

TRIBE AND STATE

*essays in honour of
david montgomery hart*

edited by

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MAKHZAN AND SIBA IN MOROCCO:
an examination of
early modern attitudes
C.R. Pennell

Makhzan and siba

For decades the historiography of Morocco has been dominated by the famous "Makhzan-Siba" question. After all this time, it is tempting to try and break away from it and move on to something else. Unfortunately, as several of the papers in this collection have shown, this is a controversy which will run and run. It deals with one of the most important issues in North African history - or in the history of any area, for that matter, - that of the nature of the state, of legitimate power within it, and of how that power is put into effect.

The classical view should, by now, be pretty well known, but it is worth looking over the main features of it quickly, to remind ourselves that this has mainly been seen as a *political* question. It had Morocco divided into two areas; in the words of Robin Bidwell, a British historian of French colonial administration in Morocco:

"It has long been the custom for writers to divide Morocco into two parts - the Bled Makhzen which obeyed the Sultan and the Bled Siba which did not. In general the Bled Makhzen consisted of the tribes between the Atlas and the Atlantic and was therefore the first to be encountered by the French who landed at Casablanca. . . The Bled Siba consisted of those tribes which has been subject only to the strongest of sultans and some indeed claimed that they had never been conquered."¹

That is the traditional view painted with a very broad brush, but it contains the essence of the classical argument. The

¹ Robin Bidwell, *Morocco under Colonial Rule: French Administration of Tribal Areas, 1912-1926* (London: Frank Cass, 1973), 33.

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American anthropologist, Bernard Hoffman² set the makhzan-siba dichotomy in the context of a segmentary tribal system:

"The primary organization of the society . . . is into horizontal units of increasingly inclusive character - nuclear family, extended family, lineage, district or section, tribe, and confederation - in which the principles of affiliation are those of blood relationship in the male line, descent from a common ancestor (real or alleged), and geographical proximity. The secondary organisation, is by mode of residence - diffused hamlets, concentrated villages, fortress towns, or nomadic camps. These two differing types of organisation, common to all ethnic groups found in the rural scene . . . have no consistent correlation. The larger of the units usually carry out numerous social and political functions, particularly in the mountain areas inhabited by independent Berber people (the so called *Bled es Siba* or Land of Insolence). The government controlled plains and steppes (the *Bled el Makhzen* or Land of Government), on the other hand, had a much more autocratic and hierarchical organization."³

Despite the political divide between *bilad al-siba* and *bilad al-makhzan*, the people of the *bilad al-siba* did not reject the religious authority of the Sultan:

The . . . inhabitants regard themselves as faithful and fervent followers of Allah and even regard the Sultan as an infallible Imam, a belief also shared by the Arabic-speakers of the Sunni areas. . . Furthermore, these same Berber tribes of the *Bled es Siba*, even while they stubbornly

² Bernard Hoffman, *The Structure of Traditional Moroccan Rural Society* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1967)

³ Hoffman, 13.

defended their independence against the secular authority of the Sultan, recognised their common origin and unity with their Arab-speaking neighbors; together they constituted a single Moroccan state.⁴

This all raised some difficult questions. Firstly, how can a "state" exist if a large proportion of its inhabitants reject the authority of the government? Secondly, how can religious and secular authority be distinguished in an Islamic state. Not surprisingly, Moroccan nationalist historians provided a revisionist view.

Among the most prominent was Germain Ayache. In two well-known articles⁵, he argued that the traditional view of Moroccan society has been constructed from a colonialist viewpoint. In an article entitled "La fonction d'arbitrage du makhzen" he attacked it:

"This account of Moroccan history, which is far too convenient and simple, was developed and popularised by French writers at just the right time to serve France's colonial plans. By portraying Morocco as a country which had never before been conquered fully, since the conqueror, that is the Sultan, was simultaneously brutal, grasping and impoverished, it could then be said that the colonising power would have to do everything."⁶

To counter this colonialist viewpoint, Ayache argued firstly, that the rebellions described by colonialist writers were not unique to Morocco, rebellions have always happened in every state, and secondly that they were atypical, and for that reason attracted the attention of chroniclers.

⁴ Ibid., 154.

⁵ Germain Ayache, "La fonction d'arbitrage du Makhzen" in idem, *Etudes d'histoire marocaine* (Rabat: SMER, 1979), 159-176, and "Société rifaine et pouvoir central marocain" in ibid. 199-227.

⁶ Ayache, "La fonction d'arbitrage," 159.

