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Sources on the History of the Berber Tribal Confederation of Şanhāja in the Middle Ages: The Issue of Reliability

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Abstract. The indigenous population of North Africa was represented by various Berber tribes, most of which belonged to three large genealogical confederations - Şanhāja, Zenāta and Maşmūda. The question, which the author of the present research examines, is the origin of the Şanhāja tribe, its ethnicity and possible ties with Arab tribes that migrated from territories of modern Yemen in the early Islamic period. This work reveals a range of problems associated with the authenticity of sources, the availability of copies, authors, translations. The medieval history of the Maghreb and Berber tribes is a promising, however, still insufficiently studied field for research. Understanding a reconstruction of the historical process, its features, ambiguity, and methodology in the light of the undertaken research appears to provide a necessary basis for formation of a correct approach to the study of sources. This article discusses the issue of historical authenticity and the genealogy of Şanhāja confederation as well as the origin of this ethnonym.

Keywords: Maghreb; Berbers; Şanhāja; historical authenticity; Middle Ages

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Источники по истории берберского племенного объединения санхаджа в Средние века: проблема достоверности

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Аннотация. Основным населением Северной Африки были различные берберские племена, большая часть которых принадлежала к трем крупным



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народам – санхаджа, зената и масмуда. Вопрос, который волнует автора как исследователя, это происхождение племени санхаджа, его этническая принадлежность и возможные родственные связи с арабскими племенами, мигрировавшими в тот период с территорий современного Йемена. Эта работа выявляет целый комплекс проблем, связанных с подлинностью источников, наличием копий, авторов, переводом. Средневековая история Магриба и берберских племен является перспективным и до сих пор недостаточно изученным полем для исследования. Понимание особенностей реконструкции исторического процесса, его неоднозначности и методологии изучения в свете предпринятого исследования кажется наиболее ценным, дающим необходимую основу для формирования верного подхода к изучению источников. В статье рассматривается вопрос исторической достоверности и проблема генеалогии народа санхаджа и происхождение данного этнонима.

Ключевые слова: Магриб; берберы; санхаджа; историческая достоверность; Средние века

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Introduction

The history of the medieval Maghreb is of considerable interest in the context of world history. The indigenous population of North Africa was represented by various Berber tribes, most of which belonged to three large groups – Ṣanhāja, Zenāta and Maṣmūda. The main issue examined by the author of the present research is the origin of Ṣanhāja, its ethnicity and possible kinship with the Arab tribes that migrated from territories of modern Yemen at that time, since the similarity of some ethnonyms cannot be accidental.

Interior regions of the Sahara still remain little explored. The existence of a local system of writing did not result in formation of the sustainable written tradition there. It is extremely difficult to track any changes in the ethnic or social political picture of the region, given that the “Berber written tradition” is practically absent, and in the medieval period before the beginning of the reign of the Almohad dynasty it was nearly nonexistent. Falsification of sources have undoubtedly taken place, but in this case, it is worth distinguishing between later falsifications and traditional genealogies, which quite often turned out to be fictitious, but influenced history and reflected the alignment of ethnopolitical forces.

It is generally recognized that South Arabian tribes took an active part in the conquest of North Africa, but how Ṣanhāja was included in this system is still under question.

In the article the proper names and terms of Arab-Muslim origin are given in accordance with transliteration, apart from personal names and geographical names that have entered the tradition. As for the Berber onomastics, it



is given in free transmission from French or Arabic, because its principles have not yet been developed.

Interdisciplinary Reconstruction of Historical Knowledge

A historian encounters the task of reconstructing the past in its maximum completeness, trying to reflect a fragment of historical reality as accurately and reliably as possible, forming an integral image of an object as a system of facts reflecting historical reality. This is called historical reconstruction.

In recent decades, the idea of interdisciplinarity has become more and more widespread as a methodological principle designed to open new horizons in the planning and organization of scientific research, as well as in the effectiveness of the latter.

Interdisciplinarity as a methodological principle of modern scientific research presupposes the widespread use of scientific information regardless of its disciplinary affiliation. One of the main tasks solved by any theory is to find an answer to the question “What is actually happening?” i. e. the task of revealing the essence of the phenomena covered by the theory.

The study of the medieval period of history is especially difficult due to the temporal distance between the object and the researcher, and here written sources play the main role, which imposes certain restrictions on the amount and quality of information received, especially if we consider areas without a developed written tradition. Namely, the Maghreb is such a region.

