

but that remains authoritarian (10). Second, and partially as a result of the hybrid character of a regime in which independent media outlets exist, Algeria's political landscape has moved from being opaque and impenetrable to becoming visible in its ordinary complexity (2–3). Third and finally, rather than being about a single person or institution that holds incontestable power, the struggle at the apex of the state is a never-ending conflict among several rival groups, determining tactical alliances as well as long-lasting antagonisms (6). The coming together of these three elements opens up two rather different perspectives. In scholarly terms, the broad transformations currently ongoing in Algeria can be observed as never before, allowing a depiction of the previously blurred game of the decision-making process. In political terms, by contrast, whereas the hybrid regime offers some safety valves to the mounting pressure from the lower and middle classes, a widely shared call for political change has indirectly pushed several and different social forces to coalesce. In Martinez and Boserup's introductory notes, the latter aspect is seen as the likely stepping stone for a process of gradual and genuine political opening, which, after Bouteflika's departure, might avoid abrupt outbreaks and expected subsequent repressive closures by the military, as already happened in January 1992. Yet such a scenario remains, in the opinion of this reviewer, highly unlikely in light of the interests and power of the army. If such a view is correct, the ruling elite will be tempted to compromise only under an extensive and almost unbearable wave of discontent.

Beyond the introduction, the seven chapters are divided almost equally between those focused on the regime and those contributions that draw attention to its opponents. Regarding the former, Martinez's chapter lays the foundations for analysing the Algerian regime 'as a collection of organised interest groups' and interpreting the government as an indirect expression of the conflicts among these groups (14). Despite the consequent unaccountability of the executive to social demands, the regime relies on three important bases: hydrocarbon revenues; the loyalty of some constituencies; and a legitimising narrative founded on the image of a country that represents itself as a bulwark of stability in a problematic area (13). These factors are extensively discussed in three following chapters. Samia Boucetta deals with the double-edged sword of the Algerian economy's tremendously high dependency on oil and gas charges, both evaluating the huge amount of social spending that hydrocarbon exports have allowed from the early 2000s onwards and considering the country's diminishing oil reserves and constant reduction in energy production in the last decade (42). In Djallil Lounnas's chapter, the paradoxical support that moderate Islamist parties, and Hamas-MSP in particular, have provided to the regime from the mid-1990s onwards is analysed in detail (86–90), whereas Abdennour Benantar casts doubt on the current validity of Algeria's three fundamental pillars in security policies – that is, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, non-intervention of its forces abroad and foreign non-intervention in the region (109). The failure of the Libyan state, the French intervention in the Malian crisis and the unprecedented terrorist attack on the In Amenas gas facility in January 2013 are all factors that can be cited to support Benantar's view.

In one of the most interesting chapters, Boserup analyses the growing number of popular protests in Algeria during Bouteflika's presidency. Correctly rejecting the often mentioned hypothesis that the collective trauma of the civil war would prevent Algerians from moving from unplanned riots to openly anti-systemic demonstrations, Boserup sees protests as a rational political calculation to exert pressure on the regime to share its revenues. In such a view, contention in Algeria is thought of as 'non-revolutionary' (59). I suspect that the statement is empirically correct – after all, it would be difficult to argue differently – but theoretically erroneous. Uprisings and revolutions are not the product of a conscious project of the masses. Rather, their outbreak represents the plastic evidence that structural contradictions cannot be absorbed by the existing system. For some of the factors previously noted, such a tipping point has not been reached yet in Algeria. In this regard, that contentious politics has been non-revolutionary in Bouteflika's Algeria depends more on the regime's capacity to maintain the support of some key constituencies than on a strategic calculation by protesters. In spite of these theoretical issues, Boserup's framework is compelling as it explains street protests experienced by the country in the last decade. This clearly emerges in the chapters by Ed McAllister and Anouar Boukhars. The former deals with the most famous Algerian neighbourhood – that is, Bab el-Oued – which has constantly been a litmus test for the country's developments, anticipating nationwide tendencies and transformations (63). The latter tackles instead Algeria's south and the wave of protests and strikes that have developed there in the last five years, showing that too few new discoveries of oil and gas fields forced the regime to embark on plans for shale gas extractions. In response to this, as well as to the long-lasting social and economic marginalisation, the 'quiet' south has emerged as a new frontline for the regime. It is exactly here, at the point of conjunction between the regime and its opponents, that the volume makes an important and interesting contribution to understanding contemporary Algeria, deserving the full attention of scholars interested in the country and in the region more generally.

