

“recovers” an entire landscape of esoteric philosophers, occultists, and gnostic thinkers who were both active and in active communication with one another, from Cairo to Samarqand. Thus, we hear of the usual coteries, such as the Ni‘matullahis of Yazd as well as the Khvajagan of Khurasan (both Sufi brotherhoods), but we also encounter intriguing references, such as to the famous Ikhvan al-Safa’ (“Brethren of Purity”) which appears to have been a re-articulated fifteenth-century Ottoman version of the original tenth-century secret society of gnostic thinkers that had been based in Iraq (8). Also interesting are Yazdi’s references to the Ahl-i Kashf va Tahqiq which denotes to a group of intellectuals who believed that “true” reality (*haqīqa*) could only be perceived if one embraced the “unity of existence” (*wahdat al-wujūd*) that had been discussed by two centuries earlier by the famous Sufi philosopher, Ibn ‘Arabi. In doing so, one also accepted the concept of *coincidentia oppositorum* (unity of opposites), and, as Yazdi himself states: “the finest perfection of any quality depends on its ability to embrace its opposite” (100). With such premises in mind, the Ahl-i Kashf va Tahqiq (“Those who reveal and understand Truth”) looked for evidence of divine perfection in celestial events, astrology, and, more profoundly, a cabbalism-inspired system wherein some twenty-nine “isolated” (*muqatta‘at*) letters in the Qur’an provide the basis for accessing the underlying truth of not only revealed scripture but all of God’s created universe. The science of lettrism (*‘ilm al-hurūf*) was relatively common among medieval Islamic thinkers, and Binbaş looks particularly to Yazdi’s fascination with the literary convention of *mu‘ammayāt*, or logogriphs, whereby poets “encoded” meaning in lines of poetry that could only be deciphered through a careful (arguably painstaking) reading. Yazdi clearly saw great potential in such *mu‘ammayāt*, but contemporaries, most notably the litterateur-cum-statesman Mir ‘Ali Shir Nava’i and the famous Timurid poet Jami, were doubtful. The most popular Timurid treatise on *mu‘ammayāt*, the *Risala fi al-Mu‘amma* by Amir Husayn Nishapuri “Mu‘amma’i” (d. 1498), is not mentioned by Binbaş, and it would be interesting to see whether Yazdi’s unique gnostic approach was noticed by this doyen of *mu‘ammā*-writing. Nishapuri’s impact was such that a group of commentaries regarding his treatise was collected in the early sixteenth century (*Sharh-i Dastur-i Mu‘amma-i Nishapuri*; see also Maria Eva Subtelny, “A Taste for the Intricate: The Persian Poetry of the Late Timurid Period,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 136, no. 1 [1986]: 56–79; and Francis Richard, “Quelques traités d’énigmes (*moammā*) en persan de XV^e et XVI^e siècles” in Christophe Balaj, C. Kappler, and Živa Vesel, eds., *Pand-o Sokhan: Mélanges offerts à Charles-Henri de Fouchécour*, [1995], 233–242).

The book careens slightly in the second half with detailed chapters on the nature of historiography and political philosophy in the early to mid-fifteenth century. There are a number of fascinating subsections in these chapters—such as typologies of historiography according to Timurid patrilineal lines (e.g., Miranshahid versus

Shahrukhid and the commissioning of chronicles—pictured excellently in Figure 5.1, 171), as well as the tumultuous relationship between Shahrukh and Iskandar-Sultan based in Fars. But at the end of the day, readers may wonder at the overall cohesion of this study, while a general audience will likely be overwhelmed by the detail and depth of Binbaş’s inquiries (especially in chap. 6, “Writing History in the Timurid Empire”). Nonetheless, there is no doubt that this book will serve as an excellent resource for serious students of Timurid history who want to push further into the nature of Timurid sources, historiography, and the deep and heterodox world of Sufis, intellectuals, poets, and statesmen.

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SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

OUSMANE OUMAR KANE. *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016. Pp. 282. \$39.95.

Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa contains two related but distinct studies concerning the history of Islamic proselytism and education in Africa, particularly in the western and central Sudan. Ousmane Oumar Kane is eminently qualified by cultural background and formal training to address this theme.

The first study, embracing chapters 1 through 5, explores the precolonial legacy of Islamic instruction. Chapter 1, “Timbuktu Studies: The Geopolitics of the Sources,” introduces the literature of Orientalism, a discipline that emphasizes the study of written texts in Arabic and other languages spoken by Muslims. In its formative stage Orientalism paid little heed to West Africa, though its genres of discourse and techniques of knowledge production remain potent. As the European colonizing enterprise in Africa gathered impetus during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, pioneering efforts were undertaken to collect and often translate West African sources. The author’s helpful overview misses William D. Cooley, *The Negroland of the Arabs Examined and Explained; or, An Inquiry Into the Early History and Geography of Central Africa* (1841), reprinted by Taylor and Francis (2016). In about 1990 the Saudi-backed Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, followed by diverse other international organizations, greatly encouraged and increased the discovery and preservation of West African Islamic texts, while substantially freeing the endeavor from the political taint of colonialism. The digital reproduction and dissemination of sources is a radical liberation. Kane offers a country-by-country survey of current conditions.