The expansion of the factual basis of historical theories is possible mainly due to ever deeper penetration into the structures of objects-carriers of information, i.e. by attracting new technical means and creating appropriate operating rules when working with historical sources (source studies and special historical disciplines should be considered as operating rules within historical theories).

Scientific reconstruction of the historical past (historical theory) as a process and as a result is inextricably linked with the application of knowledge obtained in other scientific disciplines, and in a certain respect resembles a prefabricated structure, and at the same time a historian inevitably turns to facts and patterns related to the subjects of other scientific disciplines, and historical theory is, among other things, an interdisciplinary synthesis of the results of these disciplines.

Problems arise due to the limited source material. First, the lack of information about the connections between various elements and subsystems in medieval societies (frequent lack of written sources); secondly, the incompleteness of the initial data; as well as the heterogeneity and weak structure of the source data.

However, when the historian has only some written sources at his disposal, another difficulty arises, and it is the problem of verifying the accuracy of the



data. Methodologically, the most significant are the studies of Imre Lakatos and Thomas Kuhn [1; 2, pp. 20-49]. Kuhn introduces the concept of paradigm and the scientific community, Lakatos creates a rationalistic reconstruction of the process of the development of scientific knowledge. The ideal rational reconstruction of the historical process, created by Lakatos, is a theoretical model of a specific historical process, a way of organizing historical facts.

The real historical process consists of an explicit, realized component, and an implicit, hidden, component. The task of historical research is, firstly, to reconstruct the hidden path of historical development in order to achieve a more complete historical knowledge; and secondly, in the study of small influences in order to concretize the historical process and more accurately determine its place.

The interpretation of such implicit historical processes and attempts to explain past events are fraught with the danger of incorrect conclusions and interpretations if they are based on inaccurate documents.

History is being rewritten: its previous scheme is being revised, significant historical events are rearranged again, and well-known historical facts are re-interpreted.

Falsification of historical sources is a deliberate distortion of data and misinterpretation of something, sometimes for nationalistic reasons. This process is associated with a whole system of various techniques and methods. The counterfeit does not appear by accident. Whether it is qualitative or not, it is a tool for achieving the goal. By forgery, the author tries to prove the veracity and truthfulness of his vision of history, be it past or present. Thus, forgery is also a historical source.

All such documents are intended to serve as an argument for political or public mobilization. They create a “scientific” basis for certain requirements (territory, sovereignty), they help to form ideology, and offer symbols of cohesion. In other words, the falsification of historical facts itself is a historical fact that deserves attention.

How to assess the reliability of the source used? The assessment is carried out using the methods of source analysis, as well as by comparison with other sources. Any scientific theory reflects reality only approximately, representing one of the steps on the path of knowledge.

Review of sources on the medieval history of the Maghreb

Historical science provides a reconstruction of the course of history by identifying reports of events and subjecting them to an impartial analysis. Reconstruction of the stages of the historical development of the countries of medieval North Africa is fraught with significant difficulties, but thus the higher proves to be the value of any research in this area.

Insufficient knowledge about the development of the history of North Africa in the Middle Ages due to the lack of data is the main problem.



For many years Oriental Studies in Russia “diligently” avoided the Maghreb region, and very few works are devoted to its history. In our country, the first serious studies of the history of Morocco appeared only in the middle of the 20th century. The most significant contribution to this area was made by the works of V.B. Lutsky and his wife N.S. Lutskaya, containing a detailed scientific analysis of the features of the development of the historical process and social structure of Morocco, but only in relation to the new and modern times. The period of the early Middle Ages was especially poorly developed. By now, the situation has not changed drastically.

The role of the Soviet Orientalist and a specialist in African Studies V.V. Matveev, author of “Medieval North Africa”, is of high importance. This is the only work devoted directly to the medieval Maghreb. R.G. Landa, N.N. Dyakov, M.F. Vidyasova, N.P. Podgornova, V.V. Orlov in their works also explored many aspects of the history and culture of the northwestern part of the African continent.

In foreign Oriental Studies, there were much more works on North Africa, and the largest stock of scholarly literature was created, naturally, in France and in the countries of North Africa themselves in French, and then, on a relatively modest scale, in Arabic.