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In fact, Ayache went on, the sultan's role in peripheral areas was to allow local political mechanisms to maintain the peace, and only to intervene when they failed. In a large country, with difficult communications and limited wealth, it made sense for the Sultan to rely upon these local systems in the peripheral areas. However, when local systems of maintaining order broke down, or when famine meant that there was not enough to eat, it was to the Sultan that the tribes turned for help. After a detailed examination of a number of cases in which the Sultan was called upon to arbitrate disputes, Ayache drew this conclusion about the Sultan:

"In every single one of these cases he has emerged as a figure who does not seek to divide, nor to encourage disputes, but to conciliate and bring peace. Even better, his authority grew each time that conciliation was achieved. Successes won without violence actually raised the respect of his subjects, and his authority took on a sacred character which brought him more successes without the use of force."⁷

Ayache's other article on this subject focused more directly on the Rif. In it, while acknowledging his debt to David Hart's detailed knowledge of the Rif, he rejected his ideas about the prevalence of violence. Ayache went on to describe a political system which might be a paradigm for his general ideas about the relationship between the Makhzan and peripheral tribes. Local political organisations managed most things locally, but the tribes were nevertheless integrated into a Moroccan state, which according to Ayache had existed for "ten centuries". (If 1900 were Ayache's starting point, this would take us back to somewhere around 900, that is sometime in the Idrisi period, which is a very long time ago.) The consequence of this integration, Ayache said, was:

"the existence of two opposing political forces, of which the destiny of the tribe, in reality, is the result. One is the product of its particular conditions and grows out of its

⁷ Ayache, "La fonction d'arbitrage," 175.

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[local] base, while the other, comes from the outside, from the Makhzan, that is the state, and meets up with it. The connection is personified by the qaid. . . .⁶

What appeared to be "rebellion" was really only a mask for a highly devolved system of government. Ayache does not deny that there were rebellions, but he does not really examine the nature of these rebellions, preferring to concentrate on the overarching importance of state power.

There is a problem with this approach too, though. Rebellions cannot simply be dismissed. They were too frequent and the effective power of the Makhzan was too frequently limited by them, and long periods. Indeed, it was limited to such an extent that the Makhzan itself was obliged to recognise the fact as a basis for international agreements. One example is enough: that of the Rif and Qal'aya regions. In the treaty signed with Spain in 1799, article XV was a specific exclusion of those areas from the treaty:

"Whereas there has been the greatest harmony between the said *plaza* [Ceuta] and the Moroccans in the neighbouring districts, it is well known that those bordering on Melilla, Alhucemas, and Peñon [de Vélez or Badis] are unsettled and discontented, [and] despite the repeated orders of His Moroccan Majesty that they should preserve the same good relations with the said *plazas*, have continued to inconvenience them continually. And although this appears to be a contravention of the general Peace by land and sea which has been signed [the treaty] should not be extended in this way, because [what has happened] is contrary to the good and friendly relations between the two High Contracting Parties, and in fact the result of the bad character of the said people. Therefore His Moroccan Majesty offers to use whatever means that prudence and power put at his disposal to oblige the said frontier people to maintain good

⁶ Ayache, "Société rifaine", 203-04.

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relations, and to avoid any misfortunes which might take place, either in the garrisons of the said *plazas* or in Moroccan territory because of the excesses of the local people. But if they nevertheless continue, which it is hoped they will not, since apart from being wrongful, it would offend the decorum of the sovereignty of His Catholic Majesty [of Spain], who should not ignore or tolerate such insults when [the forces of] his *plazas* could contain them on their own, it is agreed by this new Treaty that the Spanish fortresses should use cannon and mortars on the occasions when they find themselves threatened.

..⁹

In 1844, the British Consul-General, E.W. Drummond-Hay, raised the question of "Rifi" (including Qal'ayi) pirates attacking ships off the Spanish *presidios* in a note of complaint. The reply came back that the Sultan had told them not to desist, and that article XV of the 1799 treaty exempted him from blame:

"it moreover establishes that these lawless men must most often be seen as not so much as common subjects, but as savage bandits, who are outside the domain of the law and are not at present subject to its authority."¹⁰

The key phrase here is "outside the domain of law." What did this mean for a Moroccan Sultan in the first half of the nineteenth century? One obvious answer is that the traditional "European" view is right: there is a basic difference between the spiritual and temporal authority of the Sultan. That however is a rather unlikely position for the Sultan to hold. A second is that the Sultan was indeed talking in terms of the Shari'a as well as of the

⁹ Clive Parry, ed., *The Consolidated Treaty Series*, 231 vols. (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.: Oceana Publications, 1969-1981), vol 54, 413-428: Treaty between Spain and Morocco.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 97 (1844-45): 326-331: Complaints of E.W. Drummond Hay and responses of Busilham ben Ali, 1844.

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international law as understood by his European interlocutors. The Qal'ayis, in the view of the Makhzan, were outside the law, they were therefore renegades to Islam, but that this did not mean that their territory was excluded from the Dar al-Islam. This is hardly a simple matter of "devolution" of authority.