University of Siena, Italy

Gianni Del Panta

TRIBE, ISLAM AND STATE IN LIBYA: ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE ROOTS OF LIBYAN TRIBAL SOCIETY AND EVOLUTION UP TO THE QARAMANLI REIGN (1711–1835). By Faraj Najem. *The Centre for Africa Research, Benghazi, 2017. ISBN 977-404-002-3, pp. 251, 15 maps, 6 family and tribal genealogical trees, 2 indexes of major Libyan places and major Libyan tribes and families, and an index of Berber/Tefinagh alphabets. Price: \$20 (paperback).*
doi:10.1017/lis.2018.13

Tribalism in Libya has long remained an enigma, shrouded by the country's decades of isolation and the paucity of serious scholarship on the topic, especially in Western

languages. Even when the country opened itself to visitors, the topic remained something of a taboo; the Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi proclaimed his rule to be an antidote to the backwardness and parochialism of the tribes, even if he relied on tribes himself, especially in his final years. One could visit a bookstore in Tripoli in the mid-2000s, ask for a book on the tribes and be met with a blank stare or a hushed retort: 'We don't have tribes here and we don't have any books on tribes.' One would then be forced to revert to a limited number of older, European-language studies, many from the period of the Italian occupation or the British military administration.¹

The collapse of the Gaddafi regime in 2011 saw a renewed interest in tribes, as outsiders struggled to discern the outlines of post-revolutionary politics and the key political and social authorities in the new landscape. A flood of Western diplomats, NGOs and intelligence officers rushed into the country, many with experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, and immediately gravitated towards tribes as nodes of analysis and as interlocutors. As Libya descended into chaos, tribes were seen as mediators, buffers against extremism and perhaps even a foundation upon which to build the new state, given the hollowness of more formal institutions under Gaddafi. Still others, however, saw them as the primary engines of Libya's dissolution. In his own diagnosis for why Libya had failed after his 2011 military intervention, US President Barack Obama famously stated to a reporter, 'The degree of tribal division in Libya was greater than our analysts had expected.'²

Yet such a reading obscured the realities on the ground; tribal authority was often context dependent and hard to define, with lineages and genealogies muddled by alliances, migrations and intermarriages. Urbanisation, globalisation, media and the spread of other affiliations such as Salafism further complicated the picture. Libyans themselves were unclear about the tribal firmament; the Russian anthropologist Igor Cherstich, in one of the more thoughtful studies of tribes, noted, 'I have never met a Libyan who knew the identity of his tribal head.'³ Still, understanding tribalism is important, albeit with caveats and nuance. The country's legacy of tribes – their movements, alliances and wars – forms a rich narrative that colours and informs the present.

Enter the masterful work of the Benghazi-based scholar Faraj Najem. In the 1990s, while a doctoral student in the United Kingdom, Najem undertook a sweeping dissertation of Libyan tribes, focusing on the formative eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including the rule of the Qaramanli dynasty. It is at once an encyclopaedic volume of vast synthesis, trenchant analysis and original research. The great value of his study was in conveying the findings of earlier studies on tribal genealogies, most notably by Italian orientalist and Arab authors, but at the same time adding fresh and rigorous scholarship.⁴ Yet for years it was available only as a PDF, passed around approvingly by Libyan scholars and analysts as a go-to resource. Now, finally, it appears as a revised, soft-cover book, published by the Benghazi research centre that Najem oversees.

