UCLA

UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

The Contested Legend of al-Kâhina: Prophetess or Propaganda?

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1h26v3q3

Author

Keuter, Jessica Leigh

Publication Date

2019

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

The Contested Legend of al-Kâhina: Prophetess or Propaganda?

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree Master of Art

in African Studies

by

Jessica Leigh Keuter

2019

© Copyright by

Jessica Leigh Keuter

2019

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Contested Legend of al-Kâhina: Prophetess or Propaganda?

by

Jessica Leigh Keuter

Master of Arts in African Studies

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor Ghislaine Lydon, Chair

With depictions ranging from anti-Muslim resistance warrior of the seventh century to mythical priestess, al-Kâhina looms large in the historical narratives of North African Amazigh, Jewish, and Arab peoples. Despite her legendary status, al-Kâhina's existence as a historical female figure who reigned over the Amazigh is disputed. In this paper, I highlight the long history of colonial occupation and continual resistance organizing by the Amazigh prior to al-Kâhina's battles with the Arab invaders at the end of the seventh century. Through analysis of secondary sources, I examine how both Arab and French occupations appropriated the legend to promote their agendas. I argue that al-Kâhina's story has been used to enforce or combat different political agendas, both historically and today. Presently in the region , al-Kâhina has been iconized and used as the "face" of Amazigh nationalist and cultural movements.

The thesis of Jessica Leigh Keuter is approved.

Katherine M. Marino

William H. Worger

Ghislaine E. Lydon, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2019

"Someday we'll all be gone

But lullabies go on and on

They never die…"

~ Billy Joel

Contents

List of Figures vi

List of Maps vii

Introduction 1

Historical Context **7**
- Early Imazighen 7
- Greeks/Phoenicians 9
- Early Romans 9
- Roman Christianization 12
- Vandals/Byzantine Control 15
- Arab Invasion & Islamization 16
- Ottoman Conquest 17
- French Colonial Rule 17
- Independence 21

Discussion of the Literature **23**
- Norman Roth 23
  "The Kâhina: Legendary Material in the Accounts of the Jewish Berber Queen"
- H.T. Norris 26
  The Berbers in Arabic Literature
- Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress 28
  The Berbers
- Abdelmajid Hannoum 29
  Colonial Histories, Post-Colonial Memories: The Legend of the Kâhina, A North African Heroine
- Bruce Maddy-Weitzman 34
  The Berber Identity Movement and the Challenge to North African States
- Benjamin Hendrickx 35
  "Al-Kâhina: The Last Ally of the Roman-Byzantines in the Maghreb Against the Muslim Arab Conquest"
- Alexander Beider 36
  "Jews of Berber Origin: Myth or Reality?"

Present-Day Representation **40**

Conclusion **38**

Bibliography 45

Figures

1 Imazighen Flag 3
2 Fatima S’nomer 18
3 Graffiti depiction of al-Kâhina 38
4 *Berber Woman* painting 39
5 Al-Kâhina Monument 42
6 Colosseum 42

Maps

1	Map of North Africa (circa 150 BCE)	10
2	Map of Christianity from 300 to 800 CE	13

Introduction

Al-Kâhina[1] is a disputed female figure who may have reigned over an Imazighen clan in North Africa during the seventh century. She is featured in the historical narratives of North African Imazighen, Jewish, and Arab societies. Some historians depict her as a mythical queen of the Aures Mountains, located on the Northern border of present-day Algeria and Tunisia. In this paper, I examine this contested figure based on a review of the relevant secondary sources written by scholars drawing on historical, archeological, and linguistic evidence. By addressing the various interpretations of the epithets of her name and the discourse surrounding her religious beliefs, specifically highlighting the portrayal of al-Kâhina since her death by different groups in the region, I will validate al-Kâhina as a historical figure and show how the Imazighen have an extensive history of resistance organizing. Scholars have examined this subject relying nearly exclusively on Arabic written sources, the earliest dating to the late eighth century. Several works have been translated to, or written in, French. Due to language limitations, my research is restricted to English works and translations of key texts.

It is important to begin with a discussion of the relevant terminology prevailing in the Western scholarship. *Berber* is the identifier commonly used when discussing the Imazighen people. Several theories seek to explain the origins of the *Berber* epithet, which is now considered

[1] "a*l*" (sometimes written "*el*") that precedes Kâhina translates to English as *"the."*

derogatory. The parallels to the term *barbaric* (and the French noun *barbare*), are commonly noted. Another common explanation is that the Arabs conquered North Africa they used the Arabic term *barbar*, which means “babble noisily” or “jabber” to label the Imazighen.[2]

As the historian Maddy-Weitzman explains:

> Today, the term is viewed by many Berbers as pejorative and, as their modern ethnonational consciousness deepens, is increasingly being supplanted by “Imazighen”… Some modern-day Imazighen militants take great umbrage not only with the term “Berber” but with “Maghrib” as well, viewing them, not wholly unreasonably, as one more indication that their status is politically, socially, culturally, and historically subordinate.[3]

Al-Maghrib or *the Maghreb*, Arabic for “far west”, refers to the North African region encompassing Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, and Western Sahara. Due the term being imposed by the Arabs, presently, “[t]he Imazighen Culture Movement’s own term of choice is “Tamazgha.”[4] The term *Imazighen* (plural of Amazigh) may stem from the Tuareg word *amajeah*, translating to “free person” or “noble” and is how the group self-identifies.[5] Though scholarship being discussed often uses *Berber* and *Maghrib*, in this paper I will be use *Imazighen* and *Tamazgha*.

The Imazighen form a number of distinct clan groups, which are divided by lineages comprised of family units. Historically, the Imazighen are matrilineal, tracing descendance through the female line. This explains in part why in the past Amazigh women assumed prominent roles in both public and private life. The primary spoken languages of the Imazighen are

[2] Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, *The Berber Identity Movement and the Challenge to North African States* (Austin, TX: University of Texas, 2011), 2.

[3] Ibid., 2-3.

[4] Ibid., 4.

[5]Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress, *The Berbers* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997), 6.

Figure 1 Imazighen Flag

Tamazight, Tashelhit, Tamesheq, and Kabyle which form part of the Afro-Asiatic language family. Tifinagh is the script of the Imazighen, first attested in the fifth century BCE. The diversity of the Imazighen is symbolized by their flag which is used to promote unity amongst the clans. Each of the stripes are of equal size to show equality. The colors represent the areas Imazighen clans reside: blue the ocean, green the mountains, and yellow the sands of the Sahara.

Depictions of al-Kâhina vary from an anti-hero of Islam to a resistance warrior of the Amazigh people. Before the Arab invasions, Christianity was widespread in the region with the Roman occupation, leading scholars to infer al-Kâhina was Christian. Other sources depict al-Kâhina as Jewish relying on oral traditions, interpretations of *Kâhina*[6], and Abd al-Rahmân Ibn

[6] Some argue *Kahina*, sometimes spelled Kahena or Cahena, is an epithet and her real name to be Dahya, Daya, Dihia, Dihya, or Damiya.

Khaldûn's writings. During the twentieth century, al-Kâhina's story was appropriated by the French government to promote their colonial agenda. In the region today, al-Kâhina has been iconized and used as the "face" of Imazighen social activism. I argue that the various imagined characteristics of al-Kâhina's story have been used to advance different political agendas, both in the past and present.

There is no consensus on al-Kâhina's legend, however, several sources depict her as a seventh century female ruler from the Jarawa clan of the Kabyle Imazighen in the Aures Mountains. Who before her defeat scorched the fields and tress to prevent the Arabs from acquiring resources. . It is purported that she had the gift of prophecy and she foresaw not only the Arab invasion, but her death at the hands of General Hassân Ibn al-Nu'mân al-Ghassani, which occurred circa 700. Among the most prominent characters featured in al- Kâhina legend are Kusayla, Khâlid b. Yazîd al-Absî[7] or Khâlid b. Yazîd al-Qaysi[8], and General Hassân. Kusayla is commonly described as the Christianized Amazigh chief and predecessor to al-Kâhina as general of the military resistance to the Arab invasions in circa 670. Khâlid is depicted as an Arab man taken prisoner by al-Kâhina who either adopted him as a son or made him her lover. Lastly, is General Hassân, who is responsible for leading the Arab campaign in North Africa and presumably beheading al-Kâhina.

The writings of Abd al-Rahmân Ibn Khaldûn (d.1406), are central to the construction of al-Kâhina's narative. He was a Muslim historian born in present-day Tunisia. Islamic historian Adam Silverstein questions Ibn Khaldûn's historical approach, claiming "[he] spent much of his

---

[7] Abdelmajid Hannoum, *Colonial Histories*, *Post-Colonial Memories: The Legend of the Kâhina, A North African Heroine* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001), 6.

[8] H.T. Norris, *The Berbers in Arabic Literature* (Essex, London: Longman Group Limited, 1982), 50.

adult life immersed in self-serving schemes and political machinations."[9] Silverstein asserts that Ibn Khaldûn,

> saw history as the product of certain identifiable, dynamic processes, such as the interaction between barbarians imbued with 'tribal' cohesions ('asabiyya) and the settled civilizations they bordered. Ibn Khaldûn's theory of history dictates that barbarians will occasionally unite to overrun neighbouring civilizations and become civilized themselves, only to be conquered by a new batch of barbarians as the process is repeated indefinitely… [he] saw history as cyclical and subject to rules and patterns.[10]

Though critical of the approach, Silverstein acknowledges Ibn Khaldûn's impact on current scholarship and academia, and relevance as a historical source.

