Introduction

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A*sabiyya*, the group solidarity described by Ibn Khaldun and so familiar to students of the Maghrib, has been a somewhat fragile and precarious concept among historians of the region. Until quite recently, the limited knowledge of English in North Africa, even in intellectual circles, restricted the impact of British and North American scholarship. Conversely, excellent articles by North African historians sometimes appeared in periodicals with little or no circulation outside the Maghrib and their monographs were often published by presses with equally circumscribed distribution networks. Moreover, European and North American publications have frequently proven prohibitively expensive for Maghrib university libraries, let alone individual scholars. All of these factors have impeded free access to, and exchange of, information vital to sustaining a scholarly bond. The widespread view of the Maghrib as peripheral to other major cultural areas—the Arabo-Islamic Middle Eastern heartlands, sub-Saharan Africa, or southern Europe and the Mediterranean world—has further exacerbated matters by its implicit threat to marginalize the study of the region.

Owing to the fragmented intellectual environment these dilemmas created, historians of the Maghrib have often wrestled with questions concerning sources, methodologies, and the objectives of their work in something of a vacuum. The assessments of the current state of Maghrib historiography that are presented, from a variety of perspectives, in the essays of this book make it very apparent, however, that all historians of North Africa, regardless of their chronological or geographical specialization, do face remarkably similar challenges and would benefit enormously from more concerted interaction.

DOCUMENTATION

Whatever their period of specialization, for example, historians face thorny problems regarding the documentation they study. At best, the survival of written records from every historical period has been haphazard. Even for

the study of the modern era, where the quantity of material already accessible, or steadily becoming available, is very large in comparison with what historians of earlier periods have at their disposal, great gaps are obvious. But beyond the issue of locating and classifying new textual materials to fill lacunae in their fields, most historians of North Africa are aware of still-unexploited sources. Large quantities of inscriptions have eluded systematic study by ancient historians. Some, including much of the material from ancient Libya, remain undeciphered. North African medievalists reap great rewards from the discovery of previously unknown manuscripts, such as the biographies of Andalusian and North African saints compiled by Abu Tahir Saddafi and discovered a few years ago in Berlin, but scholars can hardly rely upon such windfalls for their evidential materials. Increasing numbers of researchers in both the medieval and ancient fields have striven to offset deficiencies of these kinds by generating new information through archaeological studies. Work now underway at such sites as Tahert in Algeria and Sijilmasa in Morocco, in the Kasserine region of Tunisia, and at UNESCO-sponsored projects in Libya confirms that this rich source will continue to yield valuable information.

Specialists in the early modern and modern periods must also cope with chronological gaps in, and the sometimes marginal quality of, currently available documentation. They, however, can harbor greater optimism about overcoming at least some of these shortcomings as new sources do come to light and as they gain access to existing collections once closed to research for one reason or another. The libraries and state archives of Europe—especially in Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain—house copious documentation that remains to be analyzed. Relatively few scholars have consulted Turkey's extensive Ottoman government archives pertaining to the Maghrib, but the work they have done has clearly revealed the wealth and variety of information there. The state archives of Tunisia and Morocco are facilitating access to their considerable holdings, especially for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Despite the havoc that Algeria's independence struggle visited on historical records, important materials bearing on that country's precolonial period have survived—some in Algeria itself, others in France—and merit more serious attention than they have thus far received.

Private collections of documents have proven increasingly important, particularly in the study of local and regional history. Not only do they bring to light frequently overlooked information, but they also provide a fresh viewpoint often at variance with that expressed in the state-generated documentation on which many historians of the modern period have customarily depended. Throughout the Maghrib, archival records, memoirs,

and other documentation germane to the nationalist campaigns against European rule are more readily attainable than in the past. The cataloguing of such materials held in the Archives de la Wilaya d'Oran; the extensive micro-filming of documents from the interwar years by the Centre National Universitaire de Documentation Scientifique et Technique in Tunis; and the multifaceted work of the Commission des Sources de l'Histoire Tunisienne en France all illustrate this positive trend.