Among such works should be mentioned the work of E. Fournel entitled “Berbers”, weak in conceptual position, but certainly useful for any historian of North Africa thanks to systematized information from Arab sources in the period from the conquest of the country in the 7th century AD.

In the 20th century AD, there appeared many works worthy of mention. Among them are the works of M. Vonderheiden, J. Marse, A. Terrace, R. Brunshvig, E. Lévi-Provençal, Hadi R. Idris. All of them adhered to a positivist approach of history and did not distinguish between natural and accidental phenomena in the historical process. They did not pay much attention to socio-economic problems. The value of the works of these scholars lies in the exceptional accuracy of the description of life in the countries of North Africa and the elaboration of the factual basic material of Arab sources.

It is hard not to mention J. Hopkins and his in-depth work *Medieval Muslim Government in Barbary: Until the Sixth Century of the Hijra*, as well as his articles in journals.

Arabic sources and literature created in the East, which give a general picture of the development of the historical process, allow us to determine the place of the described events in the general historical context. Sources written in North Africa (historically and geographically) are especially valuable because they provide the facts in the most detailed way.

Aḥmad al-Ya’qūbī, the famous Arab historian and geographer, spent about two decades in Egypt at the end of his life and probably made a trip from there to the Maghreb. His descriptions of the Maghreb countries date back to the decline of the state of the Aghlabids and the Rustamids of Tahert, on the eve of



their defeat by the Fatimids. As a testimony of an eyewitness, his works can be considered a reliable and important source [3, p. 154].

Useful information is reported by Abū-'l-Qāsim Muḥammad Ibn-'Alī al-Mauṣilī Ibn Ḥauqal an-Naṣībī (10th century). The information he provides is especially interesting because he traveled across North Africa. Impressions from what he saw, the accuracy of observations and the detailed description made his work *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-Arḍ* ("The Face of the Earth") a valuable source for the historian of North Africa. Ibn Ḥauqal gives valuable information about the stratification among the nomads of Northern Sahara, about their trade with the Sahara and Sudan, which makes his work significant for the disclosure of our topic. His journey to the Far Maghreb along the route and in time coincided with the path of another traveler, the Spanish-Arab geographer Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Warrāq.

Ibn Ḥawqal's information on trade through Sijilmāsa is of particular interest for analyzing events and the social, economic situation in the region.

The famous Arab geographer Abū 'Ubayd 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Muḥammad ibn Ayyūb ibn 'Amr al-Bakrī (died 1094) is the author of one of the most important sources on the history of medieval North Africa, *Kitāb al-Masālik wa'l-Mamālik* ("Book of the Ways and Kingdoms"). Especially interesting for us are the news about areas such as Sijilmāsa and Tamesna, for they are directly connected with the Ṣanhāja tribal confederation. In his work, al-Bakrī used the unpreserved work of Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Warrāq.

Of the later sources on the Maghrib, Ibn 'Idārī al-Marrākushī, a native of the Far Maghreb, a former qadi of Fez, should be noted. His work is a two-volume chronicle, written at the beginning of the 14th century, *Kitāb al-bayān al-mughrib fī akhbār mulūk al-Andalus wa'l-Maghrib* ("Book of the Amazing Story of the History of the Kings of al-Andalus and Maghreb"). The work is a compilation of chronicles, most of which have not reached our time.

Of particular interest is the work of another native of Fez and imam Abū 'l-Hasan 'Alī ibn Abī Zar' al-Fāsī (died in 1320). In his book on the history of the Maghreb, *Kitāb al-ānīs al-muṭrib bi-rawḍ al-qirtās fī akhbār mulūk al-Maghrib wa-tārīkh madīnah Fās* ("The Entertaining Companion Book in the Gardens of Pages from the Chronicle of the Kings of Morocco and the History of the City of Fes"), the author reports on the beginning of a powerful movement of the Almoravids. The work is usually known by its short title *Rawḍ al-Qirtās* ("The Gardens of Pages").

And finally, the most important source is the general history of 'Abd ar-Raḥmān ibn Khaldūn al-Ḥaḍramī (1332–1406), known as *Kitāb al-'Ibar* ("Book of Lessons"). It is not easy to characterize this work since an extensive literature has been written about its author. It should be borne in mind that although *Muqaddimah* ("The Introduction") to it is distinguished by a novelty of the theoretical approach to the material unprecedented for the Middle Ages, overall, the presentation is of a traditional character. The author describes in detail in chronological order the tribes, dynasties and regions, relationship of tribes, and contacts with neighbors. The main feature is that Ibn Khaldūn describes



the same events from different perspectives and in different contexts, which allows you to understand the sequence and causality of certain phenomena more fully. In the essay, you can find indications of the internal struggle of the tribes.

