

RECENT BOOKS

ARABIC MEDIEVAL INSCRIPTIONS FROM MALI

P.F. de Moraes Farias, *Arabic Medieval Inscriptions from the Republic of Mali: Epigraphy, Chronicles and Songhay-Tuareg History*, *Fontes Historiae Africanæ: Sources of Arabic History*, 4. Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2003. Page size: 11.5 in. x 8 in.

It is delightful to see this large, and carefully set-up, volume on tombstone inscriptions—mainly dated between 1013 and 1489 AD—found in north-eastern regions of Mali: Gao-Saney, 61 items; Bentiya/Kukiya, 62; Essuk/Tādmakkat, 77 items; and Junhan, near Kidal, 7 items. Images of all these items (totalling 247) are to be found at the end of the book, after nine chapters that eventually include clear productions of the Arabic texts on the tombstones, with translations and comments, fourteen pages of maps and site plans, and a bibliography of 57 pages. At the beginning of the book is a 15-page ‘Preface and Acknowledgements’, recognizing many other scholars who helped provide him with information—including myself. In fact, I began working on the tombstones of Gao-Saney in the early 1970s, and photographed some of them; and from some of them from the 11th and early 12th centuries, I was able to identify early Songhay rulers as having the title of *Zuwā*, rather than *Zā*, as had formerly been adopted for the first Songhay dynasty. Paulo de Moraes Farias had also written a publication on such materials in 1993, published at Université Mohammad V of Rabat: *Histoire contre mémoire: épigraphie. chroniques, tradition orale et lieux d’oubli dans le Sahel malien*.

Part 1: ‘Historical Introduction’ treats the history of investigations and research into the mid-Niger area and its Arabic inscribed tombstones. Chapter 2:1: ‘The Originality and Agenda of the Timbuktu Chronicles’ deals with Timbuktu chronicles on the history of the area, though the author suggests that both the *Taʿrīkh al-Sūdān* and the *Taʿrīkh al-Fattāsh* did not present accurate information on the mid-Niger area in the earlier era, in which the tombstone inscriptions were set up. That is not surprising, since both histories were written some five centuries after the period of the tombstone inscriptions. More research on the mid-Niger region prior to the sixteenth century would certainly be desirable, and we must see if it is sure that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Saʿdī in his *Taʿrīkh al-Sūdān* produced ‘disorganised bundles of raw information, not as rather well-cooked writerly productions’, as Farias ironically sums up earlier interpretations (p. lxxi). But no local writings of the 11th or 12th century are known of; only from rather remote writers, like al-Bakrī of al-Andalus in his *al-Masālik waʾl-Mamālik*.

Much of Chapter 2:1 deals with the *Taʿrīkh al-Sūdān* and the *Taʿrīkh al-Fattāsh*, and what they present on the Songhay empire; and 2:2 continues similarly, with its heading including *the politics of the title ‘Askia’*. Chapter 2:3 deals with the occupation of the Middle Niger region by the empire of Mali in the late 13th century and its abandonment of the region—just before the mid-15th century. So, as well as the wonderful presentation of the early graves of the eastern end of the region, Farias’s book provides much useful discussion of the governing of the Middle Niger area over several early centuries. Chapter 3 also continues with more historical information of the area, under the title ‘An Alternative Historical Framework for the Inscriptions’.

Those three chapters make up the ‘Historical Introduction’ as Part I of the book in 176 pages, and then Part II (Chapter 4) is ‘The Textual Characteristics of the Epigraphic Corpus’. Part III, of 210 pages, entitled ‘Transcriptions and

Translation of Inscriptions', contains chapters 5-9, covering printed texts of tomb site inscriptions and translations of every text; so now such inscriptions are easy to read in Arabic. Although the photo images of the originals, in black and white, are mainly quite difficult to read, Farias's reading and interpretation at last makes over two hundred tombstones easy to understand, and inform us of aspects of the ancient history of Gao and other eastern areas of (what became) the Songhay empire, not only dealing with rulers but also with commoners.

John O. Hunwick

## SAINTS AND SERVANTS

*Saints and Servants in Southern Morocco* by Remco Ensel. Brill: Leiden 1999. xv, 279 pp. ISBN 90-04-11429-7.

