

# The Arabic Literature of Africa project

John Hunwick

The origins of the Arabic Literature of Africa project go back almost 40 years, though its inspiration originates even before that. In 1964 at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, I initiated a project called the Centre of Arabic Documentation. The objective of the project was to microfilm Arabic manuscripts from northern Nigeria, and to catalogue and analyse them. As part of the project I started in the same year to publish a journal called *Research Bulletin* through the university's Institute of African Studies. In the third issue of the journal, in July 1965, I announced in the introduction that a project had been conceived to assemble biographical information about authors of Arabic writings and the works they had written, based on existing sources, and supplemented by information arising from the manuscripts that had been microfilmed. The eventual aim was to bring all this information together and publish it in a bio-bibliographical volume on West African Arabic writers. The model for this volume was the celebrated multi-volume work by the German scholar Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur*: two original volumes (later revised and updated) and three supplementary volumes all published in the 1930s and 1940s. These volumes covering Arabic writing tradition from Morocco to India comprise a total of 4 706 pages, but have only four pages referring to Arabic writings in sub-Saharan Africa. Certainly, before the 1950s little was known about the Arabic writings of Africa south of Egypt and the Maghrib, although one or two collections of such manuscripts did exist in Europe – most notably the library of al-Hajj 'Umar b. Sa'id al-Futi and his descendants, seized by French colonial forces in Ségou in 1890 and preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, but left uncatalogued for almost a century.

## The Arabic Literature of Africa series

In view of the absence of any guide to sub-Saharan Arabic writings, and the evident richness of such a tradition in West Africa, the idea of creating such a guide for West Africa grew in my mind, though at that time I thought that it would all be contained

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A manuscript ready for restoration, digitisation and conservation.

in a single volume. One just could not imagine how much Arabic writing there had been, or the huge number of hidden manuscripts that would eventually come to light. The map on page 308 shows where some of the larger manuscript and archive collections from West Africa are currently held.

For the next 25 years I continued to gather information about the titles and locations of West African Arabic manuscripts, recording it all, before the existence of computer technology and its public availability, on card indexes. In 1980 (whilst at the American University in Cairo) I discussed the project with Professor Sean O'Fahey of the University of Bergen, Norway,

whose greatest area of interest and knowledge, as regards Arabic sources, was the Nilotic Sudan and East Africa. O'Fahey immediately offered collaboration to expand the project from West Africa to include the whole of sub-Saharan Africa. We decided that we would, as it were, divide the continent between ourselves. Whilst I would focus on Africa west of Lake Chad, O'Fahey would work on Africa to the east of Lake Chad, covering the Sudan, the Horn of Africa, and East Africa. The first product of this enterprise was a journal called *Arabic Literature of Africa: A Bulletin of Biographical and Bibliographical Information*, of which three issues were published through the Program of African Studies at Northwestern University between 1985 and 1987.

In the early 1990s we began to plan publication of a series of volumes of such information, and in 1994 and 1995 the first two volumes were published by Brill Academic Publishers of Leiden, Netherlands, the original publishers of Brockelmann's series.<sup>1</sup>

Volume 1, *Arabic Literature of Africa: The Writings of Eastern Sudanic Africa to c.1900*, was compiled by O'Fahey. He was assisted by two Sudanese scholars, Muhammad Ibrahim Abu Salim and Yahya Muhammad Ibrahim; two German scholars, Bernd Radtke and Albrecht Hofheinz; and a Norwegian scholar Knut Vikør who, together with O'Fahey and myself, had in 1990 launched at the University of Bergen an annual journal called *Sudanic Africa: A Journal of Historical Sources*, in which much information on African Arabic writings has since been published, as well as short Arabic documents in their original Arabic text with English translations.

All volumes of *Arabic Literature of Africa* were planned to refer to 'Sudanic Africa', a term primarily referring to the Sahelian region, known in medieval Arabic as the *Bilad al-Sudan* (land of the black peoples), but also to include the rest of 'sub-Saharan Africa'.

### **Volume 1: Eastern Sudanic Africa**

The first volume – on eastern Sudanic Africa – dealt with the area that now comprises the Republic of the Sudan, covering the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The information in this volume, and all others since, was divided into chapters according to periods of time and/or the interrelationship of the authors and

their writings, for example members of a Sufi 'brotherhood' (*tariqa*). In fact, some of the richest chapters in Volume 1 deal with Sufi *tariqas*. Among these was that of a Sufi shaykh, who originated from and initially functioned outside the Bilad al-Sudan, but whose teachings later had much influence on it and on the Horn of Africa. This was Ahmad b. Idris, who was born in Morocco in 1750 and died in the Yemen in 1837. Such an inclusion is justified in the introduction to the chapter, which reads as follows:

We have grouped here the Sufi traditions that derive from Ahmad b. Idris, his son 'Abd al-'Ali, and his Sudanese student Ibrahim al-Rashid. This tradition includes the Idrisiyya (variously called Ahmadiyya Idrisiyya, or Ahmadiyya), Rashidiyya, Sahiliyya and Dandarawiyya *tariqas*, that were to spread to Egypt, Ottoman Turkey, the former Yugoslavia and Albania, Syria, Somalia, East Africa, and southeast Asia.<sup>2</sup>

One other *tariqa*, originating from a disciple of Ahmad b. Idris, forms another separate chapter. This is the Sanusiyya, founded by Muhammad b. 'Ali al-Sanusi, who was born in Mustaghanim in Algeria in 1787 and set up his *tariqa* in what is now eastern Libya, eventually spreading it through southern Libya and Chad, with branches of it going as far east as Darfur in the Sudan and as far west as Kano in Nigeria.