In recent years, other disciplines have substantially contributed to modifying historians' traditional approaches to identifying, locating, and examining sources. Paleobotany, zooarcheology, numismatics, and geomorphology are among the many fields to have exerted valuable influence on the study of ancient and medieval history. The methodologies and conceptual frameworks of anthropology have offered historians of all periods insights that have enriched their studies. Affected by colleagues in anthropology and by the *Annales* historians of France, more and more historians of the Maghrib are evincing an interest in questions that no longer privilege politics and ruling groups. As a result, legal documents, oral accounts, literary works, hagiographies, and other written materials have acquired new significance. Recent developments in literary criticism have also had an impact on the historical community, prompting some of its members to reevaluate the very notion of texts as a source of truth and to reexamine familiar sources in ways that make them, in practice, new sources. In sum, whatever the inadequacies of documentation—and these exist in generous measure—the range and quantity of source materials available to today's historian of North Africa could not even have been hoped for twenty-five years ago.

STRUCTURES

A wide variety of organizations and institutions promoting research and higher education, many of which include among their activities historical research and publishing or instruction on regional history, have been created since the Maghrib states attained their independence. A remarkable numerical and qualitative growth of universities, research institutes, libraries, laboratories, and researchers has occurred in every country. That such expansion has been accomplished in the face of a truly formidable array of obstacles, some of which remain to be fully overcome, makes the process all the more striking and impressive. As university systems expanded rapidly after independence, state scholarships played a critical major role in training a cadre of teachers and scholars to staff the faculties at the new institutions. Now, after more than three decades, Maghribi students are as likely to pur-

sue advanced degrees in historical studies at home as abroad, and studies written for such degrees (*Diplôme d'études supérieures*; *Doctorat du troisième cycle*) are beginning to fill library shelves. Many of these recent graduates have chosen aspects of their own countries' history as topics for their projects.

An informal analysis of the content of dissertations produced in recent years reveals that they have, through their emphasis on the use of internal documentation, significantly advanced our understanding of North African history while producing a new generation of historians eager to carry on the work they began as students. The same analysis suggests that although the number of individuals holding advanced academic degrees has increased noticeably in all fields of historical specialization, most of them have focused their work on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Important gaps remain to be filled. Archeologists trained to work in the Islamic period are in extremely short supply, for example, as are Ottomanists. Colonial regimes long neglected these fields, while early nationalist governments were often either ill disposed toward them or uninterested. Only time and the infusion of substantial financial resources will overcome the serious deficiencies that continue to characterize these areas of study.

The states have also championed the development of historical studies through their administrative and programmatic participation in the study, preservation, and management of monuments and other aspects of the cultural patrimony within their national borders. Whatever the dangers of "patrimonialisation" or "folklorisation" of the past inherent in such an approach, state support for archeological projects, the restoration of monuments, the preservation of documents, the development of museums, and the sponsorship of academic meetings have undoubtedly promoted historical study. This is not to say that the private sector has not contributed, but its comparatively modest resources have limited the extent of its participation.

Specialized research institutes are yet another illustration of structural support for the study of North African history. Many of these are North African, but several important European and American ones have also emerged. The American Institute of Maghrib Studies (AIMS), with its North African affiliate, the Centre d'Etudes Maghrébines à Tunis (CEMAT), and the Tangier American Legation Museum (TALM) exemplify the latter category. Other centers and institutes outside the Maghrib that have made major contributions to the advancement of North African historical studies include the Centre de Recherches et d'Etudes sur les Sociétés Méditerranéennes (CRESM) in Aix-en-Provence and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) in Paris. Each Maghribi country has established a national documentation center to encourage and facilitate historical work through

the preservation and classification of documentation. Institutes of archeology similar to the Institut National des Sciences et de l'Archéologie et du Patrimoine in Rabat now function in each country and have made considerable progress in training personnel for fieldwork, the analysis of artifacts, and the preservation of sites and findings for future study and exhibition. Organizations with more general missions include the Centre d'Etudes de Recherches Economiques et Sociales (CERES) in Tunis; the Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches Ottomanes, Morisques, de Documentation et d'Information (CEROMDI) in Zaghouan; L'Institut Agronomique et Vétérinaire Hassan II in Rabat; and the Unité de Recherche en Anthropologie Sociale et Culturelle (URASC) in Oran.

