
Making and Remaking Mosques in Senegal.

Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2011, 408 p., bibl., ill.

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Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafriaines/18050>

DOI : 10.4000/etudesafriaines.18050

ISSN : 1777-5353

Éditeur

Éditions de l'EHESS

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 1 avril 2015

ISSN : 0008-0055

Référence électronique

Ousmane Kane, « Making and Remaking Mosques in Senegal. », *Cahiers d'études africaines* [En ligne], 217 | 2015, mis en ligne le 31 mars 2017, consulté le 24 septembre 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesafriaines/18050> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesafriaines.18050>

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CANTONE, Cleo. — *Making and Remaking Mosques in Senegal*. Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2011, 408 p., bibl., ill.

- 1 According to a 2010 Pew Charitable Trust Survey, 98% of the Senegalese believed that religion is very important in their life. This makes Senegal the most religious country in the planet. 95% of the twelve million Senegalese are Muslims and Christians constitute about 5% of its population. The spread of Islam lasted over a millennium in West Africa, culminating in the 20th century of European colonial rule, which witnessed the fastest spread of Islam than any other period in history. To rule tens of millions of West African Muslims, colonial powers, including France, realized that coercion alone was not the panacea. They strove to gain acquiescence to their rule by sponsoring numerous religious institutions, including Muslim tribunals, Islamic schools, the pilgrimage to Mecca of Muslim notables, and last but not least the sponsorship of mosques. Thus, the French colonial state made also a contribution to what Cleo Cantone describes as the making and the remaking of mosques in Senegal.
- 2 In this study, Dr Cantone provides an architectural history of mosques that is woven into the political history and religious sociology of Senegal. The book is based on extensive field research in Senegal, and other North and West African countries. With a solid background in art history and anthropology, the author mastered the analytical tools needed to undertake this research. The architectural history of Senegalese is broadly organized around the main periods of Senegalese history: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. The overall number of Senegalese mosques is estimated at 48.000. Dr Cantone focuses on a few dozen mosques that are representative of dominant styles that flourished in the country. To illustrate the pre-colonial style, she analyzed “Sudanese style mosques”, which dominated the landscape from the 15th to the 19th

century. With very nice pictures, she shows remarkable architectural similarities between main Sudanese mosques belonging to that style, including old historical mosques in Boundoukou, Cote-d'Ivoire, Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, and Segou, Mali. In Senegal, the author looks at a few mosques of similar style in Fuuta Toro and argues that they proliferated following the 18th and 19th century Fulani led-jihads. The defensive character of these mosques, she further argued, springs from the ribat (fortress) style which originates in the 11th century Almoravid movement that started in the Southern Sahara.

- 3 Colonial rule provoked major changes in the building industry. The threat of fire and disease led the French to ban building material like straw, mud and some types of wood in urban areas (p. 167). In a few major colonial cities like Saint-Louis, Dakar, and Rufisque, a typical colonial mosque was introduced. As shown by the author's analysis and supportive illustrations, the colonial mosques in Saint-Louis and Gorée could easily be mistaken for a church. "The double square minarets replaced the square bell-towers, the arches on the windows and arcades on the front veranda are pointed instead of semi-circular, and the towers are crowned by two small domes" (p. 128). This typical colonial mosque was gradually replaced by new styles closer to Islamic architectural aesthetics. Illustrative of that shift is the mosque of Touba, one of the greatest architectural marvels of West Africa, which has multiple minarets instead of bell towers. Other competing styles emerged gradually during the 20th century, including heterogeneous mosques which took basic forms of French neo-gothic church architecture elaborated by addition of North African Muslim ingredients (p. 157).
- 4 The third important period in this architectural history coincides with the postcolonial period, which witnessed a great fragmentation of religious authority and the emergence of new competing groups to Sufi orders, including so-called Sunnites and Shiites. During this period, Senegal received substantial financial assistance from the Arab world, some of which was channeled to the construction of new mosques.
- 5 In the final chapter titled "Women, Mosques and West African Mosques" the author discusses the history of the postcolonial Islamic women movement. She provides a fine analysis of how women strove to carve a niche of their own in this sacred space. Confining gender contestation of sacred space to this last chapter is problematic as the author herself acknowledges (p. 297). A more gender friendly analysis throughout the book would have made the argument more persuasive.
- 6 With dozens of illustrations of mosques, some churches and other administrative buildings and palaces, this book provides a rich analysis of the architectural history of Islam in the Bilad al-Sudan, which is a neglected theme in the study of Islamic art. Cleo Cantone must be praised for authoring a major study of the Islamic architectural history of the Bilad al-Sudan.