Another major chapter deals with the writings of the Sudanese Mahdi Muhammad Ahmad, who took over the area from the Turco-Egyptians in 1884, and his successors, beginning with the *khalifa* 'Abd Allahi.

O'Fahey and Hunwick will draft a follow-up to this volume in the coming years, with some Sudanese and European collaborators, dealing with Arabic writings of the West Africa in the twentieth century, including material outside the 'intellectual tradition', such as the writings of the famous novelist al-Tayyib Salih. This will constitute Volume 5 of *Arabic Literature of Africa*.

## Volume 2: Central Sudanic Africa

Hunwick compiled Volume 2 with the assistance of three Nigerian scholars (Razak Abu Bakre, Hamidu Bobboyi and Muhammad Sani 'Umar), as well as two German scholars (Roman Loimeier and Stefan Reichmuth). It was published in 1995 with the subtitle 'The Writings of Central Sudanic Africa'. Central Sudanic Africa is defined principally as Nigeria, but the volume also includes material on parts of Cameroon, Chad and Niger.

The volume starts off with a chapter entitled 'The Central Sudan before 1800', beginning with a poet called Ibrahim b. Ya'qub al-Kanemi, who died around 1212 and is known to us through poems he composed when he was in Morocco and Spain (Andalusia), parts of which were recorded in writings by Arabic authors of those regions. He was certainly the earliest known West African writer, but by the sixteenth century many more writers



emerged, not only in northern Nigeria (Bornu and Hausaland), but also in the Timbuktu region. Perhaps the most important chapters in that volume deal with a family whom I call the Fodiawa. The primary scholar of that family was 'Uthman b. Muhammad Fodiye, also usually known as 'Uthman dan Fodio (d.1817), the Islamic regenerator (*mujaddid*) and creator of an Islamic state, generally known nowadays as the Sokoto Caliphate. He was a Fulani whose origins were in Futa Toro (Senegal), from where ancestors of his migrated to Hausaland in the fifteenth century. He was a note-worthy scholar who wrote at least 100 works in Arabic, plus numerous poems, mainly in Fulfulde. Other members of his family whose works are listed include his brother 'Abdullahi ('Abd Allah; d.1829), who wrote 88 works in Arabic and 6 in Hausa; dan Fodio's son and political successor Muhammad Bello (d.1837), author of 175 works, including 70 Arabic poems; and dan Fodio's daughter Nana Asma'u (d.1864), who wrote 9 poems in Arabic, 42 in Fulfulde and 26 in Hausa. In another chapter, the volume includes writings of other relatives of Shaykh 'Uthman, his brother 'Abdullahi and his son Muhammad Bello, as well as the viziers who served Shaykh 'Uthman and his successors, right down to the *wazir* Junayd (d.1992), who assembled a great library of manuscripts and himself wrote some 50 works and a *diwan* of poetry, and to whom Volume 2 was dedicated. Other chapters deal with writers of other areas such as Kano, Katsina and Bornu, with two chapters recording writings of scholars of the Yoruba-speaking region of south-western Nigeria (Ilorin, Ibadan and Lagos), both compiled by Stefan Reichmuth. A final chapter focuses on polemical literature for and against Sufism, chiefly compiled by Muhammad Sani Umar.

### **Volume 3: Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia**

Volume 3 is currently being compiled by O'Fahey in two parts: 3A, covering Ethiopia, Eritrea and Somalia, already published in 2003; and 3B, covering the Swahili region of East Africa, hopefully to be published in 2008. Both volumes include writings in African languages in the Arabic script, especially 3B, in which the majority of writings are in the Swahili language. Volume 2 included some writings in Hausa and Fulfulde, if the author also wrote in Arabic. Later, I hope it will be possible to produce a volume uniquely focused on Hausa and Fulfulde writings from Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon.

### **Volume 4: West Africa**

Volume 4, compiled by myself, was published in May 2003. This volume, totalling 814 pages, deals with Mali, Senegal, Guinea, the 'Greater Voltaic Region' (that is, Ghana and parts of Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso), and a chapter of information on a part of Niger.

### **Manuscript collections of West Africa**

How, one may wonder, is information obtained about manuscript copies of all these writings? First of all, there are now numerous collections of manuscripts that have been catalogued, both in African countries and in Europe – although far more collections exist and still need to be catalogued. Foremost among such catalogued collections are two Malian collections: one in Timbuktu and one in Paris. One is the Ahmed Baba Institute

(see Chapter 20 in this volume) collection of Timbuktu, which has so far been only half catalogued in Arabic – only 9 000 out of some 20 000 manuscripts through the al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation in London.<sup>3</sup> The Paris collection referred to is the library of al-Hajj ‘Umar and his descendants, seized in Ségou by French colonial forces in 1890 and two years later deposited in the Bibliothèque Nationale. Finally, in 1985 a catalogue was published, entirely in French, with the title *Inventaire de la Bibliothèque ‘Umarienne de Ségou*.<sup>4</sup> It contains some 700 works by a wide range of authors, both West African and from elsewhere in the Muslim world. Other catalogued collections in Africa include both public and private collections catalogued by the al-Furqan Foundation: in Nigeria part of the Arabic collection of the National Archives, Kaduna has been catalogued, as well as the University of Ibadan library collection, whilst those of the Jos Museum and the important collection of the late *wazir* of Sokoto, Junayd b. Muhammad al-Bukhari, are in preparation. The research and documentation centre of Ahmadu Bello University, known as Arewa House (located in Kaduna), is run by Hamidu Bobboyi, who recently negotiated agreements with the sultan of Sokoto and the emir of Kano to undertake cataloguing of their manuscript collections, which will most likely contain documents of historical interest as well as works of the Islamic intellectual tradition.

