



saharan studies association
Newsletter
Vol 5, no. 2, November 1997

INTRODUCTION

The *Newsletter* is the principal organ of the Saharan Studies Association, a body of scholars with common interests, associated with the African Studies Association of the United States. The *Newsletter* is published twice a year in the Spring and Fall and is designed to be a forum for the exchange of news about publications, projects and scholarly debates in our chosen area.

Broadly speaking, the aim of the Association is to foster collaboration and exchange of information between scholars in a variety of disciplines interested in the Sahara and its northern and southern peripheries, as they encounter new research materials, engage with local fieldwork problems and seek avenues for bringing the results of their research to a wider circle of colleagues. In particular, it aims to foster dialog between scholars working on North Africa and those working on the Sahelian lands of West Africa that have been influenced by the culture of Islam.

Given that French is the *lingua franca* of much of north Africa, the Sahara and West Africa, we are happy to publish communications and comments in French

as well as English, though we regret that we are not in a position to publish a fully bi-lingual newsletter.

Membership in the Saharan Studies Association is open to all interested persons. The annual dues of US\$10 (or Sponsoring Membership of US\$25) entitle members to receive the *Newsletter* and any other occasional publications, and to present papers at panels sponsored by the Saharan Studies Association at annual meetings of the African Studies Association and the Canadian Association of African Studies. The annual business meeting is held during the ASA meeting in October/November each year. As of November 1997 membership totaled 97 from twenty-one countries. A break-down of this statistic and a list of members will be found later in this issue. Contributions for publication in the *Newsletter* should be sent to: John Hunwick, Department of History, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL 60208, USA (fax: (847) 467-1393, email: j-hunwick@nwu.edu)

Thanks once again to Greg Mann (History, NU) for proofing and mailing this issue.

TÛBÂ: AN AFRICAN ESCHATOLOGY IN
ISLAM

by

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(Ph.D. 1996, McGill University, Institute
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Tûbâ: an African eschatology in Islam is an exploration of the spiritual significance of a modern Islamic holy city called Touba in Senegal. In Islamic tradition, *Tûbâ* is the name of the Tree of Paradise. It is an eschatological symbol and the Senegalese holy city is its physical actualization on earth. The thesis is a study in both religion and geography, as its first objective is to derive spiritual meaning from spatial configuration.

The need for defining "spiritual geography" as a field of study, and the grounds for adopting the semiotic approach in the analysis of religious landscape are presented in the first section of the second chapter. It is proposed to continue along the lines of inquiry first explored by Henry Corbin. Corbin maintains the validity of the neoplatonic epistemology espoused by Muslim theosophists and posits the objective existence of an "imaginal" universe—a realm where knowledge is transmitted through images accessible through the imaginative faculty rather than the intellect.

The remainder of the second chapter is empirical and descriptive. It explains how the Sufi city called Touba is constructed around the image of the tree, how the arboreal archetype determines the city's physical and metaphysical configuration. To this end, the traditions relating to the city's foundation, its toponymy, its urban design and street plan, the architecture of its mosque and other sanctuaries, and the role of actual trees in its landscape are analyzed. The Sufi city expresses a

definite spiritual construct, tantamount to the fundamental Islamic notion of the "Straight Path", and this construct is designated as *Tûbâ*, the Tree of Paradise. People visit Touba and are buried there so that their names may be inscribed on the leaves of its celestial namesake, so that they may accede to eternal Bliss in the Garden. The act of arboreal inscription defines Touba as a holy city, as a locus of transcendence.

In order to further elucidate the spiritual significance of the holy city, the meanings which the religious traditions of Islam, West Africa and Ancient Egypt have attached to the image of the cosmic tree are inventoried. The study proceeds in the manner of an "archeology" of the tree archetype as it uncovers ever deeper levels of meaning. That the archeological survey uncovers Ancient Egyptian roots for a modern African phenomenon is the result of the "afrocentric" orientation of the thesis. The first chapter, entitled "Africa in Islam", is polemical in that it argues in favor of the inclusion of Africa within the mainstream of Islamic Studies. The ubiquitous question of "Islam in Africa" is reversed; it is argued that African religious thought, along with that of other civilizations, has always contributed and continues to contribute to construct Islam as a universal faith and that the practice of Islam on the continent should no longer be automatically considered marginal or syncretist. The modern holy city of Touba serves as a case study of how Africa is "in" Islam.