The major contribution to al-Kâhina's story made by Ibn Khaldûn is his assertion that she was Jewish. The often-cited passage, as translated by Abdelmajid Hannoum, is the foundation for arguments about al-Kâhina's Jewishness is as follows:

> It is possible that some of these Berbers professed Judaism that they took from the Children of Israel when their kingdom extended and thus became near to Syria. This was the case of the population of the Awras mountains, the tribe of the Kâhina who was killed by the Arabs early on during the conquests. This was also the case of the Naffusa, a Berber Tribe from Ifriqiya, the Qandalawa, the Madyuna, the Ghiyata, and the Banu Fazzan, a tribe of the Berbers of the far Maghrib.[11]

Hannoum insists that the goal of Ibn Khaldûn's work, entitled *Kitâb al-'lbar* (Book of Lessons), is to "restore a positive image of the Berbers by relating them to an Arab origin and showing their noble qualities,"[12] and many scholars, including myself, agree with Hannoum.

---

[9] Adam J. Silverstein, *Islamic History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 104.

[10] Ibid., 105.

[11] Hannoum, *Colonial Histories*, 18.

[12] Ibid., 16.

Ibn Khaldûn provides additional information, such as a genealogical history of the Imazighen, including al- Kâhina's clan, claiming her full name was Dihya bint Tabîta b. Nîqân b. Bâwrâ b. Maskisrî b. Afrad b. Wasîla b. Jrâw. Tunisian historian Mohammed Talbi (d. 2017 CE) provides a very different genealogy for al-Kâhina and writes: " 'Dihya daughter of Matiya son of Tifian' (ie. Dahya, daughter of Mathew, son of Theophanes)," in support of the argument that she was in fact Christian.[13] The tracing of kinships are unclear. Ibn Khaldûn's would seem to be matrilineal (Tabita) and Talbi's patrilineal (Mathew), but ultimately, we are unable to determine with certainty as surnames were not used as they are today. As linguist Fatima Sadiqi points out:

> The Punic and Roman genealogies survived through Muslim Middle Ages…. Berber matronymic customs go back to the pre-Carthage era. In the Punic era, epitaphs on ancient tombs recorded maternal lineage and ancient Libyans sometimes had matronymic names indicating female lineage. This tradition continued after the foundation of Carthage, as archaeologists noted the regular persistence of matronymic names.[14]

In addition to the aforementioned debates regarding her genealogy and spiritual beliefs, some of the vacillating elements of her legend include: her existence as a historical figure, the number of battles she had with General Hassân, her offspring – how many and what happened to them, her motives for leading an uprising against the Arabs, and the governing policies she implemented. In the literary review section of this paper, these topics will be discussed in more detail. Before examining the literature, it is important to understand the history of the region.

---

[13] Benjamin Hendrickx, "Al-Kâhina: The Last Ally of the Roman-Byzantines in the Maghreb Against the Muslim Arab Conquest," *Journal of Early Christian History* 3 (2013), 57.

[14] Fatima Sadiqi, *Moroccan Feminist Discourses* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 45-46.

Historical Context

Early Imazighen and Jews

In the 1950s, archeological excavations of the Fezzan Valleys, located in the southwest region of present-day Libya, yielded the discovery of nearly 60,000 tombs dated as early as 1,000 BCE. Evidence also revealed that the large site known as Garama (present-day Jarmah) had livestock and was, "a mixed farming community, without a visible hierarchy within the settlement itself."[15] These were the ruins of the capital of the Garamantes, the earliest known city of Imazighen in the region, yet, not written about until the fifth century BCE by Greek historian, Herodotus.[16] It is difficult to pinpoint Imazighen origins as, "the Berbers' geographical and anthropological origins are themselves veiled: as far as can be determined, they are multiple, emanating from the Mediterranean, Nile Valley, and the Sahara, resulting in a composite population during Neolithic times."[17] Although the origins of Imazighen are indeterminate, what is evident is they are the indigenous peoples of North Africa.

---

[15] Brett and Fentress, *The Berbers*, 24.

[16] According to Brett and Fentress, "The really original aspect of the North African prehistoric cultures is evident not on the Mediterranean coast but the Sahara, in the highlands of Tibesti and Tassili, the Hoggar and west to the Atlantic coast. In these areas, and to a lesser extent in Kabylia and the Saharan Atlas, are found numerous elaborate rock carvings and paintings." (Ibid., 17.)

[17] Maddy-Weitzman, *Berber Identity Movement*, 14.

It is unclear when the Jewish population emerged in North Africa. There is a debate whether Jewish arrival was marked by the destruction of Solomon's Temple (587 BCE) or the destruction of the second Temple (70 CE). Historian and expert on early Christianity in North Africa Francois Decret asserts that, "[b]efore the end of the third century BCE,some noteworthy Jewish settlements had been formed…[f]rom very early on, the Jews began to migrate in successive waves toward the Berber regions and settle there."[18] So far, the speculation of Jewish populations in the region prior to the first century CE is largely based on Jewish oral traditions.

The controversial theory of *Judeo-Berbers*, first introduced by archeologist & Hebrew literature expert Nahum Slouschz, is based on Ibn Khaldûn's *Kitâb al-lbar.*

> The truth which should be accepted regarding the origin of Berbers is that they are descendants of Canaan, son of Ham, son of Noah, as indicated in the presentation of the genealogies of men since the creation. The name of their ancestor is Mazigh; the Kerethetes [Arqish] and the Philistines were their brothers; their brothers, Casluhim, son of Ham. Their King Jault [Goliath] is well known as one of their kings. There were well-known wars between Philistines and the Children of Israel in Syria. The Canaanites and the Kerethetes were allies of the Philistines. This is what one must believe, because it is the truth that one must not ignore.[19]

The passage depicts more than a genealogy, "[a]scribing Semantic and Arab origins to the Berbers served… [to] promote a reconciliation based on the return of long-lost cousins to the fold."[20] Until more sources are discovered on early Jewish migration and conversions, it will remain unclear when Judaism spread in Tamazgha. What is clear is that the Jewish population has a deep-rooted history in North Africa and had early contact with Imazighen peoples.

[18] Francois Decret, *Early Christianity in North Africa* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books 2009), 13-14.

[19] Hannoum, *Colonial Histories*, 17-18.
(Brackets inserted by Hannoum in his translation of the text from Arabic to English)

[20] Maddy-Weitzman, *Berber Identity Movement*, 33.

Phoenicians and Greek Colonies

In approximately 814 BCE, the port city of Carthage (near present-day Tunis, Tunisia) was settled by Phoenicians migrating from Tyre (in present-day Lebanon).

> Elissa, sister of King Pygmalion (who is a historical figure), left Tyre when her royal brother killed her husband and confiscated his property. In the course of retelling, the name "Dido", which is Greek rather than Phoenician, came to be given Elissa, and it became famous through Virgil's *Aeneid*. Thus conflict in Tyre, which might have been a political nature, was responsible for the emigration to what became called Qart Hadasht (the new town) from which the name "Carthage" derived.[21]

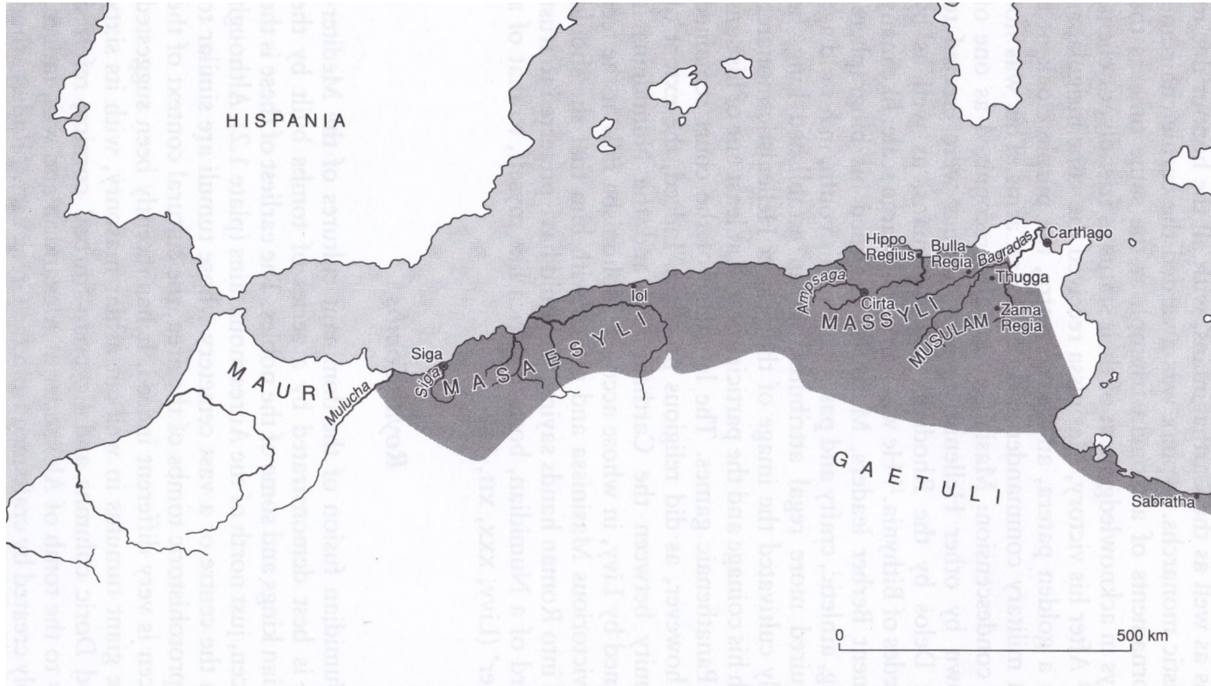
800-miles across the Mediterranean to the East, Cyrenaica (Mediterranean coastal region in the northwest of present-day Libya) was colonized by the Greeks in the seventh century BCE. Phoenicians were categorized as either Libyphoenicians or Syrophoencians. Libyphoencians were in North Africa and synonymous with Carthaginians, they were Greek or gentile often Imazighen. Syrophenicians were in the East, such as Tyre.