As regards Mauritania, the al-Furqan Foundation has published a catalogue of 12 private collections (6 in Shinqit and 6 in Wadan), with a total of over 1 100 manuscripts; and Charles Stewart of the University of Illinois has catalogued, and made available through his university, the private collection of the family of Shaykh Sidiyya of Boutilimit. In Senegal, too, several private collections have been catalogued by Ousmane Kane.<sup>5</sup> These include the libraries of Serigne Mor Mbaye Cissé of Diourbel, of the late Shaykh Ibrahim Niassé of Kaolack, and of al-Hajj Malik Sy of Tivaouane, all of which contain large numbers of manuscripts of writings by Senegalese authors, including the library owners themselves. Ousmane Kane has examined several other collections, whilst the archives of IFAN (the Institut Fondamental [formerly Français] d’Afrique Noire) at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar contain hundreds of Arabic manuscripts by Senegalese authors, plus Fulfulde manuscripts from Guinea.

Elsewhere in West Africa there are collections of reproductions of manuscripts, the originals of which were retained by their owners, whose personal collections have never been preserved or catalogued. At the University of Ibadan, manuscripts from Nigerian collections were microfilmed in the 1950s and 1960s by the main library and, after 1964, by the Centre of Arabic Documentation in the Institute of African Studies, totalling some 700 items. At the University of Ghana in Legon a different method was used in the 1960s and 1970s. Manuscripts were borrowed from Muslim scholars and xeroxed in multiple copies. The originals were then returned to their owners together with a number of xerox copies, so that they could share their collections with other scholars. Whilst at least two xeroxed copies of every manuscript were held at the University of Ghana in its Institute of African Studies, it was permissible for any scholar who needed





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## UNITED STATES

LOCATION	INSTITUTE	FOR AN OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION	LOCATION	INSTITUTE	FOR AN OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION
ACCRA	National Archives of Ghana		NEW HAVEN	Malian Arabic Manuscript Microfilming Project, Sterling Library, Yale University	See Nemoj (1965)
ABIDJAN	Institut d'Histoire, d'Art et d'Archéologie Africaines		NIAMEY	Institut de Recherche en Sciences Humaines	Cyclostyled list in situ. Also Kani (1984)
ALGIERS	Fonds Ben Hamouda, Bibliothèque Nationale d'Alger		PARIS	Bibliothèque de l'Institut de France	See Smith (1959a); Hunwick & Gwarzo (1967)
BOUDJBEHA	Private library of Shaykh Bay b. Zayn b. 'Abd al-'Aziz of Boudjebeha	See ISESCO (1988)		Bibliothèque Nationale, (1959b); Sauvan & Vajda (1987)	See Ghali et al. (1985); Vajda (1950); Smith
CAIRO	Arab League/Jami'at al-duwal al-'arabiyya: Ma'had al-makhtutat al-Azhar University Library	See Sayyid (1954–63) See al-Azhar University Library (1949)		Musée des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie	See Adnani (2000–01)
	Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyya	See Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyya (1924–42)	RABAT	Khizanat Mu'assasat 'Allal al-Fasi	See al-Harishi (1992–1997)
DAKAR	Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire, Université Cheikh Anta Diop	See Diallo et al. (1966); Mbaye & Mbaye (1975); Mbacké & Ka (1994)		Al-Khizana al-'amma al-Tumi (1973). Also card indexes in situ	See al-Tadili & al-Murabiti (1997);
DIORBEL	Maktabat Serigne Mor Mbaye Cissé	See Kane (1997)		Al-Khizana al-Hasaniyya (Bibliothèque Royale)	See al-'Arbi al-Khattabi (1980–1987) and catalogues in situ
EVANSTON	Northwestern University	Catalogue in situ		Ma'had al-Dirasat al-Ifrigiyya, Jami'at Muhammad al-Khamis (Institut des Etudes Africaines, Université Mohammed V)	No published catalogue
	• Louis Brenner's collection of xerox copies of Arabic books published in Africa	Database catalogue in situ		Bibliothèque Générale et Archives du Maroc	See Unesco (1962)
	• 'Umar Falke collection	Catalogue in situ	SALÉ	al-Khizana al-'ilmiyya al-Subayhiyya (Subayhiyya Library)	See Hajji (1985/1405)
	• Hiskett Legacy collection	Catalogue in situ. Also see Saad (1980)	SHINQIT	Private libraries of Ahl Habut, Ahl Ahmad Sharif, Ahl Hamanni, Ahl 'Abd al-Hamid, Ahl Luda' and Ahl al-Sabt	See Yahya (1997)
	• John O Hunwick collection		TAMGROUT	Library of the Nasiriyya zawiya	See al-Mannuni (1985)
	• John Naber Paden collection		TIMBUKTU	Ahmed Baba Institute	See Ahmed Baba Institute (1995–98)
	• Ivor G Wilks' Field Notes (copies available at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, and Rhodes House Library, Oxford)			Mamma Haidara Manuscript Library	See Sayyid (2001)
FEZ	Library of Al-Qarawiyyin	See Bel (1918); al-Fasi (1979)	TETUAN	Al-Khizana al-'Amma (General Library of Tetuan)	See Al-Khizana al-'Amma (1981)
THE HAGUE	See Voorhoeve (1980)			Maktabat al-Jami' al-Kabir (Bibliothèque de la Grande Mosquée, Tetuan)	See Dilayru (1977)
JOS	Nigerian National Museum	See Arif & Hakima (1965)	TIVAOUANE	Maktabat al-Hajj Malik Sy	See Kane (1997)
KADUNA	National Archives of Nigeria 1967; and index in situ	See Muhammad (1995); Last (1966, 1967)	TUNIS	Dar al-Kutub al-Qawmiyya (National Library of Tunisia)	See Mansur (1975)
KAOLACK	Maktabat al-Hajj Ibrahim Niyas	See Kane (1997)		Maktabat al-'Abdaliyya	See Maktabat al-'Abdaliyya (1908–11)
LEGON	Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana. Copies available at the African Studies Library, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois	See Boyo et al. (1962); Martin (1966); Odoom & Holden (1965, 1967, 1968)		Bibliothèque de la Mosquée de Zeitouna	
LONDON	British Library	See card index in situ	WADAN	Private libraries of Ahl Muhammad b. al-Hajj, Ahl al-Kitab, Ahl Dahi, Ahl 'Idi, Ahl Yaya Buya and Ahl Ahmad Sharif	See Yahya (1997)
	School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London	See Gacek (1981)	YALE	See Nemoj (1965).	
MARRAKESH	See bin al-'Arabi (1994)		ZARIA	Northern History Research Scheme, Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University	See al-Bill (1967–87); and card index in situ
MEKNES	Maktabat al-Jami' al-Kabir	See Dilayru (1977)			
	al-Khizana al-'amma	See Dilayru (1977)			



