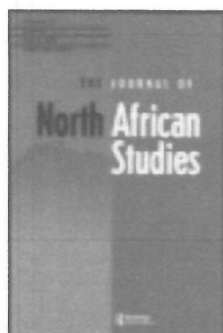


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BOOK REVIEW

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BOOK REVIEW

Forgotten saints: history, power and politics in the making of modern Morocco, by Sahar Bazzar, Cambridge, Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2010, 192pp, \$19.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-0674035393

While studying the biography of the *sherif* (saint and mystic) Mohamed al-Kattani in *Forgotten Saints: History, Power and Politics in the Making of Modern Morocco*, the historian Sahar Bazzar simultaneously makes a major contribution to several fields of studies – namely pre-colonial Moroccan political history, studies on colonialism and nationalism and political studies. Political processes themselves have an impact on nationalist historiographies, which in turn often influence the very content of History.

First, Bazzar's monograph fills a gap in Moroccan pre-colonial political history. Although the *sherif* Mohamed al-Kattani played a significant political role in Moroccan society and its political scene at the end of the nineteenth century, classical national history continues to overlook his contributions. Yet, al-Kattani had an impact in his society, not only in his native city Fez, but also beyond, where he had extensive allies, disciples and followers among Northern tribes and in cities such as Tangiers. Keenly discerning the danger of European encroachment on Moroccan sovereignty, al-Kattani abandoned his ascetic life and engaged in political activism. In so doing, he called both for *tajdid* (Islamic renewal) and resistance against all forms of foreign dominance in Morocco. Moreover, he embarked on promoting a new political order in which the Sultan would be subjected to constraints on his powers, pressuring him to consult with the *ulemas* (theologians) and Moroccan political advisers as part of his decision-making process.

When the Sultan Abd al-Hafiz contacted al-Kattani in order to support his accession to power, the latter effectively mobilised the Moroccan masses, with the promise that the Sultan would respect the conditions of the project of the new political order. However, once in power, in 1909 the Sultan rewarded the *sherif* with a violent death. Furthermore, the Sultan ordered that al-Kattani be buried in an anonymous tomb. Without a structure identifying the mystic's tomb, his disciples and followers did not have a space where they could gather and honour the saint's memory. In other words, the Sultan sentenced al-Kattani to oblivion, which resulted in the pre-colonial nationalist historiographies' omission of al-Kattani's contributions.

Thus, Bazzar's monograph can be considered a landmark contribution to the studies of nationalism and anti-colonialism. Indeed, scholars tend to view the era of pre-colonial Morocco (1860–1912) as a period of reforms and modernisation, mainly initiated and led by the *makhzen* (Moroccan government) in its efforts to resist European domination. Conversely, traditional doctrines and institutions often appear as an obstacle to these reforms and efforts of modernisation. Yet, as Bazzar's original research demonstrates, Islamic mysticism played an important role in the development of nationalism and political modernity. While using the doctrines and institutions of Sufism, al-Kattani mobilised the Moroccan masses from different social classes and various regions in defence of the nation's sovereignty. However, in the case of

Morocco and numerous other post-colonial societies, to produce a linear and uncontested history – and because of the dependence of history on the politics of nationalism – it has been necessary to silence narratives contradicting the dominant narrative.

Finally, Bazzar's monograph makes a significant contribution to nationalist historiography. Thus, Bazzar raises the question as to why an important figure such as al-Kattani is still absent from the history of Moroccan nationalism. Moreover, he provokes consideration of the ways in which the knowledge of this history would alter our perception of pre-colonial Morocco. Ultimately, a historian reaches the conclusion that the real question is: What does al-Kattani's historiographical marginalisation tell of the relationship between history and politics in modern post-colonial Morocco?

Using original Arabic sources, Bazzar succeeded not only in salvaging a significant chapter of Moroccan pre-colonial history from oblivion, but also in shading light on erroneous perceptions of nationalism during this era. Admittedly, it may be a common statement to say that winners write history. Yet through al-Kattani's biography, Bazzar expresses this thesis with an exceptional in-depth study and a highly sophisticated analysis. Thus, the book will be of interest to scholars and students in the fields of history, political science and Maghrebi studies.

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