

Tribe and Religion in Historical and Anthropological Studies

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Since time immemorial the tribe has been a historical reality all over the world, especially in nomadic societies, constituting a social, economic and cultural entity. On the Arabian Peninsula in particular, and on the borders of Syria and Iraq, its status has been enshrined by poets in the pre-Islamic era, and in the Arab Maghreb the tribe was distinguished by its fierce resistance to invaders. Although it is true to say that the birth of Islam saw a new supra-tribal concept of the *umma* as a uniting social force in Al-Madinah, tribalism and tribal solidarity have been forces shaping Arab Islamic history up to the present day.

With the spread of Islam into desert areas, tribalism became associated with religion in a symbiotic relationship that persisted up to the 7th century AH/13th century AD. Tribal life and culture underwent a radical change - whether in the centre or on the borders of the Arab world - as a result of progressive sedentarisation of both northern and southern Arab tribes in the cities of Syria, the new cities of Al-Basra and Al-Kufa in Iraq, Al-Fustat in Egypt and Al-Qayrawan in the Maghreb. Centres of power shifted and tribal solidarity weakened as tribes metamorphosed into smaller groupings remote from the mother tribe, as happened with the Yamani tribes in Syria in the Umayyad era. With the expansion of the Arab State, the Yamani tribes in Al-Andalus became geographically separated from their roots, although they never lost their cultural affinity with the mother tribe.

In this era tribalism became inseparable from religion as tribes sought knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence in order to spread the new faith

and improve their position in society. Although Islam has subsequently been linked to the emergence of numerous political systems, the tribe/religion nexus has always been relevant to notions such as lineage, honour and belief.

In spite of its importance, the issue of tribe and religion has generally been absent from Arabic historical and anthropological research, apart from some studies drawing on traditional theoretical premises remote from objective reality. This is an approach that we wish to avoid in our study of the tribe and its relationship to religion.

I. Tribalism and Religion for Ibn Khaldun: a Theoretical/Practical Approach

1. Ibn Khaldun's Triad of Tribalism, Religion and Power

Bedouin life is organically linked to tribal structure, which, in turn, is based on tribal solidarity and lineage. Ibn Khaldun commented on the cline between the desert and the pastoral and the lack of a clear break between them, while pointing out differences in Bedouin society between pastoralism and nomadism. For Ibn Khaldun, civilisation is not based on binary oppositions or historical stasis or cycles but on the continual evolution of the phenomenon of the tribe, whether in its internal structure or in its relation with power, culture and religion.

Tribal solidarity, based as it is on real or imaginary pride in lineage, is the solder between neighbouring tribes for their mutual protection and defence. The strongest tribe becomes the magnetic pole for its branches, which initially gravitate towards it before launching raids against neighbouring tribes. The second stage, when the tribe assumes a

hierarchical structure, is the time when the state is taken on and vanquished. Ibn Khaldun comments in this regard:

The solidarity of a single tribe overcomes that of its divisions and branches and becomes paramount. The tribes are welded into a single tribal unit, thus avoiding conflict and dissension within its ranks.(1)

However, Islam is seen as a counterpart to tribalism in the bid for power. According to Ali Umayyil, this is the only way in which the Bedouin can become politicised.(2) Religion needs tribalism as its defender but when power is achieved, tribalism is necessary to protect religion. Ibn Khaldun comments:

States whose rule is based on religion either through prophecy or missionary activity. A state based on religion will overcome a tribal power even if numerically inferior. However, a

state that has religion without tribal solidarity will not endure.

He explains this thus: 'The power of religion dissolves the dissensions and jealousies of the tribe and prioritises what is right.' As evidence of the enabling power of religion, he cites the victory of the Arabs over the Persians at Al-Qadasiya, in spite of their greatly inferior numbers. In the Maghreb he gives the example of '... the Lamtuna and the Muwahhadin, who were opposed by many other tribes more numerous and more fanatical but the religious spirit of the former gave them the foresight and courage to overcome the latter so that none prevailed against them.'(3)

Thus the invocation to practice what is right and to avoid what is unlawful acted as a catalyst, converting the hostility and lawlessness of the Bedouin into a positive fighting force, united by tribal solidarity.