Clearly, then the question of rebellion, or even of local autonomy, is complicated. There seems, as several of the papers in this book have made clear, to have been a spectrum of relations between the Makhzan and the rural communities, and a range of solutions to the problems. Tamsamani describes the functioning of local *jama'as* and how the influence of the political and sacred power of the Makhzan was expressed through the interdependence of local powers and the sacred lineages. But when Makhzan authority began to break down, local revolts were led, in many cases by the same sacred leaders (al-Raysuni for example) with whom the Makhzan had cooperated in the past. Banditry, the result of administrative decay, also became mixed in with opposition to European penetration in many cases, but by no means in all.¹¹ El-Mansour shows how the virtually independent *zawiya* at Ouezzane shared sharifian legitimacy with the ruling 'Alawi dynasty, and from there moved towards a more secular, rather than theological leadership. Although this brought conflict with the Makhzan, the *ideology* of the *zawiya* as expressed by its propagandists and hagiographers downplayed those conflicts and concentrated instead on the role the *zawiya* played in maintaining order in society.¹² Joffé examines the other side, the mainly political, and comes to the same conclusion - that the Makhzan relied upon the *zawiya* at Ouezzane as a way of delegating power to a local ally. For its part, the *zawiya* tried to maintain the link in order to use it for its own advantage, to such an extent that the economic and political power of the *zawiya* increased considerably at the expense of the Makhzan, whose own economic and political resources were diminishing. As a result the *zawiya* became in some ways the "senior partner" in the relationship.¹³

¹¹ Abdelaziz Khalouk Tamsamani, "The Jbala region", in this volume.

¹² Mohamed El-Mansour, "Sharifian Sufism: the Religious and Social Practice of the Wazzani *zawiya*," in this volume, *passim*.

¹³ George Joffé, "The *zawiya* of Ouezzane: relations between sharifs and tribe up to 1860," in this volume, *passim*.

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The ambivalent relationship between centre and periphery was paralleled at the tribal level. Burke describes the Ait Ndhir as a former Makhzan tribe ("quasi-*guich*" as he puts it) originally intended to control the transhumant tribes in the Middle Atlas, which by the end of the nineteenth century had become an independent player, with factions cooperating with the makhzan or opposing it according to what they saw as their own advantage.

Although the actors are different, there is a striking resemblance to the way in which Makhzan-zawiya and Makhzan-sharifian lineages changed. The common denominator in all these cases is the decline in the power of the Makhzan and the increase in the power of the Europeans, who provided another potential ally: The attempt by the Makhzan of 'Abd al-Hafiz to reimpose its authority, both on the tribes and on the Kattaniya brotherhood led to full-scale revolt, and an attempt to install a pretender to the throne, a brother of 'Abd al-Hafiz. In other words what the rebels were demanding was not the overthrow of the sharifian system, or even of the 'Alawi family, but of the individual who held power. The threat to the throne was real enough, of course, at least in part because the resistance of the Ait Ndhir was expressed in religious terms: popular Sufi Islam provided a bond that could unite the Ndhiris. The threat to the Makhzan came in religiously justified terms.¹⁴ Even as distinct a rebel as Bu Himara claimed to be a member of the 'Alawi family who maintained the appearances of the sharifian court. Most serious rebellions did not reject the Moroccan system as such, certainly not overtly: Islam and the sultanate were maintained as ideals. Islam did, after all, have rural roots. On the other hand, there was enough criminality and banditry in the rural areas to show that much of Morocco was indeed out of control at the end of the nineteenth century.

The problem is making distinctions. Where does simple criminality end and rebellion (in its various forms) begin? And what lay behind the different sorts of rebellion? Laroui has a system of categories: rebels who wanted to claim the system for themselves usually claiming that they were 'reforming' it - Mahdist revolts, those who were undertaking a form of protest against

¹⁴ Edmund Burke III, "Tribalism and Moroccan Resistance, 1890-1914: The Role of the Ait Ndhir," in this volume, *passim*.

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corrupt governors for example) and those who wanted to secure for themselves a wider degree of autonomy.¹⁵

However, it must be stressed that there is an ocean of difference between those who accept the basic tenets of the ideology of the Makhzan - the primacy of shari'a, sharifian lineage, a system of government - even if they contested those who wielded it, or at the very least juggled for power with them -, and those who had nothing much in common with it: criminals and the people who were religiously very heterodox or, which often came to much the same thing, paid little attention to law. In an essentially fragile political state such people were always snapping at the margins of society. There was always a tiger, or a savage, at the gates.

Us and them - the physical margins of culture and law

The image is deliberately a spatial one - margins, outside the gates - because the difference was often seen in spatial terms. "Our space" was occupied by civilisation, "their space" by barbarians. The reply to Drummond-Hay called the inhabitants of the Rif "savages": this is a moral distance too.

There is nothing particularly Moroccan about the central authorities, and the educated elite, feeling a physical and moral distance from the inhabitants of the countryside. Nor was it the result of the economic and political changes caused by the problems of the nineteenth century.