an item to purchase a xerox copy. As a result of this accessibility policy, Professor Ivor Wilks – the leading expert on the history of Muslim communities in Ghana, and a director of the project – purchased copies of every manuscript, and later donated this collection to Northwestern University. The Arabic collection in Northwestern University's Africana Library also contains a collection of some 3 000 manuscripts obtained through the sons of a deceased Tijani scholar of Kano, called Umar Falke (d.1962), and some 500 items obtained by Professor John Paden in Nigeria. This latter collection not only contains original manuscripts, but also locally published reproductions of some Arabic (and Hausa) writings by Nigerian scholars. These published versions, which I have designated as 'market editions' since they are openly sold in marketplaces, have been added to by myself (over 400 items), first from Nigeria and later from Senegal, where such a manuscript publication method is also popular.

The richest West African private libraries so far known to me are the two famous ones of Timbuktu – first of all the Mamma Haidara Memorial Library, organised and run by Abdel Kader Haidara (see Chapters 17 and 18 in this volume). This contains some 5 000 manuscripts, just over 3 000 of which are already described in a catalogue published by the al-Furqan Foundation, with a volume of the remainder still awaiting publication. They are stored in a well-designed building, but are awaiting scientific conservation and digitisation. They consist of a wide range of writings, both in topic and origin of author, although a considerable number are by authors of the Timbuktu region. The other important private library is the so-called Fondo Ka'ti, a collection of some 3 000 manuscripts belonging to members of a clan descended from the famous sixteenth-century historian Mahmud Ka'ti, author of the *Tarikh al-fattash*. The collection is now located in Timbuktu (with many more items still with family members in the village of Kirshamba, about 161 kilometres to the west of Timbuktu) and is under the direction of Ismaël Diadié Haidara and his brother Ousmane Haidara. This extraordinary collection contains some manuscripts whose creation goes back to the sixteenth century, whilst within it is a beautiful copy of the Qur'an copied in Turkey in 1420. Unfortunately the manuscripts have not yet undergone scientific conservation, but recently a building was constructed where they can be safely housed. Now that this has been done, it will be possible to catalogue them, although in 2001 the German scholar Albrecht Hofheinz put together a draft catalogue on behalf of the Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (Isita).

Other major libraries include the remainder of the library of Boularaf, a man of Moroccan origin who settled in Timbuktu early in the twentieth century. Following his death in 1955, the majority of his manuscripts were inherited by a son of his and given, after 1970, to the Ahmed Baba Institute. The remainder of the collection is looked after by his grandsons, but is neither conserved nor catalogued. Also important is the library of Houmal, the *imam* of Jingere-Ber Mosque, which was for years buried below ground and is now being removed and is in urgent need of conservation and cataloguing. There are many other libraries in Timbuktu – Abdel Kader Haidara, in an article published in 1999 (in



*Revue Anthropologique*<sup>6</sup>), lists a total of 30 private collections within the city, and approximately 100 in the rest of the Middle Niger region of Mali (also see Chapter 18 in this volume). A major manuscript library is the Wangari Library, originated by Muhammad Baghayogho (d.1594), but mainly containing items (said to be a total of 8 000) obtained by his descendants (see chapter 19, this volume). There are important libraries in southern Saharan locations such as Arawan and Boudjebéha, which were both, prior to the twentieth century, recognised centres of Islamic scholarship. In Boudjebéha mention should be made of the library of Shaykh Bay, who inherited it from family members. Shaykh Bay himself is a leading scholar of the region, and has devoted much energy to retaining his family library. Containing many fine and valuable manuscripts, it greatly deserves conservation and cataloguing.