On the other hand, when the religious spirit declined, tribal conflicts were resolved by force alone, as when the Masmuda tribe prevailed over stronger tribes such as the Zanata but '... when the religious factor declined, the Zanata rose up against them and removed them from power.'(4)

In spite of the effect of religion on tribalism, without tribalism religion is incomplete. 'The Muridin movement in Al-Andalus, led by Ibn Qissi at the end of the Almoravid era, failed due to the absence of tribal solidarity. Similarly, adventurers and self-proclaimed Mahdis, whether in the desert or the town, failed in their bid for power because of a lack of tribal power base.'(5)

Ibn Khaldun discerns two complementary mechanisms that lead the tribe to power: tribal solidarity and religious invocation. Tribal

solidarity derives its unifying strength from the bonds of lineage and the more it is allied with a spiritual force, the less other tribes can prevail against it.(6) However, these models of states deriving their force from tribal solidarity cannot be extrapolated to other societies, Ibn Khaldun believes, since they are specific to Bedouin communities in Arab Islamic countries.

The Extension of Ibn Khaldun's Doctrine and the Loosening the Bonds between Tribe and Religion

In this era states operated on the basis of tribal solidarity and religious invocation. The Umayyad dynasty looked for support to Quraish, in particular the Bani Umayyah and congregationalism, while the Abbasid state depended on the loyalty of client tribes and the Mu'tazilite doctrine. The emerging emirates on the borders of the eastern and western Arab world had a different view from the tribes at

the centre; some, like the Bani Madrar at Sijilmasa looked to the Kharijite school, while others such as the Rustam state of Taharat favoured Ibadhism, which was the preferred doctrine of the Zanata, Lawata, Nafousa and Hawara tribes. On the other hand, the Idrissid state in Fez adopted Zaydi Shi'ism. In all these states tribalism and religion were conjoined in contrast to the situation in Al-Andalus, before the rise of the emirate in 137 AH, where the competing claims to power of northern and southern tribes led to the formation of pressure groups not based on confessional differences. In spite of the distance between the margins and the centre, tribal affiliations remained strong and only weakened gradually as groups with different tribal backgrounds competed for power.

Politics remained interlocked with religion in the 4th century AH/10th century AD, as evidenced by the spread of the Isma'ili doctrine among the Katama tribes of the northwest Ifriqiyya region (today bounded by

Constantine, Setif and An-Naba) in which the traditional hierarchical structure yielded to the new religious fanaticism of the Fatimid state. The religious leader, Abu Abdallah Al-San'ani, was able to build a new community within the Katama tribe, in which religious fanaticism triumphed over tribal solidarity. During the period 280-296 AH/894-909 AD the Katama tribe was transformed into a religious movement that swept all before it.

The Almoravid state developed from the tribal federation created by the veiled Sanhaja tribe of the Sahara (currently Mauritania) who, adopting the Malikite doctrine, spread their influence northwards towards Morocco as well as southwestwards towards Sudan. This tribal federation succeeded in creating a state extending from Al-Andalus in the north to the Niger River in the south, in which Malikite clerics had a firm grip on the levers of power. This resulted in the suppression of any dissenting opinion and the proscription of independent thought, culminating in the

burning of Al-Ghazzali's masterpiece, *Ihya Ulum Al-Din (The Revivification of the Sciences of Religion)*, as well as the subsequent outlawing of free thought under the Muwahhids.

Even if the Masmuda tribes of the Atlas Mountains in Morocco were able to combat the Al-Moravid doctrine and reject practical in favour of theoretical rules of religious behaviour. The state they founded remained theocratic in nature with no separation between politics and religion since they looked to the teachings of Muhammad ibn Tumarat, the disciple of Ash'ari, whose doctrine combined aspects of Sunni, Shi'a and Mu'tazilite thought.

These examples, cited from the east to the west of the Arab world, demonstrate the link between tribalism and religion in the creation of the state. However, religion began to lose its power in mobilising popular opinion after the

rise of the Bani Zayyan state in Tlemcen, the Bani Merin in Fez, and the Bani Ahmar in Granada following the fall of the Muwahhidin. With the exception of the Hafsid state in Tunis, which represented a continuation of the Muwahhidite model, at least in form, the remaining states of the Maghreb were established on the basis of the sword since religion had lost its power to mobilise followers. Ibn Zayyan was motivated by no specific doctrinal affiliation, in contrast to the kingdoms of the Maghreb and Al-Andalus where the Malikite denomination reigned supreme. This can also be seen in the eastern part of the Arab world where the Mamluk coastal states were established through force and the Mamluk communities in Egypt. Does this mean that a new model began to emerge, relying on force rather than religion, in which the clerics were consigned to an inferior position?