In the fourth and first centuries BCE, the region was fraught with wars. From 480 BCE until 306 BCE there were seven wars between the Greeks and Carthaginians, to gain control over the Western Mediterranean Island of Sicily. This was followed by three Roman-Punic Wars during 264 BCE until 146 BCE.

Early Romans

Overlapping the aforementioned conquerors, are the Imazighen living outside of Carthage, historically referred to as Numidians. Historian Abun-Nasr points out, "[b]y the third century B.C. the Greeks had come to use the name "Lybian" to refer specifically to the non-Phoenicians living within the Carthaginian state, while speaking of the other Berbers as the Numidians, the

[21] Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 15.



Map 1 North Africa at the end of Masinissa's reign

(Brett and Fentress, *The Berbers,* 28)

"Nomads", a name which reflected the fact that most of them were pastoralist."[22] By the end of the first Punic War, around 220 BCE, Numidians had three kingdoms. The Mauri Kingdom was ruled by Baga and located in present-day Morocco and West Algeria. The Massyli kingdom was ruled by Masinissa and located south of Constantine and "there is some evidence that it extended along a line of salt lakes and oases all the way to the Tunisian coast at Gabes, and from there down to the Lesser Syrtis."[23] Masaesyli, the largest of the three kingdoms, was located in the northern half of present-day Algeria and ruled by Syphax.

During the second Punic war (218-201 BCE), between Carthage and Rome, another battle took place between Carthage ally Syphax (Masaesyli) and Rome supporter Masinissa (Massyli).

[22] Ibid., 7.

[23] Brett and Fentress, *The Berbers*, 25.

Carthage's loss of the war resulted in Rome gaining the allegiance of 473 clans of Numidia. Masinissa and his successors are referred to as the Numidian Kings.

In the third Punic war (151-146 BCE), the Carthaginians resisted Rome's attempt to drive them out of the city. Due to Carthage's port location they were able to resist occupation for three years until 146 BCE when they surrendered. Attempting to thwart resistance efforts, Rome implemented a scorched earth policy, destroying Carthage, yet their tactic was ultimately futile. Rome, "annexed the region of conquered Carthage, an area comprising at least 25,00 square kilometers—which roughly corresponds to the northeast tier of modern Tunisia."[24] Additionally, "[o]utside their province, the Romans established a protectorate over Numidia, thus enabling Italian merchants to trade with Berbers without assuming the burdens of its military occupation."[25] Though Rome was able to assert its geographical domination, the Imazighen were not going to acquiesce.

Jugurtha was a key resistance leader against the establishment of Rome's first province, who, like his grandfather Masinissa, sought the creation of a united Imazighen Kingdom. Resembling his predecessors, he adopted fighting skills acquired from his encounters with Roman armies, combining them with Numidian strategies. As we will see in future encounters between Imazighen and foreign invaders, "[t]he Jugurthine war was in many ways a paradigm for future wars," encompassing, "most of the essential characteristics of Berber military resistance."[26] These not only include the reoccurring theme of resistance to colonial occupation and the imposition of foreign rule, but selective implementation of outside influences, specifically, the blending of

---

[24] Decret, *Early Christianity*, 1.

[25] Abun-Nasr, *History*, 30.

[26] Brett and Fentress, *The Berbers*, 41.

military strategies. In addition to the Numidians fighting Rome, there were also internal conflicts. When Jugurtha's army was weakened, he fled to his father-in-law, Bochus, to gain more forces, yet Bochus double-crossed him by delivering him to the Romans.

By 33 CE, Rome controlled most of North Africa. In 25 CE, Augustus of Rome gave Mauretania to Numidian King Juba II, who was raised in Rome after Juba I was defeated in 46 BCE by Julius Caesar. Juba II knew both the Amazigh language and Latin. He was married to Cleopatra Selene, the daughter of the famed Mark Anthony and Cleopatra of Egypt. Like her husband, Cleopatra Selene was relocated to Rome after her husband's father's defeat by Caesar.

Augustus' re-establishment of the Numidian Kingdom, "is one of the most noteworthy examples of the complete co-option of an African aristocrat into the Roman structure…[and] hardly the last."[27] Juba II and Cleopatra Selene had a son named Ptolemy who assumed the throne after his father's death in 23 CE. Yet, Ptolemy's reign was short-lived, as a unified rebellion emerged "as if all of Gaul had risen at once against the Romans."[28] It was during this uprising that emperor Caligula killed Ptolemy, "eliminating the last Berber kingdom in Africa," since he had no heirs.[29]

Roman Christianization

Rome's occupation of North Africa witnessed the gradual spread of Christianity to Imazighen during the third and fourth centuries CE. It is important to note that, "long before the arrival of Christianity, the Africans were already deeply religious," and yet, "the past and present were able

[27] Ibid., 46.

[28] Ibid., 47.

[29] Ibid., 47.

Map 2 The spread of Christianity from 300 to 800 CE

(Digital image. Weebly. Accessed March 11, 2019. http://chapt10rome.weebly.com/christianity.html)

to co-exist despite different dates of arrival in Africa and juxtaposition in belief and practice."[30] Not only did the Imazighen practice polytheism, but there was a significant Jewish population in Tamazgha as well, as already noted. The seemingly utopian, religiously tolerant way of living of the Imazighen began to decline near the end of the third century with the appointment of Diocletian as Emperor of Rome in 284.

In 293 CE, Diocletian, his co-emperor Maximian, Galerius (lieutenant under Diocletian in the East), and Constantius (lieutenant under Maximian in the West) formed a "tetrarchy" seeking to solidify their divine right to rule. From 303-304 CE, they issued four edicts aimed at persecuting Christians. Several believers succumbed to martyrdom, including Roman Catholic Saint Crispina.

[30] Decret, *Early Christianity*, 7.

Saint Crispina was beheaded in Theveste, Numidia, present-day Tebessa in Algeria near Tunisia boarder and the Aures Mountains. This is a significant historical detail, since this situates Christian activity close to where al-Kâhina's clan lived.

Amazigh Christian bishop, Donatus, began in Carthage leading the resistance movement in opposition of the Roman Catholic Church. Emerging as a reaction to the Diocletian edicts, this movement developed into Donaticism, a sect of Christianity. Due to the Catholic church being outnumbered by Donatist churches, a counter movement arose led by Augustine of Hippo, also known as St. Augustine whose, "mother had been Christian for several generations, but his father was still pagan."[31] Further complicating Christian dynamics during this time, was the rise of a Donatist faction, the Circumcellion, between 340 and 345 CE. The Circumcellion were initially at odds with the "traditional" Donatists, but eventually both sects became allies against the Catholic Church. In 401 CE, Catholic missionaries were sent out to convert any non-Catholics and recommended to, "Catholic landowners to convert their Donatist peasantry by force."[32] The Edict of Unity enacted in 405 CE declared Catholics owners of all Donatist property, including that of Imazighen. By the end of 411 CE, Catholics controlled the cities of Mauretania and Numidia, but, "Donatism remained strong in the countryside…[and] mountain tribes of the interior and other tribes in the south were now a constant source of anxiety."[33] The Aures Mountains are located within present-day Algeria on the boarder of present-day Tunisia, where the Atlas and Saharan Mountain ranges meet. Because al-Kâhina's clan lived in the Aures Mountains, it is possible that her clan were Donatists. If the Imazighen in the Aures, or more specifically al-Kâhina's clan, were

---

[31] Susan Raven, *Rome in Africa* (New York, NY: Longman, 1984), 166.

[32] Ibid., 201.

[33] Ibid., 205.

not Donatists while under Roman control, they may have adopted the beliefs during the next wave of colonial invasions.

Vandals/Byzantine Control

In 430 CE Rome ceded control of Numidia to the Vandals. By the end of the decade, Vandals controlled Carthage, bringing an end to the Roman Empire in North Africa for one-hundred years. Towards the end of his reign, Vandal King Huneric (d. 484) issued edicts persecuting Catholics, emulating edicts of the Romans, resulting in, "500 clergy from Carthage [being] denounced and sent into exile…the African Catholic leadership suffered much brutality: 334 pastors were exiled or dispersed; others were sent to Corsica to cut wood for royal fleets, while another 90 leaders died."[34] In 534 CE, the Eastern Roman Empire known as the Byzantine Empire under the rule of Justinian reclaimed North Africa. "Despite its victory, the Byzantines still faced a small but ever-present movement of "re-Berberization"."[35] The organized Imazighen resistance, including a re-emergence of Donatism in Numidia, threatened the Empire's control. To prevent the Byzantine's access to the Aures Mountains, Imazighen partially destroyed Timgad. Previously, in 100 CE, Rome established Timgad in 100 CE as a military defense position against the mountain clans. The destruction of Timgad encapsulates Imazighen implementing the same tactics used by Rome in the destruction of Carthage , both attempting to thwart future conflicts. The Byzantine Empire held North Africa until the Arab invasion in the seventh century.