Chapter 2, “The Growth and Political Economy of Islamic Scholarship in the Bilad al-Sudan,” offers a historical overview of the arrival of the new faith in the western and central portions of the Sudanic region. Merchants are seen to be very important vectors of Islamization; kings, artisans, free farmers, and slaves played considerably lesser roles. The author acknowledges the existence of an eastern Sudan, but does not discuss the rather dif-

ferent historical array of political, cultural, and socioeconomic settings it provided for the arrival and establishment of Islam. Islamic expertise was not homogeneously distributed among the diverse communities of West Africa. Chapter 3, "The Rise of Clerical Lineages in the Sahara and the Bilad al-Sudan," introduces several groups who embraced the clerical vocation: the early "Ibadi Berbers, post-Almoravid Sanhaja, Zawaya, Djula, Fulbe, and Wolof have above all been the main teachers and messengers of Islam" (74). Chapter 4, "Curriculum and Knowledge Transmission," introduces the major genres of West African Islamic learning (scriptural studies, law, biographically informed Prophetic studies, theology, Sufism, the Arabic language, "talismanic sciences" of divination and healing, and the Islamic enrichment of vernacular languages [70]). Many of the major textbooks in which these genres were housed and through which they were disseminated are given. Kane throughout skillfully displays the complex interplay between the written and the oral, Arabic and vernacular, exoteric and esoteric interpretations, and Sufi versus non-Sufi understandings. Chapter 5, "Shaping an Islamic Space of Meaning: The Discursive Tradition," summarizes Islamic West African history from about 1500 to 1900. "Muslim scholars endeavored to shape an Islamic space of meaning . . . They did so by defining the Muslim political community, delimiting its boundaries, and determining who within the community got what, when, and how" (98). Successive generations of clerisy advanced ever more stringent definitions of "Islam" to justify the overthrow of hitherto-Islamic politics and the enslavement of erstwhile Muslim subjects. The present reviewer would suggest that this controversial program created a social environment of "Islam"-upon-"Islam" repression that greatly facilitated the European conquest.

Edward Said, the eminent critic of Orientalism, cited approvingly by the author on page 22, correctly observed that the primary sources generated via Orientalist techniques are at best a mere collocation of textual fragments that rarely do justice to the wider and deeper realities of history. For example, the enslaved Muslims discussed in chapter 5 will never be heard through elite fundamentalist texts of the Muslim masters that rationalize their subjugation. History of the victors, indeed! Concerning Kane's study in chapters 1 through 5 of precolonial Islamic instruction, the manifest scholarly excellences of this Orientalist exercise should not obscure its obvious biases and historiographical limitations.

Kane's second study (chaps. 6 through 9), based upon the author's own fieldwork as well as wide-ranging research among written sources, examines the rise of new Islamic educational and missionary institutions during the colonial era and after. Chapter 6, "Islamic Education and the Colonial Encounter," traces the development of Western and Islamic educational institutions in colonial West Africa. While the time-honored Islamic system endured, especially at the basic level and in rural areas, diverse compromise arrangements were extended into higher education in attempts to accommodate the best of both traditions. The twentieth-century victory of nationalism among

the Arabs and the rise of wealthy oil states opened new opportunities to West Africans for advanced training via the Arabic language, though the practical utility of such an experience remained problematic. Sponsorship of education by newly independent African states often collapsed during the "structural adjustments" of the 1980s. Wealthy foreign donors such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference took the opportunity to advance numerous private projects. Chapter 7, "Modern Islamic Institutions of Higher Learning," introduces a selection of case studies that reveal the movement's scope and diverse emphases. Special consideration is given to the Islamic Universities of Say (Niger) and Mbale (Uganda). The collapse of state authority during the 1980s also opened the door to a wide variety of oil-funded Islamic institutions of civil society. Chapter 8, "Islam in the Post-colonial Public Sphere," offers a survey of the nature and scope of these efforts, with special emphasis upon the media.

Chapter 9, "Arabophones Triumphant: Timbuktu under Islamic Rule," offers detailed case studies for northern Nigeria and northern Mali; featured actors are Boko Haram and Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb. Kane's nonjudgmental description of these groups understates their nihilistic behavior. Arabophones they may have been, but they destroyed every treasured Arabic manuscript they could lay their hands on. They nauseate.

An unexpected epilogue reasserts the prominence of the Sufi tradition in Islamic West Africa today, despite the changes enumerated in previous chapters.

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ABOU B. BAMBA. *African Miracle, African Mirage: Transnational Politics and the Paradox of Modernization in Ivory Coast*. (New African Histories.) Athens: Ohio University Press, 2016. Pp. xviii, 297. Paper \$34.95.

Analysts and contemporary participants alike typically foreshorten the historical record in their quest to understand more recent African affairs, more especially as the continent continues to wrestle with severe political, economic, and social problems. Yet the condition of postcolonial Africa has not always been bleak. In 1960, a year typically referred to as "the year of Africa," when seventeen nations in the continent obtained independence, leaders of those nations embarked on an urgent task to modernize the economies of their countries. During the next two decades, economies of some of those nations did generally well, but by the third decade they experienced a major hangover, as they were hit by one economic recession after another. Progress of African nations in the immediate aftermath of independence resulted from an influx of foreign capital. Abou B. Bamba's *African Miracle, African Mirage: Transnational Politics and the Paradox of Modernization in Ivory Coast* is a thoughtful and well-researched study of those trends in Africa. Utilizing Ivory Coast as a case study, Bamba discusses the country's post-independence prospects, challenges, and efforts to modernize. Ivory Coast experienced an economic boom