Ibn Khaldun utilised actual examples in order to formulate his triadic

power/tribe/religion theory and since his main concern was Berber and Arab tribes, his *Muqaddama* attracted the interest of a follower of the French army of occupation in Algeria, Baron de Slane, who published a study entitled *History of the Berbers*. Ibn Khaldun's ideas were also present in the writings of Maskari, Quti, Marcais and Gellner, among others, and were generally favourably received as long as they were in line with the current orthodoxy. Although Ibn Khaldun's approach is basically different to that of the anthropologists, there is some superficial similarity between his analysis of the evolution of tribal power and structures and the 'schismatic' approach of ethnologists and anthropologists.

II. Tribe and Religion in Ethnological and Anthropological Studies

1. Ethnological and Sociological Approaches in the Colonial Period:

Montagne and Berque's Competing Analyses

These types of studies pre-date and overlap the French occupation of Arab North African lands and concentrate primarily on the Berber tribes, who were believed to be less open to outside influences, in the Kabylie, Aures and Mزاب in Algeria, in the Atlas Mountains and the Rif in Morocco, and in the Jabal Waslat, Dammar and Nafousa regions of Tunis and Libya. They focused particularly on the remaining Ibadhi groups among the Zanata tribes. Maskri wrote about the origins of villages and social groupings in Algeria and in 1878 translated into French Abu Zakariah Al-Warjlani's *Lives of the Imams*, one of the principal works on Ibadhism. In 1905 Mutlanski published a list of manuscripts discovered in Algiers and edited Ibn Al-Saghir's work on the history of the Ibadhi Bani Rustum emirate. Joseph Schacht also published and edited a list of some two hundred Ibadhi manuscripts and Italian

researchers dealt with the same theme, for example Ripinacci's study of Ibadhism in Libya in 1949. In general, there was abundant interest in the Berber/Ibadhi nexus.

And in the colonial era, when the researchers sought to win over the original inhabitants and differentiate them from the Arabs, they eulogised the Berber tribes (especially the settled descendants of the Sanhaja, Kitama and Masmuda tribes) while they treated the history of the Arab tribes in a different way. Whether these tribes came to the Maghreb with the Arab conquests or with the Bani Hilal migrations in the 5th century AH/11th century AD, they tended to present them in a negative light, which would be tedious to exemplify.

In general, such historical and ethnological studies considered that the Ibadhi tribes had not developed at all during the period between the Roman occupation and the French occupation. This is the period that Al-Quti

labels the Maghreb's Dark Ages, from which the people were 'delivered' by colonialism.

This is well exemplified by the ethnological studies carried out by colonial and military officials such as that of Robert Montagne (1893-1954) on the Berbers and the *makhzan* (government) in the Atlas Mountains, in which he sought to explain the characteristics of the settled Berber tribes of the Atlas, in contrast to the Arab tribes. Montagne put forward the concept of Berber 'republics', which were governed by the law of *al-saff* and *al-laff*, referring to binary oppositions competing within the same tribe. In this he drew on Maskri's previous work on the theory of *al-laff* in Morocco and *al-saff* in Algeria. In his opinion, these tribes were beyond the pale, in the sense that they were not subject to the control of the *makhzan* (state) and were distinguished by oral culture and accepted custom, in contrast to urban life characterised by literacy and religious sanction. Throughout his work he appeals to the dichotomy of the

central authority (the *makhzan*) and the Berber tribes.

According to Gellner, Montagne 'represents the French colonial anthropological tradition at its best'(7) since it was located in an imperialistic context in which the tribes of the Rif rebelled against the colonising power and almost defeated it, although their influence was less in the cities. The occupying power operated a policy based on alliances with these tribes and the preservation of their quasi-republican structures and their self-government according to accepted custom.

Gellner noticed that Montagne adopted a mixed theoretical/practical approach similar to that of Ibn Khaldun's view of the relationship between tribe and state as a continuing factor from the Almoravid and Muwahhid eras up to the present time, with leaders such as Abdelkarim Al-Khattabi in the Rif and the sheikhs of the Atlas tribes (Al-Mgharr), whom

he likened to the tyrants of ancient Greek city states. There was a fragile balance of power between these 'republics', which could break down if one leader became too strong. This is what he meant by the absence of central power in this tribal society.

Such ideas crop up repeatedly in studies on southern Ifriqiyya and Algeria and have an affinity to Evans-Pritchard's study of the Nuer of southern Sudan since all these studies draw on the concept of equilibrium between opposing factions of a tribe or between competing tribes.

