



Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam (African Studies)

By Chouki El Hamel

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Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam (African Studies) By Chouki El Hamel

Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race and Islam chronicles the experiences, identity, and agency of enslaved black people in Morocco from the sixteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. It demonstrates the extent to which religion orders society but also the extent to which the economic and political conditions influence the religious discourse and the ideology of enslavement. The interpretation and application of Islam did not guarantee the freedom and integration of black Moroccan ex-slaves into society. It starts with the Islamic legal discourse and racial stereotypes that existed in Moroccan society leading up to the era of Mawlay Isma'il (r. 1672-1727), with a special emphasis on the black army during and after his reign. The first part of the book provides a narrative relating the legal discourse on race, concubinage and slavery as well as historical events and developments that are not well known in printed scholarship and western contexts. The second part of the book is conceptually ambitious; it provides the reader with a deeper sense of the historical and sociological implications of the story being told across a long period of time, from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. Though the strongest element of these chapters concerns the "black army," an important component of the discussion is the role of female slaves. One of the problems the historian faces with this kind of analysis is that it must rest on a limited "evidentiary base." This book has broadened this base and clarified the importance of female slaves in relation to the army and Moroccan society at large. The emphasis on the political history of the black army is augmented by a close examination of the continuity of black Moroccan identity through the musical and cultural practices of the Gnawa.

Black Morocco redefines the terms of the scholarly debate about the historical nature of Moroccan slavery and proposes an original analysis of issues concerning race, concubinage and gender, with a special focus on their theoretical aspects. The Moroccan system of racial definition was clearly "racialist" and was in fact a curious inversion of the Western racist model. Whereas in the western model "one drop" of black blood identifies one as black, in the Moroccan model, "one drop" of white blood identifies one as Arab (i.e.,

privileged). This process helped create a "nationalist" Moroccan Arab majority and at the same time subjugated black ancestry (i.e., those without the "one drop" of Arab blood), seen as having more bearing on the historical antecedents of slavery. *Black Morocco* offers a new paradigm for the study of race in the region that will transform the way we approach and understand ethnicity and racial identities in North Africa and most crucially it helps eliminate the culture of silence -- the refusal to engage in discussions about slavery, racial attitudes, and gender issues.

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Editorial Review

Review

"... a valuable contribution to North African historiography and the study of slavery ... an important contribution not only to the study of slavery but also to the field of North African history. ... Black Morocco offers us the most sustained and in-depth discussion of Mawlay Isma'il's army to date, and provides a solid overview of slavery in Morocco beyond this particular sultan's reign."

Jonathan Glasser, H-Atlantic

"Chouki El Hamel has given us a thorough, well-researched, engaging study of Islam, slavery, and race in Morocco. He weaves together Islamic jurisprudence, Moroccan court histories, European travel accounts, Sufi hagiography, diplomatic correspondence, and social history to explode long-standing cultural myths ... El Hamel locates a window to the past in the black diasporic mystical culture of the present."

Ellen Amster, American Historical Review

About the Author

Chouki El Hamel is Associate Professor in History at Arizona State University.

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