

century Ghana. It is an important contribution to Ghanaian historiography, African consumer history, African economic and business history, and social and cultural history.

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APPROACHING THE QUR'AN IN AFRICA

Approaches to the Qur'an in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Edited by Zulfikar Hirji.

New York and London: Oxford University Press and the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2019. Pp. 543. \$85.00, hardcover (ISBN: 9780198840770).

doi:10.1017/S0021853720000432

KEY WORDS: Islam, regional, religion, sources, cultural.

In the last fifteen years, three edited volumes featuring cutting edge research have established the study of Islamic erudition in Africa as an important field of intellectual inquiry.¹ This volume, which focuses on the Qur'an, is a welcome addition to that field. In the introductory chapter, the editor Zulfikar Hirji offers an overview of the study of Islam in the contemporary academy to show how Islam in Africa has long been a neglected field of study. He also argues convincingly that Qur'anic Studies in Africa has been overlooked as a subfield. The thirteen chapters of this volume address the many ways in which African Muslims engage the Qur'an, such as through manuscripts, commentaries, translations, recitations and invocations, music and poetry, talismanic practices, and designs and decorations. The editor sees four overlapping genres of practice emerging from the case studies presented: interpretation, embodiment, gendered knowledge, and transmission.

In the book's second chapter, Dimitry Bondarev offers an erudite discussion of *tafsīr*, or exegetical, Islamic sources in Borno. He examines four Qur'anic manuscripts to argue for the awareness of the Borno *'ulamā*, or learned scholars, of the complex problems of Koranic hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*). Bondarev also shows the substantial grounding of *'ulamā* in the science of exegesis and their familiarity with many exegetical works of the Qur'an, especially the *Tafsīr al Jalālayn* by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī (d. 1459) and Jalāl al-Dīn Al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505), which is the manual of *tafsīr* par excellence in Africa. This article is destined for an audience of specialists.

In Chapter Three, 'Qur'anic exegesis in Manding: the example of a Bamana oral commentary on Sūrat al-Raḥmān', Tal Tamari examines the social and cultural contexts in which Qur'anic exegesis takes place, the doctrinal sources of such analyses, and the scholarly language developed to express Islamic contents. Tamari also discusses the two central

¹ S. Reese (ed.), *The Transmission of Learning in Islamic Africa* (Boston, 2004), S. Jeppie and S. B. Diagne (eds.), *The Meanings of Timbuktu* (Cape Town, 2008.), R. Launay (ed.) *Islamic Education in Africa: Writing Boards and Blackboards* (Bloomington, IN, 2016).

texts of *tafsīr* used in Mali and indeed West Africa more widely: the abovementioned *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* and its commentary by Egyptian Aḥmad Sāwī (d. 1825), entitled *Hāshiya al-Ṣāwī*. Tamari shows that the teaching of *tafsīr* is always done in a bilingual manner and consists of reading the Qurʾanic verse in Arabic and delivering an intertextual commentary in an African language. This approach requires the use of an elaborate technical vocabulary in Arabic. Through the analysis of the *tafsīr* of Qurʾan 55 (Sūrat al-Raḥmān), Tamari shows that Bamana-speaking Muslim scholars have developed a methodology and a specialized vocabulary for interpreting the meanings of the Qurʾan. The appended transcription and English translation of the *tafsīr* of Sūrat al-Raḥmān serves to substantiate the point of the author. This text establishes convincingly that a tradition of Islamic learning in both Arabic and African languages has long existed in West Africa. Tamari's chapter is the longest in the volume, at 97 pages.

In Chapter Four, Farouk Topan studies the historical context and processes of production for Swahili translations of the entire Qurʾan. Topan considers closely three Muslim translations, all published in the second half of the twentieth century. But he also considers their antecedent: the earliest Swahili translation of the Qurʾan was authored by missionary Canon Godfrey Dale and published by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) in 1923. Muslim scholars did not like 'the approach, tone and arguments that Dale employed in his translation and commentary' (166). In response, and over subsequent decades, three Muslim scholars published their own translations. The first, by Mubarak Ahmad, appeared in 1953 and refuted some anti-Islamic comments of Dale. Not without controversy, this translation was sponsored by the Ahmadiyya, a group whose founder Ghulam Ahmad (d. 1908) claimed the status of prophethood, a claim which most Muslims rejected. The second translation was undertaken by Abdullah Saleh al-Farsy, an established scholar and preacher in East Africa, and published in 1969. It was sponsored by the Islamic Foundation in Leicester, Britain. In his commentary, Farsy takes issue with some of Mubarak's commentaries and translation, especially those related to the end of the prophecy. But Farsy, who was inspired by Salafi doctrine, dismissed some religious practices in East Africa, identifying them as *bid'a*, or heresy, which also sparked contention. The third Muslim translation was conducted by Ali Muhsin al-Barwani. Originally published by Al-Azhar in 1995, it was non-sectarian, unlike that of his predecessors. Topan discusses each of the translations and their histories, and concludes that all three translations share the common aim of making the Qurʾan accessible to ordinary people in the Swahili-speaking world.

