

26 January 2016

Berbers and Borderlands.**Report on the December 2015 Workshop**

The first Berbers and Borderlands workshop met in Leicester on Monday December 14 2015. In attendance were: Andy Merrills (University of Leicester); Corisande Fenwick (UCL); Philipp von Rummel (DAI, Berlin); Guy Halsall (University of York); Simon Loseby (University of Sheffield); David Edwards (University of Leicester). The workshop was deliberately open-ended in structure, with three sessions of c.90 minutes, devoted to principal themes in the study of Moorish Africa (respectively: Authority beyond 'the State'; Ethnicity, Kinship and Problems of Ethnographic models; Mobilities), and a fourth session in which aspirations for future meetings and collaborations were discussed. A number of articles and book chapters were pre-circulated to stimulate discussion, and the principal investigators briefly introduced each session.

The sessions were fruitful, wide-ranging and stimulating, with different scholars drawing on their own areas of expertise in discussion. Particular attention was paid to the ongoing archaeology of Volubilis in its regional setting, the epigraphic evidence for polity formation in fifth- and sixth-century Mauretania, and the famous passage of Procopius' *Vandal War* relating to the regalia of the Moorish 'kings'. In each case, the open-ended nature of the discussion, and the involvement of scholars from a range of fields helped move the debates on enormously. All participants involved were enthusiastic about the potential of the project – particularly those working outside North Africa, who recognized its enormous value for bringing together a large body of critically understudied material to a variety of new audiences.

Berber and Moorish North Africa is clearly a field with enormous scope for scholarly development. The precise forms that this might take were discussed at length in the final session of the workshop. Participants noted the desirability of bringing together a collaborative volume of source material, along the lines of Greg Fisher's important *Arabs and Empires before Islam* (OUP). Any comparable approach to the Berber material would have to place a greater emphasis upon the archaeological literature, but an accessible survey of this, along with comparable treatment of Latin, Greek and Arabic texts, and epigraphy, would certainly be a desideratum. This is a project that the principal investigators plan to develop in the future, perhaps with the support of a wider network grant.

In the immediate term, two approaches will be taken:

1. Progress on **Berbers and Borderlands II**. This will be a larger, and more formal round-table workshop, to be held (provisionally) in Leicester in Easter 2017. It was decided that the over-arching theme for the workshop should be '**Authority and Power beyond the State**'. Here, specific studies focused upon late Antique and early medieval North Africa will be complemented by papers on more modern Berber polities, and discussion will be encouraged among scholars working in a variety of cognate fields. Named individuals will be invited to produce papers on specific themes, which will then be pre-circulated. Further scholars will be asked to produce short responses to these papers, (which will also be pre-circulated). An over-arching 'position paper' by Merrills and Fenwick will be circulated to all participants six months before the conference. It is hoped that this approach will maximise the potential for collaborative discussion.

All papers will then be published in a volume edited by Fenwick and Merrills, and to be submitted to Cambridge University Press in the first instance. All of the participants in the first workshop welcomed this strategy, and all were anxious to be included in the second gathering.

[Further scholars to be invited include: Analise Nef; James MacDougall; Bonnie Effros; Virginie Prevost; Alloua Amara; Robin Whelan; Greg Fisher; Lisa Fentress; Cyril Aillet]

2. **Pump-priming and discussions for the establishment of a wider network grant**, bringing together institutions in Leicester, London and Berlin. This would enable the B+B project to continue for longer, and support workshops of the kind that proved so effective in December 2015. It is hoped that such a network would also provide the foundation for further collaborative publications.

To date, £1000 of the allotted budget of £1228 has been spent on transport, accommodation and food for the delegates at the first workshop. The last expenses claims for travel are still being received by the University of Leicester, and it is expected that the workshop will come in at budget. Any remaining money will be carried over to assist international scholars (particularly those from North Africa) to attend the second meeting.

We would be grateful if the 'second stage' grant of £4640 could be released to allow planning to begin on the second stage of the project.

Andy Merrills and Corisande Fenwick

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