

Song and dance of the Gnawa brotherhood

Morocco

«Through the centuries of Islam, the Sudanese have preserved the practices of a fetishist antiquity, a poetry of sound and gesticulations that find full expression in the forests haunted with monsters.» Isabelle Eberhardt

The illustrious Gnawa, jewels as much as hostages of a tourist and folkloric Morocco, subject of fascination to the Beat Generation and the American jazzmen of the 1960s until today, are still inscribed in a system of brotherhoods.

These ancient slaves, originating from different ethnic backgrounds arriving over the centuries from Guinea (from which the Gnawa is derived, associated with the Berber expression akal-n-inguinaouen, the «country of the Blacks»), but also from the Bambara ethnic group of Mali, from Mauritania, from Niger and from Senegal, are the spiritual descendants of the first liberated black Muslim: Sidna Bilal, companion of the Prophet, also the first muezzin in history.

Present in Tunisia and in Algeria through the stambali and the diwan, the Gnawa brotherhoods centre around the Zawaya, assemblies and meeting places. The prayer rituals and therapeutic healing, in an approach close to the Afro Caribbean ceremonies (Santeria or Candomblé), are dedicated to a certain number of divinities, each corresponding to a rhythm and a colour.