The “History of North Africa” by Charles-André Julien contains sufficiently detailed information about the history of Berber tribes.

Dictionaries and historical reference books on the dynasties and languages of the region, such as the works of K. E. Bosworth and S. Lane-Poole are of a great interest.

After analyzing the chronicles, research works in Arabic and French (C. Lévi-Strauss, G. Balandier, M. Brett and others) and sources in the genre of itineraries, paying special attention to the history of the Almoravid dynasty, it is possible to determine the main features of the social structure of the Ṣanhāja tribal confederation and determine the origin of the ethnonym entrenched in it.

Features of the study of the medieval history of the Maghreb

A feature of the medieval Maghreb, even in comparison with other Arab countries, was the incomparably higher role of nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes, Amazigh and Arab, in the economic, social, and political life. This circumstance, explained mainly by geographic factors, significantly influenced opinions of historians.

Another feature is the dominant role of nomadic and semi-nomadic cattle breeding. This component, being one of the elements of the symbiotic existence of the pastoralist and agricultural population in the entire region, predominated numerically in North Africa and had a greater influence there on its agricultural areas.

The main population of North Africa was various Amazigh tribes, most of which belonged to three large Amazigh alliances of Ṣanhāja, Zenāta and Maṣmūda. Many Amazigh tribes were not part of these unions, but they did not play such a significant historical role in this era as those mentioned above [4, p. 49; 5, p. 150–151].

The Ṣanhāja tribal confederation was divided into groups of nomadic tribes of the Sahara – the main population of the Maghreb deserts, among which the main tribes were Massufa, Lamta and Utriga – and two groups of Atlas tribes – non-nomadic and semi-nomadic farmers and pastoralists of the mountainous regions of the Central Maghreb.

Along with the nomadic people, a non-nomadic people existed in the numerous oases of the desert. The largest areas of oasis agriculture in the Middle Ages were Tafilalt with the capital at Sijilmāsa and Mzab with the capital at Biskra. For most of medieval history, these areas, though theoretically subordinated to the sheikhs of the powerful nomadic Arab tribes, were virtually completely autonomous.

The well-being of the people of the desert and desert regions depended not only on cattle breeding and agriculture, but also on the transit caravan trade



with Black Africa and on successful raids by nomads towards Senegal or towards the rich coastal northern regions whenever possible.

Apparently, already in the 3rd century BC some of the branches of Ṣanhāja, such as Hawwara, Levata, Lamtuna, Massufa, Guddala, gradually penetrated the Sahara Desert. Other groups, such as Jasula, Lamta, Haskura, remained nomads or delayed in the early stages of the transition to a semi-nomadic lifestyle, migrated to the plains of the Moroccan coast in the Sousse region. Others moved northeast to the foothills of the Middle Atlas and Reef [6, p. 43]. Some tribes remained in the oases around Sijilmāsa, then moved eastward, and spread to the area of the modern city of Constantine, where in the 10th century the Kutama tribe provided decisive support for the Fatimid uprising. The Zirid dynasty, which ruled from the end of the 10th to the middle of the 12th centuries, originated from the Algerian branch of the Ṣanhāja. The Hammadids of the 11th–12th centuries – the dynasty of northern Algeria and Tunisia – also had the Ṣanhāja origin.

The history of this tribal confederation is extremely complicated. It is possible to collect it piece by piece, having worked out sources not only on the history of Morocco, but also on neighboring states and territories, primarily the chronicles of an extensive period.

The Ṣanhāja tribes of the North occupied the territories between the Ouarsenis, the Titteri and South of the Bibans. The Ṣanhāja were the nomadic Berber tribes of the Sahara, who were the ancestors of the Tuareg, they occupied the same regions that the Tuaregs occupy nowadays. Despite belonging to different linguistic groups, similar customs, traditions, territorial location, linguistic borrowings make it possible to make such an assumption even without direct written evidence [7, p. 821–841; 8, p. 80–163; 9, p. 62; 10, p. 245; 11, p. 150–154]. In addition, the trade caravans that went from Northern Sahara, including the territory of Ouargla and the Nefus (Nafusa) mountains, were protected by the Tuaregs.