Chapter 3 deals with the tree archetype in Islamic tradition. There are a number of cosmic and celestial trees mentioned in the Qur'ân and in primary Islamic sources: *hadith*, the *mi'râj* narrative. As well as *Tûbâ* the Tree of Paradise, we find the "lote-tree of the extremity" (*sûra* 53) which marks a cosmic threshold, and the "tree of 'Azrâ'îl", the tree of the Angel of

death. These two arboreal symbols share the common attribute of inscription, inscription of Divine Knowledge (as in the "Preserved Tablet") or the registering of the names of mortals (the Ledger of words and deeds). Through the works of the great medieval theosophists especially (al-Ghazâlî, Suhrawardî, Ibn 'Arabî), these various trees have come to be subsumed under a single designation, *Tûbâ*. The emergence of a modern Sufi city of this name in Senegal marks the accomplishment of this process of synthesis.

Chapter 4 deals with the tree archetype in West African tradition. Traditionally, various arboreal species, baobabs and kapok-trees especially, have fulfilled a number of spiritual functions. Of particular relevance to an understanding of the Islamic city of Touba is the role of baobabs as loci of pious inscription and burial. Furthermore, monumental trees have been a determining factor of West African urban design (the palaver-tree, the foundation-tree) and these physical trees incarnate metaphysical notions of the properly governed community. The Islamic city of Touba marks a modern development of this tradition. It is the means by which the West African notion of the rightly ordered community has been assimilated to the Islamic notion of the "Straight Path".

Chapter 5 deals with the tree archetype in Ancient Egyptian thought. The peculiar act of writing on the cosmic tree, which distinguishes modern Islamic Touba, had already been developed in Pharaonic times, most notably in the sacred "ished-tree of Heliopolis". This ancient ished-tree was the cosmic locus of the transcription of Divine Knowledge/Light into written Word. It is closely paralleled by the Quranic "lote-tree of the extremity". The cosmic and celestial trees which figure in the Islamic *mi'râj* narrative and the

Quranic recension of the "parable of the two trees" (*sûra* 14) are also quite close to this Ancient Egyptian construct. One possible link between the Pharaonic cosmology and the later Islamic one is the early Sufi, Dhû al-Nûn al-Misrî. Moreover, the specific attributes of inscription and sweet fragrance, associated with the Ancient Egyptian cosmic tree construct, have left their mark on Coptic and Christian Ethiopian traditions (the Tree of the Virgin Mary, the fragrant celestial trees mentioned in the Book of Enoch) and can be traced through Hermetist and Gnostic texts.

In conclusion, it is argued that the recent emergence of the Islamic holy city of Touba has permitted the assembly of many disparate traditions and concepts associated to the tree archetype into a single cohesive entity imparting a coherent message. This modern synthesis is possible first of all because the tree archetype is pretty nearly a universal one; as a symbol, the tree conveys a fixed set of meanings (ascension, resurrection, rejuvenation...) regardless of any specific religious tradition. Secondly, it is its actualization as an earthly holy city which has helped to give the arboreal archetype a definite meaning. The spatial configuration of the city named Touba informs us of *Tûbâ*, the celestial Tree of Paradise.

NEW JOURNAL

Annales de l'Ouest saharien/Annals of Western Sahara

Revue internationale pluridisciplinaire
International Multidisciplinary Journal

The *Annals* are a new annual review published by Harmattan in Paris, with the aim of awakening interest for the Western Sahara, stimulating research about this region and bringing together all those people who are interested in this subject. In this context Western Sahara means the

hassanophone Moorish cultural area including its neighbours, south Moroccan Berbers, Touaregs from Mali and Black Africans of Mauritania.

The *Annals* (format 16 x 26 cm, around 150 pages) will be published in French and English with a digest in the other language. Each volume will have a main theme, and other contributions like bibliography, chronology, book reviews, events, documents.

