

Medicine and the Saints: Science, Islam, and the Colonial Encounter in Morocco, 1877–1956

IN *Medicine and the Saints*, Ellen Amster takes the colonised body as a category of political analysis in order to explore the relationship between corporeal knowledge and expressions of the body politic in Morocco. Through a creative interdisciplinary approach that combines a range of French and Arabic sources, Amster investigates the multi-layered relationship between colonial science and medicine and local Sufi logics of bodily, spiritual and social health. By focusing on a series of discreet medical encounters—a doctor’s murder, urban disease and revolt, national identity and welfare—Amster makes an important contribution to the growing body of scholarship that highlights the interplay between European and North African forms of knowledge ‘in an attempt to avoid and historicize modernity’s epistemological cage’ (p. 15). Ultimately, Amster demonstrates convincingly that ‘ways of knowing become ways of being’ (p. 3) and that the question of Moroccan bodies, moral hygiene and social health were important staging grounds for struggles over sovereignty, gender, religious power and modernity itself. These colonial-era struggles gave birth to a hybrid form of modern Islamic body politics that continues the dialogue between the mutually-constitutive citizen and body politic in Morocco today.

Colonial science and medicine have long been understood as important mechanisms for the spread of European colonial power. Rather than treating

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Penulis
Ellen Amster

Penerbit
Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press,
2013

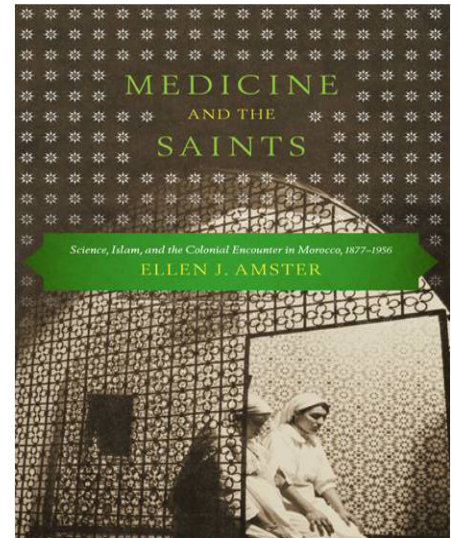
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ISBN
978 0 292 74544 5

metropolitan science as a totalising force that obliterated all forms of indigenous culture in its path, Amster highlights the negotiations between French and Moroccan ‘ways of knowing’ that were themselves protean and unstable. Following David Arnold and others, Amster extends Foucault’s notion of biopolitics to empire and shows how colonising forces achieve hegemony through the eradication of local forms of knowledge and the creation of new forms of subjectivity supported by reconstituted indigenous institutions. Amster makes an important theoretical distinction, however, by showing how bodies often elude the net of biopolitics.

The historical encounters between French and Moroccan ways of knowing



did not constitute a zero-sum game, as Moroccans ‘digested ...the experience of French colonialism and its forms of modernity’ (p. 5) and ultimately produced a new paradigm of Islamic modernism born out of the colonial encounter.

The book is divided into six chapters which build upon three overlapping themes: Sufi healing and the moral body of pre-colonial Moroccan society; French positivism and attempts to control colonised bodies; and the ruptures and challenges of colonial-era epistemologies of health and medicine.

Amster assumes the heavy task of reconciling colonial medical programmes and social histories of bodies in Morocco. *Medicine and the Saints* challenges the very notion of modernity and provides fresh insight into contemporary questions of post-colonial epistemologies of personal and social health. This book is essential for scholars interested in social life at the interstices of colonial-modern Morocco.