Publications printed in the region are another aspect of structural support. Well-established journals such as the *Cahiers de Tunisie*, *Revue de l'Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes* (IBLA), and *Hespéris Tamuda* have served as excellent outlets for the history and historians of North Africa over many years. More recently, other periodicals published by university faculties and institutes have assumed importance as forums for the discussion of historical issues throughout the region. The *Majallat Kullīyyat al-Adab*, produced by the Faculté des Lettres at Université Mohammed V in Rabat, is only one noteworthy example of this trend. Among the European periodicals that have consistently presented high quality material on the Maghrib are *Annales, économies, sociétés, civilisations* (AESC); *Revue de l'Occident musulman et de la Méditerranée* (ROMM); and the *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord*.

Government presses play a major role in the publication of historical and other academic works in North Africa. The Algerian Société Nationale d'Edition et de Diffusion and the Société Tunisienne de Diffusion are perhaps the two best known government publishers, but there are others, particularly if presses subsidized in whole or part by state funds are included. Especially in Morocco, private publishing houses have become important outlets for scholarly work, including history. Toubqal, Afrique Orient, al-Najjah al-Jadida, and al-Afaq al-Jadida have all given a prominent place to Maghribi history in their lists.

Both state-run and private firms have published works of importance to historians that had long been out of print. The Ministry of Awqaf (pious endowments) in Morocco, for example, is publishing an edition of the *Mi'yar al-Mu'rib* of Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Wansharisi. In a new series called "Collection Archives," Afrique Orient of Casablanca is republishing such "classics" as Robert Montagne's *Les Berbères et le makhzen*, *La Berbérie musulmane et l'Orient au moyen-âge* by Georges Marçais, and *Les Historiens des chorfas* by Evariste Lévi-Provençal. Between 1974 and 1983, the Imprimerie Royale in Rabat reprinted those portions of the ten-volume biographical

dictionary *al-‘Ilm bi-man hal Marrakush wa-’Aghmat* of al-‘Abbas bin Ibrahim al-Marrakishi that had appeared between 1936 and 1938, as well as publishing the parts still in manuscript. For each North African country, there are numerous other examples. Since access to the earlier editions is often difficult, owing to the ravages of time and a world book market that has rendered these valuable items scarce or unavailable, such publication projects, provided they are undertaken with care, are invaluable to historians, regardless of their theoretical or methodological approaches.

The publication of manuscripts has enjoyed similar attention, as have the efforts by a small number of dedicated scholars in each country to produce inventories of manuscript collections held in public and private libraries. In the latter category, the works of ‘Abd al-Hafiz Mansur (*Catalogue général des manuscrits*, 1974–) in Tunisia, Muhammed Manuni (*al-Masadir al-‘arabiyya li-ta’rikh al-Maghrib*, 1983–) in Morocco, and Abdeljelil Temimi (*Inventaire sommaire des registres arabes et turcs d’Alger*, 1979) for Algeria have proven extremely useful. A number of guides to sources have appeared or are in preparation in a variety of formats, but especially as periodical articles.

Despite the work of the postindependence decades, there remains a need for the most basic information about many sources. The search for new sources must certainly continue, but equal attention must be given to making what has already been discovered in North Africa, Europe, and the United States more readily available and “usable” to students of history. In the past, certain kinds of sources have been privileged, with chronicles and “classical” texts in each field receiving priority attention in publication projects and the preparation of critical editions.

Newly discovered sources coupled with methodological innovations have enabled historians to understand well-known sources in quite different and highly productive ways. They have also encouraged scholars to appreciate categories of sources—customary law, oral accounts, juridical texts, literary works, and statistical materials—which, until recently, were not given serious attention. While presenting historians of all periods with a new opportunity, this development also complicates the choices that must be made in the process of distributing meager financial resources and marshaling the skills and time needed to preserve materials and make them accessible to scholars. By organizing microfilm projects intended to preserve archival materials from all of these genres, national documentation centers have made a start at grappling with this problem.

In summation, although considerable progress has been made in the development of cadres, facilities, and sources throughout the region, as well as outside it, much remains to be accomplished. For every collection micro-

filmed, every book published or republished, every manuscript edited or archeological expedition launched, many more might be proposed and justified. Scholars, government officials, and interested parties in the private sector face contracting budgets and increasing demands. Everywhere, they are finding it more difficult to make decisions about what is to be studied, reconstructed, restored, and preserved and what is to be left aside and frequently, in cases such as oral history and some archeological sites, allowed to perish. The task is rendered more painful by the general absence of consensus among professionals about precisely what is historically significant, worthy of attention, and essential to preserve for the cultural and political well-being of generations to come.

