

## Workshop report: Before capitalist hegemony

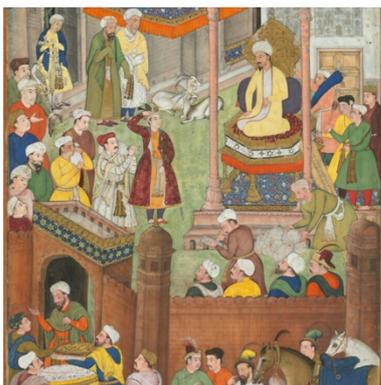
The 'Before capitalist hegemony' workshop sought to address a central epistemological problem of the historical discipline, one made all the more urgent by the current turn towards global history: how are we to approach the immensely varied historical specificity of past societies, while retaining a shared framework of inquiry allowing for collaborative and comparative work to take place across disciplinary boundaries?

The workshop brought together an international group of scholars with an exceptionally broad and diverse range of historical expertise; the goal was to re-open a debate on pre-capitalist Modes of Production and their potential valence as a cross-disciplinary heuristic tool to understand the functioning of extra-European, pre-industrial state societies. Originating within the Marxian corpus, the concept of Mode of Production enjoyed broad fortune in the last century; at the same time, its deployment within Marxist circles often veered towards an unhelpful orthodox formalism, leading to its declining fortune in the last decades.

The speakers of Before Capitalist Hegemony made significant steps towards breaking out of this theoretical dead end by recasting Modes of Production in the many different moulds of their own historical fields of specialization. From the entanglements of cast and class in ancient and medieval South Asia, through the interplay of commercial capital and state taxation in the Abbasid Islamicate, to the relationship between peasants and ruling class in late medieval and early modern Ethiopia, the ten speakers offered a wide selection of case studies spanning Afro-Eurasia, beyond Western Europe and before the inception of European capitalist and colonial hegemony.

By mapping theory onto history and history onto theory, the papers highlighted both unexplored opportunities and enduring limitations of the Modes of Production framework, pushing its boundaries in search of fault lines and untapped ore. The conversation has barely (re)started: we hope it will be a long and fruitful one.

Convenors: Lorenzo Bondioli, Michele Campopiano and Paolo Tedesco



Babur receives booty and Humayun's salute after the victory over Sultan Ibrahim in 1526, from an Akbar-nama (Book of Akbar) of Abu'l Fazl (Indian, 1551–1602), c. 1596–1597 or 1604.

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