

History and methodological issues in Mauritania: What horizon?

التاريخ والاشكالات المنهجية في موريتانيا: أي أفق

Pr. Baba Ahmed cheikh sidiya ♦

professor at the Higher School of Education, Nouakchott - Mauritania
babaahkhch@gmail.com

Received: 17/10/2024 Accepted: 20/03/2025 Published: 30/04/2025

الملخص:

يسعى البحث إلى محاولة النظر في هذه الكتابات المعرفية ومناهجها واهتمامها، حول الغاية من التاريخ وطرح سؤال التجديد في هذا الإطار، حول المقاصد والغايات والأهداف المبتغاة منه حسب المخيلة الجموعية، وهو أمر حدد طبيعة هذه الكتابة في خطوطها العريضة على الأقل في منهج سردي لا يتبنى أي طرح بنيوي؛ لأن الهدف يكمن في إبراز مواضيع من قبيل الأيام والأنساب المحلية وارتباطها بمحيطها العربي والإفريقي خصوصا النسب الشريف منه في عملية ترتبط بالأساس بالرحلة إلى الحج وتعريف الشناقطة بأنفسهم في الديار المشرقية. وعموما فإننا نسعى في هذا المقال إلى تلمس المعطيات العلمية والفكرية للنظر في هذا الموروث التاريخي وغربلته. الكلمات المفتاحية: التاريخ؛ المنهجية، موريتانيا؛ الموروث التاريخي.

Abstract:

The research seeks to attempt to examine these cognitive writings, their approaches and interests, about the purpose of history and to pose the question of renewal in this framework, about the

♦ Pr. Baba Ahmed cheikh sidiya

History and methodological issues in Mauritania: What horizon?

purposes, aims and objectives sought from it according to the collective imagination, which is something that has determined the nature of this writing in its broad outlines at least in a narrative approach that does not adopt any structural approach because the goal lies in highlighting topics such as local days and lineages and their connection to their Arab and African surroundings, especially the noble lineage in a process that is primarily linked to the journey to Hajj and the introduction of the Shinqiti themselves in the Levant. In general, we seek in this article to explore the scientific and intellectual data to examine this historical heritage and sift it.

Keywords: History; Methodology; Mauritania; Historical Heritage.

introduction

Today, the Mauritanian university lesson needs a lot of attention to the curriculum and knowledge of the tools for interpreting the historical phenomenon in its various dimensions and manifestations over a long period of time, in the contexts of the event and the factors of influence and impact combined.

Therefore, the question about the concept of history in general seems to be a reflection of the development of knowledge and mentalities and the meaning of the event itself in the understanding of the writer, intellectual and layman of the historical phenomenon and its role in a given society. Therefore, the concept will gradually be liberated over time and formulated according to the conditions of all human societies, whatever their sects, doctrines or knowledge.

History, for the ancients, from the Greeks, Romans and Arabs, was considered a narration of the events of past nations, including kings and dignitaries, without regard to the contexts that produced the historical event itself, so that the speaker would remain elitist in his dealings and the material produced in terms of events and their type. Therefore, the focus was the appearance of the great events that affected human history, such as earthquakes, wars, pandemics and epidemics, i.e. the political and event-related aspect, transcending talk about the public and the general public in their various types and classifications.

The Mauritanian case does not seem far from this context, despite the differences in the development of the concept and purpose of history according to

the development of mentalities, knowledge, and the source material provided, which we will address in this article with a degree of analysis and contemporary methodological approaches.

The problem of the paper: History is no longer the traditional science concerned with sultans and kings, but rather the historical field has become a field Fertile for research into the social and intellectual transformations that societies are exposed to throughout their deep histories, which makes this type of topic new in expressing the various things that hinder serious historical writing despite the abundance of knowledge production in the country, and in light of this problem:

What are the motivations for historical writing in the Mauritanian field? What are the methods used in writing about the phenomenon? What similarity is there between it and traditional writings in the Islamic field? And what are the most prominent obstacles that stand as a stumbling block in the way of the modern development of historical writing in terms of topics, product and content?

