

**Colonial Histories, Post-colonial Memories: The Legend of the Kahina, a North African Heroine**, by Abdelmajid Hannoum. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2001. xvii + 216 pp. ISBN 0-325-00253-3 cloth.

In *Colonial Histories, Post-colonial memories: The Legend of the Kahina, a North African Heroine*, Abdelmajid Hannoum pieces together a puzzle of narratives that created and modified the Kahina's story along the centuries. Thanks to his limpid writing, the readers can follow the intricacies of this fascinating myth central to ancient and modern communities in the Maghreb. Different voices and—often conflicting—perspectives indeed emerge progressively from Arabic, Berber, Jewish, French/European, nationalist, and feminist writings.

The basic plot of the story is a quest (4) including a hero/anti-hero conflict and the need of remedy for a situation of disorder. The context is given by the Arabic-Islamic conquest of the Maghreb and the fight of the Kahina, queen of the Berbers in the Aurès Mountains (the pre-Saharan central area of present Algeria). Abdelmajid Hannoum convincingly shows how historical and contemporary variations of the story are shaped by either apparently minor modifications or substantial changes in actions and characterization. Early Arabic versions, written in the ninth century, present the Kahina as an infidel female leader who plunges the Maghreb into disorder and tyranny and is finally overcome by the Muslim heroes who restore Islam, peace, and order. In Maghrebi medieval versions, the story of the Kahina illustrates Arab and Berber bravery and Berbers' free decision to join Islam, while in precolonial and colonial French historiography she becomes a Roman and Christianized Berber—even transformed into the Patriarch Jean—opposing the Arabs and their conquest of the Maghreb. By and by the Kahina is a North African Jewish woman or man (104), a nationalist anti-colonial heroine (113, 119, 130), a communist ideal (170), a present-day Algerian feminist model (147), and the symbol of the Amazigh fight for the rights of Berber minorities (139). As Hannoum writes in the introduction: "Having exhausted the Mediterranean categories of ethnic groups, she [the Kahina] also exhausted gender categories" (xv-xvi).

A stronger theoretical approach would have reinforced the study as far as orality is concerned. The large oral production concerning the Kahina and her origins is mentioned more than integrated in the analysis (see 13, 150). Studies on Berber oral narratives such as those by C. Lacoste-Dujardin, T. Yacine-Titouh, and P. Galand-Pernet are not mentioned or taken into consideration. These studies not only would have offered a theoretical framework for the treatment of Berber oral productions, but would also have clarified qualifications and actions of the myth. For example, the element of the Kahina adopting the hero by giving him her breast is not only a general Mediterranean folkloric theme (13), but a specific qualification of the *teryel*, the ogress, representing female negativity in Kabyle Berber oral narratives. Likewise, the origin myth from ancient Rome (see Mercier) collected in Chaouia Berber villages of the Aurès—the place of the Kahina's fight—would have presented a local Berber voice speaking in the polyphony of ancient and modern versions and interpre-

tations on Berber myths of origin (see Boulhaïs; Dakhli; Fremeaux; Merolla). One can also observe some simplifications in the treatment of Maghrebian contemporary literatures, as in the case of the "Berberist" label attributed right away to writers such as Kateb Yacine and Nabile Farès, which disregards the multilayered and nuanced discourses that emerge in the whole of their respective works (see Woodhull 1993).

Altogether, this book does a great service to all those who are interested in the comprehension of group, class, and gender relationships in the Maghreb and provides a balanced reading of subjects still controversial in present political debates. Hannoum does indeed much more than collecting and interpreting different versions of a Maghrebian foundational myth. Firmly setting his analysis in the contexts of production of myths and ideologies, he is able to trace the subjective making of history and to enlighten the entwined positions of ancient and modern historians and literary writers. *Colonial Histories, Post-colonial memories: The Legend of the Kahina, a North African Heroine* helps us to rethink the story of the Maghreb and the reciprocal apprehension of the different "selves" that lived, competitively or cooperatively, in such a vast geopolitical and cultural area. The Kahina becomes "a symbol of the encounter and the clash between civilizations" (52) and—as the author writes—once again demonstrates the force of the never-ending process of narrative re-invention.

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