Chapter Five, "A confirmation of what went before it": historicising the Shi'i Swahili Qurʾan translation of Ali Jumaa Mayunga' by Gerard C. van de Bruinhorst, is also devoted to Swahili translations of the Qurʾan. The author notes that between 1995 and 2015 up to ten finalized or more than half-way completed translations of the Qurʾan in Swahili were published. Van de Bruinhorst argues that all translations are enmeshed in at least three layers of history: the personal history of the translator, the history of Islam, and finally a contemporary political history through which the applicability of the Qurʾan to the translator's life is established (194). Just like Topan in Chapter Four, van de Bruinhorst shows that different translators of the Qurʾan in Swahili have interpreted the Qurʾan either to defend their own theological persuasion or their political views. This study focuses on the Swahili translation of the Qurʾan and other writings of Ali Jumaa Mayunga, a prolific

Tanzanian Muslim public intellectual who was born a Sunni as Omar Jumaa Mayunga in 1947. Mayunga subsequently converted to Shiism. The Qur'an provided Mayunga a framework to simultaneously reread Islamic history, especially from a Shiite perspective, and make sense of contemporary political issues. Of particular note in this process is the sense of vulnerability and marginalization that Muslims felt under the rule of former president of Tanzania Julius Nyerere, whom Mayunga likened to a pharaoh. The findings of this chapter and the previous one highlight an important aspect of contemporary *tafsīr*: they tend to reflect the doctrinal persuasion of their authors, especially in the contemporary period which is marked by the fragmentation of sacred authority and theological conflicts in Muslim societies.

In Chapter Six, Ryan Thomas Skinner analyzes the role played by popular music in shaping Islamic subjectivity in postcolonial Mali. The first part of the article discusses the ways in which urban artists in Bamako invoke the Qur'an across different genres of popular music, notably in praise songs, rap, and dance lyricism. The second part considers the principally vocal means by which popular piety is ideologically achieved. The third section addresses the territorial politics of this pious poetics, as moral subjects are called upon — and at times contested — across multiple scales of place (233–4). The chapter offers a rich description of the insertion of Koranic verses into popular music songs as a means of expressing moral subjectivity among urban artists in Mali.

In the next chapter, Ruba Kana'an scrutinizes a talismanic shirt from Muslim West Africa that is part of the collection of the Textile Museum of Canada (item T91.0091). The museum dates the shirt from the late twentieth century and identifies it as a high-status object, given its overall decoration and conservation status. The author starts the article by providing a detailed physical description of the textile, including its size and composition (it is made up of verses of the Qur'an, a prayer for the Prophet and his family, magic squares, attached amulets, diagrams, beautiful terms for God, and names of the Islamic and biblical prophets). Comparing T91.0091 with talismanic shirts of Saffavid Iran, Ottoman Turkey, and the Indian subcontinent, Kana'an argues that 'perhaps one of the closest connections amongst the diverse Muslim civilizations throughout histories and around the world is the way in which they endeavor to harness the protective and curative power of the Qur'an' (273). To substantiate her point, the author identifies and discusses the most used Koranic verses in talismans, including the opening *sūrat* of the Qur'an (*al-fātiḥa*), *sūrat al-ikhhlāṣ* (112) and the last two *sūrats* of the Qur'an (113 and 114), known as talismanic *sūrats* or *mu'awwidhatān*. The author identifies the most used talismanic verses and explains their function, which usually coincides with their literal meaning. For example, the verse 'And God will protect you from people', or 'God is the best keeper, and he is the most merciful', is believed to provide protection.

In Chapter Eight, 'Prayer, piety and pleasure: contested models of Islamic worship in Niger', Adeline Masquelier explores the polemics deployed by practitioners of Sufism, especially those who belong to the Tijāniyya Sufi order, and their opponents, whom she refers to as reformists, who belong to the movement known as the Yan Izala. Established in Northern Nigeria in 1978, Yan Izala spread to neighboring countries such as Niger and Cameroon. The author focusses on Dogondoutchi, a village of 40,000 inhabitants in the Republic of Niger. Masquelier posits that the invocation of the Qur'an has been central in these polemics. Regardless of their degree of literacy in

Arabic, Hausa, or French, the various protagonists in these doctrinal debates routinely invoke verses of the Qur'an and interpret them to justify the performance of a devotional act or its removal. Masquelier also analyzes the polemics concerning the correct posture in prayer as well as the recitation of some Sufi rituals rejected by reformists as heterodox, especially a litany known as *salat al-fātib*. She presents the main protagonists in the conflicts and their different arguments.