Remco Ensel's book is a revised dissertation which focuses on cultural and social hierarchy in a small oasis town in southeastern Morocco. This study examines the cleavage between the Sharifian elite on the one hand, and the 'servile' strata of society, known as the Haratin or Drawa, on the other, while offering glimpses into the everyday lives of both groups. Concerned with understanding the reproduction of social inequality in today's Morocco, Ensel successfully shows how the boundary between these two strata, while not always completely clear, remains firmly in place to perpetuate a master-servant hierarchy. This is an examination of the relationships between these diametrically opposed social groups and the existence of a 'double-bind,' a term he borrows from the work of sociologist Norbert Elias. In his own words, the author explains that the 'leitmotif of this study is the construction and contestation of the "double-bind" relationship between *shurfā'* and Haratin'. The book is composed of eight chapters, including the introduction and the conclusion, contains a number of figures and eight regional photographs.

Aduafil, one of sixty villages located in the oasis of Ktawa of the Dra<sup>c</sup> river valley of Southern Morocco, is where the author undertook his fieldwork in 1993-1994. Ensel's previous year-long residence in the Dra<sup>c</sup> region, for the completion of a Master's thesis, prepared him well for this undertaking. Ensel has produced a remarkable study given the limitations of his source-base. He relies primarily on unrecorded oral interviews and participant observation, French colonial reports held at the formerly-named *Centre de Hautes Etudes d'Administration Musulmane* (CHEAM),

as well as secondary material. Ensel does not seem to have consulted Moroccan archives aside from those held at the regional office of the Ministry of Agriculture in Ouarzazate.

The village of Aduafil was named after a religious leader, descendant from the Prophet Muḥammad, who came to settle there sometime in the sixteenth century. Ensel does not tell us much about the life and legacy of Mulāy Adafil, who apparently was owner of a sizeable library. His main concern is to understand the relationship between Sharifian families, on the one hand, and the people of servile origin on the other. The later, who pejoratively are called Haratin (*ḥarātīn*), prefer the local *nisba* Drawī, to designate their regional belonging. Ensel compares this group to the *shawa-shin* of Tunisia, and the Haratin of neighbouring Mauritania. Ironically, the Drawa who are held in contempt but the noble and Sharifian elite, are considered by them to be nothing more than 'strangers' who are more 'African' than Moroccan per se.

In Chapter 2, Ensel discusses how the social order between these two groups is embedded in various layers of 'social distance' which reproduce 'cultural ideals' propagating 'implicit and explicit segregation.' Relying on riddles, proverbs, jokes and local understandings of the Hamitic hypothesis, he examines the imagery of race and taboos which constitute the body of knowledge or referent of this particular social order.

Chapter 3 is a presentation of the oasis of Ktawa, together with historical information about Aduafil and its inhabitants. As with most anthropological studies, the historical information provided is on a need-to-know basis, and could have been more tightly organized. While the author paints a clear picture of the sixteenth century arrival of the saint Mulāy Adafil, much information is not provided. In fact, from reading this book, I am still not sure why he became a local saint, aside from the fact that he is said to have introduced Islam to the region (as we learn in Chapter 5). Nor do we learn much about his family, and whether, for

instance, he married local women as the first *sharīf* to move to the area. At this point in time the land would have belonged primarily to the *aḥrār*, a rather nebulous group said to be the town's original inhabitants. Sometimes referred to as 'nobles,' other times as 'self-proclaimed free-men,' one would have expected the *aḥrār* to have played a significant role in brokering *shurfā'*-Drawa relations, but this group is oddly short-changed in the entire study. This is particularly problematic since the author places the Drawa in a hierarchical ladder between the slaves ('*abīd*') and the *aḥrār*. One of the most interesting features of this chapter, however, is the author's exploration of a Drawa family named Hazzabin. When the author inquired about the family history, the initial reply was that the Drawa do not have '*ta'riḥ*.' They meant by this that they did not possess 'religious history' or the 'official' history, of which only the *shurfā'* were the custodians, and secular history was not considered relevant. Ensel found that transmissions of historical information among this group was typically no deeper than several generations.