Nor is this a question posed in isolation from politics and the broader cultural and intellectual contexts peculiar to each country involved. The need to contribute to (or at least not to detract from) the process of national reconstruction and the ongoing effort to “decolonize” North African history strongly influences decisions on the choice of themes and methodologies for historical study. Thus, decisions about the type and extent of support given to any of the fundamental components essential to the advancement of historical research and production are seldom made without reference to these broader criteria, as well as to more strictly intellectual and financial ones. Professional historians often view the results of this politicization of their efforts with little enthusiasm. This situation is not, of course, unique to historians in North Africa; but in the Maghrib, as in other parts of the recently decolonized world, the pressure to consider national politics and issues of cultural identity in the conduct of research and writing is often quite explicit.

INTERPRETIVE ISSUES

Despite the obvious relationship between documentation and support structures on the one hand and matters of interpretation and methodology on the other, a much clearer consensus exists among historians of North Africa on the former than on the latter. In method and focus, the historiography of the Maghrib is so diverse that some of its practitioners have worried that the dispersal of efforts and resources inevitably entailed in such a multiplicity of inquiries will lead to fragmentation rather than the construction of national histories or other useful works of general significance. Neither the approach of the traditional Orientalists—with its focus on the normative, the literary, and the ruling elites—nor more recent methodologies that

concentrate on social history, local history, the community, the family, and the individual have yet done much to allay these concerns.

In fact, the challenge to the production of critical, documented national history has, if anything, intensified in recent years. The very coherence of such key concepts as “society” and “culture,” or of such notions as “continuity” and “consciousness,” has come under fire, no longer from a colonial policy that sought to divide, marginalize, subjugate, and rule, but rather from a set of theoretical propositions—again originating in Europe—that seems to oppose any form of hegemony. One might go so far as to speak of histories, rather than *the* history, of the Maghrib or its national units. At the same time, however, North African governments and their intellectual elites have become more secure in their identity as Tunisians, Moroccans, and Algerians. With this has come a greater willingness to acknowledge and appreciate the diversity of their past, which they recognize as a source of richness and cultural potential rather than as a threat.

In dealing with the colonial regimes, a unified political stand was essential for Maghribi historians, as was a consensus on the singularity of the nation and the commonality of its historical origins, culture, and experience. With the prize of independence won and endowed with some substance on the cultural and political levels, however, it has become possible for many North African historians to see their pasts as more shared and less homogeneous than participants in the independence struggle and the early years of national consolidation would have had it. Many different constituencies can, and do, legitimately claim the North African past. If history is not to be an enterprise primarily engaged in the production of a particular ideological perspective—or of several with competing hegemonic pretensions—these claims and differences must be recognized, accepted, and studied with the same attention to methodological rigor and documentation accorded to other, hitherto more privileged, aspects of the past. Doing so faithfully will create a more nuanced and substantive account of the past than now exists—one that more faithfully depicts the historical experiences that continue to have a formative influence on the entire region.

THE UNIT OF ANALYSIS

Although most historians of the Maghrib, North African and otherwise, tend to formulate their inquiries and focus their documentary research in terms of presently existing nation-states, many find such an analytical framework unsatisfactory. The nation-state remains the unit of choice for histo-

rians from the generation of nationalist struggle and for those who, because of their skepticism about the stability and durability of the nation-state and the national community, insist that history should, above all else, serve to defend and reinforce those concepts.

The continued reliance on a scheme of artificial compartmentalization imposed by a colonial regime has distressed some historians and provoked a search for alternative spatial definitions of the units they study. Some scholars have engaged in comparative analyses of existing national units as a method of downplaying artificially imposed discontinuities that does not, at the same time, necessitate the formulation of an altogether different set of parameters. Others, basing themselves on substantial geographical, cultural, and historical evidence, have suggested that the Maghrib could best be studied in the context of Africa, as an extension of the Middle East, or as a part of the Mediterranean world. Yet a third group has emphasized that the notion of the Maghrib is itself a historical-cultural construct whose spatial content has changed over time and must, therefore, be considered historically. The history of this concept and its use over centuries by various political regimes and cultural entities has yet to be undertaken, despite long-standing calls for such work.