YUSUF AL-SHIRBINI AND EGYPT

In the seventeenth century, Yusuf al-Shirbini, an Egyptian, wrote a long poem about life in the Egyptian countryside, which has been analysed by Gabriel Baer.¹⁶ Baer concentrates on one particular

¹⁵ Abdallah Laroui, *Les origines sociales et culturelles du nationalisme marocain (1830-1912)* (Paris: Maspero, 1977), 157-160.

¹⁶ Gabriel Baer, "Shirbini's Hazz al-Quhuf and its significance," in *idem., Fellah and townsman in the Middle East, Studies in Social History* (London: Frank Cass, 1982), 3-47.

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aspect of the poem: the relations between countryside and the city, concentrating on the *fallahin* and the rural 'ulama.

Shirbini's poem is, to say the least, uncomplimentary about rural life which he aggressively satirises. Shirbini makes a comparison between rural and urban life: food, dress, customs, institutions, building¹⁷ and finds that urban life is preferable. A number of things which characterise rural life, make it unpleasant. The *fallahin* are malicious, quarrelsome and only respond to oppression; they do not pay their debts; they are slack in their observance of religion and prayer; they are uneducated, because there are no institutions of learning in the villages, and no 'ulama live in the countryside; what religion they do have is dominated by heterodox dervishes and their *faqih*s are uneducated; they are unclean, both physically and ritually; they are poor; they live in squalid housing; they have bad table manners; they are primitive and vulgar; they are thieves; their sexual life is immoral and disgusting; they practise feuding; they are stupid; in short they are contemptible.¹⁸

Baer suggests that Shirbini's unflattering picture of life in the Egyptian countryside has two sources: a general tendency of the inhabitants of Cairo, and indeed of other cities in the Middle East, to mock the *fallahin*;¹⁹ and his own need to distance himself from his rural origins.²⁰ In other words, the difference is a cultural one.

The basis of a comparison

More is at stake than just culture. Behind the cultural differences, moral distinctions are being made - almost inevitably for an educated Muslim. But comparison with sixteenth and seventeenth century Morocco, however, suggests that political considerations are involved. By setting the two side-by-side some light may be thrown both on Shirbini and on Morocco. And by looking at the

¹⁷ Baer, 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8-23, *passim*.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22-34; 36.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

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eighteenth century, some perspective may be given to the nineteenth.

There were of course considerable differences between Egypt and Morocco. Settled Egypt was confined to the Delta and the river banks of Upper Egypt. Settlement in Morocco was much more widely spread into inaccessible regions in the mountains and desert oases. While there certainly were rural revolts in Ottoman Egypt, they do not seem to have had quite the same pervasive character that they did in Morocco. While it is true, as Baer points out, that "the (Egyptian) village differed from the town in that nobody belonging to the ruling institution lived there", the rural revolts seem to have been put down reasonably surely.

In sixteenth and seventeenth century Morocco this was not so. Like the nineteenth century, these were turbulent times. In the last quarter of the sixteenth century, Morocco was ruled by Mawlay Ahmad al-Mansur, the Golden Sultan who invaded the Sudan in search of mineral wealth and who ruled with as firm a hand as any Sultan was able in early modern Morocco. After his death, Morocco fell apart, first in a civil war between his sons and then in a general scramble for power by local leaders, some of them connected with *zawiyas*, others simply "condottieri".²¹

During Ahmad's reign, the central power was always open to question, even when he seemed most secure. The threat came particularly from two sources, the Turks and the mountain tribes, mainly Berbers, and nomadic Arabs. After Ahmad's death a further source of opposition to central authority emerged during the civil war: the *zawiyas* in the country side, mountains and deserts.

THE MOROCCAN SOURCES

Baer analysed cultural attitudes through the medium of a poem specifically concerned with rural life. However, he says the "*Hazz al-quhuf* is the only satire on the fellah known in Arabic literary history. It is not an example of a widespread genre, but a unique phenomenon."²² Certainly, there is no equivalent, as far as I

²¹ Abdallah Laroui, *The History of the Maghrib, an Interpretive Essay*, trans. Ralph Mannheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 258.

²² Baer, 37.

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know, in Morocco. So judgements must rely upon indications drawn from other literary sources. Some of these do provide very clear insights. For reasons of space attention here is confined to three of them. The first is the long chronicle of Sa'idi Morocco, Muhammad al-Ifrani's *Nuzhat al-Hadi*.²³ The second is a collection of biographies of 'ulama from the first part of the sixteenth century, ibn 'Askar's *Dawhat al-nashir*.²⁴ The third is the *rihla* of Abu Salim Sidi 'Abdallah al-'Ayyashi.²⁵ This would seem to be a reasonable cross section of the relevant Moroccan literature of the early modern period: a major chronicle, a collection of biographies and a *rihla*, all of them noticeably coloured by personal experience and feelings.