According to Leo Africanus, the Zenaga tribes date back to the inhabitants of Numidia [12, p. 21]. But Numidia in his description does not correspond to the Roman province of the same name and refers, rather, to a strip of land north of the Sahara. According to Strabo, they were the southern neighbors of the Garamantes [13], the ancient people of the Sahara first mentioned by Herodotus (about 500 BC) as “an exceedingly great nation” [14].

It is also difficult to find out the etymology of the name Ṣanhāja (صنهاجة). The representatives of the tribe call themselves *iznagen*. According to Ibn Khaldūn, Ṣanhāja are one of the seven main tribes of the Bran. The deformation of the name *iznagen* occurs among the Arab authors of the Middle Ages. Different variants of it are known: *aznāg*, *iznāgen*, *ifnayen*, *znāga*, *zenāga*, *ṣanāga*, *ṣenākha*, *ṣenhājī*, *ṣanhāja*, *ṣinhāja*. Their analysis intended to build a complete picture of the past requires good linguistic training in the field of Afro-Asian linguistics, as well as the ability to correctly interpret medieval historical sources [15; 16]



The significant chronological and territorial framework of this historical study, which focuses on the Ṣanhāja, as well as the heterogeneity and scarcity of sources determine the problems of reconstructing the main stages of the historical development of the Ṣanhāja tribal confederation and complicate the identification of the main features of the social structure of this group of tribes.

Historical accuracy problem

The concept of historical reliability characterizes a degree of correspondence of an event to historical reality. The past can be reconstructed on the basis of certain historical sources available to us. They can be any objects created by man such as architectural monuments, objects of applied art, various narrative sources, and/or documents as opposed to natural objects. Texts in the course of considerable periods and with a change in the socio-cultural background are subject to reinterpretation. Therefore, the content of historical knowledge is constantly changing.

In the humanities, a lot depends on interpretation, and based on the same facts, you can create completely different images of the history of the same society. The selection of facts plays a role as does the meaning assigned to them and the interpretation of the same events and facts. For instance we cannot be absolutely sure of the impartiality of Ibn Khaldūn, who is practically the only authority on the issue of identifying the origin and genealogy of the Ṣanhāja tribal confederation, whose opinion was then simply repeated and quoted by other historians. Moreover, he worked several centuries after the events described, which could not but affect the reliability of the information he provided.

In the traditional Arab and Spanish cultures of North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula, experts find many Amazigh elements, but the Arabs and Spaniards try to downplay their significance. For example: the military victories of the Arabs in the territory of modern Spain and Portugal in the Middle Ages owe much to the dedication and forces of the Amazigh population and army, but it is not customary to mention this. Therefore, what culture and history represent, and the way in which they appear before their bearers, are far from the same thing [17, p. 10; 18, p. 53–57].

Sometimes we are talking about non-literate peoples, but it also happens that the conquerors destroy the local written language and documents about the past, eradicating the historical memory that could feed separatism.

If we are talking about the conditions of traditional tribal social organization typical of nomadic peoples, which is closer to the topic of my research, then there could be no question of some kind of national unity. Throughout history, individual tribal groups have been able to migrate long distances and change their place in the system of tribal alliances. As a result, tribal unions and intertribal relations are rather unstable concepts.

In ancient and medieval states, it rarely occurred to rulers to care about the linguistic or cultural unity of their subjects, and political loyalty almost



coincided with personal loyalty to the monarch. Therefore, cultural unity was not a necessary basis for a political community but was already a derivative of a social or political organization.

It was kinship, tribal ties, or loyalty to the ruler, and by no means language or culture, that then lay at the basis of political alliances. However, considering all these difficulties, an historian was faced with the task of providing the authorities with legitimacy and the people with unity. This is how myths are created - first, about political unity based on linguistic and cultural kinship, and, secondly, about the extraordinary antiquity of such a unity. At the same time, the specificity of various historical eras is no longer so important.

Contrary to popular belief, originality is not something primordial, rooted in antiquity, but is formed in time from a variety of elements: traditional, new, borrowed. Culture is not a closed system; it is constantly changing. Therefore, any culture is hybrid.