Although Jacques Berque's study of social structures in the Atlas Mountains derives from the same tradition of scholarship, his perspective is more objective, for example in his study of the Saskasawa tribes of the Atlas he rules out the existence of *al-laff*, pointing out that the conflicts over water and pasturage were not definable in terms of the *al-laff*

system. His article on tribalism in northern Ifriqiyya had a considerable impact in the field of tribal studies and marked a departure from the traditional tribe/power/culture analysis applied to the Maghreb. Berque called for a re-interpretation of the concept of the tribe in terms of its historical context and its relations with ruling authority.

The currency of these ideas did not cease with the coming of independence to Arab countries as can be seen - intentionally or unintentionally - in a number of contemporary studies on the tribe and its relationships with political and religious authority. The Polish Arabist Tadeus Livsky studied the Zanata tribes in terms of Ibadhism in northern Tunisia and contemporary studies by Western and some Arab academics are still unable to free themselves from the misleading and exaggerated theories circulated by the colonial school of writing and fail to achieve the necessary degree of objectivity in their research.

2. The 'Schismatic' Approach

The ethno-anthropological studies undertaken by Robert Montagne on the Berber tribes and the government in the Atlas Mountains helped to crystallise Durkheim's concept of 'organic solidarity', and although this theory was strongly rooted in the colonialism of the era, it did not prevent it from being adopted by Western researchers like Gellner in his theory of tribal schism and the conciliatory role of holy men.

Followers of this approach drew theoretical support for their model of tribal organisation and equilibrium, in the absence of a central deterrent authority, from the Arab proverb: 'I against my brother; my brother and I against my cousin; my cousin, my brother and I against the stranger.' They viewed tribalism as adialectic between convergence in the face of

an external threat and divergence when the tribe became weak and fragmentary.

Gellner believed that tribal society, in addition to its inherent fissiparousness, tended to live far from the centre on the margins, and in Morocco he described the tribal lands as beyond the pale (or areas beyond the jurisdiction of Shari'ah law) in spite of the fact that numerous studies by orientalists such as Paul Bascon and Moroccan researchers proved the contrary.

In his approach to the question of lineage within the network of tribal hierarchies and sanctity, he commented on the role of holy men in linking the tribal world with the wider world of Islam and in preserving social equilibrium, contrasting the tribal brand of Sufism with the more rigid and conservative urban world of orthodox Islam.

In his opinion the tribes of the Atlas Mountains constituted a suitable research model since their political and social structure was schismatic in nature. Every tribe divided into branches, which in turn divided into sub-branches, culminating in the family unit and, on the basis of case studies and Ibn Khaldun's history, he posited that constantly renewing leadership was a feature of tribalism.

Since *zawiyas* were situated in adjoining neighbourhoods and erected on tribal boundaries, it was natural for holy men to take on the role of arbitrators. That this was an effective role can be seen from the fact that holy men interceded between quarrelling tribal sheikhs, drawing on their personal charisma as well as their own brand of saintliness; very different from the urban theologians whom they despised.

The holy man's authority derived from a number of rituals involving dances, legends,

miracles and lineage for the tribes of the middle Atlas, united around a common legendary ancestor, the founder of the tribe and guarantor of good luck, and certain times of the year were set aside for visits to the tombs and shrines of saints, in the vicinity of which fighting was prohibited.

3. Criticism of the Previous Approach

It is evident that the advent of independence in Arab countries after the end of the Second World War generated a new perspective on the phenomenon of tribalism and its relationship to power and culture. Georges Balandi, a vehement critic of the theories of the colonial era, called for an 'independence-based' rather than an 'imperialistic' sociology, and Jacques Berque's approach inspired a new generation of studies on tribalism and power by North African researchers such as Abdullah Al-Arawi on the history of the Maghreb and Muhammad Al-Qibli on society, power and

religion in Morocco (reminiscent of the anthropological approach).

In the light of historical and anthropological studies, researchers were able to gain a more objective understanding of the issue. Although they did not deny the value of some aspects of the culture/religion analysis of tribal society, researchers such as Jacques Berque, Abdullah Hamoudi, Abdullah Al-Arawi, Lilia bin Salem et al criticised the 'schismatic' approach on the grounds of its limitations and its inaccuracy; it focused on description rather than on explanation of the workings of tribalism and failed to account for its evolution and development over time.

