

GORI, Alessandro: *Studi sulla letteratura agiografica islamica somala in lingua araba* (Studies in Somalian Hagiographic Islamic Literature in the Arabic Language). Firenze, Università di Firenze 2003. xii + 430 pp. ISBN 88-901340-0-3; ISSN 1724-8213.

The monograph aims at contributing to the study of Islamic hagiography as reflected in the literature written by Somali authors using the Arabic language. Two types of hagiographic texts are examined to this purpose: (i) texts representing what the author calls 'genealogical' hagiography, and (ii) those related to 'brotherhood' hagiography.

The first type of texts deal with the ancestors of Somali clans, clan-families and the holy men associated with these families. These texts narrate various legendary episodes of the holy men, their pious life and erudition, and their memorable miracles.

Genealogical hagiographies, examined in the monograph, are represented by three texts focused on the personality of *šayḥ* Iṣḥāq b. Aḥmad, the forefather of the Isaaq Somali clans: the *Manāqib* (glorious deeds) of *šayḥ* Iṣḥāq; the *Nubḍa* (genealogic story) written by *šayḥ* Ādam b. Waʿays; and the *Amḡād* (praiseworthy qualities), by *šayḥ* Ḥusayn b. Aḥmad Darwīš.

The holy man, the forefather of the clan, is presented in these texts as a descendent of a noble Arabian lineage and his outstanding origin is proved by an alleged historical evidence.

The second type of texts forms part of what the author classifies as 'brotherhood' hagiography and represents the literary expression of the Islamic mystical brotherhoods (*ṭuruq*, sing. *ṭarīqa*) spread all over Somalia.

The latter type, represented by the critical edition of the *Ṭaḍkira* of *šayḥ* ʿAlī b. Muḥammad "Mayye" from Merka, is an important source of data related to the activities of the most important mystical brotherhoods in Somalia and their impact on the cultural and religious milieu of this Islamic country.

Apart from the pivotal part of the study, dealing with Islamic hagiography and its place in the social and cultural life of Somalia, the book provides valuable introductory information about the use of the Arabic language in Somalia as well as the mainstream of the literary production of the Somali authors using this language. From the point of view of the Arabic studies, the chapter 'La letteratura somala in lingua araba/la letteratura araba di Somalia' ('The Somali literature in Arabic language/the Arabic literature of Somalia') is perhaps the most interesting part providing highly valuable first-hand information of this largely unexplored field where the tradition is challenged by modern creativeness and the Arabic form seems only to disguise the Somali content and Somali identity.

The monograph is a worthy contribution to the study of Islamic hagiography as part of the Somali literary and cultural tradition.

Ladislav Drozdík

OLIVER, Roland – ATMORE, Anthony: *Medieval Africa, 1250-1800*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2001. 251pp. ISBN 0 521 79372 6 paperback.

It is a difficult task to present an up-to-date work on the history of Africa, a field of study in which knowledge increases steadily and almost daily as new archaeological discoveries and historical sources are brought to light. It is commendable therefore that Roland Oliver and Anthony Atmore in this new revised edition of their earlier work have tried to present a comprehensive story of this period of African history from a new

perspective and "to look at the entire continent from a more distinctively African viewpoint, free from the bias inevitably imparted by the reliance from the outset on European written sources". (Preface, VII) And this aim, according to the two authors, might be best achieved by setting an earlier date for the work as a whole. *Medieval Africa 1250-1800* is a revised edition of *The African Middle Ages 1400 – 1800* written by the same authors and published by Cambridge University Press in 1891 as a companion volume of an earlier book *Africa since 1800*, now in its Fourth Revised Edition. With the well-known *Africa in the Iron Age* by Roland Oliver and Brian Fagan these three volumes forms a trilogy and a complete history of Africa from the earliest times to the present. The new edition of an earlier book covering the history of Africa in the Middle Ages thus can be seen as a yardstick to measure the progress of research in the study of this period of African history reflecting the current scholarship and ongoing debates. Both authors are eminent scholars, Professor Oliver one of the founding fathers of African historiography and no doubt one of the most distinguished and prolific students of African history.

One reason for calling the period covered in the first edition of the volume under review *The African Middle Ages* was, the two authors told us, that the dominant sources were literary and traditional, with archaeology playing only a minor role. Another reason for calling the period from 1400 to 1800 the African Middle Ages they found in certain features of this period corresponding with the period of European history known as the Middle Ages, or mediaeval times. (Introduction, p. 3) These common features were identified in the emergence and steady growth of state systems in Europe and their parallels in Africa ranging from loose-knit African empires of the western and central Sudan, such as Mali, Kanem-Bornu and, perhaps, also ancient Ghana and Songhay, through the second category of states, based on the ethnic or cultural unity of subjects, such as Asante, Benin, Oyo, Congo or Rwanda to the city states in Hausaland, Yorubaland and on the Swahili coast. Another common aspect they found in the ever increasing importance of trade, commerce and financial matters, that is of economic changes generally, in the Middle Ages of both continents.

The volume in its new form roughly follows the overall plan of the first edition and contain the same number of regional chapters, however, the first two chapters of the first edition of this book on *The African dimension of Islam* and the back country of the African Middle Ages were skipped and Mediterranean Africa is dealt with in three chapters rather than the original two and entitled: *Egypt: al-Misr*, *Ifriqiya* and *The Islamic Far West: Morocco*. A conventional approach to Africa and its history, from the north downwards was adopted, the first three chapters and most of the chapters which follow cover Muslim regions of the continent and the fringes of Muslim activities. Compared with the first editions, the contents were rearranged, Nubia, Darfur and Wadai are treated in a separate chapter and a completely new chapter was added. This chapter entitled *The heart of Africa* covers the region lying at the geographical centre of the continent to the north of the Congo basin and draws heavily on the results of recent researches. The least accessible region of Africa covered by the rain forest was little known and rarely studied until the meticulous researches of Jan Vansina including his pioneering field work enabled him to reconstruct the history of its inhabitants.

The rest of Africa is covered in the same number of chapters. The dominant motivation to prepare a revised and updated edition while adopting an earlier starting date was, the two authors tell us, to take into account the wealth of new supportive literature in African historical studies since the 1980s and look at the entire continent from a more distinctly African viewpoint. This can be seen in some discussions of the integration of

the basically regional trade and economic activities into the long-distance, international trade. The emphasis is still laid on the enlargement of scale, the emergence and growth of state systems, with perhaps more stress, at least in the treatment of some regions, laid on the African societies themselves and environmental conditions they had to face.

The volume betrays a high level of scholarship associated with the names of both authors, and it will surely find its readership among students and the general public as an introduction to African history even though works have recently appeared providing a fresher and more innovative approach to the interpretation of African history.

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