The concept of history in Mauritania seems very vague in its origins, and is driven by the developments that the region will witness throughout its history, influenced by factors that we consider necessary to include in order to be familiar with some of its aspects and foundations:

A- A factor related to the influence of the Arab Islamic civilization and its interest in history and its purpose, as it is ultimately a narration of the events of past nations, the purpose of which is to learn from their conditions and outcomes, and a factor related to companionship from stories and narratives about the conditions of previous civilizations.

B - A factor related to the internal local conditions of the Mauritanian region and its impact on migrations and cultural interaction between it and the regions adjacent to it in North Africa or West Africa.

History and methodological issues in Mauritania: What horizon?

C - The emergence of some ancient historical cities such as Chinguetti, Lata, Tichit and Ouadane, and the emergence of the annual concept of writing history, which constituted a new factor for interest in history and its purpose represented in the emergence of annals of the history of these cities and writing about their most prominent events of famines, epidemics and wars...

The French colonialism, which would constitute a very favorable incentive for the abundance of writings about the Shinqiti field in defense of identity and definition of it and focusing on the conditions, days and countries in this field. The truth is that this period would witness the most prominent traditional historians who wrote in a remarkable abundance, sometimes for demand and on the other hand for personal initiatives.

Therefore, the construction of historical knowledge in Mauritania appears to be significantly behind its neighboring Sudanese or Moroccan contexts, influenced by its local problems of the predominance of the Bedouin character, the traditional structure of society, and the desert conditions that do not help in documentation or interest in history in general, then what the historical process itself leads to in terms of sensitivities and turns that may be unspoken in traditional societies, transcending everything that could be reflected on the writer of the event himself. (Muhammad Ahmad Yura, 1992, p. 6)

This is something that made the interest in documenting history obsolete, even though the circumstances and conditions imposed the creation of multiple types of these writings that would appear with Ahmed bin Al-Hajj Al-Kurdi, who died in 1130 AH, in his book *Al-Ansab*, which is perhaps one of the oldest of these books that appeared in this spatial context, and the book *Lubb Al-Albab fi Haqaiq Al-Ansab* by Sheikh Sidi Al-Mukhtar Al-Kunti, who died in 1226 AH, and the *Conquerors of Africa, its Kings and Tribes*, and the book *Al-Haswa Al-Baisaniyya fi Ilm Al-Ansab Al-Hasaniyya* 1271 AH (Hama Allah Ould Al-Salem, 2010, p. 14).

Contemporary researchers believe that the issue of the Shinqiti Waqf in the land of the Two Holy Mosques and the extent to which the people are entitled to benefit from it, given their affiliations to Arab lineages, and their knowledge of the jurisprudential and Arabic texts about dates and days, is the best witness to that and a criterion for it. (Hama Allah Ould Al-Salem, 2003, p. 114)

Therefore, this demand seems to be one of the grievances that have been monopolized by the mind and that scholars and jurists have called upon to defend and defend the right and pure lineage of this field, such as the book *Sahihah al-Naql fi Alawiyat Id'al* and Bakriya Muhammad Qali, who died in 1233 AD. It is a matter that will bear fruit at the level of interest in incidents and taking care of them and writing scientific trips to the Hijaz in a process that, from our point of view, is not devoid of giving an image of the other in the Arab fields from defining the self in a tendency towards the desired goal of linking it to an Arab Islamic field that is considered its origin and first source, even if the countries, conditions, circumstances and distance from the origin and source differ. (Sidi Abdullah bin al-Hajj Ibrahim, 1989, p. 424)

This greatly accelerated the emergence of this type of writings defending and defending the right of the people, in addition to what is known locally as the annals books written in the Shinqiti context, following the approach followed by the first ones in terms of caring about history and its purposes. It is a reason for preaching and learning lessons and bringing benefits to previous nations. (Ahmed Al-Shukri, 2005, p. 98)

Perhaps the lack of interest in historical material was expressed by countless jurists and scholars, although it was mostly a direct reaction to a specific event, as Sheikh Sidi Baba says in his book, *The Emirates of Idou'ish and Mashdhuf*, which is the following: "As for what follows, it is not hidden from the wise, intelligent, and virtuous scholar what the books of the art of history contain of scientific issues that are hardly found in the books of other arts, and of wisdom and manners that cannot be obtained from other means, and the talk is a passion and news about matters that reveal legal rulings to the scholars'