(Sumber: *Social History of Medicine Journal*, 2014 27 (3) 604-602)

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The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam

TOO seldom does a plodding dissertation become transformed into an elegant monograph. This 2010 dissertation is the rare, and welcome, exception. *The Millennial Sovereign* surveys a broad range of historical narrative from sixteenth century Mughal India, with frequent, productive references to parallel developments in Safavid Iran. It appears in a series focusing on 'South Asia across the disciplines', the avowed intent of which is to open up new archives and/or show how new methods apply to data from the Indian subcontinent. The author has conducted deep archival research with an accent on visual history and astrology. He demonstrates the intense competition among numerous elites for millennial legitimacy, that is, becoming the single figure who consummates the thousand year stretch of Muslim history, from 622 to 1582 ceor 1 to 1000 ah, in South Asia.

At the core of this book's argument are twin themes, highlighted in the subtitle: sacred kingship and (charismatic) sainthood. Both reflect what is variously called 'the spectacle of empire and the theater of sovereignty' (p. 110) or simply 'the theater of empire'. There is ample visual evidence, especially from commissioned paintings at the courts of the Great Mughals (Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan), which displays the eruption of a post-Timurid, Islamically validated image of the divine sovereign. Though the book's chronological range is broad, from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries, its central thesis hinges on the evidence of four monarchs— Humayun, Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan. Their legacy is mediated through Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb, the two elder sons of Shah Jahan, who competed with one another to become the next Great Mughal. Alas, this competition receives scant attention. Dara occupies less than two pages (pp.

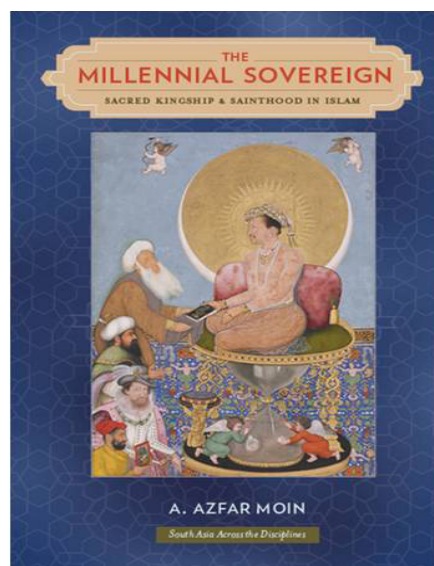
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Penerbit
New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2012

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xvp 343

ISBN
978-0231160360



213–15), while Aurangzeb becomes the reluctant legatee of the theatre of empire bequeathed to his sons and heirs through messianic rituals, linked to public and popular performances (pp. 233–9).

Yet the brief section on Aurangzeb is as welcome as it is revisionist.

Contrasting to the dour image of a puritanical ruler who tried to mitigate clashes amid subjects as well as defeats from opponents, we find an exuberant picture of both court customs and the everyday life of Hindustan under Aurangzeb. Despite strictures, it seems that both royalty and the populace at large frolicked, enjoying an ambient pluralism in the shadow of the Great Mughal's once dominant court. 'Despite his exhortations to the contrary', we are told, 'Aurangzeb's sons still celebrated the Persian New Year and had themselves weighed against gold and silver on their solar and lunar birthdays. Astrologers continued to dominate public and private affairs. Music was patronized and enjoyed throughout the realm. Poets wrote raunchy satires on the duplicity of the ruling elites. Naked mendicants roamed the streets mocking the pious and powerful' (p. 234). Aurangzeb, in short, could not and did not stem the tide of popular sentiment for the tradition of Timurid sacred kingship, one crafted by his forebears and still observed, albeit reduced, among his successors.

The *Millennial Sovereign* does deliver on its promise, 'to recover some of these lost modes and genres that had once anchored notions of sovereignty' (p. 240). The thin line between exalted kingship and lower case divinity is made thinner, almost invisible, and those who participated in the royal courts of Safavid Iran as well as Mughal India were largely successful in sequestering the symbol of sovereignty to themselves and their descendants. When their empires ceased, it was to a different sacred centre, the individual Muslim self, that reformers directed their attention, but without the benefit of adab.

(Sumber: *Journal of Islamic Studies*, January 2015; 26: 69 - 72.)

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