

Report of the CRG African History for 2017/18

Julia Tischler, Baz Lecocq

Activities

The main activity in this year was the *Fourth Biennial CRG African History Conference*, hosted by the University of West Bohemia, Pilsen CZ, from 14 to 16 June 2018. The conference was attended by 37 participants from various universities and other research institutions in Europe (Britain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Austria, Spain, and Poland) as well as from overseas (Egypt, Republic of the Congo). Following the established format, the conference consisted of roundtables, rather than conventional conference panels, to facilitate more interaction and discussion. Roundtables encompassed a diverse range of topics, as listed below. Camille Lefebvre, CNRS Paris, had been selected as speaker for the Exciting Lecture on African History. Her talk “Language as archive. New light on old material, Hausa-Kanuri sources from 18th-19th century” discussed an underused body of sources of Hausa and Kanuri texts and translations thereof, addressing also larger questions of written source material, issues of translation and biases.

In sum, it is fair to speak of a very successful conference, which provided many opportunities for scholars of different stages of their career (from early PhD to retired professors) and different institutional backgrounds to engage in intensive debates.

Program overview:

Roundtable I: “Decolonizing sovereignty”

Critical discussion of the concept of sovereignty, its political and economic aspects as well as historical trajectories of self-determination.

Moritz Mihatsch, Brussels; Michael Mulligan, Cairo; Cassandra Thiesen-Mark, Basel; Eva-Maria, Berlin.

Roundtable II: «Settler colonialism and African History»

Engaging with recent scholarship on settler colonialism as a distinct from other forms of imperial rule.

Julia Tischler, Basel; Zoë Groves, Leister; Andy Cohen, Kent; Kai Herzog, Basel

Roundtable III: «Photos as sources for African history»

Participants presenting a selection of photographs to discuss their value as sources

Adam Jones, Leipzig; Kirsten Rüther, Vienna; Ines Plasencia, Madrid; Michaela Unterholzner, Leipzig; Dmitri van de Bersselaar, Leipzig

Roundtable IV: “Material histories: interdisciplinary engagements of archaeology in Africa”

Archaeologists and environmental scientists debated prospects of collaboration with historians and incorporation of hard data

Monika Baumanova, Pilsen; Ladislav Smejda, Prague; Martin Odler, Prague; Jaromir Benes, Budweis; Veronika Dulikova; Prague

Roundtable V: “Writing the history of postcolonial societies through regional archives”

Panelists shared experiences in working with regional archives and potential of these underused resources

Alexander Keese, Geneva; Brice Owabiro, Brazzaville; Annalisa Urbano, Geneva ; Romain Tiquet, Geneva; Andreas Zeman, Bern; Vincent Hirribaren, London

Administrative matters

Chairperson:

During the business meeting held at the 4th biennial conference, members confirmed the following administrative changes: Klaas van Walraven stepped down as chairperson and was replaced by Julia Tischler, University of Basel. Contact: julia.tischler@unibas.ch; <https://dg.philhist.unibas.ch/de/personen/julia-tischler>

Visibility:

Participants discussed the timing of the biennial, as June has become a very busy conference month. Debating how both the conference and the CRG could be made more visible, members suggested using social media more extensively to advertise the activities of the CRG (e.g. set up a Facebook page). In addition, the call for the next biennial should be sent out rather a long time in advance.

5th biennial conference of the CRG African History:

To be held at the African Studies Centre Leiden in the summer of 2020; the exact date will be settled soon. Local conference committee: Jan-Bart Gewald and Klaas van Walraven.