Another interesting way of falsifying history is the “choice” of ancestors. Among many Muslim peoples of Africa, ethnic genealogies are traced back to Arab/Middle Eastern characters, most often from the Quran, but not only. For example, to ‘Uqba ibn Nāfi’, to ‘Ali, to the prophets, for example, Iṣḥāk (among the Somalis – Isak), as well as to Kisra, Nimrud, Uj, Musa (if the people have recently converted to Islam). This is fiction, but usually not falsification in the exact sense of the word. A completely different question is whether there is a reality in these genealogies. There is most likely little.

All this, firstly, indicates to the importance of ancestors, whose prestige affects descendants. And secondly, it creates a certain set of ancestors, real or fictitious, allowing selection. But a variety of components are involved in the formation of peoples: some could reward it with some special elements of culture, others help to convey the language. Such changes provide endless possibilities for choosing the ancestors that are most suitable for the current moment. The ancestors should, most importantly, possess certain valuable qualities, perhaps it is not always power and constant victories over the enemy, but they should always behave with dignity, protecting the weak, while remaining faithful to ideals.

Sometimes such details are drawn from historical documents, but if they are not found, then you must resort to forgeries. However, the fate of fakes can be convoluted. All such documents are intended to serve as an argument for political or public mobilization. They create a “well-founded” basis for certain requirements (territory, sovereignty), help shape ideology, and offer symbols of cohesion. In other words, falsification of historical facts itself is a historical fact that deserves attention.

The problem of the Ṣanhāja genealogy and the origin of the ethnonym

Ṣanhāja was a large group of Amazigh tribes, historically associated with the Maṣmūda tribes, the Imazighen of the West (Morocco); Ṣanhāja was Saharan Imazighen, occupying a large region from southern Morocco to Mauritania



in the west and from southern Morocco to Timbuktu in the south. They are Imazighen or Berbers or, although some of them claimed Arab ancestry, because it was prestigious. The migration of the Ṣanhāja tribes began with the formation of the great Almoravid empire.

According to medieval historians, the Berbers were divided into two branches – Bort and Barnes - which in turn were divided into tribes and tribal divisions [19, p. 276–280; 20, p. 143; 21, p. 16–23]. The descendants of the Barnes descendants (Barnos/Barnass) have settled almost throughout northern Africa since time immemorial. The coast and especially the ports regions, came under the control of the Phoenicians, Dorians, Carthaginians, Romans, Vandals and Visigoths. These peoples were forced to constantly reckon with the proto-state formations located inside the country [22, p. 28–31].

The Arab conquest, which was mostly in land, not in sea, caused upheavals previously unknown and changed the political situation previously marked by the ethnic stability of the Berbers. The Arabs brought with them Islam with its offshoots (Shiism, Kharijism), as well as their dynasties. The Amazigh peoples preferred to resist and fight for their independence. This process, marked by the victories of some Berber leaders and the defeats of others, led to a significant mobility of tribal groups that overlapped with each other geographically and ethnically, which was very seldom recorded in the sources, and therefore it is extremely difficult to trace any changes in the ethnic picture of the region.

The work of Ibn Khaldān *Kitāb al-ʿIbar* says that the Berbers were descendants of Barbara, the son of Tamallah, the son of Mazi, the son of Canaan, the son of Ham, the son of Noah [19, p. 278]. Rejecting any lineage that connected them to Arabs, they preferred to be associated with Ham, the son of Noah. Perhaps they were written there by Muslims and the “People of the Book” to integrate the Berbers into the biblical map of the world. Zinite father Zanat, considered to be the son of Khan (Yana) b. Yahya b. Solat b. Varsak b. Dhari b. Macbo b. Karval b. Yamla b. Madagiz b. Zadzhik b. Hamarkhak b. Krad (Grad) b. Mazig b. Harik b. Barra b. Barbar b. Cannan (Canaan) b. Ham. Meanwhile, the head of the Zenāta tribe claims that, according to Ibn Khaldūn, they originate directly from Barnos.

According to the Islamic historical tradition, Barnass (Barnas, Barnos, Barnos), the ethnic progenitor of the Barnes tribe, had 7 or 10 sons: Ezdah, Masmud, Aurab, Ujis, Ktam, Ṣanhāj (Senag), from whom the Ṣanhāja, Aurig, Lamt tribes came, Hascor, Kzul (Gzul). The descendants of the three brothers Ṣanhāj, Lamtan, or Lunt, and Aurig, became numerous and influential. They gained power over other Amazigh tribes and led them across the deserts to the Atlantic coast, spreading across the northwest Maghreb.

