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**THE OXFORD LITERARY FESTIVAL PRESENTS SAMANTHA HERRON - ON LIVING WITH A FAMILY OF FORMER NOMADS IN MOROCCO AND HER NEW BOOK
*THE DJINN IN THE SKULL: STORIES FROM HIDDEN MOROCCO***

London UK – January 24th 2016 - Following on from the success of her appearance at last year's Gibraltar International Literary Festival, Soul Bay Press is pleased to announce that author Samantha Herron will be appearing at the Oxford Literary Festival in April. She will once again be talking to author and critic Iain Finlayson about her experiences living with a family of former nomads on the edge of the Sahara Desert and the stories in her debut collection *The Djinn in the Skull: Stories from hidden Morocco*.

The event will take place on Wednesday 6th April 2016 at 2pm in the Bodleian: Divinity School, Bodleian Library, Broad Street, Oxford OX1 3BG. Tickets cost £12 and can be purchased online via the festival website.

<http://oxfordliteraryfestival.org/literature-events/2016/april-06/the-djinn-in-the-skull-stories-from-hidden-morocco>

When Samantha visited Morocco for the first time it changed the course of her life. On her return to London she abandoned her successful art career and, knowing that language is the key which opens the door into another culture, she devoted herself to studying Arabic. She went on to spend time living with a Berber family of former nomads, living in a small village in Morocco's Draa Valley on the edge of the Sahara Desert. Here she immersed herself in the language, traditions and culture of the family and the community in which she was living.

Samantha comments: 'I studied classical Arabic and the Quran with the women of the village, travelled in the desert, learned how to take care of camels and sheep, how to ablate and pray, and helped the other women in the family with the day-to-day running of the home. I fell in love with storytelling and stories, which are at the heart of everyday life in Morocco: sharing old stories handed down from generation to generation, embellishing jokes, spreading gossip or simply recounting a personal experience. I began to document the stories I was hearing and then found myself imagining and composing my own.'

This debut collection of her stories, all set in contemporary Morocco, takes the reader on a journey into the hearts and minds of ordinary Moroccans and offers a glimpse into life in this magical and ancient land.

Tahir Shah, author of *The Caliph's House* and *In Arabian Nights*, comments: 'Samantha Herron has succeeded triumphantly in doing what many Occidental writers have failed in for centuries - showing Morocco from the inside out. The stories she has so eloquently told are part of the 'real' Morocco, a kingdom that is so often invisible to visitors. This magical realm has traditionally been received orally, and not through written text. It exists, not in the grand touristic sites, but in the ancient fabric of places like the Draa Valley, from where her stories come. A wonderful collection, highly recommended.'

Tim Mackintosh-Smith, Arabist and author of *Travels with a Tangerine: A Journey in the Footnotes of Ibn Battutah*, comments: 'Samantha Herron found some of her Moroccan stories ready-made. Others she imagined or dreamed. In size they are miniatures; but they all express big things on a small scale. Reading them is like peering through a series of keyholes – and, each time, glimpsing something momentary but momentous, instants with life-long consequences. They will make you smile, and shiver. And they will tell you as much truth about their Moroccan setting as a shelf-full of ethnologies.'

Samantha Herron's previous work includes the English and Arabic publication *Dardasha: Testimonies of Migration by Moroccan Women* (Soul Bay Press 2011) which was produced in association with the Al Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Centre in London and featured at London's Nour Festival of Arts 2013. Samantha presented some of the stories from *The Djinn in the Skull: Stories from hidden Morocco* as part of *The Storytelling Circle* at Nour Festival of Arts 2014 and recently appeared in conversation with author and critic Iain Finlayson at the 2015 Gibraltar International Literary Festival. This is her first work of fiction.

The Djinn in the Skull: Stories from hidden Morocco was published on 23rd October 2015. Author and book cover photos can be downloaded from the publisher's website. Samantha is available for interviews, readings and signings and can be contacted via the publisher. Samantha will be speaking and giving readings of her stories in London and Morocco throughout 2016.

Author website: <https://samanthaherron.wordpress.com/>

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