The first volume will be published in Spring 1998 and will take stock of the status of studies in the different subjects.

The editorial board is composed for the moment of Pierre Boilley, Rahal Boubrik, Ali Omar Yara and Emmanuel Martinoli, the latter functioning as executive editor. Editorial correspondence should be sent to P. Boilley or E. Martinoli. The editorial board collects, evaluates and chooses the contributions. It is organized as an association. A board of scientific consultants is under formation.

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NEW BOOKS

Collected Works of Nana Asma'u, daughter of Usman d'an Fodiyo, ed. and trans. Beverly Mack and Jean Boyd. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1997, 753 pages, including facsimiles of documents in Hausa and Fulfulde.

Oral Epics from Africa: Vibrant Voices from a Vast Continent, eds. John Wm. Johnson, Thomas A. Hale, and Stephen Belcher. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997

Le Maroc et l'Afrique subsaharienne aux débuts des temps modernes. Les Sa'diens et l'Empire Songhay. Actes du Colloque International organisé par l'Institut des Études Africaines, Marrakech, 23-25 octobre 1992. Published by Université Mohammed V, Publications de l'Institut des Études Africaines, Rabat. Série: Colloques et Séminaires, no. 2, 1995.

This collaborative volume contains twenty contributions in English, French, or Spanish and five in Arabic:

Ahmed Boucharb: La présence européenne sur la côte ouest africaine et la politique soudanaise de la dynastie Sa'dienne.

Oumar Kane: Les relations entre le Maroc et les états riverains du fleuve Sénégal de la fin du XVe au milieu du XVIIIe siècle.

Ferran Iniesta Vernet: Un aspect de la crise songhay au XVIe siècle: les askiya et la fin de la royauté divine.

Michal Tymowski: Dispute au sujet du caractère de la propriété au Songhay au XVIe siècle.

Djibo Hamani: Le Hausa entre le Maroc et le Songhay à la fin du XVIe siècle.

Mohammed Laalaoui: Regards sur le monnayage Sa'dien.

Ismaël Dadie Haidara: La conquête sa'dienne du Songhay: les questions logistiques.

Mustapha Naimi: Espace tribal et spécificités sahariennes en 1592.

Juan Manuel Riesgo: La formation de un ejército Hispano-Marroquí y la conquista del Sudan Nigériano en 1591.

Thierno Mouctar Bah: La bataille de Tondibi.

Torcuato Perez de Guzman Moor: La marroquinización del ejército conquistador del Sudan.