Elsewhere in West Africa there are important public and private collections. In Niamey, the capital of Niger, there is a large public collection at the Institut de Recherche en Sciences Humaines (IRSH). Originally, it was assembled by the scholarly president of the Assemblée Nationale of Niger, the late Boubou Hama, but later handed over to the University of Niamey, which incorporated it into IRSH. There are more than 3 200 manuscripts, with no scientific conservation, but recently catalogued.<sup>7</sup> Although many of the manuscripts are by authors from Niger, there are also many by authors from Mali and some by authors from what are now Ghana and Burkina Faso. They are stored in a room without any sort of climate control, and some of them are in a fragile condition. This is a major West African collection that is easily accessible. A description of the collection was written in 1984 by the Sudanese–Nigerian scholar Ahmad Kani and published in the *Bulletin d'Information* of the Fontes Historiae Africanae project (then directed by me). He made this interesting observation:

Overall, the IRSH collection covers a wide geographical area, stretching from the old Kanem-Bornu region across Hausaland, through the Niger Bend, and northwards to Air and the Saharan regions, and ranges chronologically from the 14th century to the present day. Materials relating to state formation, interstate and external relations, are contained in the collection. The collection also houses important material on various Islamic sciences such as *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *tasawwuf* (Sufism), *tawhid* (theology), *tafsir* (exegesis), and related disciplines. A great deal of literature of North African and Middle Eastern origin is included within the IRSH collection. The Western Sahara is another area of provenance of mss in the IRSH collection. The Shinqit region in particular has a long-standing tradition of literary activity. The IRSH possesses a photocopy of a manuscript in the author's handwriting of the *Izalat al-rayb wa'l-shakk wa'l-tafrit fi dhikr al-mu 'allifin min ahl Takrur wa'l-Sahra' wa-ahl Shinqit* by Ahmad Abu'l-A'raf [Boularaf] – a work written in 1941–42, a biographical dictionary of 'ulama' of 'Takrur' and the Sahara. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the IRSH collection, and one which distinguishes it from other collections in West Africa is its holdings of works by West African Sufi shaykhs of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (especially writings of the Qadiri shaykh al-Mukhtar al-Kunti).<sup>8</sup>

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The xeroxed collection of the Institute of African Studies of the University of Ghana has already been mentioned, but there are many other private collections in different parts of that country. The al-Furqan Foundation has recently published a catalogue of 15 such libraries, with a total of over 3 000 manuscripts, including numbers of items on medicine (20), history (80), geography (11), philosophy (17), and astronomy and mathematics (32), as well as the traditional Islamic sciences such as Qur'anic study.

Some Nigerian manuscripts exist elsewhere in Africa. One set of Arabic manuscript collections in the Sudan belongs to descendants of the sultan of Sokoto's family and associates, who fled from the British conquest of Hausaland in 1903. They eventually settled in and around a place known as Mai Urno to the south of Khartoum. With them are numerous manuscripts of works by Sokoto writers, and the main collections have been examined by Muhammad Sharif, an African-American student and digitiser of manuscripts (to form a basis for cataloguing). Likewise, many Timbuktu manuscripts are now in public collections elsewhere in Africa, principally in Morocco. Some are in Algeria, brought there by an Algerian who in the early twentieth century taught in a Timbuktu school.<sup>9</sup>

The Arabic Literature of Africa project was one of the foundation stones of Isita, set up by myself in the Program of African Studies at Northwestern University (Evanston, Illinois) in collaboration with O'Fahey in 2001. The objectives of Isita include identification and analysis of Arabic manuscript collections, and the translation and publication of manuscripts dealing with African history and aspects of Islamic thought in Africa. One of our ultimate aims is to map Arabic manuscript libraries in various countries of Africa and to analyse their content. Also, I still plan to undertake more work on *Arabic Literature of Africa*. Volume 6 on western Saharan Africa (Mauritania) is one I shall work on myself, together with Ulrich Rebstock, the prominent German scholar on Mauritania – and hopefully with more help from Charles Stewart, who has catalogued a private manuscript collection in Boutilimit in Mauritania. If Muhammad Sani Umar becomes available – which I hope he will – I would wish him to compile a volume on Hausa and Fulfulde (Fulani) writings of Nigeria and Cameroon,<sup>10</sup> together with Hamidu Bobboyi and perhaps with Ibrahim Mukoshy who, in the 1960s, was my assistant in the Centre of Arabic Documentation in Ibadan, and is now a professor of Nigerian languages at the University of Sokoto.

### **An overview of West African Islamic and scholarly traditions**

Western Sudanic Africa constitutes a large and diverse region. *Arabic Literature of Africa* Volume 4 only attempts to cover certain parts of it – those where sufficient research has been done, and where a strong manuscript tradition exists. To a large extent this also reflects the areas where Islamic scholarly and literary traditions have been most prominent.

One of the key centres of Islamic scholarship, from a millennium ago right down to the twentieth century, has been Timbuktu, and not only the city itself – though this was

the inspirational heart – but also the neighbouring regions of Azawad (the semi-desert region to the north of the Middle Niger) and the western reaches of the Niger Bend from Gimbala down to Masina. As Timbuktu established itself as a centre of commercial interchange between tropical Africa and Saharan and Mediterranean Africa during the fourteenth century AD, it began to attract men of religion as well as men of business – the two categories sometimes overlapping. The city was early settled by members of the Masufa tribe of the Sanhaja confederation following the apparent dissolution of the Almoravid movement in sub-Saharan Africa. To what extent they brought with them the Maliki juristic tradition is not clear. When Ibn Battuta visited Timbuktu in 1352 he noted the predominance of the Masufa, but had nothing to say about Islamic learning there. A century later, however, a Masufa clan – the Aqit – migrated to Timbuktu from Masina, and they clearly brought with them a deep tradition of learning, especially in the sphere of *fiqh*. Muhammad Aqit's descendants, intermarried with another Berber and possibly a Sanhaja family, provided the *qadis* of Timbuktu over the next century and a half.