The unit of analysis problem has taken on new urgency in recent years owing, in part, to the revival of activity designed to create a “Grand Maghrib” and the emergence of this goal as an important element in state policy. The formulation of sweeping theories has lost popularity among historians, and the greater emphasis on projects with more modest goals and more narrowly defined units of analysis has also stimulated thinking on this issue. A trend toward local history and historical-anthropological projects that make, at most, only cursory reference to larger social, political, and cultural entities and processes, has posed new problems of defining the appropriate object of historical research and analysis. For reasons outlined above, many North African historians worry that an “excessive” focus on local history might bolster regional identities at the expense of maturing—but still fragile—national ones. Even historians for whom this is not a serious concern are skeptical or ambivalent about such an approach, seeing in it the danger of uncoupling local questions from the “national” or other larger frameworks and processes in a way that makes meaningful generalizations impossible and renders local history less comprehensible by isolating it from the broader context which undoubtedly had some formative influence on it.

Proponents of local history regard it as ideally suited to the task of reconstructing North African history on the basis of concrete, documented examples. They argue that their approach, if carefully employed, has the ca-

capacity to produce a history closely attuned to the values, constraints, and opportunities experienced by North Africans at a given time. On the other hand, local history is, no less than other models, conceptualized and executed by human beings living in specific cultural, political, and social settings and sharing a particular set of values. Consequently, it constitutes neither a polar opposite nor a reliable antidote to ideological or teleological versions of history—the chronicles, biographical dictionaries, and other writings produced by Muslim scholars who conceived, and still conceive, of history as a means of religious edification, demonstrating how God works in the world, or as a vehicle for bringing deeds considered exemplary to the attention of the faithful. Nor is it a strategy that has yet proven its adequacy for reconstructing history on a larger scale. Despite some hopeful analogies to pointillism, no one is yet certain that the proliferating number of micro-studies will add up to anything more significant and reliable than the historiography that grappled with questions raised by grand theories. Whether or not local history is obliged thus to justify itself is another question, although most scholars believe that it should if it is to secure a place as a legitimate unit of historical analysis. Similarly, practitioners of local history must also maintain a continuous dialogue with larger theoretical discourses to prevent their work from “degenerating” into ethnography or folklore. With these caveats taken into account, the North African historical community appears to support the trend toward a sharper focus on local history, acknowledging it as a methodological approach potentially more productive than, and less susceptible to the shortcomings of, the paradigms of Weberian sociology, structuralism, the political economy tradition of Marx, or the methods employed by “traditional” Arabo-Muslim historians.

Akin to the question of appropriate units of analysis is the matter of the chronological division of North African history. Once again, there is general dissatisfaction with the widely used periodization—Roman, Arab, Ottoman, French (or Spanish or Italian), Independent—based primarily on dynastic or racial criteria. Such categories as ancient, medieval, and modern are even less useful because of their extreme imprecision and the heavy cultural baggage accompanying them. Unfortunately, these conventional terms are so deeply embedded in the historical discourse that their usage persists, even in the face of the near-universal acknowledgment of the overlap and continuity between, for example, the Roman and early Islamic periods, or colonial and postcolonial history. Any examination of periodization serves to highlight the virtual absence of historical work on some periods, most notably the first centuries of the Islamic period, the Ottoman era, and the eighteenth century. Historians must devote more attention to the continuities and connections between periods and places in the history of the Ma-

ghrib if an accurate comprehension of the interpenetration of cultures over time and the evolution of the Maghrib's most salient political, social and cultural features is to be achieved.

HISTORY AND THE COLONIAL LEGACY

Although the effort to "decolonize" North African history and historiography and the critique of Orientalism have scored significant successes in replacing Eurocentric interpretations and preoccupations with North African priorities and perspectives, concerns about this legacy persist. French and Italian historians and archeologists continue to play influential roles in the study of pre-Islamic North African history, for example, while scholars of all periods still make extensive use of many Orientalist studies which have, in some sense, attained the status of classics and are judged authoritative on a wide range of topics in which further original research might revise their findings. The interpretations of colonial historians are still well-represented in such works as the third (1987) edition of Jamil Abun-Nasr's *History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period*. The texts and methodologies of previous generations have given way only slowly to newly developed sources for, and approaches to, the study of history, although substantial progress has occurred since the 1960s.