- Abdelmajid Kaddouri:** L'expédition d'Aḥmad al-Manṣūr au Soudan: historiographie et discours.
- John Ralph Willis:** The *bay'a* in Islam and some aspects of the *bay'a* in Morocco's relations with the Western Sudan.
- Dahiru Yahya:** The ideological framework of Sa[°]dian foreign policy.
- E. Ann McDougall:** The question of Tegaza and the conquest of Songhay: some Saharan considerations.
- John O. Hunwick:** Piety and power: relations between the religious estate and the ruling estate in Songhay under the askiyas.
- Thomas A. Hale:** La chute de l'empire songhay en 1591: une interprétation comparative à partir des *tārīkhs* et l'*Épopée d'Askia Muḥammad*.
- Mohammed Abu Talib:** The Sa[°]dian conquest of English literature.
- M. Maizada, R. Fernandez et Ismaël Haidara:** Introduction à la tradition musicale des Arma de la Boucle du Niger.
- Charles C. Stewart:** The legacy of Islamic scholarship in post-Songhay West Africa.
- Abderrahman Moudden:** *Tasā'ulāt ḥawl mawqif al-°Uthmāniyyīn min al-ghazw al-Sa[°]dī li'l-Sūdān*
- Mohammed Rezzouq:** *Mas[°]alat al-Andalus fī °amaliyyat fath al-Sūdān khilāl °aṣr Aḥmad al-Manṣūr al-Dhahabī.*
- Mohamed Hījjī:** *Ḥamlat al-Manṣūr wa-hājis al-khilāfa.*
- Shawqī al-Gamal:** *Tinbuku wa-°alāqātu-hā bi'l-Maghrib qabl ḥamlat al-Manṣūr al-Sa[°]dī wa-taḥt al-ḥukm al-Maghribī.*
- Mohamed Bencharifa:** *Bayna Aḥmad Bābā wa-Aḥmad al-Manṣūr.*
- Fès et l'Afrique. Relations Économiques, culturelles et spirituelles.* Actes du Colloque International organisé par l'Institut des Études Africaines et la Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, Saïs-Fès, Fès, 28-30 Octobre, 1993. Published by Université Mohammed V, Publications de l'Institut des Études Africaines, Rabat. Série: Colloques et Séminaires, no. 3, and Université Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah, Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, SAIS-FES, 1996.
- This edited volume contains nine contributions in French or English, and ten in Arabic:
- Oumar Kane:** La communauté Tijane du Sénégal et la zaouia du Cheikh Ahmed Tijani à Fès.
- Djibo Hamani:** Ibn Battouta, historien de l'espace nigérien.
- Doulaye Kounate:** Relations économiques entre Fès et l'Afrique.
- John Hunwick:** Fez and West Africa in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: scholarly and sharifian networks.
- R.S. O'Fahey:** Fez, Aḥmad b. Idrīs and Islamic Africa.
- Knut S. Vikør:** Muḥammad b. °Alī al-Sanūsī: a Fāsī graduate in the Central Sahara.
- Penda Mbow:** Ahmed Baba de Tombouctou, précurseur des relations culturelles entre Fès et le Soudan.
- Hamidu Bobboyi:** Shaykh °Abd Allāh al-Barnāwī and the world of Fez: some preliminary observations.
- Abdelghani Maghnia:** Bala Bala Dimba: un génie ophidien de la forêt.
- Hassan Sadki:** *Makḥṭūtāt fi mawḍū° Fās wa-Ifriqiyyā.*
- Khalid Chegraoui:** *Fās min khilāl al-maṣādir al-sūdāniyya: qirā°a awwaliyya.*

- Ammar Hillal:** al-‘Ulamā’ al-Jazā’iriyyūn fi Fās bayn al-qarnāyn al-‘āshir wa’l-‘ishrīn al-milādiyyayn.
- Abdel Aziz Alaoui:** Fās wa’l-tijāra al-ṣahrāwiyya qabl al-ḥamla al-ṣa‘diyya ‘alā imbaratūriyyat Sunghāy: fardiyyāt wa-waqā’i‘.
- Ahmed Choukri:** Mamlakat Mālī al-sūdāniyya bayn al-Marīniyyīn wa’l-Mamālīk fi Miṣr zamān Ibn Battūṭa.
- Yahya Abou-el-Farah:** al-Ḥudūr al-Maghribī bi’l-Sinighāl wa-Sāḥil al-‘Aj.
- Abdelouahed Agmir:** al-Jāliya al-Fāsiyya fi Ifriqiya al-gharbiyya.
- Aziz Batran:** Ḥarb fatāwī al-tadkhīn bayn ‘ulamā’ al-muslimīn min shimāl wa-gharb Ifriqiya fi ‘l-‘aqdayn al-awwal wa’l-thānī min zuhūr al-tabagh.
- Saber Charif:** Dawr madīnat Fās fi nashr al-tarīqa al-Tijāniyya fi Ifriqiya janūb al-Ṣahrā’.
- Ahmed El Azmi:** Dawr al-zāwiya al-Tijāniyya fi tamtīn al-rawābiṭ bayn madīnat Fās wa-Ifriqiya janūb al-Ṣahrā’.

HANGLISTS OF ARABIC MANUSCRIPTS

The following handlists of Arabic manuscripts relating to the Sahara and West African Sahel have been published by the al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, Eagle House, High Street, Wimbledon, London SW19 5EF, U.K.. Although each volume has an English title page, the text is entirely in Arabic.

1. *Handlist of Manuscripts in the Centre de Documentation et de Recherches Historiques Ahmed Baba, Timbuktu*
Volume I: prepared by Sidi Amar Ould Ely, edited by Julian Johansen, 1995.
Volume II: prepared by Librarians of the Centre, edited by ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-‘Abbās, 1996.