But such Saharan peoples were not the sole source of Islamic knowledge in Timbuktu at that period. In fact, the most celebrated member of the Aqit clan, Ahmad Baba (1556–1627), had as his principal shaykh a Juula scholar from Jenne, Muhammad Baghayogho. The Juula were undoubtedly among the first West Africans to acquire Islamic knowledge, being originally a merchant group who traded gold with North African merchants in Ancient Ghana. They may well have been influenced eventually by Almoravid Maliki teachings. At some point in time (perhaps after the break-up of Ancient Ghana), some of them settled in the Masina region. By the fifteenth century they had opened up a trade route southwards from Jenne for acquiring gold that was being mined in the Akan forests of what is now the Republic of Ghana. Some also moved into the central Niger Bend region, especially Timbuktu, whilst others moved eastwards to Hausaland. They played a significant role in bringing Islam to areas of what are now the Ivory Coast and southern Burkina Faso. Another group of them, originally settled in Diakha in the Masina region, dispersed westwards and became celebrated as proponents of Islamic knowledge under the name Diakhanke (that is, people of Diakha), better known as the Jahanke.

Timbuktu distinguished itself from the sixteenth century onwards as a centre of study which attracted students from many parts of West Africa, and scholars of Saharan oases from Walata to Awjila, and also from North African cities. The city's educational reputation has led some people to speak of a Timbuktu university, beginning with Felix Dubois, who wrote of the 'University of Sankore'.<sup>11</sup> While the Sankore quarter in the north-east of Timbuktu certainly was an area which attracted many scholars to live in it, there is nevertheless no evidence of any institutionalised centre of learning. Teaching of some texts was undertaken in the Sankore Mosque, and also in the Sidi Yahya Mosque and the Great Mosque – Jingere-Ber – but teaching authorisations (*ijazat*) always came directly from the individual shaykhs with whom the students

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studied. Much of the teaching was done in the scholars' homes, and individual scholars had their own personal research and teaching libraries. In terms of writings, Timbuktu was noted for its *fiqh* works right into the twentieth century and, apart from anything else, there is a rich *fatwa* literature in the Timbuktu region. Timbuktu is also noted as a source of historical writing. One of the earliest such works, the *Jawahir al-hisan fi akhbar al-Sudan*,<sup>12</sup> was a product of the sixteenth century written by one Baba Guru b. al-Hajj Muhammad b. al-Hajj al-Amin Ganu. Nothing is known about him and his book has never come to light, but it is known of since it was a source for the celebrated *Tarikh al-fattash*, written by members of the Ka'ti family. A twentieth-century scholar, Ahmad Baber (d.1997), wrote a book with the same title designated to take the place of the lost sixteenth-century work. The other great chronicle of Timbuktu and the Middle Niger region, the *Tarikh al-Sudan* of 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sa'di<sup>13</sup>, was written at about the same time as the *Tarikh al-fattash* (mid-1650s), while roughly a century later an anonymous chronicle, *Diwan al-muluk fi salat al-Sudan*, recorded the history of Timbuktu and its region under the rule of the Moroccan forces from 1591 onwards. The Timbuktu chronicle tradition appears to have spread far and wide over West Africa. In what is now the Republic of Ghana there has been a strong chronicling tradition, beginning with the *Kitab ghanja* in the early eighteenth century. Following the Moroccan conquest of Timbuktu in 1591, many of the city's scholars dispersed and it is known that some went as far south as the Volta River basin. That region<sup>14</sup> was also a meeting point for scholars from east and west. From the west came Juula scholars from the time of the establishment of the trade route from Jenne, leading down to the town of Begho just north of the Akan forests. Others established themselves in towns of the northern Ivory Coast such as Bonduku, Buna and Kong, and eventually in Ghanaian polities such as Wa and Gonja. From the east, in the late seventeenth century, Hausa merchants from what is now northern Nigeria began to pursue their trading activities in the Greater Voltaic basin, while in the late nineteenth century such activity brought in trader-scholars such as al-Hajj 'Umar b. Abi Bakr, originally from Kebbi, who settled and made his scholarly reputation in Salaga.

In a very broad sense, Arabic writings of western Sudanic Africa may be classified under four headings: historical; pedagogical; devotional; and polemical. Historical writings help Muslim communities to establish and confirm their identities, a necessary exercise for those living in remote areas surrounded largely by non-Muslim peoples, but also valuable in terms of community solidarity for those dwelling in recognised centres of Islam, such as Timbuktu, Arawan and Jenne. Only occasionally, starting in the twentieth century (and under the influence of European colonial administrators), do we find a broader and what might be called more 'secular' approach to history. A notable example of this is the celebrated *Zuhur al-basatin* (Plants of the Gardens) of the Senegalese writer Musa Kamara (d.1943 or 1945), a broad history of the lands and peoples of Futa Toro and its neighbours; some writings of al-Hajj 'Umar b. Abi Bakr of Kete-Krayke in Ghana (d.1934) also fall into this category. Kamara also wrote works in verse that are of

historical significance, including an account of the 1892 civil war in Salaga and commentaries on colonial intrusions into the Volta region. The historical writing tradition of what is now the north of the Republic of Ghana is very rich. As Bradford Martin once wrote: 'If this material could be used for research it would contribute very greatly to a rewriting of the history of this region, which is so badly needed.'<sup>15</sup>

