

mediation by official scribes, legal sources offer a voice to the marginalized, who in Hegel's words "were generally silent and invisible" in other official sources and in cultural artefacts. Case 7 is one of adultery and murder and reveals traces of a non-elite group, the tanners (or *p'ijang* 皮匠), who appear infrequently in official records. It is this latter feature of *Wrongful Deaths* that makes it a welcome addition to available classroom materials on Chosŏn Korea. One of my colleagues' most frequent complaints is the difficulty of making pre-modern Korean history interesting and motivating for students, who are separated geographically, temporally and culturally from the events described in history books, and more seriously fail to see any need for academic enquiry: "It [pre-modern Korean history] is boring because it doesn't seem relevant to my life", one student confessed to me. Used effectively in class, *Wrongful Deaths* can help lift history off the page by providing detailed insights into the lives of both elites and non-elites.

One minor misgiving concerns the limited choice of cases, and it is a shame, that unlike Hegel's book, there is no coverage of official legal deliberations over rebellious activity or politically motivated violence. There was no shortage of such cases in the period covered by *Wrongful Deaths*, and it would be interesting to compare official judgments of those accused of political crimes and those charged with criminal offences.

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AFRICA

MEIKAL MUMIN and KEES VERSTEEGH (eds):

The Arabic Script in Africa: Studies in the Use of a Writing System.

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The volume under review derives from a workshop held in Cologne, Germany, in April 2010. It contains contributions by a star cast of experts on African linguistic and cultural traditions in which the Arabic script is used in the transcription of local languages. It consists of five sections made up of sixteen contributions. The first section deals with the general issues related to the type, spread and adaptability of the Arabic script for the various languages with which it had come into contact from Islamic antiquity. The remaining four sections are dedicated to North Africa, West Africa, East Africa and South Africa respectively. The objectives of this work are: to examine the contents and contexts of the Arabic script-based African writing systems from a sociolinguistic perspective; and to illustrate the various idiosyncratic techniques by which experts and local authors tried to improvise or adapt Arabic graphs for phonemes and consonants in the local languages for which there are no exact equivalents in the Arabic alphabet. This writing system, generally referred to as *ajami*, has become a marker of all languages, particularly African, which use the Arabic script. Materials for the languages discussed in the volume are analysed in the context of problems of phonology, loan word challenges, digraphic representations, domains of use, grammatical features, and idiosyncratic orthographies.

In the section on North Africa, the two essays deal with the Tuareg (Berber) writing tradition (Niger and Mali), and Shelha (that is, all non-Arabic languages of south

western Algeria). For the latter, materials from internet forums as contributed by speakers of the language varieties are analysed. For the former, however, personal and religious documents in Tuareg *ajami* are contextualized and the salient features of this writing system are related to the wider context of the regional *ajami* tradition. The section on West Africa, the largest in the volume, has seven contributions: the region has more local languages with attested use of the Arabic script than all the other regions. These include: Old Kanembu (17th c.), a highly specialized written variety of Kanuri which is “solely used for translation from Arabic” (p. 109); Fulfulde; Mande languages, viz, Mandinka, Jula, and Bamana; Chadian Arabic; and Hausa. Materials used by the various authors range from intralinear glosses, (Old Kanembu), excerpts from Usman Dan Fodio’s poetical corpus (Fulfulde), hunters’ incantations and Bamana texts (Manding) among others. But an exceptionally intriguing contribution on West African *ajami* is its use *ex situ*, that is, by literate Muslims and military servicemen during colonial and slavery *longue durée* in the Caribbean and North America. Nikolay Dobronravin (pp. 159–71) shows how the Arabic script writing system here betrays a hybrid, or rather, an amalgam of sorts, as it contains words in Arabic, Eastern Fula, Mandinka, English/English-based Caribbean Creole, and Hausa, thus illustrating the cosmopolitan nature of the West African literate commune outside the region. This should provoke a greater interest among avid explorers into the intellectual and literary practice of diasporic Sudanic Africans. The three papers on East Africa clearly show that apart from Swahili, which has a long history in the Arabic script for religious and secular writings, other languages, for example, Chimmini (originally spoken in Brava-Somalia), equally has a remarkable history of literacy, and indeed a poetical tradition in the script. The two papers on South Africa deal with a far less known, but nonetheless significant tradition of Afrikaans in the Arabic script among the Muslims of the Cape from the second half of the nineteenth century, specifically in the domains of religious enlightenment and political pamphleteering (1884). The papers here show the form of Arabic Afrikaans used by the Muslims as influenced by the norms of standard Dutch.

A significant contribution of this work, apart from unearthing the little-known narratives on the history and use of the Arabic script for a number of African languages, is the bold effort at standardizing their transcription and transliteration systems. (cf. www.webcitation.org/65onDHHix). There are, however, a few omissions which do not necessarily detract from its overall importance. Apart from the Cape, no other province of South Africa is discussed, although evidence of Arabic Afrikaans in other regions is not lacking. A major West African language not discussed at all is Yoruba (south-west Nigeria) which language has, among other narratives, a history of Arabic-based writing system going back to the seventeenth century, and documentary evidential examples of *ajami* in the form of religious poetry datable to the early nineteenth century. Although evidence of the “adastratal influence” of the Classical Arabic poetical model on Sudanic African versesmithing practice has long been recognized and studied (Cf. S. Sperl and C. Shackle (eds), *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Asia and Africa, Vol 1: Classical Traditions and Modern Meanings*, Leiden, 1996), it is strange that none of the contributions in this volume, particularly those dealing with *ajami* religious poetry (for example, A. Breedveld (pp. 143–57) in her treatment of Fulfulde Jihad poetry, and B. Banafunzi and A. Vianello (pp. 293–309) in their discussion of Chimini religious poetry (ste:nzi)) refer to this useful study, nor to the insightful snippets offered in John Hunwick’s *Arabic Literature of Africa* series, particularly, Vols 2 and 4 (Leiden, 1995 and 2003). Nonetheless, this work has convincingly disproved the quotidian Western stereotype of Africa as a “Dark Continent” with an overwhelming

tradition of orality without literacy until European colonialism. Tifnag, the script of Tuareg, for example, is shown to have had a writing history of over two thousand years (p. 79). Even if we discount the ancient Ethiopic script of the Axumite kingdom and Egyptian hieroglyphics, due to their crudeness, the various chapters in this collection have indeed established the falsity of the argument that “Africa south of the Sahara was, until recently, one of the main areas of the world where writing was totally absent” (Jack Goody, *Myth, Ritual, and the Oral*, Cambridge, 2010, p. 122). This work is doubtless a useful addition to the literature on world writing systems and promises to offer enlightening insights into the intellectual legacy of Africa.

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