

Conclusion

The Arabic documents from Libya and Mali that have been presented in this book shed light upon issues that are highly pertinent to the history of the spread of al-Islām across the Sahara in early medieval times. The routes that were followed from Ghadāmes to West Africa, and the surviving legacy of the characteristics of Islamic practises that are to be found there are relevant to this day.

The eighteenth century biography of Shaykh Sidī ‘Abdallāh b. Abī Bakr al-Ghadāmisi *Tadhkīr al-Nāsī wa-Talyīn al-Qalb al-Qāsī* comprehensively demonstrates the major influence that Ghadāmis, in its commerce and in intellectual activities exerted from the early medieval ages almost up to recent times. It also reveals the links that were established between scholars in Libya, in Egypt and in West Africa. This same document illustrates the local view of the expeditions that were made by ‘Uqba b. Nāfi’, and his successors, and the peculiar importance of those lineal bonds within North Africa in general and within the existing Saharan populations, in particular.

The textual style, in places, has a certain religious message, and, in spirit, it seems to foreshadow Ferruccio Busoni’s monumental choral setting in his Piano Concerto from Adam Gottlob Oenlenschläger’s, drama, op. 39, ‘Aladdin’, with its ecstatic cry to ‘Lift up your hearts to the Eternal Power; sense the presence of Allāh, and behold His deed!’

Those documents that refer to the Kel-Essouk are also significant. They show conclusively, despite their overwhelmingly late date, that whatever may have been the local and temporal impact of the Almoravid movement of the eleventh century, within the Sahara, and upon its people, outside the territories that are now in Morocco, in Mauritania and in parts of Mali, the case for its major decisive and lasting historical influence upon the evolution of the way al-Islām was to penetrate North and West Africa, as a whole, is open to considerable doubt. It also suggests much geographical variation in its historical influence.

Other forces at work were equally important, if not more so. In Mauritania, there is a widespread claim to descent from the Awlād Ḥassān. The memories of the people of Ghadāmis and of the Tuareg and the Kunta, in Mali and in Niger, would persuade us to look elsewhere for the spur that marked the beginning, and, later, the impetus, and the progress, of shaping an Islāmic identity within the Saharan communities and beyond.

In these latter communities, lineages display no particular interest whatsoever, nor any special pride in, the leaders of the Almoravid movement. Aside

from a passing mention within several of the archives of the Kel Ntṣar – whose forebears may well have been associated with the Banū Wārith who dwelt in, and well to the west and north of, Azawād – the late lineages of both the Imūjāgh and the Ineslemen revolve around and adumbrate a principal, even strict, matrilineal succession, or, if this is unmentioned, rest upon a strongly asserted claim of an early lineal descent from those Arabs who speared the conquest of the Maghrib; the Companions (*saḥāba*), or the Helpers (*anṣār*), of the Prophet, or else from families of *shurafā'* whose origins were located within Morocco at a date far earlier, or far later, than the Almoravid movement.

Both the Kel-Essouk and the Kel Ntṣar, and even the Moorish Kunta, share such an inspiring claim, as do some amongst the leading lettered families in Ghadāmes. This claim is not only a characteristic feature in Saharan literary works but it also pervades much popular oral tradition and in story telling as is told by Tuareg religious figures in the south.

One or two examples are provided by the Tuareg Nigerian scholar, Altinine ag Arias, in areas in the south of Niger where the Kel-Essouk are to be found. They are included in his publication, *Iwillimadan*.

Digga was told by his 'marabout' from the Kel-Essouk [Essuk] that their ancestor was a Companion of the Prophet whose name was Ibnu Aljerkh [Ibn al-Jarrāḥ]. He is the ancestor of all the Kel-Essouk, those from Agades and the others from Mali. His son Ghubeydeta ['Ubayd] was one of the partisans of the Prophet Muḥammad. He was the father of Ukhbata Almustejab ['Uqba b. Nāfi' al-Mustajāb] who had come to Agades from al-Madīna. He was one of the fighters who coerced the people of Gao in Mali. He had a son known as Ghali ['Alī]. He was the father of Akhmad [Aḥmad] Egag who was amongst those who commanded the rain to fall.¹

Ghubaydata, above, is clearly Abū 'Ubayda b. al-Jarrāḥ.²

Here, a possible identification with Wajjāj/Waggag b. Zalwī, the religious founder of the Almoravid movement has also been suggested. However, this theory may have no historical foundation whatsoever. Even had it been true, it was a claim that was secondary, in terms of lineal priorities, to 'Uqba al-Mustajāb, or to the *anṣār*. According to Ghubayd ägg-Alāwji, *aggag* is a term, or a name, or both. It simply denotes *prêtre, religieux, théologien*.³ It is not in

1 Centre Nigérien de Recherches en Sciences Humaines, Niamey, Novembre, 1970, p. 143.

2 See Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, pp. 140, 148, 152 and 154.

3 Ghubayd ägg-Alāwji, *Lexique*.