History and methodological issues in Mauritania: What horizon?

observers and sound opinions of the most virtuous of the wise, and the good deeds that are praised by those who listen to the saying and follow the best of it, and the stories that the virtuous narrate in the evening conversations of the moon and in the breezes of the dawn and the breaths of the flowers, and entering into the sermon and consideration from each chapter by looking at the stories of those centuries for the people of understanding.” (Bab bin Sheikh Sidiya, 1994, p. 90)

This text shows throughout its length the nature of the intent of history and the purpose behind writing it. The historical event is ultimately a set of ideal values and valuable data that must be benefited from and learned so that the benefit from it is widespread and its harm is avoided if any. Indeed, the text and others are a sermon for newly emerging nations, drawing on their past and the outcomes of things in a given that is not devoid of linking it to the sacred and benefiting from the historical process as a whole according to this perspective.

In order for interest in the history of the first Arab Islamic civilization to remain an intellectual preoccupation and a rich subject for discussion and writing about it, it is necessary to pay attention to the Prophet Muhammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, in talking about his biography, his food, his clothing, his lineage, the lineage of his uncles and maternal uncles, and the Islamic conquests and their paths, such as Muhammad al-Yadali, who died in 1166 AH, in his book *Al-Hilla Al-Siri fi Ansab Al-Arab wa Sirat Khair Al-Wara* and others. (Al-Khalil Al-Nahwi, 1990, p. 50)

The second axis: the type of historical material presented:

We mean here the nature of these sources and the type of writings written by Mauritania, which can be summarized as follows:

Annals books: Despite the antiquity of this type of source in the Arab-Islamic civilization, which practically refers to the meaning of the year, it is in essence a civil tradition practiced by the people of the cities (Oualata - Tchit - Tidjikja, Nema, Timbuktu) in recording their conditions and days and the incidents they went through, characterized by talk of drought, coldness and epidemics. It is a tradition that was absent from

the countryside, which is the largest geographical area and area in the Mauritanian region.

Books of biographies and virtues: This type of book is widespread in the Mauritanian field, due to its abundance, variety of styles, and the scientific purposes behind writing it. Therefore, scholars were interested in talking about men and jurists in a discussion that is not devoid of encyclopedic knowledge of cultural life and its developments over the centuries.

Mauritanian history at the beginning of the history of the national state.

Genealogy books: The civil document seems to hold its place even today in the Mauritanian field, and this is something that finds its historical justification in that each tribe or group has its own lineages and representations produced by sons and grandsons without being looked at by specialists and scholars. Rather, the matter is considered very dangerous to talk about or refine and work to polish it from impurities.

Colonial books: There is no dispute about the importance of the colonial writings produced by European travelers, even if they were. With the aim of controlling the country, it provided the reader and researcher with a set of observations about the history of the region and a study of its social and economic conditions and a look at the specificity of the desert region and the nature of its climate, which constituted an additional asset for those following this history and its stages (Mohammadou Mohamedhen, 1998, p. 26)

Oral sources: Collective memory is considered one of the most important historical sources in Mauritania in the form of

The ancients adopted it based on the authenticity of its chains of transmission transmitted by trustworthy men (in the form "so-and-so narrated to us" and "so-and-so took it"), which is an approach rooted in Islamic encyclopedias. Consequently, the oral tendency, unless scientific conditions are set for it, will be affected by regional conditions and existing social structures to form content that can be referred to in times of local necessities in entitlement, ownership, and historical legitimacy. (Al-Amin Muhammad Babah, 2015, p. 400)

History and methodological issues in Mauritania: What horizon?

The third axis: History and the question of methodology: What horizon?

Despite the strenuous efforts made by contemporary researchers since the eighties of the last century in producing valuable studies on the Mauritanian field and

mostly objective approaches that take the contemporary method as their basis and an axis according to which they move to understand society and its profound transformations.