Ironically, several decades after independence, the conviction that this earlier corpus of work should be replaced entirely is no longer so readily answered in the affirmative. Instead, there is a growing awareness that, despite its grounding in methodological and ideological frameworks now considered flawed and perhaps even reprehensible, this body of literature remains a storehouse of material for historians utilizing newer methods and speaking in different ideological contexts. The use and reevaluation of this material is an important part of the contemporary historian's task.

Many historians now practicing their craft in North Africa received their training in France under the guidance of mentors imbued with ideological and methodological traditions with which their former students are now clashing. The small but growing group of North African scholars trained in the United States are also, to some extent, heirs to this colonial tradition, given their wide exposure to the production of French scholars writing within it. In many ways, the rhetorical commitment to the decolonization of history and a rigorous critique of "Orientalist" prejudices and methods have crystallized well in advance of the actual work of reinterpretation. Much remains to be done to regulate this stubborn intellectual heritage.

The resilience of the colonial legacy poses especially acute problems for

North African scholars by virtue of its intersection with such other issues as the choice of language for historical discourse, national politics, and the continuing influence of academic trends and models generated in Europe. Michel Foucault, the *Annales* School, Anglo-Saxon social science, and a variety of Marxist and neo-Marxist approaches to the study of society and history have all left their marks on the recent historiography of the Maghrib, once again raising questions about external influences in defining North Africa's present and past. The determination of scholars to engage in dialogue with significant intellectual traditions that may contribute to a more sophisticated and coherent understanding of their own fields of research and study makes the maintenance of autonomy vis-à-vis the intellectual and historiographical traditions of Europe—whether viewed as colonial, neocolonial, or something other—extremely difficult.

The works of Jacques Berque illustrate this point. His writings on North African history continue to stimulate interest, guide research, and provoke lively debates. A French native of Algeria who spent his entire career studying the Maghrib, Berque has been viewed as authoritative by several generations of scholars in North Africa and elsewhere. His last works earned high praise for their innovative use of manuscript sources and their contribution to local history. Yet, for North African scholars, many of whom were his students, admiration for Berque's achievements is tempered by a disillusionment with his attempts to sustain comparisons between early modern Europe and North Africa during the same period. At times, they find his use of language and imagery to be paternalistic, even as they applaud his rejection of "Orientalist assumptions" and "revolutionary history," or his contributions to the development of local identity and self-critique.

THE LEGACY OF NATIONAL STRUGGLE

The obverse of historians' need to guard against misleading interpretations fostered by the colonial legacy is their obligation to take a discerning view of the historiography produced within the context of, and often for the explicit purpose of legitimating, the national struggle. As might be anticipated, critical evaluations of the nationalist legacy can impose burdensome political and professional liabilities on North African historians, many of whom feel the need to position themselves in such a way as to avoid giving any appearance of detracting from the achievement of nationhood and communal solidarity. Consequently, little attention was given to Berber studies or to Islamic reform and militancy in the years following independence. Developments in Algeria in the 1990s have rendered an interest in such topics

even less viable than previously. This neglect, as well as the general lack of interest in ancient history since independence or in Ottoman history throughout the modern era, stems in part from the difficulty of fitting these groups and periods into the historical framework fashioned to support the nationalist struggle, and in part from the belief that the disproportionate emphasis accorded to them in the colonial period justified their relegation to a status of secondary importance by postcolonial scholars.

Assessing the contribution of religious reformers to the nationalist struggle has presented an especially acute dilemma of both a political and a methodological nature. Scholars of the Salafiyya tradition, whose historical writing marked a new departure for North Africans, played a pivotal role in the nationalist movement. Combining methodologies borrowed from European practice with others drawn from their own Arabo-Islamic tradition, they wrote about North Africans for North Africans with the explicit purpose of providing them with a mirror on their past—a mirror that showed them heroes of their own, gave them proof of their existence as a people, and offered a new scale of values by which to comprehend and evaluate their condition under colonial rule in the twentieth century. These scholars intended for their history to serve as a pedagogical tool in the reawakening of Algerians, Tunisians, and Moroccans to their potential strength as a community and their worth as persons. In short, they sought to affirm the “historicity” of the conquered people and their brilliant past while providing the tools with which to confront colonial historiography and prove that they were not French.

For all these contributions, Tawfiq al-Madani, Mubarak al-Mili, and other practitioners of a “reformed” Arabo-Islamic historical tradition deserve recognition. But their methods and production (not to mention their politics) in the postindependence setting all but compel a new generation of scholars, intent on a more “scientific” and critical study of North African history and anxious to avoid the production of history as propaganda for a particular form of nation-state or political system, to formulate criticisms.