'RURAL' AND 'URBAN' IN EARLY MODERN MOROCCO

The contrast is between urban society and rural society in its very widest sense. But "rural" covers a great deal: the wide plains running down the Atlantic coast, then referred to in a general fashion as the Gharb (a much wider area than is designated in this way today)²⁶, the settled areas of the mountains, and the deserts as well as all sorts of intermediate stages in between. A simple division between *bilad al-siba* and *bilad al-makhzan* is inadequate as far as cultural perceptions are concerned, quite apart from its political validity. All these rural areas had their centres of culture. There were major towns like Chaouen in the Jibala - important because ibn 'Askar had a close connection with it and devoted

²³ Muhammad al-Saghir bin al-Hajj bin 'Abdallah al-Ifrani, *nuzhat al-hadi bi-akhbar muluk al-qarn al-hadi*, edited and translated Octave Houdas, 2 Vols. (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1889). All references are to volume 2.

²⁴ Muhammad ibn 'Askar al-Hasani al-Shafshawi, *dawhat al-nashir l-mahasin man kan b-il-maghrib min mashayikh al-qarn al-'ashir*, ed. Muhammad Hajji (Rabat: Dar al-Maghrib, 1396/1976).

²⁵ Abu Salim Sidi 'Abdallah al-'Ayyashi, *rihla*, lithographed (Fez, n.d.) There is a partial French translation which may be useful, given the indistinct orthography of the Fez lithograph: Adrien Berbrugger 'Voyages dans le Sud d'Algérie et des états barbaresques par el-'Aiachi et Moula-Ahmed' in *Exploration Scientifique de l'Algérie pendant les Années 1840, 1841, 1842, Sciences Historiques et Géographiques* (Paris) 9 (1846).

²⁶ See Ibn 'Askar, 23 for usage of this term.

considerable attention to the northern part of Morocco as a result. But there were also important cultural and religious centres in the more remote areas, be they important *zawiyas* like that at Dila, or the much smaller centres of individual shaykhs. These rural centres were of some importance in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries because the founding of the Sa'di dynasty had led to the spread of learning not only in the cities but in the countryside as well.²⁷ That does not mean that those who were cultured and learned were necessarily men of the Makhzan, though many undoubtedly were. Among the shaykhs mentioned by ibn 'Askar were those who were indifferent to the Sultan's power, others who refused to be impressed by its trappings and yet others who rejected it outright. But these *were* men of religion: ascetics, some of them, who were unconcerned with the things of this world, as well as those who considered the Makhzan to be corrupt and irreligious. Both found the more remote areas of the country welcoming.

Such men of religion might withdraw to the rural areas in order better to practise their asceticism or to teach their ideas undisturbed by the political desires of sultans or to lead movements of religious and social reform. But there were others, very different, for whom the rural areas were an ideal base for rebellion and brigandage.

Banditry and morality

Very often in the seventeenth century literature, the bandits and uncontrolled elements were given the catch-all name of 'Arabs', which usually meant nomadic or semi-nomadic tribes who raided peaceable travellers. The other term which was sometimes used was 'Berbers,' which usually meant people living in the mountains. They may have spoken a different language, but they were just as untrustworthy.

THE 'ARAB' AS BANDIT

²⁷ Mohamed Hajji, *L'Activité intellectuelle au Maroc à l'époque sa'dide*, 2 Vols. (Rabat: Dar al-Magrib, 1976), Vol. 1, 64, 153, 229 etc.

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The real problem was the 'Arabs,' who lived on, or rather off, the plains and in the deserts by attacking travellers. Travellers were accordingly very worried about them and there was a good demand for charms to protect against robbers and brigands. These were provided by rural shaykhs, some of whom had considerable influence over the marauders. Muhammad bin 'Ali, 'Abd al-Salam al-'Ayyashi's host at Medrara at the beginning of his pilgrimage before he attempted the desert proper, was kind enough to provide the text of a prayer which would protect him.²⁸ Ibn 'Askar reported that the authority of another desert shaykh, Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad al-Saytuni, was so great that the "Arabs of Angad, al-Zab and Ifriqiya" left alone the caravans that he organised, because of his alleged supernatural powers. He used to recite the Surat al-Qadr before a caravan that was setting off, as "a protection against robbers and highwaymen."²⁹ Religion, then, was the antidote to disorder.

The fear of 'Arabs' was pretty general. When Al-'Ayyashi's pilgrimage caravan arrived at the village of al-Daghamsha near Tuat the *amir al-rakab* (leader of the pilgrimage caravan) went to visit the local marabut, who was considered a very holy man. Al-'Ayyashi related that:

According to what we heard of this man he did not allow any of the Arabs of that country to eat his food. And if he did not realise that one had (come in) until he sat down among the people he was receiving, he said to them 'I do not let these robbers eat my food so that they can make use of it to (prepare themselves) to do evil to Muslims.' And despite that there was not one for all his ferocity and arrogance who was capable of doing him any harm.³⁰

They could, in fact, usually be relied upon to cause harm. Ibn 'Askar told the story of a certain 'Abd Allah al-Kush al-Marrukushi who wanted to martyr himself; so he deliberately

²⁸ Al-'Ayyashi, 15 (French translation).