[34] Decret, *Early Christianity,* 194.

[35] Ibid., 195.

Arab Invasion & Islamization

By 641, less than a decade after the passing of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, Arabs had control of Egypt. It would still take over five decades for Arabs to conquer Numidia. Though this marked the beginnings of the religion of Islam in northern Africa, the spread of Islam and Arabization did not occur simultaneously. The Arabs faced organized Imazighen resistance, including under al-Kâhina's leadership. General Hassân lost his first battle in Carthage and retreated to Cyrenaica where he waited for military reinforcements. In circa 705, Hassân was victorious against al- Kâhina beheading her in battle. By 709, North Africa was firmly under Arab control and they, "adopted a language policy that enabled them to spread Arabic and Islamic values. The remarkable relation between Arabic and Islam, as mentioned in the Qur'an itself, made this spread and dominance of Arabic unavoidable."[36] Eventually the Arabic language became the dominant language in the region.

Over 100 years after al-Kâhina's death is when the first account available to us emerges.[37] With the introduction of her legend into Arabic literature, narratives appeared to enhance her depiction as resistance leader against the Muslim invasion. The promotion of Islamic literature to erase the Imazighen collective memory, "left most Berbers with no awareness of their actual past."[38] This was the case until the introduction of *mafâkhir al-Barbar* ("Boasts of the Berbers"[39])

[36] Moha Ennaji, *Multilingualism, Cultural Identity, and Education in Morocco* (New York, NY: Springer, 2005), 18.

[37] Depending on the scholar, some attribute Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam (d.871 CE) or Waqidi (d. 822 CE) with the earliest account. This will be discussed further in the Discussion of the Literature section, particularly with Hannoum's analysis.

[38] Maddy-Weitzman, *Berber Identity Movement*, 33.

[39] Ibid., 33.

in the thirteenth century. The *mafâkhir* literary genre was a form of resistance with the goal of reconstructing Imazighen history. However, some scholars argue *mafâkhir* was actually a form of Islamization and the Imazighen, "were left with tribal genealogies, which increasingly included fabricated sharifian [Muslim] lineages."[40] Unifying origins would be a method used by the French colonial government, making Imazighen struggles for autonomy and inclusion even more complex.

Ottoman Conquest

Like the Arab invasion, the Ottoman Empire began by conquering Cairo, Egypt in 1517 and expanding westward. The Ottomans controlled North Africa until 1800s during which, "Berber populations were increasingly consigned to the periphery of society, and the Berbers as a named group gradually faded."[41] Unfortunately, the Ottoman Era in North Africa is underrepresented in scholarship, with less written in or translated to English, and deserves further exploration.

French Colonial Rule

As the Ottoman Empire began to collapse in the early nineteenth century, France preyed on their weakness by taking control of Algeria and beginning their rule in Tamazgha. Algeria was deemed a French colony and became its longest held territory in Africa, with France occupying it from 1830 until 1962.[42] Initially, Kabylia (located in the Tell Atlas mountains within Algeria) was avoided, not only due to its, "harshness of temperatures, rocky terrain, dense forests, and poor soil

---

[40] Ibid., 33.

[41] Ibid., 34.

[42] Tunisia from 1881 until 1956 and from 1912 until 1956 Morocco, were both French protectorates. Since Algeria was a colony, under French colonial rule, Algeria was an extension of the metropole, yet not all inhabitants had equal rights or were accorded to French citizens, resulting in a large settler community.

Figure 2 Photograph most atributed to Fatma n'Soumer

(From: Digital Image. Algeria. Accessed March 10, 2019. https://www.algeria.com/forums/forum/culture-culture/history-histoire/29401-is-lalla-fatma-n-soumer-s-photo-real-or-fake)

quality,"[43] but also due to the anti-French resistance initially led by Emir 'Abd al-Qadâr from 1832 until 1847. From 1854 to 1857, the final rebellion took place:

> Imazighen prophetess, Fatma n[']Soumer or Lalla Fatma (Lalla, "Lady") took part in the resistance to the French in Kabylia in 1854, a woman leading the North African peoples to war once more, this time against the invading French. It took an army of 30,000 to finally defeat the prophetess.[44]

The uprising led by Fatma n'Soumer shares strong parallels to al-Kâhina's resistance to the Arab invasion over one-thousand years prior. Aside from the obvious similarity of a powerful woman leading an Amazigh military uprising, both women lived in a mountainous region near the present-day Algeria/Tunisia boarder. These two female leaders are credited with the final resistance to outside invaders and often classified as prophetesses. There is, at least within Western scholarship, little written on the undisputed historical figure Fatma n'Soumer as compared to the volume of writings mentioning al-Kâhina. Although al-Kâhina's beliefs are indeterminant, Fatma n'Soumer is known to have been a devout Muslim. It is probable that her image is not used in current Imazighen social movements due to her Islamic identity, which is not inclusive of all Amazigh peoples.

Ten years after defeating Fatima n'Soumer, the French established, "the strategic garrison town of Fort National…as a "throne of Kabylie," and formal resistance ceased for a time."[45] In an attempt to maintain colonial control of the region, the French sought to gain knowledge of the inhabitants. Some information was gained from the poems and songs collected by Colonel Adolphe Hanoteau (d.1897 CE), and it was, "believed [they] would reveal the essence of the

---

[43] Maddy-Weitzman, *Berber Identity Movement*, 39-40.

[44] Ulbani Ait Frawsen and Ukerdis L'Hocine Ukerdis, "The Origins of Imazighen Women's Power in North Africa: An Historical Overview," *Al-Raida* 20 (2003): 20.

[45] Maddy-Weitzman, *Berber Identity Movement*, 40.

Kabyle personality and level of intellectual and moral development,"[46] creating what is known as the Kabyle Myth. French writers learned of, "the story of [al-]Kâhina's resistance to Muslim invaders [which] captured [their] imagination."[47] The Kabyle Myth shifted the commonality of Eastern origins between Imazighen and Muslims set forth by the *mafâkhir* literature and asserted indigenous Imazighen population as descendants of Rome and superior to Muslims.

This new ideology influenced policy making, including the integration of French language into institutions. The alienation of Muslims, "drove [Arab-Islamic] nationalists to oppose the disintegrative influence of particularly French culture."[48] There was a push by Arab Islamic nationalists to resist French assimilation. Despite this, the colonial "policy of educating and training an elite who would become culturally and linguistically alien to their own people, that is, who would be "pseudo-Europeans","[49] was largely successful.

Algerian resistance movements prevailed throughout the colonial period, leading to the war for Algerian liberation from 1954 until independence in 1962, led by the *Front de Liberation Nationale* (FLN). The participation of Algerian woman the struggle for independence is well documented. As depicted by political philosopher Frantz Fanon, even under colonial control, Algerian women were able to use their social status uniquely, to benefit political resistance movements.[50] Fanon describes how women voluntarily unveiled so they could seamlessly transport information for the independence movement, subverting the French colonial regime. The

---

[46] Ibid., 40.

[47] Ibid., 40.

[48] Ennaji, *Multilingualism*, 12.

[49] Ibid., 13.

[50] Frantz Fanon, "Algeria Unveiled," in *Studies in a Dying Colonialism* (London: Earthscan, 1989), 35-67.

French view of the veil being repressive, or associated with an antiquated practice, is a view that continues to be re-inscribed onto Western views of modernity. Resisting the imposition of Western ideologies is a key objective of current social movements in Tamazgha.

Independence

After independence, countries in North Africa adopted Arabization policies declaring Arabic the national language and Islam the official religion. However, French, "as the language of modernization," continues to dominate the educational and political systems, "because it can bring about an individual's social promotion and a valorized social well-being."[51] This policy contributed to the marginalization of Amazigh languages and demonstrates how colonial legacies has resulted in the belief that development is tied to the Western beliefs . This view gets projected onto resistance movements of Imazighen, characterizing them as static and resisting modernity. When in fact, through waves of colonial occupation, "Berbers were neither merely passive victims of imperial conquest by the ancient world's bearers of "modernity" and "globalization" nor stanch resisters of it."[52] Discrimination against Imazighen gave rise to the 1980s political movement known as the "Berber Spring", marking the beginning of current Imazighen nationalist and cultural movements, including feminist movements, in the region.

Feminism in the Tamazgha region, as in other Muslim majority societies, can be loosely classified into two categories, secular and Islamic. Though there is often polarized interpretations of these terms, there seems to be some fluidity. Looking at Morocco, for example, secular feminism is not a "modern" movement or one that rejects Islam, whereas, "Islamic feminism is a

---

[51] Ennaji, *Multilingualism*, 215.

[52] Maddy-Weitzman, *Berber Identity Movement*, 19.

relatively new reality that has emerged in the heat of the 1990s' ideological crisis over the woman issues."[53] Within these two classifications, there is a spectrum of views ranging between conservative, moderate, and liberal. Discussions surrounding Moroccan feminisms, reveal that both secular and Islamic ideologies are grappling with the Western idea of "universal feminism" and advocate for a new, uniquely Moroccan, definition of feminism that would meet their needs.