These efforts were limited to sponsoring some projects that did not survive and did not last long, such as sponsoring the archaeological research that took place in Awdaght and Koumbi Saleh, for which the late Mauritanian President Mokhtar Ould Daddah presented the first writings. The state also directed some historians and newsmen, such as Haroun bin Sheikh Sidi Baba and Mokhtar bin Hamdoun, to write aspects of the country's history and gather its scattered sources (Mokhtar bin Hamdan, 1966, p. 2). During the 1970s, in 1974, the Mauritanian government established the Mauritanian Institute for Scientific Research, and entrusted this emerging institution with collecting and organizing historical manuscripts. This institution supervised the publication of some historical works within the framework of Written and Oral Traditions Project in Mauritania.

Tribal and clan structure: The tribe, in its relationship with the state, appears to enjoy many privileges, as the latter is not able to Getting rid of its symbolism within a framework that glorifies the tribal heritage and submits to it according to the involuntary alliance and solidarity during hardships and epidemics or when interests are affected (Muhammad al-Mukhtar bin al-Saad, p. 46)

This is something that has been reflected in the development of cultural industries, and has even limited their impact and the role of transcending them in change and creating a different opinion that is subject to science and objective approaches in that direction. This is something that has made many writings today subject to the standards of the

individual ego in the context of his search for the legacy of fathers and grandfathers and writing about them in search of a past that can be employed in their roles and functions and the symbolism of that in their societies. Consequently, pure science and academic methodology are absent in these works, despite the

However, the observer will notice that writing about people's destinies, history and structures will start from this principle in the absence of specialized centers that oversee the history of the field and its role, although the issue is not related to a specific field or region that may have its initial contributions regardless of their credibility. However, what can be noticed is that it will be linked to determinants according to which what is produced is understood and justified according to the general rule of the lack of comprehensive writing. Thus, any work in this field has every excuse in its environment as long as nothing has been written or composed, and what is found is eroded in boxes devoured by the desert on the one hand and by mismanagement (Hama Allah bin Al-Salem, 2010, p. 15). It is as if the observer can link two histories or periods without much effort, especially in the principle and foundations from which it is based. Historical writing was scarce and organically linked to its context in the absence of authority and the lack of means. However, it is self-evident here that contemporary writing will start from the same principle, finding an excuse for the absence of writing despite the existence of the state and the fluidity of the ruling system.

Oral culture and its lack of subjection to the scientific standards known by specialists have contributed to its widespread circulation and its emergence as a primary source in writing about the founding histories of this field, without considering its authenticity or weakness as a specific family sanctity for a group or class. (Al-Amin Muhammad Babah, 2015, p. 410)

Status of Mauritanian manuscripts: Which are distributed between typed manuscripts in the Mauritanian Institute for Scientific Research, and they are in the best condition. Its conditions are classified, but the process of publication and

History and methodological issues in Mauritania: What horizon?

investigation is still minimal, and among the indigenous manuscripts - which are the majority - are considered personal property and pure family heritage, which makes any historical writing about the history of this country incomplete unless those works come into existence and become in the hands of researchers. (Bab Bin Sheikh Sidiya, 2013, p. 4)

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the need to write the history of a nation appears to be an urgent demand and a strategic vision from a contemporary perspective that goes

beyond the individual to a comprehensive structural context that studies and analyzes phenomena according to transformations and places of migration without excluding any party or social class

Perhaps the demand for openness to auxiliary sciences and sending scientific missions to study the national heritage in global libraries and geographically similar areas is a justification for establishing certain assumptions, denying them, or subjecting them to contemporary historical criticism.

Therefore, it appears that Mauritanian history has not been written to date in a scientific manner that goes beyond the individual and his tendencies and

desires in creating events and the captivating imagination of the sons of the tribe, which is considered a family heritage that falls within the framework of the sacred and historical legitimacy.

Perhaps interest in fatwas, incidents and archaeological evidence will constitute an additional cognitive asset for this history, and provide information that is absent or hidden from what is unspoken and overlooked in the local history of the homeland. In general, a group of factors have limited the recent developments in curricula and their application to the Mauritanian situation, which are represented in the following:

Tribal and clan structure: The tribe, in its relationship with the state, appears to enjoy many privileges, as the latter is not able to Getting rid of its symbolism in a society that glorifies tribal heritage and submits to it according to involuntary

alliance and solidarity during hardships, epidemics, or when interests are affected.

