Introduction: Authority beyond Tribe and State in the ‘Middle Maghrib’
Corisande Fenwick and Andy Merrills

The history of Ancient and Medieval North Africa has all too often been written as the history of its conquerors. Accounts of Roman, Vandal, Byzantine, or Islamic North Africa typically focus on the civilized heartland of Carthage or Kairouan and their environs and neglect the upland regions, pre-desert and Sahara beyond as the undifferentiated world of the barbarians. These were the lands of al-Barbar (the Berbers) in the eyes of medieval Arab commentators, who were the first to group together the peoples in this universalising label; it was ‘L’Afrique oubliée’ (‘forgotten Africa’), to Christian Courtois in the last major work of colonial-period scholarship on the pre-Islamic Maghrib. ¹ His was the latest in a long line of colonial scholarship which commonly defined the inhabitants of such regions by what they were not: not Punic, not Roman, not Arab, and often not actors in history at all. As the Moroccan intellectual Abdallah Laroui argued in 1970 in one of the first works to disrupt this consensus, North Africans most often appear as “mere supernumeraries in a history enacted on their soil”. ² In challenging these assumptions, Laroui divided the stage of North African history into three. He devoted his greatest attention to the region he termed ‘the Middle Maghrib’, the territories of Morocco and northern Algeria, the uplands of the Atlas and the Tell ranges, and the pre-desert and high plateaux beyond, in which imperial power of successive occupiers was resisted, and in which new social and political systems developed, particularly in the second half of the first millennium.³ This he contrasted with the ‘Subjugated Maghrib’, that is the heartland of Roman Africa and Islamic Ifriqiya which has been the primary focus of scholarship, and the Sahara to the south, which was frequently accorded a romanticized (and often implausible) agency in the grand narratives of North African history (Figure 1).

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

In the period between the decline of western Roman influence in this region in the early-fifth century CE and the rise of Almoravid and Almohad imperial claims half a millennium later, the Middle Maghrib was a crucible of social and political change. This was every bit as remarkable as that apparent in Europe or the Fertile Crescent in the same period, if much less familiar to many scholars. Perhaps most significantly, the medieval history of this region has retained a political valence of remarkable intensity. The works of Courtois and Laroui emerged either side of the revolutions in North Africa, and Laroui himself intended his work to have a relevance in the changed political environment in the aftermath of independence. The years that followed prompted an increasing recognition of the influence

³ Laroui, History of the Maghrib, 70-9.
of colonialist assumptions on scholarly models of North Africa’s past. New attention was paid to those groups traditionally overlooked in histories of the region, including those broadly identified as ‘Berbers’. More recently, contemporary Amazigh or Berber identity movements across the Maghrib have themselves drawn inspiration from the prehistoric, medieval, and ancient past, and particularly upon the region’s complex history of colonial occupation. The resistance of ‘Berber’ societies to Roman, medieval and modern imperialisms, and the catalytic role of Islam in the development of early medieval polities have proved particularly significant points of reference in this changing historical discourse.

It is regrettable, but perhaps not surprising, that North African societies are not better known to medievalists working in neighbouring regions. The societies of ‘Moorish’ or ‘Berber’ North Africa are rarely included in discussions of the successor states of the post-Roman west, and Masuna, the Kahina or Ibn Rustam are much less familiar figures than Clovis or Charlemagne in the wider historical imagination. Similarly, the Maghrib and the Islamic West are usually little more than a footnote in scholarly discussions of the early Islamic Caliphate and Islamic world. Even well-known states and empires, which have left a material and textual imprint, such as the Aghlabids, the Almorovids and the Almohads are seldom included in discussions – or worse, interpreted through a core-periphery framework by scholars working outside the region. It is frequently assumed that a paucity of textual sources, combined with practical difficulties of dating archaeological sites and materials, have rendered late antique and early medieval North Africa unknowable to scholars. The same claim used to be made of early medieval societies elsewhere in the Mediterranean world in the so-called ‘dark ages’ but has been categorically overturned, and it is demonstrably incorrect for North Africa too.

