

Koranic Exegesis in Manding: Some Cultural and Linguistic Aspects

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This paper will present the findings of field research concerning several languages, especially Manding (Bamana, Maninka, Mandinka, and Dyula speech forms), carried out primarily in Mali but also in Guinea and The Gambia. The entire Koran is read aloud, orally rendered into and commented upon in the local language, in two contexts: for a wide audience, in the month of Ramadan; as a subject of the advanced curriculum, in traditional forms of Islamic education. Brief passages may also be cited and commented upon in the Friday sermon, in public preaching, and in the *madrassa* (modernising Islamic schools). In accordance with what appears to be a general practice in West Africa, the Arabic text is parsed into syntactical units, then translated - unit by unit - into the local language. Analysis will focus on aspects such as: the written, typically Arabic, sources of these oral commentaries; Koran reading and recitation styles; associated ceremonial and ritual practices; the specialised vocabulary created by scholars (usually from Manding roots) to express religious concepts; specific syntactical features of scholarly discourse; the exceptional use of writing to record Manding-language commentaries; the oral/written relationship; references to contemporary social and cultural issues.