²⁹ Ibn 'Askar, 71-72.

³⁰ Al-'Ayyashi, 21.

exposed himself to danger of robbery. A group of Angad Arabs took his clothes, but he refused to remove his trousers on the grounds that this was shameful. So they killed him, and he achieved his desired martyrdom.³¹

Not everyone wanted to be a martyr. The more common view was that of the Sultan Mawlay Ahmad al-Mansur, who like many Sultans saw the control of the Gharb as being one of his most pressing problems. Mawlay Ahmad al-Mansur, who was very keen on ceremonial, celebrated the *ʿid al-mulud* in a big way, inviting people to come from all parts of Morocco. On one occasion, the Qadi Qudat of Fes came to Marrakech and passed by a line of chained men and women, one of whom went into labour while still shackled to her neighbour. He complained to the Sultan about this mistreatment. Mawlay Ahmad al-Mansur was very angry, and refused to see the qadi for ten days. Finally, the qadi apologised for having told the story. The sultan replied:

If it was not for what you saw, it would not be possible for you to travel with your companions for ten days in peace and equanimity. The inhabitants of the Gharb are madmen and their hospital the afflictions of chains and fetters.

It was an attitude that al-Ifrani, who told the story, shared: he pointed to it as a sign of Mawlay Ahmad al-Mansur's indulgence towards the qadi, that he accepted the man's apology.³²

The Gharb was a byword for disorder in early modern Morocco. In the declining years of the Sa'di dynasty, its inhabitants were characterised on all sides as public enemies. The great mujahid leader Muhammad al-ʿAyyashi, who headed the campaign against the Spanish and Portuguese along the Atlantic coast, effectively ruled north-western Morocco for much of the first half of the seventeenth century, despite the efforts of the Sa'dis to have him killed. When mayhem broke out in Sale, al-ʿAyyashi agreed to restore order there, but on condition that the heads of the Arab and Berber tribes should sign an agreement recognising him as leader and promising to punish anyone who disobeyed his

³¹ Ibn ʿAskar, 110-111.

³² Al-Ifrani, 145, 158.

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orders. That did not help much for, as al-Ifrani reports, he soon "had to deal with the Arabs of the Gharb who depended upon rebellion and absence of government."³³

Those are al-Ifrani's words, and al-Ifrani was a man of the Makhzan, but they are an echo of al-^cAyyashi's own feelings, which he expressed in a letter to King Charles II of England about a ship which had been cast ashore on the Moroccan coast. Al-^cAyyashi rescued the passengers, and explained:

att that present there wanted not the country. people not only to rob them of their goods but also to make slaves of their persons, according unto y^e order in these p'ts. And seeing it was the English consol of Salle, I caused him to be called and sent my servants with him to bringe all his goods to my tents not suffering any to abuse them and that misfortune of theirs happened betweene Tanger and Arzila, the country of Barbarous people y^t knowes neither king nor governement.³⁴

Al-^cAyyashi, as it turned out, had good grounds for what he said: as a result of a series of rebellions among the Arab and some of the Berber tribes, he was betrayed by the al-Khlut tribe and assassinated.³⁵

One of the very last Sa^cdis, Mawlay Muhammad al-Shaykh al-Asghar, tried to recoup some of his power by writing to the zawiya of Dila, which had usurped much of it, to tell them that they had a duty to obey him, and that their actions were rooted in the anarchy of the tribes. The monopoly of armed force, he went on, belonged to the Sultan. He explained his opinions in a vivid, if ornithologically absurd, image:

It is for a king only to group troops beside a leader who is effective and whose words are

³³ Ibid., 265.

³⁴ PRO SP71/12(i)/177 Mohamet ben Ahamad al Ayashy to (Charles I) 19 March 1039 [sic]. Headed 'Translation of the Morabites letter'.

³⁵ Al-Ifrani, 271.

accepted and listened to. This is especially true of the Gharb, that has never stopped being full of the confidants of every soothsayer...here the owl goes to sleep at night with its penis flaccid and awakes in the morning with beak and claws.³⁶

THE DEVIANT AND THE DEPRAVED

Rebelliousness and disorder were not the Arabs' only offences: there were other signs of depravity, too. They were indecent in their behaviour. Ibn 'Askar tells the story of a noted libertine who was unable to contain himself until he was cured by a shaykh in a miraculous manner. He described to the shaykh the workings of his uncontrollable lust. When he wanted someone to lie with, he said, "I went to find an Arab woman."³⁷ It would have had to be an Arab woman.