According to linguist and gender studies professor Fatima Sadiqi, "[Al-]Kâhina's female leadership did not rely on institutionalized authority,"[54] and that is one of the reasons she has become a symbol for feminist movements. The current generation of feminists emulate al-Kâhina, "to defend personal liberties and self-determination, carve out a space to act in spite of patriarchal constraints, or to become free and in control of one's destiny."[55] By occupying an array of public spaces and not limiting themselves to institutional organizations, North African women are rebranding what feminism means locally.

[53] Ennaji, *Multilingualism*,177.

[54] Sadiqi, *Moroccan Feminist*, 60.

[55] Ibid., 60.

Discussion of the Literature

Norman Roth

The writings of the famed fourteenth-century scholar Ibn Khaldûn are the earliest source linking al-Kâhina to a Jewish identity. Norman Roth, a specialist in Jewish history and literature, analyzes the epithet *Kâhina* and elements of her story to ascertain whether she was a Jewish historical figure. Like me, Roth did not have access to Arabic texts so relied on other scholars' works and translations of key texts about al-Kâhina.

Arguments given for or against al-Kâhina as Jewish, concerns the epithet *Kâhina*. Support for her Jewishness claims *Kâhina* as a feminized title derived from the Hebrew of Kohen (priest). Roth supports Nahum Slouchz's argument that al-*Kâhina* has Jewish origins but disagrees with her classification of al-Kâhina as a prophetess. Accounts by Abraham Ibn Daud, a twelfth-century Jewish historian from Spain, lead Roth to assert that a more precise Jewish title for al-Kâhina is *Mu'allima* (Arabic for teacher). Roth postulates that *Kâhina* does not translate to 'priestess,' "rather a sort of divineress, which function was often performed among the Berbers as we know from Ibn Khaldûn and from the contemporary testimony of Procopius of Caesaria, a sixth-century Byzantine historian."[56] He further suggests that Dihya is to be read Dahiya which means crafty or

[56] Norman Roth, "The Kâhina: Legendary Material in the Accounts of the Jewish Berber Queen," *The Maghrib Review* 7(1982): 123.

cunning in Arabic, citing Ibn Idhari al-Nuwari accounts on al-Kâhina's divination powers. Roth concludes that not only is *Kâhina* a title but so is *Dihya*.

For Roth, the confusion surrounding al-Kâhina's name stems from H. Z. Hirschberg's 1957 article written in Hebrew. According to Roth, "Hirshberg concluded that Kâhina is a corruption of Kahiya (or Kahya)," rejecting both the name *Dihya* provided by Ibn Khaldûn and the title *Kâhina*. Roth asserts, Hirschberg's translation of, "[t]he modern eulogy (so called *qasida*) of the Jews of Constantine," were the basis of his findings.[57] He provides the following poem (the bracketed insertions are Roth's):

> Sons of Yeshurun [Israel], do not forget your persecutors,
> The Chaldeans, Caesar, Hadrian and Kahiya [or Kahya].
> Cursed is that one, more cruel was she than all these together.
> She gave our virgins to her warriors
> And in the blood of our children she washed her feet.
> The Lord created her in order to atone for our sins.
> The Lord hates those who oppress His people.
> Return to me my children, so they may mourn me—
> I have left them in the hands of Kahiya [Kahya].[58]

In this depiction of al-Kâhina, followers of Judaism are presented as victims of her violent polices. In Roth's footnote citation, he clarifies the above translation is from Chouraqui's English translation of Hirshberg, in which Hirshberg cites Moroccan Jewish historian, David Cazes. The translation provided in the article, according to Roth, "differs only slightly," from Chouraqui's. Ultimately, Hirshberg asserts even though the Jewish poem is referencing al-Kâhina, her actions are evidence against the claim of her being Jewish. Citing insufficient linguistic parallels between the *Kâhina* and *Kahiya*, Roth refutes Hirshberg's analysis that al-Kâhina and the poem's Kahiya are the same figure.

---

[57] Ibid., 122.

[58] Ibid., 122.

In his article, Roth also discusses two key background characters in al-Kâhina's story, Kusayla and Khâlid. Kusayla was a Christian Amazigh chief who converted to Islam, but eventually turned against the Arab leaders. Citing Wâqidî (d.822), via Ibn al-Athîr (d.1233), who depicts Kâhina seeking revenge for Kusayla's death as her reason for an uprising against the Muslim invasion, Roth wonders if Kusayla and Kâhina were the beginning of Imazighen clans' unification against outside occupation. It could be the beginning of unification against the Arabs, however, as evident with the Kings of Numidia, this would not have been the first joint effort against invaders. Roth attributes the introduction of Khâlid to Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam (d.871), whom he believes is the earliest account, and credits Ibn 'Idhâri for the notion that al-Kâhina had two other sons; one Imazighen and one Christian. Ibn Khaldûn draws the same conclusion stating she adopted her third son, the prisoner Khâlid. Roth points out that Khâlid shares the exact name of the grandson of the Caliph and argues the addition of Khâlid to the narrative is to encourage a reconciliation and unity between the Muslim and Imazighen populations.

In Roth's opinion, there is a mythical component to al-Kâhina's story due to Ibn Khaldûn's account that Kâhina ruled sixty-five years and died at the age of 120, the same as Moses. Al-Bakari (d. 1094 CE), according to Roth, wrote that she "was besieged in the fortress (Lajam),"[59] but it was Ibn Khaldûn who declared the location of her death being at *The Well of al-Kâhina* (Bir al-Kâhina). Attaching her legend to a geographical location adds validity to her existence. Roth notes that, "Hirschberg's translation in *Tarbiz* is either incorrect or based on a different text. The site referred to [The Well of al-Kâhina] is near Gabes according to Jamil Abun-Nasr."[60] Historian, Abun-Nasr's description is as follows: "Her second encounter with [Hassân] Ibn al-Nu'mân took

[59] Ibid., 124.

[60] Ibid., 125.

place near Gabis. She was defeated, pursued by Arab warriors, and eventually killed at a place in the Auras which came to be called Bir al-Khaina (al-Kâhina's well)."[61] Roth imprecisely depicts Abun-Nasr's statement, as it says the battle with Hassân was *near* Gabis and then she fled before being killed. Abun-Nasr does not say how far away from the battle she was killed. Therefore, it is possible both translations are accurate.

As far as al-Kâhina's scorched earth policy before her death, Roth surmises it is likely later that historians found it necessary to assign blame for the agricultural decline of the early medieval period. Conclusively, Roth believes that al-Kâhina was a historical figure, although her story has been elaborated, and he argues that Ibn Khaldûn's assertion that she was Jewish must be taken seriously.

H.T. Norris

Published in the same year as Roth's article, *The Berbers in Arabic Literature*, is written by H.T. Norris, a Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies. Like the title implies, Norris uses Arabic literature, both written and oral, to present his findings. In the preface, he perhaps echoes the mindset of scholars during the 1980s with the clarification of the term *Berbers*, "by Berbers I mean the family of North African people who share a common language of clearly distinguished and mutually unintelligible dialects."[62] He later asserts that "Berber has a linguistic but not an ethnic reality."[63] Norris' goal in the book is to increase accessible material for future scholars by

[61] Abun-Nasr, *History*, 70.

[62] Norris, *Arabic Literature*, X.

[63] Ibid., 1.

prioritizing works written by Imazighen, yet, “[t]his book is not intended to be an historical survey, nor is it an anthropological study supported by documentary evidence.”[64]

Norris compiles the writings about al-Kâhina from Ibn al-Athîr, Ibn ‘Idhâri, ‘Ubayd Allâh Ibn Sâlih, and Ibn Khaldûn to adequately, “assess how she was portrayed and imagined.”[65] He asserts that al-Kâhina was a member of the Jarawa, who were a part of the Zenata group, residing in the Eastern Algeria Aures mountains, stating, “[t]hese mountains became a major rallying point for the Berbers, for the Banu Ifren and for the Botr in particular.”[66] Norris claims her death at the age of 127 was at the hands of Hassân and two battles took place. Hassân was forced to retreat in the first battle, that is when al-Kâhina took Khâlid captive, eventually adopting him. The names of her two other sons, according to Norris, are Ifren and Yazdiyan. Before the second battle in c.705 CE (four-years after their first encounter), al-Kâhina sent her all her sons to Hassân to convert, shortly after he cut off her head during combat.

Using the same Arabic sources as Roth, Norris intertwines accounts to create a sensationalized narrative. Using analogies, Norris portrays al-Kâhina as a Maghribian Boudica,[67] with loose, wild like the hair in the manner of Queen Asbyte of the Garamantes. Norris regards most of the story as a legend that incorporates embedded features of Arab storytellers with some historical reality, arguing Arabs are responsible for her creation, depiction, and reputation. He concludes the section on al-Kâhina with a quote by the French colonial scholar E.-F. Gautier that he believes, “perfectly summed up the significance of the story.”[68] It reads:

---

[64] Ibid., X.

[65] Ibid., 49.

[66] Ibid., 51.

