UWICAH’s First Annual Postgraduate Conference

In autumn 2013, the Universities in Wales Institute of Classics and Ancient History embarked on a new venture. Swansea University recently hosted UWICAH’s First Annual Postgraduate Conference. The conference was the first of an annual series of meetings organised by, and principally aimed at, postgraduate students researching any aspect of the ancient world. The inaugural event took place on November 9th and was organised by a committee of PhD candidates from Swansea University, who represent the disciplines of ancient history, classics and Egyptology, working under the guidance of academics with the University’s department of History and Classics. Candidates were invited to speak on the topic of ‘Transformations’ in the ancient world, a broad and wide-reaching theme, which was chosen specifically to allow for a number of different interpretations and methodological approaches, and therefore, a diverse range of papers. The conference provided research students from the three constituent institutions of UWICAH (Cardiff University, Swansea University and University of Wales Trinity Saint David), and also students from the University of Birmingham, an opportunity to present papers relevant to their research projects and enabled postgraduates from across the U.K. to experience, at first hand, the varied scope of research currently being undertaken in Wales and beyond.

The impetus behind this new initiative is the desire to foster a sense of community amongst postgraduate students in Wales, and establish firm links between the research community in Wales and those in other institutions throughout the U.K., in order to develop a dynamic research environment in the study of the ancient world.
First, and foremost, the conference provided postgraduates with a forum in which to present their research in a friendly and welcoming atmosphere. It is widely recognised that a successful research experience requires networking and communication skills, and this conference aims to encourage continuing working relationships and an appreciation of the variety of approaches and interests of postgraduate researchers. The audience was not limited to postgraduates from Welsh universities and we were also able to accept speakers from beyond Wales, namely from Birmingham, and this interest from outside the country has the potential for the conference series to develop into an occasion which, although centred in Wales, need not limit itself to the three constituent institutions.

Whilst officially UWICAH represents departments of classics and ancient history within Welsh universities, it recognises the strong research environment for Egyptology in the country, and has long included the discipline in its academic programme. The inclusion of Egyptology in this new conference series served to foster further cohesion and a sense of community amongst postgraduates in Wales. It is our hope that postgraduate students from all three disciplines recognised common themes and approaches, common difficulties and innovative new methodologies that they will be able to apply to their own field of research. Through integrating these disciplines, this conference allowed for a cross-disciplinary exchange of ideas, methodologies and approaches, thus ensuring that the research community remains diverse, dynamic and open to new ideas.

In order to ensure the development of a thriving and cohesive postgraduate community in Wales the conference staged a number of skills-based workshops
alongside its programme of academic papers. These workshops were aimed at providing and enhancing a set of practical skills that research students will need to become successful academics. These seminars were hosted by teaching and research staff from Swansea University and included three workshops on the following topics: a teaching skills workshop which sought to provide postgraduate tutors with inspiration and innovative techniques to actively involve undergraduates in seminars, advice on careers within the heritage sector and information on the formation of research groups, on the model of University of Wales Trinity Saint David and Swansea’s own KYKNOS Centre for Research on the Narrative Literatures of the Ancient World. Each workshop was devoted to highlighting skills that postgraduate students will need in their future careers, but for which they may not have received any formal training.

The success of this first conference has been evident in the fantastic feedback received from staff and student attendees alike. John Morgan, Swansea University said that he “thought the conference was a significant step forwards for graduate Classics in Wales, and in fact for the whole of the UK. A friendly forum like this, where research students can present their research to an audience of their peers and share ideas, both provides invaluable experience and is immensely fertile.” Dr Martina Minas-Nerpel, Swansea University, also commented that “The meeting provided new insights into the transformations in the ancient world, drawing on historical, textual, and visual sources, thus including several disciplines with diverging traditions, foci, and methodologies.” The success of the conference has also been evident in this publication of selected papers presented at the event. We
would like to thank the team at Rosetta Journal for their support and hard work in the preparation of this collection of articles.

Zuzanna Bennett of Swansea University opened the first session with a discussion of the function of demonic entities in the Ancient Egyptian *Book of Two Ways*. Her paper presents a new argument for the interpretation of these demons based on the detailed and varied names of these beings. Alex Ferron, also from Swansea University, examined the Classical text *Cyropaedia* by Xenophon. In his paper, he argues against the interpretation of the *Cyropaedia* as a satire, instead believing that the text is a philosophical and educational narrative. Jill Mitchel of University of Wales, Trinity Saint David examined the transformation of Christianity during the course of the Fourth Century. Her paper follows the development of Christianity from being *superstitio* to replacing the traditional cults of the Roman state as the *religio uera*. Finally, Nicholas Mataya of Swansea University focuses on the transformation of Christianity in the Balkans during the Late Roman Empire from a marginal sect into one of the most important aspects of the region, drawing on martyr stories and hagiographies.

Other papers presented at the conference, but not included in this publication, included David Colwill’s paper on Genocide and Rome, Rachel Bird’s discussion of Eros and Sophrosyne, Ulriika Vihervalli’s paper on homosexual behaviour in Roman North Africa, William Jupp’s presentation on Abba Arsenius, Flavio Sanza’s examination of Julius Caesar, Glyn Bryan’s paper on Post-Roman Germanic kingship, Ruth Leger’s discussion of Artemis’ cults, Jeff Lindsey’s analysis of hoplites in Classical Greece and Phillip Myer’s paper on the Punic West.
The conference series has the potential to instil a sense of belonging to postgraduate researchers in Wales. By giving participants this opportunity, we, as organisers of the inaugural event, hope that the initiative will allow existing research strengths in the participating universities concerned to grow and develop. Swansea provided the base for the start of this process, but our collective research strengths guarantee that this is only the beginning. It is our intention to establish an annual event which will become an integral part of the academic calendar in Wales, building upon the successes of the annual meeting of UWICAH at Gregynog Hall. Our ambition, to start a new conference series to develop research talent amongst postgraduate students, draws comparison to similar initiatives in the U.K., such as AMPAH. However, we aim to distinguish ourselves by adopting a more focused approach. Our narrower geographical focus, coupled with our desire to foster a sense of community, will ensure that the UWICAH Annual Meeting of Postgraduates not only acts as a showcase of new research and ideas in Wales, but also provides an opportunity for postgraduate students from Welsh universities to meet their peers (both in Wales and from further afield), gain valuable skills, network, form lasting friendships and understand how their individual project fits into the wider research environment. UWICAH’s Annual Meeting of Postgraduates will be hosted at each of the three universities in turn, ensuring the long term success of the venture by allowing students and academics from each institution to add their focus and personality to the event. It is our firm belief that this new conference series will be a success not only on a regional level, but will also have the potential to serve as a model to develop postgraduate communities in a number of localities throughout the U.K.
Zuzanna Bennett, Rachel Bird and Alex Ferron, Swansea University
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