Results:

Oral culture and its lack of subjection to the scientific standards known by specialists to its widespread circulation and emergence as a primary source in writing about the founding histories of this field, without considering its authenticity or its weakness as a specific family sanctity for a group or category.

The absence of modern studies on topics of a modern nature, such as epidemics and famines, i.e. the long history according to the concept of the French Annales School. Therefore, titles from the country's history in the plural form will increase in modern studies after independence.

Not deciding on the identity and constants according to which this history is written, i.e. the rules according to which this history is written, with a view that is not devoid of tradition and a view of historical writing as a vessel for the tribal structure on the basis of which ranks and positions are given.

Recommendations:

Establishing a scientific encyclopedia that is concerned with the history of this region, far from the tribal tendencies and ideas that are accused at the expense of general history, which makes historical writing in this region depend primarily on the regional dimension, and these are local writings that abound in the Mauritanian field by amateurs and non-specialists.

Archiving these writings, trying to verify them, and working to bring them into existence, so that the ravages of time do not bury them.

Working on publishing the Nawazil manuscripts and placing them in state institutions for researchers to review, which will change many of the rulings and assumptions in this history.

It is prior to anything else to establish a national body that includes various researchers and to consider the experiences of others and benefit from their expertise in order to write the

History and methodological issues in Mauritania: What horizon?

history of a nation that is far from flattery, outbidding, and other scientific tools.

List of sources and references:

Mohammed bin Ahmed Yura, Telling the rabbis about the news of the wells, Investigation by Ahmed Ould Al Hassan, first edition, Institute of Studies African, Rabat, Morocco, 1992.

Hamahoullah Salem, History of the country of Chinguetti Mauritania, First Edition, Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilmiyah, Beirut, Lebanon. 2010.

Hamahoullah Salem, Mauritania in Arab memory, First Edition, Center for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, Lebanon. 2003,

Ahmed bin Al-Amin, The mediator in the biographies of the writers of Shinqit, Fourth Edition, Al-Khanji Library, Cairo, Egypt. 1989.

Ahmed Al-Shokry, Sudanese historical writing as a model by Kaat and Abdul Rahman Al-Saeedi, African Maghreb: Magazine Specializing in Heritage and African Studies, Issue 6, Rabat, Morocco, 2005.

baba, Sheikh Sidia, The Emirates of Idouich and MashdhoufA study in Mauritanian political history, study and investigation by Izid Beih Ould Mohamed Mahmoud, First Edition, National Educational Institute, Nouakchott - Mauritania. 1994.

Al-Khalil Nahoui, The land of Chinguetti, the lighthouse and the ribat "A presentation of scientific life, cultural influence and religious jihad from During the Mobile Bedouin Universities, Lecturer, First Edition, Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization, Tunis, 1987.

Mohamedou Mohameden, Foreign sources of contemporary Mauritanian history, a reading of the Senegalese archives, Conference proceedings The First Contemporary History Forum, Al-Tamimi Foundation for Research and Information, held from 27 to 29 November 1997, Zaghouan, Tunisia, 1998.

Al-Amin bin Muhammad Baba Al-Mustafa, The conflict between the written and the oral and the paradoxes of the Mauritanian heritage, within the works of oral history: approaches to

concepts, methodology and experiences, first edition, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, Doha, Qatar. 2015.

Al-Mukhtar bin Hamdoun, Bibliographical inventory or directory of Mauritanian authors Mauritanian Institute for Scientific Research, Nouakchott - Mauritania, 1966.

Mohamed El Mokhtar Ould El Saad, Obstacles to research in Mauritanian history, Arab Historian Magazine, Issue No.6, Cairo - Egypt. 1994.

Baba Sheikh Sidiya (2013), The social and economic history of the Lebanese in the country of Chinguetti through Fatwas and Incidents, PhD thesis, Contemporary History, Department of History, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Hassan II University - Morocco. 2013