Acutely aware that this debate, like the one concerning the colonial legacy, is about much more than methodological issues, North African historians are cautious in broaching these subjects. They know full well that in each country of the Maghrib, the retrieval and definition of the past is an integral part of the ongoing process of constructing (or reconstructing) the society, culture, and political system. Their academic study is enmeshed in the larger search for symbols of authenticity and political legitimacy and the manipulation of these symbols for their own purposes by political parties, ethnic groups, religious movements, and governments. Whatever their individual preferences or the strength of their wish to remain detached from

these debates, historians who are not themselves North Africans must take these issues into account in their work. This will inevitably, albeit indirectly, feed back into the debates by contributing to the continuing historical discourse that provides their context.

HISTORY AS A DISCIPLINE

Delimiting the boundaries of history has become something of a growth industry in Europe and the United States. Nor has history in, and of, North Africa escaped this debate. Historians of the region generally advocate an interdisciplinary approach to the study of historical problems, arguing that ancillary sciences (most obviously, but not exclusively, archeology and anthropology) can make enormous contributions to creating new opportunities for historians and to providing them with valuable data and methodological assistance. Many of these same scholars have expressed their malaise with historiography that focused primarily on political events or the activities of ruling elites, or that which was teleological or evolutionary. Having fallen short of their promise, the grand paradigms of Marxist and Weberian inspiration, which pulled history in the direction of political economy and other social sciences, have, for the moment receded into the background, although they continue to inspire and guide many historians. The challenge to the identity of history posed by anthropology and sociology has been offset by the sustained critique of structuralism and the call, even among some anthropologists closely identified with the structuralist approach, for greater attention to the diachronic aspect of social experience. Hence, the question arises for all historians of what, exactly, they are engaged in and how, if at all, it is distinct from other ways of analyzing and describing human societies.

Historians of North Africa have certainly not reached a consensus on what history is or should be, but they agree that history, in the sense of a study of change over time and the use of chronological structure, has been an essential ingredient in the process of reconstructing the past—perhaps not so much at the level of individual memory, but certainly at that of the collective memory of groups and institutions. History, then, should interact with other disciplines and they with it. Historians should avoid articulating a particular ideological perspective, be critically aware of the context in which they are producing their work, emphasize a rational approach to research and analysis, and eschew involvement in the unrealistic quest for comprehensive explanatory theories.

All of this relates back to the issue of local history. Although some historians of the Maghrib believe that the need to know more about many

broad—but still inadequately studied and poorly understood—issues concerning government, the state, the economy, and the like makes an emphasis on local history premature at this juncture, a larger number seem sympathetic to the move to narrow the focus of historical research to something less than such unwieldy categories as nation, state, and society. At the same time, however, they recognize the need to keep the analysis of local history linked to broader historical and theoretical contexts. Maghribi historians of this school clearly regard the goal of specificity and the careful documentation of cases from local sources to be not merely the acquisition of knowledge about particular places, groups, and processes, but the application of that new knowledge in a way that illuminates larger entities, provides comparative examples, and tests theoretical assumptions and previous historical analysis.

Nevertheless, even the advocates of local history have not agreed on a rigorous definition of the concept. For some, it means a concern for small groups—the oasis, village, city quarter, or family. For others, it has a wider definition that includes the study of regions, cities, minority groups, mentalités, and a variety of cultural phenomena, all of whose spatial domains are smaller than such categories as state, society, and nation. The accessibility of new archival sources in North Africa has stimulated interest in and provided support for increasing numbers of projects devoted to variously defined studies of local history, as have theoretical developments pertaining to social and cultural history in the United States, Great Britain, and France. The works of such scholars as E. P. Thompson, Peter Brown, Natalie Zemon Davis, Clifford Geertz, and Michel Foucault are reaching an ever-widening audience among younger North African scholars now entering the academy and embarking on research careers.

The essays that follow provide a very encouraging look into the future of North African historical studies. The discipline promises to be productive and engaging, both in terms of the significant advances likely to occur in what is known about the Maghrib's history in all periods and in terms of the heightened level of comprehension of this history and its place in the larger world of Africa, the Middle East, and Mediterranean Europe.

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The Maghrib in Question

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