**Histories of ‘The Berbers’; Histories of ‘The Maghrib’.**

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The greatest challenge in the study of the early medieval Maghrib is not the absence of source material, but resisting the tendency to essentialize, and to draw wider conclusions from specific fragments of information. The extrapolation of general patterns from discrete points of evidence must be a basic part of any historical or archaeological methodology, of course, but students of North Africa must be particularly wary. It is often tempting to use sources from one part of this vast world to relieve the silences in another, but doing so risks simplifying regional complexity and presenting large swathes of North Africa – and substantial periods of time – in more or less identical terms. No less significantly, it risks unconscious perpetuation of social caricatures about the ‘permanence Berbère’ which were established during North Africa’s violent colonial history. Conversely, eschewing entirely the possibilities for comparison and cross-illumination risks leaving the study of this period as a series of isolated fragments.

In fact, the vast majority of recent scholarship on early medieval North Africa is acutely sensitive to regional diversity and chronology, but framing the subject of our study in appropriate language remains exceptionally difficult. ‘Berber’ is the most common shorthand to describe the inhabitants of the Maghrib (and sometimes the Sahara) from prehistory onward, for example. The label was a coinage of the earliest Arabic writers on the region, of course, and one that has since been burdened with the ideological baggage of colonial period ethnography. Given this history, uncritical use of this language would indeed be problematic, but scholars frequently address this at length in their studies; indeed, the changing evolution of the term has itself been the subject of extensive scholarship. Nor are the alternatives without difficulties. In recent years, the term Amazigh/Imazighen has become more common in scholarship on historical periods, in deference to the preferred terminology of contemporary groups within North Africa, but assertions of ‘Amazigh’ identities in prehistory are scarcely less essentializing than the language that they replace. Similarly, studies of late antique North Africa now commonly refer to Mauri or ‘Moors’ rather than ‘Berbers’, but the difficulties remain: there is little reason to think that the groups so named by later Roman or Byzantine sources regarded themselves as unified, and there is good reason to think that they did not. References to the ‘autochthonous’ or ‘indigenous’ inhabitants of the region may side-step universalizing ethnographic terminology of this kind, but they too implicitly reinforce some of the assumptions of colonial-period ethnography. Even seemingly innocuous references to the populations of ‘North Africa’ (or the ‘Maghrib’) impose clumsy geographical parameters on the past which have little

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11 Camps, Aux origines; Camps, Berbères; Brett and Fentress, The Berbers; Vandals, Romans and Berbers, ed. A.H. Merrills (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004). And of course the ongoing Encyclopédie berbère.
12 Rouigui, Inventing the Berbers, examines the earliest evolution of the term.
reference to the extraordinary human (and indeed topographical) diversity disguised by such labels.\(^\text{16}\) Finally, the names of individual groups – where they are known – offer limited help. Not only do terms like ‘Mazices’, ‘Frexes’ or the ‘Awraba’ mean little to scholars of other regions or periods, they may have meant little to members of the groups themselves outside a few specific moments in their history.

Scholars have attempted to make sense of Laroui’s ‘Middle Maghrib’ (or Courtois’ ‘Forgotten Africa’), in a variety of different ways, and this work is ongoing. A vital first step has been to recognize the limitations on our scholarly vocabulary, whether we refer to groups as ‘Berbers’, ‘Moors’, or ‘Imazighen’, (or indeed simply as ‘groups’). A second crucial step has been to demonstrate that a critical reappraisal of textual and archaeological sources, imperfect as they are, can bring the political structures and everyday practices of local societies into sharp focus. It is becoming ever clearer that such societies are often very different from one another, and we need to appreciate the individual puzzle pieces in their own right. At the same time, however, it is important not to get lost in the detail: reflection on wider patterns and differences across regions and time is also crucial to understanding political and social trajectories in this pivotal period. Although challenges remain, these obstacles are not insurmountable. Over the past three decades especially, archaeologists, philologists and epigraphers have done a great deal to illuminate a startling range of societies across this diverse region which offer new perspectives on debates about kingship, state formation and identity in the early medieval world.\(^\text{17}\)

**The Middle Maghrib: A historical and archaeological introduction**

North Africa had been at the heart of the Roman Empire.\(^\text{18}\) Famously described as the ‘granary of the Roman empire’, in the third and fourth centuries CE, the African provinces were among the richest and most urbanised in the Roman world, and the political and

\(^{16}\) Rouighi, *Inventing the Berbers*, 105-29; Laroui, *History of the Maghrib* notes some of the problems with the term at p.9.