They were not only sexually deviant, these Arabs, but irreligious as well. Relating the history of an allegedly heterodox "madhab", the 'Abbadiya, ibn 'Askar says that it was joined by "the mob, the boorish Arabs, and those townspeople filled with greed".³⁸ Even when they were not involved in deliberate religious heterodoxy, their religious conduct was tainted by ignorance. When the pilgrim al-'Ayyashi arrived at Tsabit on the edge of the Tuat, he stayed there six days. But he complained:

we did not meet there anyone to whom could be attributed either saintliness or piety. There was no-one of knowledge or prosperity. Most of them were common people who lived by commerce the major portion of whose living came from dates...we prayed the Friday prayer there on the first day we arrived there, and the *khatib* presented a fine *khutba* and a good sermon,

³⁶ Ibid., 249.

³⁷ Ibn 'Askar, 76.

³⁸ Ibid., 124-125.

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which he took from a page of a book except that there were many grammatical mistakes.³⁹

Depraved, ignorant, and criminal though the Arab and Berber tribes may have been they could still play a role in the structure of the Makhzan. They made excellent soldiers. Troops from the Sous, and the Sharaga (people from just over the border with Algeria) formed two of the most important elements in Ahmad al-Mansur's army.⁴⁰ The same Sultan had recruited people from the Awlad Talh tribe, because they had asked for employment and he had been unwise enough to give it, on the grounds that Marrakech was far enough away from their home territory for them not to be a nuisance. However, when he learned that his son, Mawlay Muhammad al-Shaykh who was governor of Fes, had taken people of the Awlad Talh into his service he wrote to him to warn him against it. These people were extremely unreliable, he said, and were probably Turkish spies as well:

Even if they are friendly and only want to do you good, these people are Arabs and they do not keep to themselves what they have read or heard.

In addition, the Sultan had heard that despite recent revolt among the al-Khlut tribe, his son had formed some of them into a troop of riflemen. They should be dismissed at once; so should the tribe of Awlad Husayn who had pitched camp outside the city. Had his son forgotten how these people rebelled? He should arrest their qaids at once. Finally he tells his son not to recruit riflemen from the *'ahl al-jabal'*, who are only interested in feeding themselves and making themselves rich (*ahl al-sahfa wa-l-dinar*). If he must recruit people, let it be from Sous, Dra^c or Marrakech, and if that fails from the people of Fes - not from anyone else.⁴¹

In short, the people from the tribes should not be trusted, particularly if they came from close by. That of course was the attraction of the Sharaga, and other mercenary groups - and the

³⁹ Al-^cAyyashi, 20.

⁴⁰ Al-Ifrani, 116.

⁴¹ Ibid., 174-79.

most famous of all were the black slave armies of Ahmad al-Mansur and Isma'il in the following century. But these mercenaries owed no local allegiance so when they got out of hand, little that could be done to control them. Once Sa'di authority broke down in Fes following Ahmad al-Mansur's death in 1603, there was civil war in the city and the Sharaga went on the rampage. For about a year, in 1610/1611, they held sway in the capital. They invaded private harems, they pillaged the markets and they were found drunk in the streets. Al-Ifrani told one particularly unpleasant story about them:

A woman was cooking *khali* and her baby still suckling at her breast when one of the Sharaga burst in on her. The woman fled and locked herself onto the balcony and he was unable to overcome her. He tried to persuade her to come down, but the woman refused. So he said: If you do not come down to me I will throw your child into the pot. She continued to refuse, so he threw him in. The woman let out a huge cry and threw herself upon him. She broke her neck and died.⁴²

The city: seat of depravity or centre of culture?

At one point during the civil war which filled the first part of the seventeenth century, 'Aisa ben 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sijtani was qadi in Taroudannt. When one of the contenders for power, Yahya bin 'Abdullah asked for his support, al-Sijtani refused. Yahya then tried to capture him, so the qadi fled to Marrakech. From there he sent a letter to Yahya, to say that he was glad to be in the city with his family. Even though he had been brought up in the countryside (*badiya*) his family was accustomed to the towns. Then he recalled the words of some faqihs from al-Andalus to the effect that the countryside was a place of exile among primitive people.⁴³ Besides the lack of culture there were political

⁴² Ibid., 233-34.

⁴³ Ibid., 226.

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considerations to: the city was the place of the Sultan and of the law. However corrupt his ruler might be, a Muslim should not separate himself from the sultan either politically or physically.