[67] Boudica is a British Celtic queen who led failed uprising against Rome’s occupation

> The act of the Kâhina is something essentially Berber. It is particularly Botr. The Kâhina adopted an Arab son who was to play a predominant role in the last act of the drama. He it is who guides the true offspring of the old queen to the Arab Amir. Throughout the whole history of the Maghrib we shall come across the attraction which brings the nomads, both Arab and Berber closer together…. In the Maghrib, sedentaries and nomads have never tried to live together without the one disgorging the other. There lies the triumph of the Arab invasion. It was the turning point, and it was Hassân who passed beyond it. Musa Ibn Nusayr may come, but he will not meet more than a scattering of disorganized tribes, with real submission nowhere to be found, that is indeed true, but of serious resistance nothing more. And he will be able to launch Islam into a new adventure, much further onwards, across the water into Spain.[69]

This quote illustrates the social complexity of the region, and how the legend of al-Kâhina was manipulated by Arabs to assimilate Imazighen and unify the region under Islam.

Michael Brett and Elizabeth Fentress

In *The Berbers,* Africanist Michael Brett and archeologist Elizabeth Fentress' rely exclusively on written secondary sources and archeological evidence. As the editor highlights, they combine "perspectives of archaeology, anthropology, and history."[70] Brett and Fentress emphasize the role of Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam account as the "earliest substantial source" on al-Kâhina story and, "her prophecy of Hassân's eventual victory is the whole purpose of her existence."[71] The introduction of *The Well of al-Kâhina* as site of her death they credit to the Ibn 'Idhâri during the fourteenth century, and give the location of *The Well of al-Kâhina*, "to the west of the Aures mountains."[72]

---

[68] Norris, *Arabic Literature*, 53.

[69] Ibid., 53.

[70] Ibid., XV.

[71] Ibid., 85.

[72] Ibid., 85.

They echo Roth's opinion about *The Well of al-Kâhina* being a geographical insertion to strengthen the myth.

Ultimately, Brett and Fentress opine al-Kâhina's story is a legend of the destiny of a Imazighen Prince (Khalid), due to her "prophesying her own death at the hands of the Arabs and the future of her sons in their service, is a celebration of the alliance of the two nations."[73] They assert that Imazighen embraced their new Arab identity as al-Kâhina prophesized, eventually leading to the creation of Islamic-Amazigh nation. This is a shift from an image of hostility to one of friendship between Imazighen and Arabs. Roth highlights this shift and sees Kusayla's death as the catalyst for al-Kâhina's resistance to the Arab invasion. Brett and Fentress emphasize the impact of Arabization on Imazighen and the need for adding not only Amazigh to the historical narrative, but also reimagining the region to include the society where women have more freedom than their Arab counterparts.

Abdelmajid Hannoum

Colonial Histories, Post-Colonial Memories: The Legend of the Kâhina, A North African Heroine, is the only book written in English exclusively on al-Kâhina, and possibly the most exhaustive literary study written on her. Abdelmajid Hannoum, anthropologist and author, uses a myriad of primary and secondary sources, mainly written in Arabic or French, attempting, "to show that the account of the Kâhina was first transmitted orally, and even when it was put into writing it continued to be part of folklore."[74] The only available texts about al-Kâhina were written after the

---

[73] Ibid.,87.

[74] Hannoum, *Colonial Histories*, 1.

Arab invasion and according to Hannoum commonality exists between Muslim and Imazighen folklore features.

In Chapter One, Hannoum examines available Arabic sources, including those used by Roth, Norris, Brett, and Fentress, but Hannoum's work is more expansive with his inclusion of key translations and authors names. Like Roth, he believes the earliest account is by Wâqidî (d. 822) reported by Ibn al-Athir (d.1233). Hannoum presents two more authors Khalîfa Ibn Khayyât al-'Usfûri (d. 854) and Balâdhurî (d. 892), whose accounts of al-Kâhina are brief. Hannoum argues:

> [f]or Wâqidî it is explicit, and there is a a description in his account of the misdeeds of the Kâhina—ill-treating Muslims, brutalizing the population of Ifriqiya. In Baladhuri it is expressed by the death of a Muslim general and by the takeover of a non-Muslim female ruler. In Ibn Khayyat, the appointment of Hassân as a general presupposes what the semioticians call a "situation of lack", which makes the Caliph send a hero to "fulfill the lack".[75]

Hannoum argues that Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam's (d. 871) account, "undertook a local history, that is, of Egypt and the Maghrib,"[76]by utilizing local memory.

Roth and Hannoum agree that the inclusion of Khâlid by Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam was a significant shift in the narrative. For Hannoum, the addition of sorcery along with al-Kâhina's voice into the narrative, "not only tells the story of the heroism of the Arabs, it tells that of the Berbers as well." The ideology imposed onto the narrative by this point "contains the myth of the civilizing mission of Islam… Hassân is the symbol of Islam and the Kâhina is the symbol of the *Jahiliya*," meaning pre-Islamic ignorance."[77]

---

[75] Ibid., 3.

[76] Ibid., 5.

[77] Ibid., 8.

During the eleventh century, significant elements are introduced to the narrative by geographer al-Bakrî (d.1094) and biographer al-Mâlikî (d. 1058). Al-Bakri's account in the eleventh century, states al-Kâhina and Hassân's first battle was in Gabes against "an old general of Kusayla,"[78] changing al-Kâhina's gender from female to male. This appears to be the only account that asserts al-Kâhina as anything but female. Hannoum argues that the insertion of a male anti-hero allowed Hassân to be defeated and the loss classified as a test of faith. Al- Bakri includes the location of al-Kâhina dwelling to be the fortress of Lajm,[79] and that she was killed at Tabarqa.[80] This provide a different, or perhaps more precise, geographical location for her death than previous scholars.

In the text by Maliki, also written in the eleventh century, Hannoum analyzes the spatial divisions within in the narrative:

> …the space the battle took place is divided along with the actors' in the following manner:
> Upstream v. Downstream
> Dar al-Islam v. Dar al-Harb
> Hassân and his army v. The Kâhina and her army[81]

These divisions validate Muslims' superiority over Imazighen and the details provided by the account further contribute to the story's authenticity or believability.

Hannoum asserts the following elements are incorporated into al-Kâhina's legend by the end of the twelfth century: two battles with Hassân, the introduction of Khâlid as her adopted son, and the location of her death. Hannoum moves forward into the *Medieval Historiography,* "that is

[78] Ibid., 10.

[79] Perhaps the fortress in present-day el Djem, Tunisia.

[80] Present day Tabarka, Tunisia – A coastal port city on the border with Algeria.

[81] Hannoum, *Colonial Histories*, 11.

from the thirteenth to the fourteenth centuries, by historians mainly, but not exclusively, Maghribi."[82] However, he begins with a ninth century account from Ibn al-Raqiq (d.1028):

> This account was presumably written at the beginning of the eleventh century, and my analysis of it leads me to rethink my hypothesis regarding the construction of the legend. The account is a part of a book entitled *Tarikh Ifraquiya wa al-Maghrib*, attributed to the Maghribi historian Ibn al-Raqiq (d. 1027-28), but most probably he didn't write it. I argue, however, that the book was written in the thirteenth century because it is only after the account of Ibn al-Athir that the story of the Kâhina integrated the themes that one finds in the book attributed to Ibn al-Raqiq. The reverse hypothesis would be that the story already acquired most of its themes in the eleventh century. This hypothesis does not stand, however, because neither Maliki nor Bakri mentions the very important theme of the destruction, a theme that has been systematically reported since Ibn al-Athir.[83]

Hannoum sees the ninth-century Waqidi's account, referred to by Ibn al-Athir in the thirteenth-century, as the starting point of his hypothesis. He attributes Ibn al- Athir's introduction of the scorched earth policy tactics ascribed to al-Kâhina.[84] But Hannoum suspects that the account by Ibn al-Raqiq could not have been written in the eleventh century.

Hannoum expands on Hirshberg's arguments and provides a more complete translation of David Cazes' French-colonial era poem, than provided by Roth:

> O Children of Yeschouroun,
> Do not forget your persecutors:
> The Chaldas, Caesar, Hadrian and the Kahiya,
> That damned woman, more cruel than the others combined,
> She gave virgins to her warriors;
> God has created her to make us expiate our sins
> But God hates those who make his people suffer.
>
> The refrain is:
>
> Give me back my children

[82] Ibid., 2.

[83] Ibid., 15.

[84] Additionally, Ibn al- Athir reported that the title of Kâhina was bestowed onto al-Kâhina due to ability to foresee the future.

To mourn me (after my death);
I have left them
In the hands of the Kahiya.[85]

Hannoum gives more context to its transmission and translation and describes it as, "[a] poem in Hebrew with Arabic characters communicated to Cazes by an erudite Jew of Constantine."[86] Despite the chain of events, Hannoum insists that the interpretation should be attributed to Cazes' and his "cognitive agenda…to persuade readers of the cruelty of the [al-]Kâhina toward Jews."[87]

Without addressing Ibn Khaldûn's possible agenda, Hannoum posits that his account of al-Kâhina is the final narrative by a historian, "a complete synthesis, integrating all the themes we have discussed, and adding two more details about the Kâhina."[88] Ibn Khaldûn reported she, "ruled the Berbers for thirty-five years, and lived one hundred and twenty seven years."[89] As Roth pointed out in his analysis, this would make her the same age as Moses.

During French colonial period in North Africa, the narrative of al-Kâhina, now acquired by colonial scholars, shifted from anti-heroine to heroine. Hannoum attributes the change to French writers, including Dennis Dominique Cardone (d.1783) Ernest Mercier (d.1955), and Emile-Felix Gautier (d.1940). Since Rome inhabited the region prior to the Arab invasion and France succeeded Rome, the French believed they," had the right, if not the duty, to colonize."[90] In their minds Imazighen were not Arabs, and therefore more likely to convert to Christianity. Hannoum,

[85] Hannoum, *Colonial Histories*, 52-3.