economic tendrils of the empire extended even deep into the Sahara. The nature of the Roman presence varied dramatically across the region, of course. In the imperial heartlands around Carthage, in the Tunisian Sahel and in the Numidian cereal plains around Cirta (Constantine), this was a region of intense agricultural exploitation. Well-connected towns covered the landscape, and Latin Christianity took deep root alongside Judaism, Manichaeanism and the traditional civic cults. Here, as throughout the empire, Romanitas was inflected with local elements, and regional identities flourished. Such variations were particularly pronounced on the fringes of this imperial world. In the upland regions of the Moroccan Atlas and the Algerian Tell – the Roman provinces of Mauretania Tingitana, Caesariensis and Sitifiensis – and in the pre-desert borderlands of Tripolitania and southern Byzacena, the Roman presence was felt differently. Here, towns were scarcer, agricultural exploitation developed alongside different modes of pastoralism, Christianity mingled with a range of local religious practices, and military authority frequently devolved to local powerbrokers acting in the name of the empire, particularly in the fourth and fifth centuries.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

The occupation of Carthage by the Vandals in 439 shrank this political landscape, and it reduced further following the conquest (or ‘reconquest’) of Africa during the reign of the eastern emperor Justinian in 533. Vandal and Byzantine rule was largely restricted to the rump territories of Africa Proconsularis, Byzacena and eastern Numidia; outside this region, authority was restricted to the coastal enclave of Septem and Tingis (Figure 2). The vast territories beyond were to follow their own trajectories. These regions are imperfectly illuminated by our textual sources, and have been little studied by archaeologists more interested in early Roman towns, public buildings, aristocratic housing and – in late antiquity - churches, but some hints remain. Civic life continued in some of the widely-scattered towns of the west. The best known is that of Volubilis/Walīla, the provincial Roman capital of Mauretania Tingitana, partially occupied in the sixth and seventh century. The late antique town was strikingly different in appearance to that of the early Roman provincial capital, however, and from the changing cityscapes of contemporary

20 Brent D. Shaw, Bringing in the Sheaves. Economy and Metaphor in the Roman World (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013) is a fine introduction to this world.
21 Cf. David J. Mattingly, Tripolitania (London: Batsford, 1995); Hamdoune, Ad fines
Byzantine Tunisia: no churches or fortifications have yet been uncovered, and there is no evidence of continued occupation of the splendid insulae with their mosaic floors. Urban settlements of this scale were rare in the sixth- and seventh-century western Maghrib, but are paralleled at Pomaria (mod. Tlemcen), Altava and Tingartia (mod. Tahert) in Algeria.26 Christianity, too, seems to have survived across the old Roman provinces, and there are occasional hints of Jewish communities.27 Papal letters of the fifth and sixth centuries, and conciliar lists down to the later Byzantine period testify to the survival of an episcopal network which seems to have been an important rallying point for local and provincial identities, and surprising clusters of Latin Christian epigraphy survive into the seventh century.28 But there are hints too at the emergence of new religious practices across the region, or perhaps the revival of the old, including cults of the ram and the bull, and traditions of ancestor veneration.29

Very little is known of the inhabitants of this changing world, their political organisation or their rulers, apart from a few tantalising hints.30 Sedentary and mobile populations certainly continued to coexist throughout this period, although there is some reason to think that pastoral communities rose to greater prominence in the centuries following the eclipse of Roman power.31 The population also remained polyglot, as the long survival of the Latin epigraphic tradition, alongside with the occasional appearance of inscriptions in Libyan scripts, demonstrates, but historical linguists have also proposed that there was a marked spread in the use of Berber dialects across the region from the fifth or sixth century onwards.32 Knowledge of the political and social structures of the region has traditionally

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28 Hamdoune, Ad fines, 239-314.
rested on a comparatively small handful of texts, inscriptions, and funerary sites, but this evidence base is slowly growing and interpretation has developed with it. Most famously, we know of one Masuna, who proclaimed himself to be ‘King of the Moorish and Roman peoples’ (Rex gentium Maurorum et Romanorum) in a Latin inscription of 508 CE from Altava in the far west of Mauretania Caesariensis. Masuna’s near-contemporary Masties seems to have ruled in the Aurès mountains later in the sixth century, and either rejoiced in the title ‘imperator’ or (more probably) the less exalted (praepositus limiti) (‘frontier officer’). But these rulers were not alone. Recent discoveries have identified another Masties from an inscription in northern Numidia, and we know of a handful of other prominent powerbrokers from across the region both from their own epigraphic testimony and from the accounts of Byzantine sources of the sixth and seventh centuries. Latin, Greek, and Arabic sources variously describe these figures as Christian, Jewish or pagan, and while such texts need to be treated with caution, the impression of religious variety that they present is striking.