Gellner studied the holy men of the Atlas tribes, starting from the following proposition: 'How is it possible for the Atlas tribes to coexist and maintain their social structure in the absence of a central authority? He believed that the answer to this conundrum lay in the

inherent schismatic nature of the tribe and the role of the holy men and saints in maintaining social equilibrium within the tribe. He compared the role of saints and Sufis in the tribe with that of the theologians in the cities. He believed that the holy men and Sufis were outside the tribal structure, in that they were perceived as neutral elements, not identified with any particular social or political group. Their basic purpose was to maintain a balance between opposing social forces, to act as conciliators and arbitrators and promote stability and security in the absence of a central authority.

The fact is that this characterisation of holy men as a wandering class of arbitrators and peacemakers, unaligned with any particular tribal grouping, is a historical fiction in both the eastern and western parts of the Arab world. We frequently read of holy men taking part in external raids as well as being involved in internal conflicts as members of tribal alliances, and defending their economic and

social interests. Besides, they were often involved in drumming up support through the allocation of lands whether by grants, bequests or conveyances. The historical-anthropological approach has proved conclusively that the holy man was an integral part of a tribe's social structure and an active participant in its affairs.

III. The Historical-Anthropological Approach

1. Tribe, Holy Man and Theologian

Traditional historical anthropological studies focus on simplistic dichotomies in Arab history in general, and the Maghreb in particular. They refer to Berber and Arab, Ibadhi and Sunni, the desert and the pastoral, and accepted custom and jurisprudence etc. Although there are echoes of these ideas in the writings of Felix Quti, Georges Marcais, Robert Brunswick, Andre Louis and others, the 'schismatic' school revived these

dichotomies, giving as evidence tribal conflicts over pasturage regardless of the tribe involved. We will attempt to clarify the relationship between tribe and religion, as well as discussing previous theories on the basis of historical and anthropological case studies of the Maghreb region.

Southern Ifriqiyya: William Brett sought to extend the schismatic theory to the southern Ifriqiyya region, building extensively on bibliographical references on the tribal balance of power. This area is ruled by two branches of the Dhabbab tribe, living in equilibrium: the Mahamid in the area between Gabes and Jabal Nafousa, and the Jawari, in the area between Jabal Nafousa and Zuwara. Tijani comments:

Leadership of the Washshah tribe is currently restricted to the Jawari and Mahamid tribes and other Washshah tribes such as the Amur, the Gawawabah. These two tribes are commensurate in numbers and

power, so that the loss of a horseman in one tribe is matched by a corresponding loss in the other.(8)

In the first place, the Dhabbab tribes are under the power of the government and not independent of the central authority. Secondly, the equilibrium between the two tribes is not automatic, as Brett suggests, but can be explained by the intervention of the Hafsid government in Tunis, which capitalised on their intertribal rivalry, a policy it also followed with the Ka'ub tribes of central Tunisia, sometimes depending on the Awlad Abi Al-Layl and sometimes the Awlad Muhalhal. It is similar to the policy followed by the Umayyad State, which alternated between dependence on northern and southern tribes.(9)

As regards the opposition between Berbers and Arabs, represented by the subordination of the Berber tribes to the Bani Dhabbab, the

former received protection in return for collecting taxes from the latter, but this is rejected by Al-Tijani when he states:

The historical context shows that the Bani Dhabbab devoted themselves to collecting taxes from other tribes for the benefit of the Hafsid government, in return for which they received protection. Thus, there was a three-way link rather than a dichotomy between two tribal groupings. In addition to that, the factors underlying these tribal alliances were governed not so much by confessional (Ibadhi-Berber and Sunni-Arab) or racial (Berber/Arab) factors as by the social and economic relations between pastoralists and semi-settled inhabitants of the mountain villages.

Thus Al-Tijani mentions the alliance between the Mahamid Arabs and the Waraghma Berbers, while referring to the rivalry between two branches of the Arab

Dhabbab tribe: the Mahamid and the Jawari. On this basis we can more readily understand the congruence in population and combatants of the two tribes.

Consequently, we can say that a dichotomous model is not applicable in the case of these tribes since the equilibrium between the tribes of southern Tunisia was a function of their relationship with the central government and differing economic factors over a considerable period of time. Neither is the distance of a tribe from the centre an indication of immunity from political developments in the country.