Volume III: prepared by Librarians of the Centre, edited by ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-‘Abbās, 1997.

A total of 4,500 items are listed. There are indexes of authors, titles, copyists, and subjects.

2. *Handlist of Manuscripts in the National Archives, Kaduna.*

Vol. I: prepared by Baba Yuhus Muhammad, edited and annotated by John Hunwick, 1995.

Vol. II: prepared by Baba Yuhus Muhammad, edited and annotated by John Hunwick, 1997.

A total of 1,645 items are described. There are indexes of authors, titles, subjects and first lines of poetry.

3. *Handlist of Manuscripts in the Libraries of Shaykh Serigne Mor Mbaye Cissé, al-Hājj Malick Sy and Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse* Compiled and edited by Ousmane Kane, 1997.

A total of 844 items are described. There are indexes of authors, titles, subjects and first lines of poetry.

4. *Handlist of Manuscripts in Shinqūt and Wādān*

Compiled by Aḥmad wuld Muḥammad Yaḥyá, edited by Ulrich Rebstock, 1997.

A total of 1,106 items from twelve libraries are described. There are indexes of authors, titles, and subjects.

[J.O. Hunwick]

THE “ISLAMOPHILE” ITALIANS BEFORE LIBYA

Anna Baldinetti, *Orientalismo e colonialismo: La ricerca di consenso in Egitto per l’impresa di Libia*. Rome: Pubblicazioni dell’Istituto per l’Oriente ‘C.A. Nallino’ 1997, 199 pp.

Before the Italian invasion in Libya in 1911, many circles in Rome believed it

would be possible to create a 'favourable impression' of Italy among the Muslims of Tripolitania. In such a venture, Cairo was, after the British occupation, considered a critical nexus. This is a study of those Italians in Egypt who were working on the 'philo-Islamic' project. In this milieu, Enrico Sabato looms large, but a number of other famous Italian Orientalists, such as Carlo Nallino, Ignazio Guidi and Daniel Santillana and others, come under scrutiny. Among the projects that were used for this purpose, and which are discussed, are the proposal for a mosque in the name of King Umberto, support for a *riwāq* at al-Azhar, but in particular support for the new University of Cairo, at which several of the Italian Orientalists taught in its first years. An important figure on the Egyptian side is the shaykh °Abd al-Rahmān °Ilaysh.

The study, apart from its interest to students of Orientalism and in particular Italian Orientalism, will no doubt be read with great interest by historians of Libya (and thus the Eastern Sahara in general), explaining some of the intellectual background to early Italian policies there.

[Knut S. Vikør]

LE SAHARIEN

Not all readers of this newsletter may be aware of a quarterly bulletin called *Le Saharien*, published in Paris as a successor to the well-known *Bulletin de liaison saharienne* as well as to *Eurafrique*. As the name of the publishers, 'L'amicale des sahariens', indicates, it is based on 'anciens' of the Sahara, former colonial and army officers, travelers, tourists and expatriates living in the region. With the passage of time, however, the latter type of *anciens* is probably starting to outweigh the former.

While not an academic journal in the strict sense, it may be of value to the student of Saharan affairs. In each issue

there is a dozen-page survey of events in the region, from Morocco to Chad, evidently based both on local printed sources and directly received reports; like a quarterly 'local newspaper' for the Saharan regions. Typical entries, for the first week of January 1997:

Algérie: 1-5: Commémoration du millénaire d'El Atteuf dans la wilaya de Ghardaïa [two paragraphs on the event, and attempts at sabotage] ...

4. Le Consul général nigérien à Tamanrasset a fait savoir à la presse qu'il jugeait que les conditions d'accueil permettant le retour des populations ayant fui la famine et les guerres, vers leurs pays d'origines, le Niger et le Mali, ne semblaient pas réunis. De ce fait, du moins pour le Nigériens, le rapatriement définitif est compromis [another two paragraphs on the issue] ...

7. Des observateurs rappellent que Tamanrasset est toujours 'l'eldorado' pour des milliers de noirs africaines de 47 nationalités différents, dont les conditions de vie 'frôlent l'indécence' ...