Precisely whom, how, or what these individuals ruled, and how these spheres related to the wider worlds of the Maghrib, the Sahara, and the Mediterranean is far from clear. Archaeological research on the late antique ‘Middle Maghrib’ remains thin outside a few isolated pockets and much of our knowledge still relies on research undertaken before the advent of modern archaeological techniques. Those towns which survived into the post-Roman period retained some political importance, and certain civic institutions evidently survived to the time of the Arab conquest if not beyond. Only a handful of plausible sites for political centres have been identified outside the cities, and even here identification is far from certain. These include a small fortified settlement at Sidi Medjahed to the west of Altava and (more recently) a similarly pseudo-military site of approximately 15 hectares from Douken Jfara in the south of the Tunisian Dorsal. Ceramic evidence suggests an occupation of this site down to the seventh century, and the discovery of architectonic and decorative masonry elements hints at its importance. Its proximity to prehistoric cave-paintings may also be significant, and the scholars who worked on the site have plausibly


35 Hamdoune, Ad fines, 283-4.

36 Handley, “End of African Christianity”.


38 Conant, Staying Roman, 284-96.

connected it to the territory of the ‘Caprapicti’ ('Painted Goats') identified by a Vandal-period author. But beyond that the political structures represented by this tantalizing site remain obscure.

Monumental tumuli (bazinas) known from the region provide our other great source of evidence. Best known among these are the thirteen great monumental tumuli near Tiaret known as the Djedar. Probably dating between the fifth and seventh centuries, the largest of these tombs are comparable in scale to the great Numidian tombs of the second and first centuries BCE, and may have drawn inspiration from them. The Djedar share similarities with other tumuli across the western Sahara, and hint at the wide geographical horizons of the communities which built them, but the earliest were clearly the work of provincial masons and incorporate dedicatory inscriptions in Latin, alongside supposedly ‘Saharan’ elements. Other important late antique tumuli are known across the region, and include a substantial necropolis at Djorf Torba, far to the south of the old Roman frontier, where plaques decorated with apparently Christian elements may reveal the spread of that faith among neighbouring populations. Further clusters of bazinas are known from southern Numidia, including two from Némencha preserving with what would appear to be religious inscriptions in Libyan script made in red ochre. Among the innumerable tumuli across the region are eight further bazinas constructed on top of an old Roman frontier fort at Ausum, which plausibly hints at their political as well as religious importance, and the aspirations of these new societies to supplant the old. Still other examples are known from Morocco, including the massive circular bazina and rectangular platform known as the ‘Gour’ to the south of Meknes, which has been dated to the seventh century. More recently, survey and excavation to the south of the Atlas mountains has identified nucleated settlements and burial tumuli which probably also date to this period.

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The Arab conquests of the late seventh century did not erase the regional differences which had developed in the centuries following Roman rule, but rather exacerbated them, and introduced new aspects to the dynamics of political and social change. Although the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphate laid claim to the entirety of North Africa and professed to have converted the Berbers – at least in theory – direct political authority across the region was limited. Umayyad and Abbasid rule again centred on the old African provincial heartland, now known as Ifriqiya, in what is today Tunisia and eastern Algeria. In the west, authority was restricted to a handful of outposts at towns such as Tlemcen, Tanger Ceuta, and perhaps Walilia (Volubilis). The interactions between imperial power and the Berber societies in the West in the seventh and eighth centuries remains poorly understood. The earliest surviving histories and geographies were compiled in the late-ninth century by scholars living hundreds of miles away under Abbasid rule in Egypt, Jerusalem or Baghdad when North Africa had already been lost to the caliphate. While these later traditions contain important hints of the political landscape as it existed at the time of the Arab conquest, and have been scrutinized in some detail by scholars, the record is far from reliable, and the basic social organization of the region, as well as the immediate impact of caliphal rule and the spread of Islam, have only recently been investigated in detail.