[86] Ibid., 53.

[87] Ibid., 53.

[88] Ibid., 17.

[89] Ibid., 19.

[90] Ibid, 37.

based on his analysis of literature on al-Kâhina, believes that only her gender as a female is consistent throughout the centuries.

Hannoum asserts, "[t]he oral tradition about the [al-]Kâhina contained many themes, integrated into the oral tradition with the consent of the community…thus a folklore theme is not the creation of an individual but of a group."[91] Relying exclusively on Arabic written sources from over 500 years after al-Kâhina's death Hannoum does not effectively make his argument that oral traditions, not just writings, perpetuated her legend. He acknowledges that, "[o]ral tradition about the [al-]Kâhina existed in North Africa, mainly in Algeria and Tunisia, long before the arrival of the French."[92] However, he goes on to credit the French with the preservation of al-Kahina, noting that "it was thanks to the French that some of this was collected, translated, and published."[93] The book is a selection of Arabic works and predominantly French scholarship on al-Kâhina, resulting in an analysis without a clear framework. Despite that, it is a great resource for scholars. It is a survey of not only of writings about al-Kâhina, but of many non-English works, and is an example of how history becomes legend, manipulated for different political agendas across time.

Bruce Maddy-Weitzman

Middle Eastern and African historian Bruce Maddy-Weitzman's points out the suspicious nature of the narrative of al-Kâhina, due to the delay the narrative's written transmision and that it is written from an Arab perspective. Though he reiterates Ibn Khaldûn's depictions, Maddy-Weitzman argues:

[91] Ibid., 13.

[92] Ibid., 131.

[93] Ibid., 131.

> The absence of any verifiable knowledge of her personal life, and even her real name (Dihya?), increased her mythological status, so much so that she is sometimes presented as the mother of another semimythological figure from this period, Tariq Ibn Ziyad, the commander of the mostly Berber Muslim forces who led the crossing of the Straits of Gibraltar and then disappeared from history, leaving only the rock that bears his (corrupted) name, Jabel Tariq.[94]

He believes al-Kâhina's story is a myth but acknowledges her role in French Algeria colonial project. Evoking parallels to Joan of Arc, several French writers appropriated and manipulated the legend of al -Kâhina, "in ways that suited their colonial agenda."[95]

Benjamin Hendrickx

In 2013, professor of Greek and Latin Studies, Benjamin Hendrickx argues that al-Kâhina was Christian and her story was manipulated. For him, "the role of the Roman Byzantines was confined to a 'footnote-status'; so were the references to their policy, administration, victories and defeats and military institutions."[96] He attempts to defend his argument by analyzing secondary sources. Hendrickx believes that Hannoum omitted works that did not support his hypotheses, such as Christides and Charles Diehl. Hendrickx postulates the presence of Greek sources on al-Kâhina and the overlooking of Byzantine sources, "may reflect some indifference of the Byzantines in general and their leaders as well as their historians in particular toward the North African situation."[97]

According to Hendrickx, in 697, after al-Kâhina's successful battle against Hassân, Byzantines regained control of Carthage and neighboring areas. He goes on to argue, "[i]t is

[94] Maddy-Weitzman, *Berber Identity Movement*, 23-24.

[95] Ibid., 40.

[96] Benjamin Hendrickx, "Al-Kâhina: The Last Ally of the Roman-Byzantines in the Maghreb Against the Muslim Arab Conquest" *Journal of Early Christian History* 3 (2013): 49.

[97] Ibid., 50.

possible, if not probable, that the Kâhina during this period destroyed fortresses, villages and the countryside near the Arab occupied territory in Cyrenaica in order to create a buffer zone against the enemy."[98] Unlike Roth's speculation that the portrayal of Kusayla as a Christian and al-Kâhina Jewish was symbolic of early Imazighen unification, Hendrickx believes that both were Christians who commanded armies comprised of Imazighen and Roman-Byzantine troops. He argues that the elements of al-Kâhina's story can be classified as the following:

- Factual:
    - Imazighen queen (or 'chief')
    - Is considered a 'prophetess.'
    - She continued the policy of Kusayla
    - Her sons converted to Islam
- Probable:
    - She had two sons
    - She carried a wooden image into war (possibly a cross)
- False:
    - Her sons had different fathers (Imazighen and Greek)
    - Genealogies attributed to her

Hendrickx never addresses the prominent character Khâlid or the origins of her name, which are two significant features in the Arabic narrative. He does present a good argument, but due to source limitations, his purpose seems as ideologically motivated as the other accounts.

Alexander Beider

By studying the history and origin of names, Alexander Beider addresses the theory of Judeo-Berbers. As a specialist in Jewish studies, he asserts that before the twentieth century, no Jewish text indicates a "mass conversion of Berbers to Judaism."[99] He cites al-Idris and Ibn Abi Zar' for

---

[98] Ibid., 52-53.

[99] Alexander Beider, "Jews of Berber Origin: Myth or Reality?," *Hamsa. Journal of Judaic and Islamic Studies* 3 (2016): 38.

mentioning of Jewish peoples in the region. However, it was not until Ibn Khaldûn that mention is made of converts to the religion. Beider highlights Ibn Khaldûn's narrative of al-Kâhina, but postulates that "[i]t is only after her death in a battle that Islam became really widespread among Berbers, while before the events in question various Berber tribes were Christian or pagan."[100] He goes on to accredit Ibn Khaldûn for the basis for what he calls Judeo-Berber theory and Nahum Slouschz 1908 writings for fortifying it with the elaboration of Khaldûn's narrative.

Beider, states that the notion of *Kâhina* deriving from a Phoenician feminized *Cohen,* that Slouschz suggests, is unfounded. Not only does the timeline not fit, but Slouschz fails to discuss the history of the Imazighen clans in any scientific manner. For Beider, *Kâhina* is entirely of Arabic origins, and, "the meaning [female soothsayer, fortuneteller] perfectly fits the information provided by Ibn Khaldûn."[101] After his lengthy analysis of scholars who support the Judeo-Berber theory based on Jewish surnames, Beider deduces that there is no, "genetic contribution of the Berber-speaking ancestors, proselytes or not, being significant for the Judeo-Arabic speaking Jews who live in Modern times in North Africa."[102]

---

[100] Ibid., 39.

[101] Ibid., 41.

[102] Ibid., 61.

Present-Day Representation

In 2006, Northwestern Africa Imazighen Art specialist Cynthia Becker photographed a graffiti mural just outside of Tizi Ouzou in the Kabyle region of Algeria that depicts three figures, one female (al-Kâhina) and two males (King Massinissa and Jugurth). Becker points out that, the subjects are inspirational historical figures utilized by the current Imazighen movements.

Figure 3 Graffiti Mural in Kabyle Region

(Becker, Cynthia. "The Kahina: The Female Face of Berber History." accessed February 18, 2019, http://www.mizanproject.org/the-kahina-the-female-face-of-berber-history/.)