Morocco: The correspondence between the tribes and religious groups in the south of Morocco in the Sufi religious brotherhood. Ibn Al-Qunfudh attended a meeting of these groups in 769 AH/1367 AD on the Atlantic coast in the north Dakalah region and

commented on the similarity between religious and tribal affiliations. He wrote:

I asked about all the sects in the land of Morocco which produces holy men like it produces pasturage and I found them to be as numerous as their leaders, most of them Sunni. They are from the tribes of Shu'aib, Sanhaja, Majar, Hajjaj, Ilhah and Ghamat.(10)

Similarly, the relationship between holy men and theologians cannot be explained as a simple dichotomy. We find that popular Sufism subscribes to the Sunni doctrine, as well as theologians who are Sufis and Sufis who are theologians. Differences are graduated rather than clear-cut; we find learned people who are converts or marabouts, scholars of the literal or the esoteric schools, those who are Sunni and those who follow scholastic theology or philosophy. Alternatively, we can classify them as followers of Prophetic tradition, theologians or Sufis. (11)

This quotation demonstrates the differences of opinion between religious and tribal groups on the one hand and the unifying force of Sufism among the tribes on the other, without any reference to tribal dichotomies.

2. 'Penitence' of the Desert Arab, the *Zawiya* and Tribal Settlement

It is clear that the decline in the phenomena of holy men, *zawiyas* and monasteries in the eastern and western Arab world went hand in hand with the waning of tribalism and orthodox religion, since tribal solidarity was superseded by religious brotherhood. We have studied the situation in Ifriqiyya drawing on new perspectives on tribalism in the Hafsid era (7th-10th centuries AH/13th-16th centuries AD). The rural *zawiya*, presided over by a holy man, performed a number of functions including settlement of the weaker tribes into

the wider social order in a process known as the 'penitence of the warlike desert Arabs'. In the Maghreb, the role of the holy men was similar to that of the farmers, hence our proposed coinage of 'holy men-farmers'.(12)

A good example of this process is Abu Yusuf Ya'qoub Al-Dahmani, of the Arab Dahman tribe that was settled around Al-Qayrawan, who was born in 551AH/1156 AD and became a warrior learning the arts of chivalry and field combat, and participated in the defence of the city of Al-Mahdiyya between 570-575 AH/1175-1180 AD. Various factors conspired to turn him into a wandering 'penitent' and he studied jurisprudence in Al-Qayrawan before studying the principles of Maliki Sufism with Abu Madin Shu'ayb at Bajaya. He left for Egypt to expand his knowledge and, on his return, settled at Al-Qayrawan, adopting Sufism as the road to 'penitence', and guiding many of the Bedouin tribes to adopt this course.

He heads the list of Arab tribesmen who substituted the sword for the pen, the horse for the *zawiya*, the tent for the house and the leadership of the tribe for the leadership of a religious brotherhood - a list which includes famous Arab tribes that had lost their fanaticism such as Jamil ibn Thaghr Al-Habibi, Ya'qoub ibn Khalifa Al-Dahmani (d.669 AH/1270 AD), Ghayth Al-Hakimi (d.685 AH/1286 AD) and Maymoun ibn Karfah Al-Lawa'ili). (13)

Abu Rahma Ghayth Al-Hakimi was a desert warrior who opted to join one of the Al-Qayrawan *zawiyas*, which was a disadvantageous move since he obtained extensive landholdings by royal decree (country estates), from which his heirs benefited for many generations - in the form of income from round rents and tithes from farmers. Thus Al-Hakimi's life can be seen not

as a function of his tribal affiliation but in terms of his service to the Hafsid government.

In general, such territorial grants to impoverished tribes were a major factor in weaning them away from raiding and encouraging their settlement on the land. It is worth noting that these grants were not made to individuals on the basis of their status as holy men but rather in their capacity as tribal leaders (of the Bani Hakim, Bani Riyah, Bani Wa'il etc.) with influence over the tribes, which were beginning to settle in the vicinity of Al-Qayrawan.

The process of inducing tribesmen to 'penitence' and subjecting them to government control continued over the next century and tribal leaders like Abu Al-Hassan Al-Ubaidli (d.748 AH/1347 AD) played an important part in bringing the tribes under government control by means of the *zawiya*. However, although based in Al-Qayrawan, Al-Ubaidli

was not able to shake off his tribal fanaticism and inflexibility and retained close links to his desert roots.