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

In the hilly, mountainous and desert territories of the far west and in regions beyond the garrison towns, the caliphate had little effective control. In 739-40, the so-called ‘Kharajite revolt’ broke out in Morocco, and rapidly spread to Iberia and Tunisia. In its wake, new Muslim political forms emerged in the West as rivals to the Umayyad and then the Abbasid caliphate: the Šāliḥids (709), the Barghawata (744); the Midrarids of Sijilmasa (758), Rustamids (776); Idrīsids (788) (Figure 3). The origins of these states was extremely varied: some were local creations, whilst others were established by exiles or incomers from the East, as in the case of the Idrīsids of central Morocco, the Šāliḥids at Nakur, or the Rustamids.

52 Compare, for example, Dahmani, “Pouvoirs tribaux autochtones”; Moderan, Les Maures, 686-810; for the archaeology, see Fenwick Early Islamic North Africa, esp. 31-52.
based at Tāhart. These new political and social constellations herald a whole package of wider changes in the western Maghrib, including wide-spread urbanisation, the appearance of new forms of architecture (mosques, hammams, courtyard houses), the spread of Islam and Muslim dietary and burial practices, and the introduction of new crops, husbandry practices, manufacturing techniques and ceramic forms.54 Dynastic cities were established to house the new rulers, and to act as the centre of government. These were not top-down foundations: local tribes played a pivotal role in the process of urbanisation and most medieval centres developed in, or near, existing settlements or market-places.55 Cities were even established in the Saharan oases, as in the case of Sijilmasa, the famous caravan city established in the eighth century that subsequently became the centre of the Midrarids and the principal centre of trans-Saharan trade.56 Some such foundations, such as Fes or Sijilmasa thrived and became major hubs; however, the majority – such as Tahart, Sedrata or the later foundations of Achir and the Qala of the Beni Hammad – boomed for several centuries and then disappeared.57 Outside the caliphate as it was, the Maghrib al-Aqsa was now integrated into a vast new trading world linking it with Ifriqiya, al-Andalus, West Africa and the Mashriq.58 This success and prosperity paved the way for the North African Berber Empires of the tenth-twelfth centuries CE, the Almoravids and Almohads, who conquered much of the western Mediterranean.59

Again, our sources on these early Muslim polities are far from ideal, but the information that is available is suggestive. Almost nothing written by North African scholars survives before the fourteenth century of the rich literary culture of Kairouan or Fez, except fragments quoted in later manuscripts. An important exception is the Ibadi manuscript tradition which was first compiled in the ninth century, and provides significant insight into the foundation of the Rustamid state, Ibadi doctrine and the development of the communities in the Djebel


Nafusa, Jerba and the M’zab. Archaeology provides a rather more optimistic picture, particularly as scholars have engaged more directly on the Islamic period in Africa and especially the complexities of the earliest periods. Excavations have taken place at many of the dynastic capitals of the Berber successor states over the past century and more—Volubilis, Sijilmasa, Nakur, Tahart, Sedrata, Achir and the Qal’a of the Beni Hammad. Islamic archaeology is most developed in Morocco and it is here that the most significant steps into understanding the different trajectories of states and societies between 700 and 1200. However, with a few notable exceptions, excavations remain small-scale with limited resources, and it is only in the past decade that a handful of sites have been satisfactorily excavated and published. So too, the impact of this research has been exacerbated by a dependence on imported ceramics for dating evidence which effectively render sites invisible, particularly in the seventh and eighth centuries. As a result, much work is still to be done on the material culture and settlement of this pivotal period.

New Approaches

The contributors to the present volume seek to bring this ongoing discussion of early medieval North Africa to a wider audience and to build upon it, to illustrate the extraordinary variety of this world, and to explore the range of methodologies that may be employed in its study. Rather than apply a single interpretative model to ‘Berber’ or Moorish society, they present a consciously fragmented series of approaches, deploying philological, archaeological, anthropological and paleo-climatological data. They do not purport to present a definitive picture of North African society in this volatile period, but rather demonstrate the complexity of this field, and the possibilities for future work from a range of different approaches.

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61 See now Fenwick, Early Islamic North Africa and the discussion therein.


64 On the challenges that these pose scholars, see Fenwick Early Islamic North Africa: 7-30 and
The papers collected here had their origin in a two-day workshop funded by the Society for Libyan Studies which took place in University College London in May 2018. Participants at the workshop were invited to reflect on modes of engaging with the history of North Africa beyond the traditional scholarly paradigms of ‘state’ or ‘tribe’. The circulated papers – and resulting discussions – were stimulating in their variety, and benefitted from a range of scholarly perspectives. Different contributions reflected on North African society in a range of ways, from the minute scrutiny of familiar texts and the representation of comparatively well-known archaeological material, to the demonstration of the value of environmental historical perspectives – or the imagery provided by satellite technology – in asking new questions of this world. The result is far from a monolithic picture of North Africa in a period of transition – if anything, this volume seeks to present the opposite. But together they demonstrate the value of revisiting familiar sources with new perspectives, and the relevance of North Africa to scholars of the wider medieval world.