Al-Sijtani's views were not shared by everyone. For some religious men, the towns were places of even greater depravity than the countryside. They were the seats, not of good order and justice, but of oppression and a bloody struggle for power. During the long civil war, it was hardly surprising that many people should flee into the countryside, and that is what they did.⁴⁴ The *zawiyas* in the mountains and on the edges of the deserts provided centres of stability in disturbed times. Al-Ifrani quotes this opinion (written by another author) of Abu Bakr, the master of the *zawiya* at Dila:

It suffices to say that the Maghrib when it had (lost?) its foundations and the pillars of sovereignty had collapsed, and order had been overturned, and the people were agitated like the sea, he was a place of refuge for the people of science and religion, a watering-place for the weak and poor.⁴⁵

Similarly, when Muhammad bin 'Abd Allah al-Madghari was asked why he had left the Sous for Sijilmasa which was further away from urban civilisation, he replied:

I left a mob that was having the most abominable sorts of pleasures, *faqihs* who gave the weakest judgements and governors (*amirs*) who fell one after the other into the deepest abysses.

Since no-one in the Sous paid attention to what was right, it was better to leave the settled world.⁴⁶ This was the attitude of a great many ascetics as well.

Some people travelled even further. Yahya al-Hajj al-Wamudi went into exile in Medina because of the depravity and

⁴⁴ E.g. al-Ifrani, 199.

⁴⁵ Al-Ifrani, 275-76.

⁴⁶ Ibn 'Askar, 87-88.

disorder in early sixteenth century Morocco. But he was homesick and when he died his children, who were even more homesick, sold their house in Medina and returned to the Gharb. But as soon as they got back they regretted it, and wanted to return to Medina. The disorder was still rife.⁴⁷

The same simple affection for his home region, the Gharb, seems to have inspired ibn 'Askar. He begins his book by saying that he will confine it to the Maghrib (by which, from the evidence of the book, he means Morocco and Tlemcen), "because it is my native land (*watan*), the nursery where I spent my youth, and my usual place of abode. What man is not moved by partisanship for his native land?" He goes on to narrow that down even further by explaining that he will begin with the biographies of the shaykhs of the Ghumara and Habt and asks: "How is it possible to deny the superiority of this region (*bilad*) over all the other regions of Morocco?"⁴⁸ Why? because this was the point of origin of two "poles" of Islam in Morocco: an argument that might not have appealed to people from other regions, who could point to equally religious products of their own areas, nor to 'Aisa al-Sijtani in his exile from Taroudannt. But even so, culture and law and security were the issue, not a simple distinction between town and countryside. And in the political circumstances of the seventeenth century, culture and law were more widely spread through the rural areas of Morocco than they were in Egypt.

Conclusion: Political and cultural attitudes

Politics and law were important elements in shaping these cultural attitudes, since religion law and culture were so closely connected. But they *were* attitudes, not reasoned analyses. Indeed they are closer to prejudices. Some sound more like fairy stories. Al-Ifrani's story of Sharaga mercenaries who boiled a child bears a startling resemblance to a story told about Turkish soldiers in Algiers just

⁴⁷ Ibid., 63.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 1-2.

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before the French occupation in 1830.⁴⁹ In fact, the myth (at least one hopes it is a myth) of the powerful cooking and eating the less powerful is a minor theme in the historiography of north-west Africa.⁵⁰

There is a remarkable similarity between the views of the countryside held by the official and educated class in sixteenth and seventeenth century Morocco and those exposed by al-Shirbini in Egypt at much the same time. The people of the countryside are violent, depraved, sexually immoral, corrupt, uneducated and irreligious. But the apparent similarity is also misleading: in Morocco many men renowned for their holiness returned to the countryside to live a life of asceticism away from the corruption, depravity, immorality and irreligiousness of the city. What is at stake is not simply a relationship between ruler and ruled, but rather the perceptions of a politically dominant culture: the fundamental question is, who is and who is not living within the bounds of the law?

Both the traditional "colonialist" explanation of *siba* and Ayache's refutation of it, concentrate too much on political manifestations and ignore culture and religion. Culture and religion explain Mawlay 'Abd al-Rahman's description of the Ghiata tribe:

vile; the most suitable attitude towards them is a determination that they should be kept in their place; we have had experience of them and know

⁴⁹ H.T. Norris (translator and editor), *The Pilgrimage of Ahmad, Son of the Little Bird of Paradise, an Account of a 19th Century Pilgrimage from Mauritania to Mecca* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1977), 84.

⁵⁰ See, for example, John Harrison, *The Tragical Life and Death of Muley Abdala Malek the late King of Barbarie, with a Proposition, or Petition to all Christian Princes, annexed thereunto* (Delft, 1633), 16. Harrison says that he collected his stories about 'Abd al-Malik from local informants. While I have not seen this particular story in the Arabic accounts, others of his are. A similar story is told of one of the last Muradi Beys of Tunis by Ahmad ibn Abi Diyyaf, *Ithaf ahl al-zaman bi-akhbar muluk Tunis wa-'ahd al-aman*, 8 volumes (Tunis, 1963-1966), vol. 2, 73-74. I am grateful to Byron Cannon for sending me a photocopy of pages of this volume.



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