The tribal confederation of Ṣanhāja included 9 tribes, namely the Talcata (from which the Zirid and Hammadid dynasties originated) [6, p. 43], Anifa, Sharta, Mandala, Banu Warit, Banu Yaltissin, Gaddala, Lamtuna, Massufa [23]. The last three tribes were the tribes that supported the Almoravid dynasty.



According to Emil Janier, Ṣanhāja was divided into two branches: non-nomadic tribes living in Kabylia, the Tell Mountains and nomads, represented by the Litham tribe, inhabiting the Sahara [10]. This point of view is supported by Arab authors. They confirmed that Central Sahara was inhabited by a branch of the Ṣanhāja tribal confederation, the ancestors of the Tuareg. In addition, trade caravans that went from northern Sahara, from the Ouargla and Nafusa mountains, were under their protection [9, p. 62].

On the other hand, it is particularly important that the idea of the South Arabian origin of the main Amazigh tribes is also attested in the medieval Yemenite genealogical tradition. According to this Ṣanāja (Ṣanhāja) was one of the sons of 'Arīb b. Zuhayra b. Ayman b. al-Hamaysa' b. Ḥimyarī [24, p. 36–37; 25, p. 101]. But it is well known that the so-called South Arabian genealogies were artificially created under the influence of the Arab culture of the Bedouins on the eve of Islam or even after its triumph.

Such a theory raises questions, since such an association had more chances of emerging not in North Africa, but in Muslim Spain, where the Berbers, torn from their roots, needed an alliance with the Arabs. Therefore, they could participate in the confrontation between the Qaḥṭānids and the 'Adnānids [26, p. 10–16] and receive some genealogies of South Arab tribes in exchange for the support given to them. But this problem deserves further study, since it was not possible to find either confirmation of this assumption, or something that would clearly refute it in the sources.

There is a point of view that the tribal association of the Ṣanhāja originated from Arabia, at least its northern branches, that is, Ṣanhāja Shams, Dhal, Gaddu, and possibly Ṣanhāja Srayr, and were Arabs from South Arabia, more precisely from the regions of Eastern Hadramawt. It is worth noting that Ibn Khaldūn himself insisted on the Arab origin of the Ṣanhāja and Kutama tribes [27, p. 71–88; 19, p. 167–170]. This is confirmed by the testimony of the previously known Islamic historian Ibn al-Kalbi: “the Kutama and Ṣanhāj tribes do not belong to the Berbers: they are branches of the Yemeni population” [19, p. 167–176] quoted by Ibn Khaldūn.

Ultimately, the hypothesis of an Arab origin for the Ṣanhāja remains dubious; there may be branches that were Arabized by the Yemenis who settled down, mingling with their tribes, like the Ṣanhāja Shams. But it is impossible to deny that the Yemenis influenced this tribal union, and this is clearly seen in the analysis of toponyms and vocabulary [24, p. 35, 37; 28, Taf. 274; 27, p. 71–88; 19, p. 167–170].

The ambiguity of the data of physical anthropology is also worth pointing out: it cannot be argued that people with fair skin and blue eyes are necessarily the result of the presence – or rather, the transition – of any people from northern Europe. European pseudoscientists have long tried to prove that the Berbers are of Scandinavian or Gallic origin to justify the presence of “blue-eyed blondes” in the region. But Gabriel Camps was able to demonstrate that people of this appearance “always existed” in this area [29, p. 173]. Moreover, this



physical anthropological type is widely represented in the Middle East (Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq).

Conclusion

To develop an accurate picture of the history of the Maghreb and research sources related to the period of medieval and modern history of the region of western North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula, the study of the reliability of historical sources represents an important stage in understanding the historical process as such and in understanding the role of a reliable source in the reconstruction of the historical past.

This work elaborates on a wide range of problems related to the authenticity of sources, the availability of copies, authors, and translations. However, the medieval history of the Maghreb and the Berber tribes is a promising and still insufficiently studied field of research. Understanding the features of the reconstruction of the historical process, its ambiguity and the methodology of study in light of the research undertaken seem to be the most valuable, providing the necessary basis for the formation of a correct approach to the study of sources.

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