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The Demise of Slavery in Southwestern Morocco, 1860-2000: Economic Modernization and Transformation of Social Hierarchy

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New Book

*The Demise of Slavery in Southwestern Morocco, 1860-2000:
Economic Modernization and Transformation of Social Hierarchy*

By Madia Thomson

Edwin Mellen Press, Cloth

349 pp., ISBN-13: 9780773414600, 2011.

Description from the Publisher:



This book examines the changes that occurred in the Moroccan social hierarchy from the pre-Protectorate to the post-Independence period (1860-2000). It argues that the actions of slaves encouraged changes in the institution of slavery. These changes combined with the forces of economic modernization to reshape social configurations in nineteenth century Morocco. The study draws heavily on Arabic, Berber and French archival and oral data collected in France and Morocco. The study first examines life in Berber-speaking Tazerwalt (southwestern Morocco) where the saint Sidi Ahmed ou Moussa established a zawiya, religious center, in the sixteenth century. Exiled by the mid-seventeenth century, his descendants, the Abudamias regained their economic and political importance to run Tazerwalt as a principality in the nineteenth century. As elsewhere during this period, the region consisted of social groups with varying social power: shorfa, descendants of the Prophet Muhammed; igourramen, descendants of a saint; imazighen, white Berbers; issouqin, Black Berbers; isemgan, slaves; and, udain, jews. The religious heritage attributed to the shorfa and igourramen assured high social standing. Lacking similar standing, imazighen, isemgan and issouqin defined themselves in terms of economic function, family origins and physiognomy; differences of religion distinguish them from udain. Using this social configuration as a baseline, the manuscript shows how a combination of government policies and human agency under the Protectorate promoted both domestic and international migration amongst non-elites to eliminate slavery and give Morocco its current fluid, increasingly urban social configuration.