

# Editorial

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The medieval Mediterranean as a region of connectivity and transformation, and its cities as hubs of agency have been the focus of several Medieval Worlds volumes and articles.<sup>1</sup> Now we approach this region again – this time from the south, from Africa. The central area of interest is the former Roman province *Africa* and later Islamic region Ifriqiya and its neighbouring regions. In the period from c. AD 500 to 1000, the inhabitants of Mediterranean Africa lived through the rulership of three different powers, the Vandals, Byzantines and Arabs, which shaped the politics, culture and society of this region. In order to trace these long-term developments, the contributions in our themed section *Africa 500-1000. New Perspectives for Historical and Archaeological Research* use a broad range of textual sources – literary, historiographical and functional texts such as legal compendia – and material evidence of changes in clothing, housing, settlement and dietary patterns. The combination of textual and material evidence sheds new light on the transformations of the region and on how they affected the ways of life of its inhabitants.

A different way in which the textual aspects of written sources and the materiality of archaeological evidence can be linked is in the study of inscriptions, as their texts are invariably connected with the objects on which they were inscribed. Handled carefully, they offer a wealth of information, as our second cluster of articles demonstrates. It continues our enquiries into *Global Epigraphy*, this time exploring the *Perception and Representation of the Foreign*.<sup>2</sup> Outsiders and markers of outside culture are always a useful foil for a group against which it can distinguish itself in order to strengthen its own cohesion. *Xenoi* and *barbari* and other terms for strangers can be found on tombstones, commemorative monuments, mosaics and painted ornaments in churches or private houses, or even on graffiti on house walls. Combined with the study of the context in which and the objects on which they were placed, where a variation in shape might be the foreign element, they offer insights into the perception of the foreign in the past. But more than that, they can also prompt methodological discussions and global narratives.

Methodological discussions are an important feature in our volumes, so we are happy to open the floor for a discussion of creolization in our individual article section. The author argues for creolization as a useful concept for studying the Latin Middle Ages and global comparison in pre-modern times and offers a theoretical framework and two short exemplary applications from the High Middle Ages. We invite further critical discussion and exemplary contributions to this topic.

- 1 *Movement and Mobility in the Medieval Mediterranean: Changing Perspectives from Late Antiquity to the Long-Twelfth Century*, guest editors: Christopher Heath, Clemens Gantner and Edoardo Manarini, part I in volume 13 and part II in volume 14, as well as *Urban Agencies: Reframing Anatolian and Caucasian Cities (13th-14th Centuries)*, guest editors: Bruno de Nicola and Matthew Kinloch.
- 2 For the opening collection of this strand, *Approaches to Global Epigraphy*, see Medieval Worlds volume 10.