Pedagogical writings arise from the need for students to have textbooks. Whilst texts from outside West Africa circulated within the region, teaching shaykhs often abridged some of them, wrote commentaries on them, or versified them so as to make them easier for students to memorise. This was especially true in great educational centres such as Timbuktu, but is also characteristic of the Greater Voltaic region where, no doubt, copies of texts from elsewhere were rather more difficult to obtain due to the remoteness of the region from the trans-Saharan trade networks. Noteworthy among such teachers was al-Hajj Marhaba (d.1981), who wrote treatises on aspects of the Arabic language, but who was also noteworthy for his writings on Muslim communities of the region.

Devotional writings are common throughout West Africa, written both in Arabic and in local languages such as Fulfulde. Both al-Mukhtar al-Kunti (d.1811) and his son Muhammad (d.1825–26) wrote a considerable number of prayers which have been preserved and re-copied over the past two centuries. Al-Mukhtar also wrote a major work on devotion for the Prophet, *Nafh al-tib fi 'l-salat 'ala 'l-nabi al-habib* (The Spending of Goodness in Prayer Upon the Beloved Prophet), which was commented on by his son, who himself wrote a collection of panegyrics of the Prophet, *al-Sitr al-da'im li'l-mudhnib al-ha'im* (Prayers for the Prophet).<sup>16</sup> Poems in praise of the Prophet, and seeking his intercession, are indeed a popular form of writing. Ahmadu Bamba (d.1927), the Senegalese Sufi leader, wrote dozens of such poems and these are recited by members of his *tariqa* in chanting fashion rather like the singing of hymns in Protestant Christian communities. Paper copies of many of these are available in the form of market editions reproduced in Dakar. In the other widespread Sufi *tariqa* of the Senegambia region, the Tijaniyya, there is a considerable volume of writing, especially poetry, in praise of the originator of the *tariqa*, Ahmad al-Tijani, and beseeching him to bless and intercede on behalf of his adherents. The most famous writer of such works was the Senegalese Tijani leader Ibrahim Niasse (d.1975), whose *al-Kibrit al-ahmar fi'l-tawassul bi-awa'il al-suwar wa-bi-uruf al-ayat al-ghurar* is in his *Jami' jawami' al-dawawin*,<sup>17</sup> which is made up of such poems.<sup>18</sup> He also wrote and published a collection of six *diwans* totalling nearly 3 000 verses, but these were in praise of the Prophet Muhammad. Ibrahim Niasse himself became an almost legendary figure in West Africa, and was regarded as a saint by many of his numerous followers. As a result, many writers in the region wrote poems honouring him.

As for polemical writing, that is mainly a feature of the rivalry between the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya *tariqas*, which surfaced in the mid-nineteenth century or, under the influence of Wahhabi teachings, attacks on Sufism as a whole, generally in the second



half of the twentieth century, as the Saudi Arabian impact on Muslim Africa increased. In the nineteenth century the Kunta scholar Ahmad al-Bakkay (d.1865) was a leading anti-Tijani polemicist, not least because his authority over the Timbuktu region was challenged by the Tijani conqueror al-Hajj 'Umar (d.1864). Some of his sharpest conflict was with a Qadiri 'convert' to the Tijaniyya, generally known as Yirkoy Talfi (or in Arabic [translation] Wadi'at Allah), whose strong response was to 'make al-Bakkay weep'— *Tabkiyat al-Bakka'i*. Ahmad al-Bakkay not only attacked local Tijanis, but even entered into polemic with a Moroccan Tijani, Muhammad b. Ahmad Akansus (d.1877), to whom he addressed the treatise *Fath al-Quddus fi 'l-radd 'ala Abi 'Abd Allah Muhammad Akansus* (Introduction of the Most Holy [God] in response to Abu Abdullah Muhammad Akansus) as a rebuttal of the latter's *al-Jawab al-muskit* (The Denied Response). In the twentieth century a leading early figure in such polemics was 'Abd al-Rahman b. Yusuf al-Ifriqi (d.1957), a Malian scholar who studied in Saudi Arabia and who wrote *al-Anwar al-rahmaniyya li-hidayat al-firqa al-Tijaniyya* (Merciful Lights for Guidance of the Tijaniyya Group), an attack on the Tijaniyya and encouragement to its adherents to abandon it. Even in the 1990s in Senegal there was sharp controversy over Sufism. Muhammad Ahmad Lo, a scholar with Saudi connections, published his *Taqdis al-ashkhas fi 'l-fikr al-Sufi* (Dedication of Persons on Sufi Thinking) in Riyadh in 1996, to which Shaykh Tijan Gaye wrote as a response *Kitab al-taqdis bayn al-talbis wa'l-tadlis wa'l-tadnis* (Book of Dedication Between Deception, Deceit and Pollution). In 1997 Muhammad Ahmad Lo published (evidently in Saudi Arabia) his doctoral thesis with the title *Jinayat al-ta'wil al-fasid 'ala 'l-'aqida al-Islamiyya* (Perpetration of the Corrupt Interpretation on the Islamic Doctrine), which constitutes an attack on many interpretations of Islam, including both Twelver and Isma'ili Shi'ism, and Islamic philosophers, and culminates with an attack on Sufism. Western Sudanic Africa is not, of course, the only locus of such polemics. Anti-Sufi writing and responses thereto are also to be found in Central Sudanic Africa, specifically Nigeria.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the abundant Islamic literature written in Arabic in western Sudanic Africa, there are also Islamic literatures in African languages. The best known of these (and perhaps the most abundant) is the Fulfulde literature of Futa Jallon in Guinea.<sup>20</sup> Fulfulde was also written in Futa Toro in Senegal, but little is known of it other than the famous *qasida* of Muhammad 'Ali Cam (or Mohammadou Aliou Tyam), a supporter of al-Hajj 'Umar, whose poem is about the latter's life and work. In Senegal there is also writing in Wolof, using the Arabic script (see, for example, Serigne Musa Ka), but it has not been possible to incorporate much of that literature into Volume 4 of *Arabic Literature of Africa*. In Mali, the Songhay language has also been written in Arabic characters and some Songhay devotional poems are preserved in the Ahmed Baba Institute in Timbuktu, but again, it has not been possible to list such material. Finally, it must be pointed out that some Muslim writers of the twentieth century have composed works in French, or translated some of their Arabic writings into French. Noteworthy among such writers is Sa'd b. 'Umar b. Sa'id Jeliya (known as Saad Oumar Touré), director of a school in Ségou, who has