In her contribution, Kjersti Larsen considers the ways in which the words of the Qur'an are understood and used in everyday life as medication and protection from emotional and social conflict in Zanzibar. This chapter assesses how the Qur'an informs the methods and practices that people use to contend with illness, angst, and change. It is common for Muslims in Africa to take spiritual steps before settling into a new house. For example, they may recite special prayers, comprised of verses of the Qur'an, to bless the dwelling. They may also slaughter an animal and distribute it to the needy. Likewise, talismanic drinks can be made of verses of the Qur'an that are written with saffron on white paper and soaked in a bowl of water to produce a drinkable talisman. The author argues convincingly that understandings and uses of the Qur'an are inspired by local circumstances as well as immediate concerns and experiences in daily life.

Chapter Ten takes up the repertoire of divination practices in a Tuareg society in Niger. Susan J. Rasmussen argues that those practices include Islamic and non-Islamic rituals and cosmologies that predate Islam. The analysis is based on a case study: a widow has a dream about her deceased husband, and then consults with an Islamic diviner who prescribes a commemorative condolence ritual (*takote*) that involves the recitation of Qur'anic verses. It is believed that this recitation will put the soul of the deceased husband at peace. Rasmussen shows that in Tuareg society there is constant negotiation between local beliefs and 'orthodox' understandings of Islam, which leads to overlap, complementarity, and contradictions. With a rich anthropological analysis of mourning and divination rituals in Tuareg societies, this chapter illustrates how the Qur'an infuses Tuareg society and social practices.

Joseph Hill considers the life and work of Shaykha Maryam Niasse in Chapter Eleven, 'Women who are men: Shaykha Maryam Niasse and the Qur'an in Dakar'. Niasse was born in 1932, and she counts among the prominent women who are Sufi scholars and educators in West Africa. She descends from a long lineage of Muslim scholars in Senegambia. Her father Shaykh Ibrahim Niasse (1900–75) is one of the most prominent Sufi leaders of the twentieth century. Shaykha Maryam married and settled in Dakar in 1952, established several schools, and trained tens of thousands of students in her teaching career, which spans almost seven decades. Having earned full credentials as a Tijani guide, she also initiated men and women to the Tijāniyya Sufi order. She has a wide network of connections in the Muslim world, and government leaders have often called on her to act as advisor and diplomatic mediator. Hill claims that Shaykha Maryam would not identify with a project aimed at resisting patriarchy. This point is true to some extent. She would not likely do something as radical as Amina Wadud, who led men and women in a Friday congregational prayer in New York City in 2005. Yet, like many Muslim feminists, Shaykha Maryam drew on her Islamic heritage to challenge gender subordination. As a general rule she would acquiesce to male authority. However, when she felt that submission to male authority would undermine her mission, she directly challenged that authority

and supported her claim by invoking quotes from the Qur'an as well as writings of her own father.

Andrea Brigaglia analyses the traditional system of Islamic education in Hausaland in Chapter Twelve, 'Fī Lawḥin Maḥfūz: towards a phenomenological analysis of the Qur'anic tablet'. At the beginning of the chapter, Brigaglia engages Louis Brenner's influential book *Controlling Knowledge*, which he rightly describes as 'one of the most comprehensive and theoretically inspiring studies of religion and education in a West African Muslim society'.² Brenner distinguishes between two existing epistemes (esoteric and exoteric) and suggested that a shift is taking place from forms of knowledge that are mystical, or esoteric, in orientation to more 'rational', systematized, or exoteric systems of knowing. Brigaglia shows that the esoteric episteme emerges in subsequent scholarship as the embodied knowledge paradigm, particularly in the works of Rudolph Ware and Zachary Wright.³ Brigaglia devotes the rest of the chapter to a thick description of the system of education in Northern Nigeria, how it has been debated, and how it has changed over time with the rise of competing modes of schooling based on different pedagogies.

In the last chapter of the volume, Zulfikar Hirji offers a comparative study of three nineteenth-century Qur'anic manuscripts produced in Siyu, East Africa. After a short introduction that surveys the development of Islam in the Lamu archipelago between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries, the author offers a detailed comparative analysis of the manuscripts that takes into consideration their respective scripts, decorative details, inks, pens, papers, bindings, and provenance to conclude that they were all produced at Siyu on the island of Pate.

This volume brings together anthropologists, who made seven contributions, as well as linguists, social historians, and art historians. Their respective articles illustrate different disciplinary approaches to the study of the Qur'an in Africa. Contributions are overall very well argued, and together they cover East and West Africa, where the overwhelming majority of African Muslims live. The book features some fine illustrations of well-executed Koranic manuscripts and talismanic materials, most of which figure in the article by art historian Kana'an, as well as color photographs of various Koranic schools. The book includes a solid bibliography, a detailed general index, as well as an index of Koranic citations. It is a major contribution in the field of Islam in Africa and Qur'anic studies.

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2 L. Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society* (Bloomington, IN, 2001).

3 R. Ware, *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2014); Z. V. Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam: The Sufi Community of Ibrahim Niassa* (Boston, 2015).