The official story is that the Drawa came from a neighbouring town and would have arrived in Aduafil with the saint in the sixteenth century. The fact that they were originally from, or intermarried with, incoming African populations who were once enslaved and transported from further south, is never explicitly cited by Ensel, perhaps because he was too respectful of the local *non-dits*. There is evidence provided to explain how the town became a significant stop for caravan trade in the nineteenth century (based on one German eye-witness account). Then, one learns that after the French arrived in the 1920s they did not find the region of much economic or agricultural interest. In the 1950s, increased migrations of Drawa and other Haratin who exited long-standing patron-master relations by seeking work in large cities such as Casablanca, would have provoked a social revolution. But, this revolution, the author remarks, was not played out in oasis towns such as Aduafil

where an established social order remained firmly in place. By the end of the twentieth century Ensel's survey of 300 plots of land in and around Aduafil reveals to what extent the *shurfā'* now own the bulk of it with the Drawa only owning a handful of plots, and having unequal access to irrigation water. But what happened to the *aḥrār*, the original landowners in this equation, remains unanswered.

His fourth chapter examines how the two groups are linked through relationships of multiple dependencies which, in the agricultural field, resulted in a complex web of labour contractual agreements. These include the classic *khammās* sharecropping system whereby the Drawi tenant works *shurfā'* land for one fifth of the total agricultural output. He also documents other forms of exchanges of services, patron-client relations, fictive kinship, milk bonds and other 'close encounters' prevailing between the two groups.

Chapter 5, which deals with spiritual exchanges between the 'saints and servants' and the religious subordination of the later, is the heart of the book. Here the author examines how the hegemony of the *shurfā'* is played out in the religious field through local metaphors. A common saying which most vividly symbolizes the established hierarchical order claims that 'one Sharifian donkey is worth a murdered Drawi.' By this it is meant that the blood-money paid for a Drawi is less than the standard payment of a man's worth. Ensel examines how the ceremonial object of the walking-stick, dating back to the saint of Aduafil, and passed down from father to son between *shurfā'* families, is the ultimate visible symbol of the *baraka* and embodied authority of this group. His discussion of the various Sharifian religious institutions, from Islamic legal services to the Mosque, reveal the surprising roles played by the Drawa who typically perform important religious duties including that of village crier and muezzin. In fact, until recently, the Hazzabin family had assumed the role of muezzin. Ensel draws a compelling parallel with the story of

Bilāl, the first muezzin of Islam, who was also from slave and Sudanic African origins.

In the last chapters, Ensel discusses more in detail how this ‘master-servant’ ideology, that overshadows relationships between Drawa and *shurfā*<sup>o</sup>, is expressed in daily activities and religious ceremonies. He is especially concerned with the rules of conduct (*adab*) of the Drawa. Particularly interesting is his discussion, based on participant observation, of the *mentalité* of ‘serving’ which is deeply ingrained in Drawi behaviour and constantly reinforces the marginality of this group. In Chapter 7, Ensel examines the fascinating world of spiritual and physical healing, dominated by the all-powerful *shurfā*<sup>o</sup> who dispense of their *baraka*, forever refuelling their symbolic capital, through all kinds of activities, from amulet creation to blood-letting. This chapter will be of particular interest to medical anthropologists.

The hallmark of Ensel’s study is his deep knowledge of Drawa society. His transcribed conversations with local Aduafil residents point to a level of familiarity with his research community which is worthy of any good anthropological research. However, this book is lacking in a number of areas, including a literature review, and a general familiarity with Moroccan scholarship, especially on the Dra<sup>c</sup> region. Despite these flaws, I believe this is a stimulating work on a difficult research topic which is motivated by a meritorious will to contribute to understanding a fundamental problem in Moroccan society today. Alongside the works of Madia Thomson, Ahmed Sikainga, Mohamed Ennaji, Cynthia Becker and Chouki El-Hamel, Ensel’s contribution is part of a growing body of scholarship on slavery, servility and discrimination in Morocco and will undoubtedly point the way towards further research.

Ghislaine Lydon