written 5 works in French as well as 21 in Arabic. The Senegalese founder of the Union Culturelle Muslumane, Shaykh Touré (b.1925), has written mainly in French – 8 books and some 20 articles. The practice of writing in English in an anglophone country such as Ghana appears to be less common. The only clear example is a bilingual work by Muhammad Mustafa Kamil (b.1936), a disciple of Ahmad Babah al-Wa'iz and director of the school he founded in Kumasi. That work is his *Bayan nisab al-zakat al-hawli li'l-dhahab wa-qimat rub' al-dinar al-shar'i fi 'umlat sidi al-ghani. Notes on Zakat and Dowry in Islam*, a bilingual publication on the minimum amount of capital upon which *zakat* is to be paid, calculated in Ghanaian cedis, and the lawful minimum dowry payment in cedis.

## Conclusion

The future may well see an increase in the amount of bilingual Islamic literature in both francophone and anglophone countries as the *madrasa* system continues to expand. More and more Islamic schools are being established, many of them combining traditional Islamic teaching in Arabic with elements of 'western' disciplines, taught in either French or English. What will be interesting to see is the extent to which more Islamic literature is written and published in African languages – a phenomenon that certainly grew during colonial rule in Guinea. Some authors, however, even use traditional Arabic verse styles to deal with contemporary political (even non-Muslim) figures, or to comment on modern issues. Prominent among these is the Senegalese scholar and Arabic schools inspector Shaykh Tijan Gaye, who has written poems about President Léopold Senghor and Nelson Mandela, and another poem on Islam and humanitarian organisations.

## NOTES

- 1 Brill has been a publisher of Oriental Studies for 220 years, and has produced some of the most celebrated writings on Islamic religion and culture – one of the most famous of which is the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, the second (and most recent) edition of which consists of 12 volumes (published between 1960 and 2003 – to which I have personally made a number of contributions dealing with sub-Saharan Africa). The academic quality of Brill's publications, and its splendid publication appearances, make it literally a 'Brill-iant' publisher. I now edit Brill's new Islam in Africa series, and Sean O'Fahey assists in editing the Oriental Studies series.
- 2 Hunwick & O'Fahey (1994: 123).
- 3 Currently, a new full cataloguing is taking place, plus digitalisation of the manuscripts.
- 4 Volume 2 of the *Subsidia Bibliographica* of the Fontes Historiae Africanæ. See Ghali et al. (1985).
- 5 Formerly of Saint-Louis University, Senegal, and now of Columbia University, New York. Kane provided information for *Arabic Literature of Africa* Volume 4.
- 6 Also published in Gaudio (2002).
- 7 The al-Furqan Foundation published the catalogue in late 2004.
- 8 Kani (1984: 41).
- 9 This refers to the Fonds Ben Hamouda in the Bibliothèque National d'Alger, in Algiers.
- 10 Although such writings are obviously not 'Arabic Literature' (of Africa), they were written in those languages in the Arabic script, and their topics are similar to those of the Arabic language writings of the area.
- 11 Dubois (1897: 275).
- 12 See Hunwick & O'Fahey (2003b: 62).
- 13 Called in Chapter 12 of *Arabic Literature of Africa* the 'Greater Voltaic Region'.

- 14 See Martin (1966: 83).  
 15 See Hunwick & O'Fahey (2003b: 112).  
 16 Published in Cairo in 1979.  
 17 See Hunwick & O'Fahey (2003b: 284).  
 18 See Hunwick & O'Fahey (1995: Chapter 13).  
 19 See Hunwick & O'Fahey (2003b: Chapter 10).

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Handwritten Arabic script on a scroll, likely a religious or historical document. The text is densely packed and written in a cursive style. The scroll is aged and shows signs of wear, including discoloration and some damage at the edges. The text is written in black ink on a light-colored, textured surface. The script is a form of Arabic calligraphy, possibly Maghrebi or similar, used in historical manuscripts. The content appears to be a collection of verses or a narrative, given the use of pronouns and verbs. The scroll is partially unrolled, showing the top edge and the way the text is arranged in lines across the width of the strip.