The book is remarkable in many respects. It captures the grand drama of Libya's tribes: the early comingling of Arab and Berber identities, followed by the arrival of the Ottomans and the to and fro of tribal migrations and

conquests across the borders that define modern Libya. It unpacks the hierarchies between 'elite' and 'client' tribes, as well as the divisions between 'interior' and 'coastal' tribes. On the latter, the book connects this North African state to the Mediterranean basin in ways that are at once vivid and astounding; one learns that Andalusians, Circassians, Cretans, Jews and Greeks have all left their imprint on Libya.

Yet at the same time it describes, with an ethnographer's eye for detail, the physical culture and political economy of tribes and how the tribal milieu has been shaped by Libya's exacting climate. Consider this lovely passage on the built environment of Libya's oasis dwellers:

Their homes are usually made up of tree branches, and palm fronds over-plastered with local clay. There were also huts made of just fronds and with all sorts of straw, called Zarāyib (sing. Zarība), and most of them lacked the sophistication or the mosaics and tiles that homes in the rest of the Maghrib had. (p. 227)

And though the book is focused on tribes, it also deals extensively with Libya's religious traditions, especially the beliefs and practices of its murabits (saints) and Sufi orders, which underpinned the authority of the Sanusi proto-state. On the Sanusis, Najem provides an important corollary to the work of Evans-Pritchard, highlighting for the first time in English the work of Arab historians.

This work will be a valuable resource for historians of Libya and the Maghrib, as well as anthropologists and scholars of Islamic history. Analysts seeking to understand present-day Libya will profit as well, provided they recognise that much has obviously changed since the nineteenth century. Still, the book's detailed kinship charts and maps shed light on the tribes who have emerged as key players in recent years, particularly Cyrenaican tribes like the Awaqir. More importantly, Najem's research forms an important corrective to those in Libya who seek to introduce revisionist narratives of tribal supremacy or separation. Here, for example, is a passage on the role of settlers from the western coastal city of Misrata in the founding of Benghazi:

The Misrātans founded in Benghazi, after Darna, the first urbanised society in a largely Bedouin Cyrenaica. They succeeded in business to the point of monopoly, and this gained them properties in a largely tribal territory, and brought them wealth that spilled over to revive the economy of the region and benefit others. For that reason they are credited with the development of both Benghazi's infra- and super-structures, and maintaining its economy. (p. 163)

What becomes clear from such insights and others in Najem's magisterial tome is that this nation of six million is ultimately a country of neighbours who, mixed and moulded together throughout the centuries, share similar fates. And that is cause for guarded hope.

*Carnegie Endowment for
International Peace*

Frederic Wehrey

Notes

- 1 The seminal Italian study is Enrico De Agostini, *Le popolazioni della Tripolitania: notizie etniche e storiche* [The Population of Tripolitania: Ethnic and Historical Report], Tripoli, 1917.
- 2 Jeffrey Goldberg, 'The Obama Doctrine', *The Atlantic*, April 2016, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/.
- 3 Igor Cherstich, 'When Tribesmen Do Not Act Tribal: Libyan Tribalism as Ideology (Not as Schizophrenia)', *Middle East Critique* 23.4 (2014): 405–21.
- 4 For a representative Libyan author, see al-Tahir Ahmad al-Zawi, *Mu'jam al-buldan al-Libiya* [Encyclopaedia of Libyan Towns], Al-Nur Publishing House, Tripoli, 1968.

ESSOUK-TADMEKKA: AN EARLY ISLAMIC TRANS-SAHARAN MARKET TOWN. Edited by Sam Nixon. *Journal of African Archaeology Monograph Series, Volume 12, Leiden, Brill, 2017. ISBN 978-90-04-34614-7, pp. 422. Price: €114 (hardback).*
doi:10.1017/lis.2018.22

This volume presents the eagerly awaited publication of Sam Nixon's excavations of the town of Essouk-Tadmekka in 2006. Located on the southern fringe of the Sahara in northern Mali, it is a site famous in the early Arabic sources for its role in trans-Saharan trade and has produced direct evidence for the medieval trade in gold. As Al-Bakri describes, 'of all the towns in the world [Tadmekka] is the one that resembles Mecca the most. Its name means "the Mecca like"'. Although long suspected, the site of Essouk was only finally confirmed from a number of nearby inscriptions with the name 'Tadmekka'. The town itself is abandoned, but remarkably upstanding with the stone ruins of houses visible over an area of c. 25 ha.

