Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies
The Audrey Barrie Brown Memorial Fund and Donald Atkinson Fund

Title of Project: “Principles of Romano-African Architecture: Unorthodoxy, Variation, and Reinvention in Mauretania Tingitana (Morocco)”

Name of Applicant: Dr Niccolò Mugnai (University of Leicester)

Amount Awarded: £1,500

Financial Statement

This generous grant provided by the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies was used to cover travel and accommodation expenses for two fieldwork seasons in Morocco in May and September 2016, and to purchase professional equipment to record archaeological materials in situ. A detailed breakdown of all incurred expenses is attached to this report as a separate document. The remaining funds of £435.87 will be used for a further season of fieldwork in Morocco (May/June 2017) to record a supplementary set of materials.

Project Report

The project’s aim was to investigate the architectural design principles of private and public buildings in the Roman province of Mauretania Tingitana (northern Morocco) dating from the late first through to the mid-third century AD. The research looked in particular at the variation, alteration, and reinvention of orthodox architectural canons at the ancient site of Volubilis (Ksar Pharaoun), as well as at the coexistence of different length-units (Roman foot, Punic, Alexandrian and local cubits) in local building projects.

A first season of fieldwork was organized in May 2016. On that occasion I finalized the details of my existing fieldwork agreement with the Moroccan heritage institution (INSAP, Rabat) and with Mr Mustapha Atki, curator of the site of Volubilis. I also carried out a thorough survey of the archaeological site to select the buildings to analyse for this project. My choices were determined by the amount of architectural evidence preserved for each building and, in many instances, by the accurateness of the columns’ anastylosis. The following buildings were selected:

- Public buildings: Judicial basilica; Capitolium and annexed piazza; Arch of Caracalla; Portico along the decumanus maximus.

- Private buildings: Palace of Gordianus; Maison au Chien; Maison aux Colonnes; Maison aux Travaux d’Hercule; Maison de Flavius Germanus; Maison des Fauves; Maison à l’Ouest du Palais du Gouverneur; Maison aux Deux Pressoirs; Maison aux Gros Pilastres.

Recording of the architectural evidence from these buildings took place in September 2016. Pro-forma sheets were designed to record all the information and measurements taken for each
column under examination, with particular regard to the ratio between the column’s total height and that of its individual components (base, shaft, capital). When possible, measurements were recorded manually. Tall columns, in particular those of public buildings, were recorded with the Leica Disto D510 laser distance meter. I also took comprehensive photographic documentation and recorded the position of each column on the respective building’s plan. During the field survey I filled in a total of 69 recording sheets, which include fully preserved columns, half-columns and pilasters, as well as isolated architectural elements (Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Examples of columns, showing variation of canonical Corinthian and composite orders. Left to right: Carthage, Antonine basilica; Volubilis, Portico along the decumanus maximus; Volubilis, Piazza of the Capitolium; Volubilis, Maison aux Colonnnes (drawing and photographs: N. Mugnai).](image)

It is my intention to organize a further season of fieldwork at Volubilis in May/June 2017 to look in more detail at design principles and ratios of single architectural elements, in particular those of Corinthian and composite capitals – for example, by testing the validity of the so-called “cross-section rule”. In addition, I will start analysing a group of architectural elements decorated with particular motifs, small figurines and human portraits, which attest to the richness of the Volubilitan artistic and architectural repertoire.

Leicester, 20 January 2017

Niccolò Mugnai