A more socially integrated example of the trend was Abu Yusuf Ya'qoub Al-Zoghbi of the Hilali Zoghbi tribe, which was settled near Al-Qayrawan, who was both founder of a *zawiya* and a judge in Al-Qayrawan (and later in Tunis). He was a constant defender of the villagers against the depredations of the Bedouin in an era marked by four plagues: 'the sun, the locust, the cold and the Bedouin.'⁽¹⁴⁾

The holy men and leaders of the *zawiyas* began to infiltrate into desert encampments all over the Maghreb region, with the exception of the Ibadhi minorities in southern Tunisia, inducing the tribesmen to 'penitence'. However, an example of failure to overcome tribal fanaticism is that of Qassem ibn Marra, cited by Ibn Khaldun. Qassem, who according to Ibn Khaldun was descended from the Ka'ub

tribe of central Tunisia, studied under his leader Yusuf Al-Dahmani (d. 621AH/1224 AD) and on returning to his tribe scolded them for their bellicosity and weak religious belief, and attempted to found a marabout order from among them. However, the tribal leaders rejected this movement as being contrary to the tribal order and it was also challenged by the central government. When Qassem was killed and his son succeeded him in 706 AH/1306 AD, only one section of the Ka'ub tribe (Awlad Muhalhal) called for his death to be avenged. (15)

The above examples provide evidence of the weakness of tribal affiliation in the case of holy men turned semi-feudal landowners, and the extent of their integration into society, both in peace and war. This goes against the claims of the 'schismatic' approach and there is no doubt that the granting of lands to such tribal groups as Bani Hakim, Bani Riyah and Bani Wa'il was a major factor in persuading them to adopt a sedentary lifestyle based around

agriculture, rather than a nomadic one based on raiding.

The same period saw the rise of a similar movement in the Az-Zab region near Biskra, led by Sa'ada Al-Riyahi, who studied in Taza and returned to his tribe as a *muhtasib* (inspector of markets). He formed a marabout movement attracting many followers, with the aim of ridding the area of highwaymen and thieves. The movement founded a *zawiya* in Tulqa, from where they were able to control the Az-Zab region. However, the movement failed in the end because of the refusal of the Riyahi tribe to lend its support and accept this cultural change. (16)

Overall, the holy man derived many benefits from land grants, which conferred upon him charisma and prestige, which in turn attracted adherents and also helped suppress dissent and rebellion. Thus the holy man did not by any means operate outside society but was tightly

integrated into the hierarchy of the tribe and in a good position to attract followers, utilising the chants and dances of the ancient zarda rites.

In short, in the Maghreb the *zawiya* operated on many levels, creating an intra-tribal and intertribal social network, whether in the city or in the desert. The social and religious groupings that emerged under the aegis of the *zawiya* operated to the disadvantage of traditional tribal hierarchies and loyalties, which began to lose their power. (17)

3. Tribal Legacy and Beliefs

We have previously shown that religion, at any stage of tribal evolution or decline, is a somewhat contingent factor and for this reason we do not generally find new religious ideas germinating in the tribe and spreading to the city. The fact is that the tribesman has an

uncomplicated attitude towards religious belief, allied to a strong respect for tribal customs and traditions. I propose to illustrate this from consideration of the Maghreb in the late Middle Ages.

Although the *zawiya* was built 'on the ashes of the tribal leader's tent', the tribesmen were not over enamoured by this importation from the city, and were not taken in by the charisma of those holy men, whose animal and agricultural wealth they would not have hesitated to ransack.(18)

In line with the dismissive attitude of the Bedouin to holy men and farmers alike, their view of sanctity differed from that of the city dweller. The famous example of Haddaj Al-Ka'abi (d.705 AH/1305 AD) is worth quoting in this context, 'When Haddaj was upbraided for entering the Zaytouniyya Mosque with his slippers, he replied that did this when he entered the Sultan's council.'(19)

Nor is the Bedouin's attitude towards religious devotion the same as the townsman's; the tribal tent is not suitable for performance of communal prayers and desert life is not conducive to the presence of imams. As for fasting in Ramadan, when Arafat Al-Shabbi visited the Tarud tribe in the Sahara, '... he found that they were not observing the fast and were Muslims only in name.'(20)

Although the Bedouin is not known for his devotion to religious observance, tribal traditions are scrupulously upheld. In the southern Tunis region, a *farid* acted as a *mufti* issuing judgements in disputes. According to Al-Tijani, the Mahamid clan had a *farid* who did not appeal in any way to Shari'ah law in giving his judgements. They also had a black Arab fortune-teller who foretold the future, although one of the urban theologians considered that there was no truth in this story.(21)