The first two parts of this volume (Chapters 1–5, pp. 3–51) provide the essential background and setting for the project. Chapter 2 is particularly helpful, providing a summary of the relevant early Arabic sources, oral histories of the Tuareg (particularly regarding the two groups: the Kel Essouk and the Tademakkat) and a history of research at the site. Chapter 4 provides a general overview of the site and an excellent description of what a medieval trading town looks like, although this is somewhat undermined by the omission of the clearest plan, which is held back until Chapter 11 (p. 104). The survey of the site including outlying cemeteries and structures is helpful if somewhat brief and not always straightforward to follow, e.g. it was not clear if all enclosures beyond the main settlement should be considered as funerary or whether some had an agricultural function. On a similar note, a plan of the wider area would have been helpful to identify the location of outlying structures, as well as (if known) the location of inscriptions, rock carvings and funerary cairns. However, the Arabic and Tifinagh inscriptions (an update on Moraes Farias 2003), which cover a range of funerary, religious and other uses, give a fascinating glimpse into the lives of the inhabitants and visitors of the site.

The third part (Chapters 6–11, pp. 55–116) details the stratigraphic excavations of three trenches located in different parts of the site and is well illustrated with a selection of plans, sections and photographs. Unit Ek-A (Chapter 7), close to the main mosque, was the most productive of these continuing to a depth of 7.68 m below the surface and a sequence of occupation from the ninth to fourteenth centuries. The deposits in Ek-B (Chapter 8), in the southern sector, were shallower (although still extending more than 2 m below the surface) and date largely to the ninth/tenth century. In Ek-C (on the island, Chapter 9) as with Ek-A the deposits extend to a depth of c. 7 m but are disturbed by a well shaft. Radiocarbon dating was carried out on a mixture of ceramics (with organic temper) and seeds from flotation (readers should note that most radiocarbon dates in the volume are mainly presented to 1-Sigma calibration). The dating of the site to c. AD 900–1400 is secure, with the site reaching its greatest extent during the tenth/eleventh centuries.

Finds from the excavation are presented in detail in the fourth part (Chapters 12–21, pp. 119–252). Much of the material culture related to trade has been published before, particularly the gold coin moulds (see Nixon et al. 2011). However, this provides a definitive publication in full and is particularly helpful for the detail and comparison with other Saharan centres such as Tegdaoust, Takedda, Kumbi Saleh and Gao. Across the different chapters, the evidence for long-distance trade is striking, with material evidence linked to the Niger River Basin (ceramics), the Azawagh (ceramics), the central Maghreb (glazed ceramics), Italy (glazed ceramics), China (porcelain, silk), Egypt (glass, glass beads), Nigeria (glass beads), India (glass beads) and the Sahara (stone beads). The finds also demonstrate a number of craft productions, apart from gold processing these include: crucible steel production, copper metallurgy, stone working/bead production, weaving and glass working/recycling. The faunal and archaeobotanical chapters give some sense of agricultural and animal husbandry. Most notable is the quantity of wheat recovered, which reflects a technological transfer of cereal production from North Africa. Further specifics and analyses on the finds are presented in the extensive appendices (pp. 283–409).

The final part of the volume (Chapters 22–24, pp. 253–280) offers a useful summary and discussion of the main themes of the volume. Of these, trans-Saharan trade figures most prominently. The existence of Tadmekka appears to be primarily related to long-distance trade with long-distance goods and probably a mixed population present from the main establishment of the town c. AD 900. Within a couple of generations it seemingly reached its greatest extent with a strong Muslim presence and the minting of blank gold dinars. However, by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, if not before, the town was in some decline in terms of both trade volume and population, although evidence for long-distance trade continues until at least the mid-fourteenth century. By the fifteenth century the town was abandoned, becoming a site of memory and pilgrimage for the Tuareg in the following centuries.

Detailed as the volume is, there are some aspects that could be further developed. There is scope for further survey around the site, particularly regarding the transition from Saharan burial cairns to Islamic cemeteries and it