In his article, Andy Merrills looks at the symbols of ‘Moorish’ rulership as they are known to us from two of the principal textual sources of the mid-sixth century. The accounts ofProcopius and Corippus provide complementary portraits of African society in the first decades of the Byzantine period, but remain challenging sources to use effectively. They have variously been read either as glimpses of the unchanging nature of Berber society – where ethnonymic fragments may occasionally be connected to those from early or later sources as evidence for the longevity of tribes, and details of politics or religion connected to other isolated fragments to create an image of cultural continuity – or simply as reflections of the chauvinism of imperial attitudes to the barbarians. Merrills reads these texts as active evidence for Moorish social hierarchies in a process of change, and argues that trappings and titles once thought to be evidence for atavistic practice, are better read as moments of renegotiation during a particular period of upheaval. He argues that even apparently timeless titles like ‘king (rex)’ need to be understood in their immediate political and cultural context.

If the Moorish polities can be traced only dimly in the fifth and sixth centuries, those of the early Islamic period can be explored with more confidence. In his contribution, Cyrille Aillet discusses the Rustamid Imamate which developed around Tahart from c.160/777 and retained its autonomy for more than a century. Tahart itself lay both on the old Roman frontier and on the edges of Caliphal authority: in this sense the polity that emerged was a political formation which responded to both imperial models, as well as to local elements within the region itself. His analysis addresses the multiple, often contradictory, narratives describing the foundation of the Imamate. He also considers the archaeology of the twinned capital complex, which is itself a complex palimpsest of information from the colonial period and after. Ultimately, Aillet presents an image of Rustamid power which drew upon local traditions, including regional religious authority which helped bind together disparate populations, but which also adopted wide discourses of Islamic rule to its own ends.

Chloe Capel considers another of these political formations – the so-called ‘Midrarid kingdom of Sijilmassa’, which developed on the south side of the Atlas range in the later eighth century, and considers the degree to which its emergence was shaped by environmental as well as historical circumstances. Although interest in the environmental
history of the early middle ages has developed spectacularly in recent years, once more North Africa has frequently been left out of this conversation. This is due in part to a relative lack of climatic data, but also to a recognition of the extraordinary micro-climatic variability across this world. Capel presents the results of recent environmental study at Sijilmassa and argues for the role that this change had on the emergence of that state. While her discussion acknowledges the importance of cultural and religious impulses in the shaping of Sijilmassa, she also shows clearly that historians and archaeologists need to appreciate the importance of the longue durée in their discussions of political change.

Finally, Virginie Prevost combines a careful scrutiny of local historical traditions and current archaeology to explore the peculiar power maintained by the Banū Yahrāsan family on the island of Djerba from the later ninth century CE. Her study reveals the potential of later historical traditions to shed light on earlier periods, when utilised with due care and caution. As Prevost demonstrates, the power of their imamate developed from the aftermath of the Rustamid polity, and in some senses was a response to it. Although certain aspects of this influence recall the familiar trappings of medieval states elsewhere – including the dominance of a central dynasty, investment in focal buildings like the Djerba mosque, and presumably practices like dispute settlement and taxation – the power of the Banū Yahrāsan rested primarily on cultural authority.

The papers assembled here consider North African society in a range of geographical contexts: from Djerba and the Jebel Nafusa to the Atlas Mountains. They consider political change from the long-term perspective of environmental change, the ways in which civic foundations and political institutions could emerge and change over decades, and reflect on even the most ephemeral moments of social distinction and hierarchy. They do not claim to present a complete portrait of political change in the early medieval Maghrib, of course: no collection could do that, but hint at the multiple paths for future scholarly discovery.

Figure List:
Figure 1: Topographic map of North Africa (Corisande Fenwick).
Figure 2: Cities in late antique North Africa, the postulated location of the ‘Moorish states’ and key towns mentioned in the text are also indicated (Corisande Fenwick).
Figure 3: Cities in ninth-century North Africa; the location of medieval states and key urban centres mentioned in the text are also indicated (Corisande Fenwick).