Among the pastoral and semi-settled tribes of southern Ifriqiyya, such as the Ibadhi Zanata, religious observance takes many forms. Although one does not find the domed shrines of holy men in this region, the tribes visit shrines, rocks and caves in rituals which predate Islam. In 'The Names of the Mountain Shrines' (Jabal Nafousa), mention is made of worship at caves and other holy places (such as rocks and stones).(22)

The Bedouin are extremely interested in natural phenomena, such as the stars, which are a reference point in their wanderings and which occupy an important place in their lore, both auspicious and inauspicious. At dawn on the 7th September when Canopus appears, they recite, 'When Canopus rises, nights become cold, the wadis flow and the heat abates.' This proverb alludes to the change from the heat and drought of summer to the cold and rain of winter and demonstrates the

importance of the stars for the Bedouin in marking the change of the seasons and other natural phenomena. For the Bedouin there is a unity between the earth and the sky, and the world is a complete whole with no separation between its upper and lower parts, a view which accords with the neo-Platonic philosophy of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) although the Bedouin belief is the product of his close association with and observation of the secrets of nature, rather than the fruit of philosophical speculation.(23)

However, this inattention to religious ordinances, simplicity of belief and close association with nature does not prevent an ascetic tendency emerging among the Bedouin from time to time. Although Gellner believes that this ascetic tendency is just a myth,(24) the spread of the Maliki doctrine among the veiled Sanhaja tribes is evidence enough of the trend.

Conclusion

In the light of the ontological and anthropological approaches to the study of the relationship between tribe and religion, the historical-anthropological method, grounded in observation and historical analysis, seems to be the most suitable vehicle for the objective study of this important social phenomenon.

To talk of one religion for the Bedouin and one religion for the townsman seems unnecessarily reductive, as is the dichotomy between Shi'a and Sunni Islam. The desert and the pastoral are not two discrete and distinct worlds and to view them in this way is to ignore the points of similarity between them and the close relationships that have subsisted between them throughout Arab history, and Maghrebi history in particular. The *zawiyas* and the holy men originated in the cities and spread among the tribes of the desert, utilising a network of relationships linking the poor

people of the tribes with their peers in the cities. For this reason it is difficult to study the evolution of this social and cultural phenomenon without reference to the settled world.

Notes:

1. Khaldun, I, *Al-Muqaddama (The Introduction)*, Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani, p.245.
2. Umlayil, A 1984, *The historical discourse, a study of Ibn Khaldun's methodology*, Casablanca, p.155.
3. Khaldun, I, op. cit., pp.277-9.
4. Ibid, p.27.
5. Ibid, pp.279-284.

6. Al-Jabari, *Tribalism and state*, p.290.
7. Gellner, E 2005, *Muslim society*. trans. Abu Bakr Ahmad Ba Qadr, Beirut, p.336.
8. Al-Tijani, *Journey*, p.118.
9. Brett, W, *Arabs, Berbers and Holy Men*.
10. Al-Qunfudh, I, *Uns Al-Faqir*, pp.63-66.
11. Al-Barzli, *Jami' Masa'il Al-Ahkam*. See our book *The City and the Desert*. Vol 2 p.746.
12. Al-Mughayyibun, 1999, in *Tunisian social History*, Bayt Al-Hikma, Tunis, pp.311-372.
13. Naji, I, *Landmarks of Faith among the theologians of Qayrawan*. Vol.3, p.264; Vol.4, pp.34, 106, 118.
14. Ibid, Vol. 4, pp.166-169.
15. Khaldun, I, *History*, Vol. 6, pp.160-162.
16. Ibid., pp.81-85.

17. For this section see our volume, *The City and the Desert in Ifriqiyya in the Hafsid Era*. Vol. 2, pp.735-772.
18. Naji, I, *Sharh Al-Risala*. Ms. Vol .2 p.209.
19. Al-Zarkashi, *History of the two States*, p.56; Khaldun, I, *op. cit.*, Vol. 6, p.715; Al-Wansharisi, *Al-Mi'yar Al-Maghreb*, Vol.1 p.22.
20. Al-Shabbi, A 1982, *Arafat Al-Shabbi*, Tunis, p.77.
21. Al-Tijani, *op cit.*, pp.188, 189,197.
22. See Al-Shamakhi, Sir, Introduction.
23. *Ibid.*, pp.59-64.
Gellner, *op cit.*, p.169.