



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

Chouki El Hamel

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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.

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. It 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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