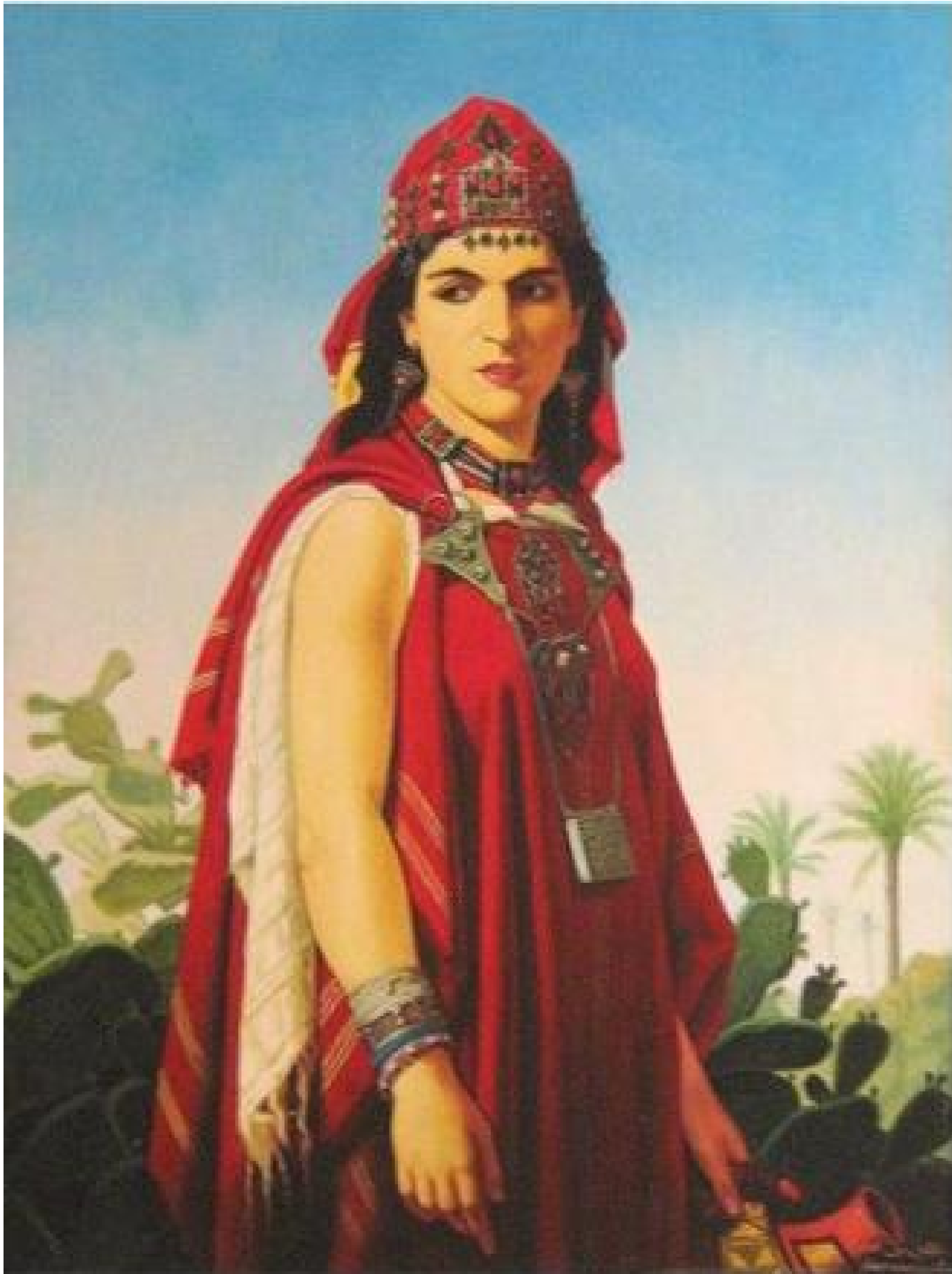


Figure 4 Lecomre-Vernet, Berber Woman, *France, 1870*

(From: Becker, Cynthia. “The Kahina: The Female Face of Berber History.” accessed February 18, 2019, http://www.mizanproject.org/the-kahina-the-female-face-of-berber-history/.)

Additionally, the use of Tifinagh in public spaces is also a form of resistance. Becker believes that the depictions of al-Kâhina, including this one, derive from the French orientalist Lecomre-Vernet's 1870 painting entitled *Berber Woman*. Becker describes the symbolism:

> Painted in the hyperrealist style typical of nineteenth-century orientalist art, Lecomte-Vernet painted the bare arm of this female figure to exude a sense of strength, while her sidelong glance suggests that she is assessing a threat—a glance also captured by the graffiti artist. Her red garment suggests courage and sacrifice, while she wears Berber-style jewelry, including a silver headpiece, broches (*fibulae)*, and silver bracelets. The desert background suggests the geographic setting of northern Africa, yet it is removed enough from any particular historical or social context that Imazighen activists can use this painting to illustrate the story of this powerful female warrior, to whom activist commonly refer to as the "Berber Queen."[103]

Becker continues to highlight Imazighen activism in Algeria, with the 2003 erection of a statue of al-Kâhina by *L'Association Aures El-Kahia*. The statue is located in Baghaii, Algeria town center and granted permission by the national government. However, Becker incorrectly states that Baghaii "activists have encouraged the government to preserve the ruins of a fortress they attribute to the Kâhina, claiming that she erected it to oppose the advancing Muslim army."[104] Imazighen activists did play a role in conservation of her fortress, however, the fortress in located in the town of El Djem, Tunisia not Baghaii, Algeria. It is possible the belief that El Djem is al-Kahina's last citadel, is due to early accounts stating her fatal battle was with Hassân at the fortress of Lajm. The fortress at El Djem was placed on the UNESCO List of World Heritage sites and in 2009 action was taken to preserve it.[105]

Al-Kâhina's persona is not merely used within the Aures Mountain Region or even North Africa for that matter. In the United States, there are several beauty product lines that use her name,

---

[103] Cynthia Becker. "The Kâhina: The Female Face of Berber History."

[104] Ibid.

[105] Thanks to Google's Street Map Project, El Djem is virtual accessible: https://youtu.be/O62nx0Q9zP0

typically revolving around Moroccan Argan oil. This is fascinating since al-Kâhina is not directly linked to the regions in Morocco. The Imazighen feminist movements there still use her image, but I wonder if it is due to Imazighen solidarity, transmission of the legend, or if there is a missing link in the narrative. The U.S. companies, such as Kahina-Giving Beauty specializing in argan oil beauty products, use al-Kâhina to sell their products and are guilty of not only misappropriating her identity but a culture.[106]

[106] New York based company Kahina-Giving Beauty, is featured in popular magazines including Vouge, Allure, and People, specializes in argan oil-based beauty products. According to their website, the argan used is sourced from, "high in the Anti-Atlas Mountains of Morocco," and their products are, "a truly effective and ethical line of luxury skin and body care products that bridges tradition and modernity by evoking the sultry spirit of Morocco through a modern gaze." By sexualizing Morocco and tying modernity to the West, Kahina-Giving Beauty evokes "Orientalism" (as coined by Edward Said).
The company boasts that one-percent of *profits* are given back to the community. The website also points out it can take up to eight hours for one woman to harvest enough nuts required for one liter of oil. Kahina-Giving Beauty sells 100mL for $82 that translates to $820 for one-liter, meaning one-percent of *sales* equals $8.20 and profits less than that. It should also be noted that high quality argan oil sells in the region for roughly $30 a liter, not including the likely wholesale discount. The most the community is receiving $38.20 per liter. If money is going directly to the women harvesting, they are making about $4.75 an hour.
The company only uses the pejorative term *berber* when discussing the Amazigh women on the website and there is no mention of al-Kahina's story or how the company's name was derived. – www.kahina-givingbeauty.com/

Figure 5 al-Kâhina Monument in Baghaii, Algeria

(Digital image. Algeria360. Accessed March 11, 2019. https://www.algerie360.com/khenchela-la-statue-de-la-reine-amazigh-dihya-incendiee-a-baghai/)

Figure 6 Roman Colosseum in El Djem, Tunisia

(Digital image. AncientOrigins. Accessed March 11, 2019. www.ancient-origins.net/ancient-places-africa/amphitheatre-el-djem-gladiatorial-arena-tunisia-003321)

Conclusion

The multifaceted elements of al-Kâhina's story covered in the literature make discerning fact from fiction difficult. I deduce from these sources that she likely implemented a scorched earth policy, mimicking the Roman war tactics like her predecessors, and that she was killed in a resistance battle against the Arabs. It is possible that she had sons and even an adopted captive son. It is difficult to ascertain their names and to determine al-Kâhina's own veritable name.

As far as her religious beliefs, there is not enough evidence to conclude she was Jewish. All support for her Judeo-Berber identity primarily steams from interpretations of Ibn Khaldûn's assertions. Based on the lengthy Roman occupation introducing Christianity to the region, along with the evidence placing Christians near the Aures Mountains, I surmise, if al-Kahina was anything other than polytheistic, she was Christian. However, more historical and present-day research is needed into the variety beliefs and practices by non-Muslim Imazighen in the Aures Mountain region. Such research should entail in-depth collection and analysis of the Amazigh oral traditions. Moreover, an investigation into new written sources, outside of Arabic and French, is needed. Perhaps there are epigraphic graffiti in Tifinagh or writings in Hebrew that have yet to be discovered or translated. Although al-Kâhina was killed in battle she still could have been buried or memorialized near the illustrious *Well of al-Kâhina* just waiting to be discovered by archeologists.

The use of al-Kâhina as a symbol of Amazigh unity in contemporary politics reflects a longstanding history of resistance organizing by the Imazighen. Due to the ambiguity surrounding al-Kâhina's beliefs and motives, she can represent a diversity of Amazigh people. This is one reason her legend has been appropriated and indeed why it has survived over fourteen centuries. Not only is her image depicted and her legend perpetuated, al-Kâhina's name is used by a variety of organizations in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and perhaps even Libya. The symbolic uses of al-Kâhina by Imazighen to combat political and social marginalization is new, but their desire for Imazighen for autonomy and equality is ever-present.

Bibliography

Abun-Nasr, Jamil M. *A History of the Maghrib*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

Becker, Cynthia. “The Kahina: The Female Face of Berber History.” accessed February 18, 2019, http://www.mizanproject.org/the-kahina-the-female-face-of-berber-history/.

Beider, Alexander. "Jews of Berber Origin: Myth or Reality?." *Hamsa. Journal of Judaic and Islamic Studies* 3 (2016): 38-61.

Brett, Michael and Fentress, Elizabeth. *The Berbers.* Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997.

Decret, Francois. *Early Christianity in North Africa*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009.

Fanon, Frantz. *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*. London: Earthscan, 1989.

Hannoum, Abdelmajid. *Colonial Histories, Post-colonial Memories: The Legend of the Kahina, a North African Heroine*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001.

Hendrickx, Benjamin. "Al-Kahina: The Last Ally of the Roman-Byzantines in the Maghreb Against the Muslim Arab Conquest.” *Journal of Early Christian History* Vol 3, 2 (2013): 47-61.

Maddy-Weitzman, Bruce. *The Berber Identity Movement and the Challenge to North African States*. Austin, TX: University of Texas, 2011.

Norris, H.T. *The Berbers in Arabic Literature*. Essex, London: Longman Group Limited, 1982.

Raven, Susan. *Rome in Africa*. New York, NY: Longman, 1984.

Roth, Norman. "The Kahina: Legendary Material in the Accounts of the Jewish Berber Queen.” *The Maghrib Review.* Vol 7, 5-6 (1982): 122-125.

Sadiqi, F. *Moroccan Feminist Discourses*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Silverstein, *Adam J. Islamic History: A Very Short Introduction.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.