to make sure that their children would inherit from them, not their maternal uncle. In addition, conversion could be seen as a way to achieve social emancipation and to gain privileges confined to Muslims, a share of the booty in war, a way out of slavery, a gate toward integration into a powerful, prosperous, successful, and prestigious (civilized) community (as on the East African coast), and thus a strategy to acquire a new identity and recognition, to rise in status and to escape oppressive and obsolete local customs. In her study of conversion among the Mawri in Niger, Adeline Masquelier was for instance told by one of her local interlocutors that "people had turned to Islam because, once (colonial) peace was established, they just wanted to get on with their lives and take advantage of new opportunities" (Masquelier 2001: 60). Processes of conversion were also often characterized by a critique of existing traditions as with respect to (costly) burial rites, initiation, and marriage ceremonies. These motivations can be observed not only for processes of conversion to Islam, but also for processes of re-affiliation within Islam, as in the context of movements of reform.

Processes of conversion have thus always been situational and selective, and specific aspects of Islam were incorporated more easily than others. Equally, local traditions were not discarded completely in processes of conversion: they could be incorporated as non-objectable 'urf (and come under attack only later in a movement of reform) and they could continue to coexist with Islam (even if recognized as non-Islamic). This process of incorporation (or enculturation) should be seen as representing a cocktail of variations in different contexts. At the same time, individual conversion could take different forms: it could come as an abrupt and complete shift to Islam, a radical reorientation which has been described in recent times as "born again Islam" (Diouf and Leichtman 2008: 8f.). Or it could evolve slowly by adopting ritual aspects of Islam, in particular prayer and fasting, in multiple steps. After some time of becoming acquainted with Muslims and their variegated practices of Islam, perhaps even after generations, local traditions of learning could emerge, a process which would lead to a more reflexive view of Islam, as well as pre-Islamic religious traditions, by studying the books. This process has been described by Humphrey Fisher as a "second conversion" to Islam (Fisher 1985: 166). Recent models of conversion are thus not characterized by a concept of development in historical stages so much as by a focus on local dynamics of conversion and variegated speeds of development, different from region to region, as well as a focus on the agency of the converts and those who did not convert.

Mağrib
130054

2 The Bilād al-Maghrib

Rebels, Saints, and Heretics

Historical Themes and Patterns

Between the late seventh and thirteenth centuries, the bilād al-maghrib saw a bewildering variety of religious and political developments, including a series of efforts toward religio-political hegemony. In the thirteenth century, the last efforts to unite the bilād al-maghrib came to an end and particularistic forces prevailed. The bilād al-maghrib remained politically divided into the four major regions that we know today, namely Morocco in the west, Algeria in the center, and Tunisia as well as Tripolitania (Libya) in the east. Not only the political divisions have remained the same since the thirteenth century, but major religious features which today still characterize Muslim society in the bilād al-maghrib were also defined conclusively at that time.

These features include adherence within the bilād al-maghrib as a whole to Sunni Islam and the Mālikī school of law. Shīʿī efforts to gain a foothold in the bilād al-maghrib eventually failed, despite the successful beginnings of the Fāṭimid caliphate in the tenth century. Since the thirteenth century, a few Ibāḍī minorities have been the only non-Sunni communities in the region. As such, the bilād al-maghrib are characterized today by a far greater religious homogeneity than many other regions of the Islamic world. The solid foundation of Islam in its Sunni-Mālikī orientation has, at the same time, contributed decisively to the establishment of this religious orientation in the Sahara as well as in the bilād al-sūdān to the south.

By the thirteenth century, Sufi thought had gained a foothold in the bilād al-maghrib, in particular in the regions beyond the immediate influence of the rulers. Sufi scholars, the so-called marabouts (from the Arabic term murābiṭūn, "those who live in a ribāṭ," a fortification built to defend Islam), came to represent a major social, religious, and political force as religious scholars, legal experts, mediators, sages, saints, and medical experts in local communities. The symbiosis of a number of disciplines of Islamic learning, in particular, fiqh (jurisprudence), ṭibb (medicine), tawḥīd (dogmatic theology) and taṣawwuf (Sufism), came to form a second major trait of Islam in the bilād al-maghrib which again spread into the Sahara and the bilād al-sūdān to the south. From the thirteenth century onward, all these territories came to form a vast Sunni-Mālikī realm that was strongly influenced by the legacy of Sufi saints and scholars, the marabouts and their schools and traditions of learning. And although Sufi orders (Arab. ṭuruq, sg. ṭarīqa) as organized religio-political bodies only played a

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01 Mart 2020

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