CHAPTER TWO

ANTIQUE SPACE, UPSTART QABILA

It is, perhaps, worth recalling that the Bayruk predicate their identity on association with the Takna. To make the Bayruk identity thinkable, then, one must first confront the question of who the Takna were—the problem of origin. In the preceding chapter, I noted that there is split between the rather short history the Takna usually claim for themselves and the robust sense of antiquity ethnographers thought they were entitled to—the notion of descent from Gétules or Lamta contemporaries of the Romans. I added that this conception became possible first through the translation of qabila to *tribe* and then through the coercive investiture of the Takna with descent from ancient Berbers. My main contention is that the ethnographic conception could best be understood in the light of the discursive division of Morocco into *Makhzan*, state, and *Siba*, tribe, and, hence, its demotion to a distant past for Europe. French colonial ethnographers, I added, posited encounter with the Romans as the last occasion for the Berbers’ breach with civilization. In the process, they also suspended the history in between—i.e. the centuries separating the Berber encounters with the Romans and French respectively. In as much as Roman sources do not mention the Takna *per se* we can hardly avoid this suspended history. The most expedient way to address the problem of historicity is to acknowledge existing conceptions of Takna origins and to identify their main sources. To amplify the similarities and differences between such postulations, I have structured my discussion around three main themes. These themes revolve around five types of evidence: subaltern Takna narratives, ethnographic texts, European travelogue, Shurafa biographies and classical Arabic texts.

Firstly, it is necessary to sketch how the Takna imagine their history and what role, if any, did they assign to the main agents of Maghribian history: the dynasty and zawiya. We can utilize the Takna conception of self as a frame of reference to reflect on the notion of descent from Berbers of antiquity proposed by French colonial ethnographers and subsequently endorsed by post-colonial sociologists and historians such as Najib, Hodges and Lydon. The main sources for this section are the Takna narratives compiled by sociologist Mustafa Naimi, and the ethnographic
texts produced by colonial authors like de la Chapelle and Monteil. From Naimi’s accounts, it is difficult to tell the exact authors of the Takna narratives. The narratives, however, are laden with historical metaphors. We can take such metaphors as indications of intervention by the kind of literate elders the Takna might consider as the authority on their history: the *nasaba*. Together the Takna narratives and ethnographic texts provide us with insights into the way the contemporary Takna wanted to present themselves and how they were represented by, to borrow from Rosaldo, “participant” observers: ethnographers. As we will see, a juxtaposition of these contemporary sources also reveals a notable split between the moments of social birth proposed by the anonymous Takna *nasaba* and colonial ethnographers.

Secondly, the split between the Takna and ethnographic visions begs a pertinent question: how could Takna *nasaba* and French ethnographers who lived in the same space, Morocco, and during the same time period, the early twentieth century, differ so profoundly in their conception of the origin of the same qabila ensemble? In addition, what kind of alternative sources could we use to either reconcile or explain such differences? It is tempting to take the Takna narratives and ethnographic texts as spontaneous productions of tangible social realities and, then, blame their discrepancies on translation. The most obvious ‘alibi’ here is the substitution of the terms familiar to the Takna, *qabila* or *taqbilt*, with the ones used by French colonial ethnographers and post-colonial Anglophone Africanists such as Gellner, Brett and Abu-Nasr: *tribu* and *tribe*. Yet, the linguistic differences between the describer and described are also symptomatic of the epistemological gap separating the textual traditions that underpin both the Takna and ethnographic conceptions of origin. Since we are dealing with “literate societies,” it is imperative to ponder the role textuality might have played in the construction of the Takna narratives and the ethnographic text. The question of whether and

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2. The idea of “participant” observer underlines the role of ethnographers in the production of the exotic phenomena they claim to have merely observed and recorded. See Renato Rosaldo, “From The Door of His Tent: The Fieldworker and the Inquisitor.” in *Writing Culture: The Poetic and Politics of Ethnography*, James Clifford, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 77-97.