public’s activism appear in the sources haphazardly, we will need to locate them and arrange them in meaningful categories. This requires surveying thousands of pages and collecting the relevant information that appears in them. After the information has been gathered, it must be examined and arranged in analytic categories that will enable researchers to access the case studies easily or compare modes of behavior.

Therefore, as we lay the empirical foundations of the project, we will create the kind of typologies that will enable us to ask meaningful research questions. After accumulating a critical mass of information, we will analyze it, ask historical questions, and publish articles.

Stages:

1. During the first two years a team (PI and three research assistants) will read through the sources and compile a body of data in a searchable manner.

2. Concurrently, during those years the team will meet to discuss its findings in order to create a classification system that will enable us to analyze the information.

3. During the third and fourth years, the PI will choose case studies and the team of researchers will deepen their reading of them, and place them within their historic contexts.

4. The in-depth examinations of these case studies will lead to a number of publications. They willl also serve as the basis for comparative studies as well as the effort to synthesize our findings into a monograph that will focus on the participation of the general public in the public sphere.

**Preliminary results**

As was noted in the survey of scholarly literature, there are many references to the masses of Baghdad in the existing scholarship. However, comprehensive studies of their behavior are rare. One example of studies that focus on the masses is Sabari’s *Mouvements Populaire*, which surveys several popular organizations and demonstrates that the masses can be studied in a fruitful manner. Another are my studies of the ways in which the Hanabila evolved out of Baghdad’s masses. These and several other studies, such as the chapters in Cook’s inquiry about the notion of *al-amr bi-‘l-ma`ruf*, Lapidus’s and Madelung’s elaborations on vigilante movements, demonstrate the feasibility and potential that lies in such a research trajectory.

**Pitfalls**

Due to the abundance of evidence, the first task of this project, to collect the information and organize it in historically meaningful categories, is a straightforward and feasible assignment. Similarly, several scholars, including myself, have alreayd written several well-defined and focused articles on the specific case studies and so, I do not foresee any pitfalls in such an endeavor.

However, what may prove to be more difficult is combiningall the insights into a single monograph that will synthesize our findings and conclusions. Although I am confident that we will be able to produce such a monograph, it is important to mention that our safety net will be to publish these insights in a series of articles.