- Rencontre des 'Patriotes' à Ghardaïa [anti-FIS civilian commandos] ...

Mali: 1. Un 4x4 de l'ONG World vision a été 'braqué', puis volé, sur la route d'Anderamboukane ...

- Passage, à l'aller, du rallye Dakar-Agadez-Dakar, venant du Sénégal [daily updates on stages]...

Niger: Au début du mois, des arabes auraient été tués dans l'Aïr par des touaregs. Des représentants de leur communauté ont décidé d'exercer des représailles, en s'en prenant au marabout touareg d'Abalak, répondant au nom de Minimini. Comme il n'étaient pas chez lui, au moment de leur venue, les vengeurs auraient emmené ses trois fils, un neveu et d'autres. [The affair is followed to its conclusion].

6. Rhissa ag Boula, chef du FLAA et de l'ORA, pratiquement réduit

aujourd'hui à ce FLAA à la suite de défections ... est descendu à Niamey, alors qu'il avaient été exclu du processus du paix [half a page on his role in peace negotiations].

As one can see, a mixture of various events, but for those of us without a regular source of current information from the Sahara, it can give a fascinating glimpse of things that happen.

The bulletin also includes "Informations routières et méharistes", including a note in the last issue that the south-east of Libya is in fact open for travellers with the correct paperwork; as well as articles on history (an incident at Idélès, Ahaggar in 1902; the history of a Tunisian army unit 1916-58; the Jews of Mali from al-Maghili until today) on science (creating camel cheese, ornithology and the observatory of Tamanrasset). There are further reports of travels carried out recently ('Méharée entre la Batha de Chinguetti et Tidjikja, avril 1996'), 'souvenirs' of various sorts, obituaries of old colonialists and some book reviews.

Each issue is about 60 pages, appearing four times a year. One may subscribe without joining the 'amicale' for 200 FF; membership is another 30 FF. 116 rue Damrémont, F-75018 Paris.

[Knut Vikør]

SIHMED: SOCIÉTÉ INTERNATIONALE DES HISTORIENS DE LA MÉDITERRANÉE

Our colleagues towards the north have organized themselves in a society similar to ours, and which publishes a newsletter very much like ours. It was founded by Professor Salvatore Bono of Perugia University, and has led a somewhat withdrawn existence during its first year, so a note here may be of interest to those who feel themselves as much Mediterraneans as Saharians.

The Bulletin (*Lettre de liaison*) appears so far to have come in only one issue, dated February 1997 (though there have been three earlier smaller newsletters). Eight pages in the same format as this one (well, European), it includes besides internal news, primarily information about future and past conferences in Mediterranean history.

The issue also carries compte-rendus of some books as well as a list of books received.

An original aspect of the association is that it has no membership fee. Members are accepted by writing to the founder. However, members are instead expected to participate actively by providing information to the newsletter—no participation, no membership.

The society even has a Web page—in Finland! Unfortunately not very well done (yet), it does contain the text of the Bulletin and the latest of the three Newsletters (an idea for the SSA to emulate?).

Web site address:

<<http://www.uta.fi/laitokset/tapri/med/sihmed/>>. The address of the Society is Prof. S. Bono, Dipartimento di scienze storiche, Università degli studi di Perugia, via Pascoli, I-06123 Perugia, Italy. Fax +39-75-585 5449.

[Knut Vikør]

SAHARAN STUDIES ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP LIST

Please note this list is not in alphabetical order of members' names. Where e-mail addresses are known, they are given. At the end of each name and address is a list of members research interests/areas, as they have stated them or, in some cases, as I have defined them. Corrections to these and any other aspects of the list are welcome.

Membership break-down by country is as follows: U.S.A., 42; Morocco, 9; United Kingdom, 7; France, 7; Germany, 6; Canada, 4; Mali, 3; Nigeria, 3; Niger, 3; Tunisia, 2; Senegal, 2; Finland, 2; Mauritania, 2; one member in each of the following countries: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Denmark, Israel, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland. The total membership now stands at 101. Of these, 13 are sponsoring memberships.

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