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## The Islamic Library in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Spoken only in the Arabian peninsula, Arabic was, in the pre-Islamic period, the language of the tribe of the Prophet Muhammad. With the expansion of Islam, it became in 2009 the language of 300 million Arabs, from Arabia to North Africa, and the liturgical language of a billion and a half Muslims from Indonesia to Senegal. In North Africa, which had been thoroughly Christianized<sup>4</sup> before the advent of Islam, the local population adopted not only the Islamic religion but also the Arabic language and culture. So they are called Arabized Arabs (*mustāriba*), as opposed to Arabizing Arabs (*ʿariba*), who are the Arabophone populations of the Arabian peninsula.

Judging by the number of colleges and other celebrated centres of learning established in Northern Africa (Qarawiyyin in Morocco, Zeytuna in Tunisia, Al-Azhar in Egypt), as well as their lively intellectual tradition during the medieval period, it has to be recognized that the Arabs and Muslims made a remarkable contribution to Islamic civilization and to medieval civilization in general. There was no field of knowledge that Muslim scholars had not investigated between the eighth and the fifteenth centuries. They contributed to philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, geography, medicine, pharmacy and chemistry (Kader 1996; Djebbar 2001). In 815, the library of Baghdad, capital of the Muslim eastern empire, contained about a million works. That of Cordoba in Spain comprised 400,000 manuscripts (Kader 1996:148) – more than all the works of the other Western European libraries combined. Saharan and sub-Saharan Africans participated in this Islamic civilization, not only as consumers but also as contributors. This African contribution to civilization and, above all, to the intellectual history of Islam was neglected for a long time. It was only in the post-colonial period, and particularly in the two decades from 1990 to 2010, that considerable efforts have been made to reconstitute the African Islamic library and to make it accessible to a Europhone public.

In contrast with North Africa, where Islamization and Arabization were rapid and almost total, sub-Saharan Africa was not entirely Islamized, nor even really Arabized. Africa was not wholly Islamized because the Islamic expansion in sub-Saharan Africa stopped at the equator. Even if Muslim communities are to be found on the eastern coast of Africa, they remain minorities in their respective countries. Sub-Saharan Africa was not really Arabized either (except for Sudan), because most Muslims, even if they used Arabic as a liturgical language, expressed themselves in African languages in everyday life.

The writings of Arab intellectuals are relatively well-known in the Arab world as well as in the West because numerous reference works exist in Arabic and in Western languages. In the European languages, there are two outstanding reference works: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* and the *Geschichte Der Arabischen Litteratur*. The former, of which there are two editions, and which exists in both French and English versions, covers essential aspects of the history, geography, philosophy, theology and culture of a large part of the Islamic world. The first edition was completed in 1938 and the second edition in 2005, and have greatly contributed to improving our knowledge of Arabic, Turkish and Persian intellectual history.

The compiler of the second important reference work, which is in German (there is now an Arabic translation) was Carl Brockelman. It was comprised of three volumes published in the 1940s (Brockelman 1937-1942). They were then followed by two supplementary volumes, published under the title *Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur Supplementbanden* (Brockelman 1943-1949).

As for the reference works in Arabic, there are of course a large number of them. Two examples of major biographical dictionaries are the *Al-A'lam* of Khayr al-Din Al-Zirikli (1979) and the *Mu'jam al-mu'allifin* of 'Umar R. Kahlala (1957).

Entitled the *Biographical Dictionary of Arab authors, Arabists, and Orientalists*, Al-Zirikli's work, which was first published in 1927, has since come out in three updated editions, in 1957, 1969 and 1979. It comprises eight volumes and contains biographical information on many Arab and Orientalist authors and on their works.

The *Mu'jam al-mu'allifin* of 'Umar R. Kahlala (1957) is another encyclopaedic reference work on Arabic writings. In 14 volumes, the *Mu'jam*, as its title indicates, aims at giving maximum information about works written in Arabic, their authors, the genealogy of these authors and their fields of specialization.

However, consultation of these four major reference works gives the impression that sub-Saharan Africa has not contributed to the intellectual history of the Muslim world. The *Encyclopaedia of Islam* focuses on the so-called central Muslim world. The *Geschichte* devotes only five pages to sub-Saharan Africa. Al-Zirikli and Kahlala barely cite authors from sub-Saharan Africa. This means that

most of sub-Saharan African Arabists are not only unknown to the Europhones, but also to a good number of Arab and orientalist compilers. And yet the external and internal Arabic and *ʿjami* sources are very useful for studying the history, philosophy and sociology of the Islamized part of Africa during the second millennium. These external Arab sources consist of testimonies from medieval Arab authors and have been put at the disposal of the Europhone public through the works of Prince Yusuf Kamal, Father J. Cuoq, John Hopkins and Nehemia Levtzion.

Compiled by a team of researchers from different nationalities, the *Monumenta Cartographica Africae and Aegypti* of Yusuf Kamal constitutes the greatest cartographical work ever undertaken, in terms of its broad range. It reproduces all the maps that concern Africa, however remotely (Sizgin in *Introduction to Kamal* 1987). Furthermore, the *Monumenta* includes an exhaustive inventory of written texts in Greek, Latin, Arabic and other medieval European languages that concern Africa, from Pharaonic Egypt to the arrival of the Portuguese in 1434. But up until recently, it was very little cited, for two main reasons. First, because only 100 copies of the first edition were produced by Brill between 1926 and 1951, of which 75 were offered to libraries. Second, the 16 volumes were large and weighty: they measured 75 x 60 centimetres and weighed between 15 and 20 kilograms each (Sizgin in *Introduction to Kamal* 1987). Only in 1987 was a second, relatively accessible edition of *Monumenta* edited by Fuat Sizgin (Kamal 1987). So, for a long time, the *Monumenta* was very seldom cited in African historiography (Mauny, in Cuoq 1975:xi-xii).

The second, more accessible work was entitled *Recueil des sources arabes concernant l'Afrique occidentale du VIIe siècle au XVe siècle*. This book was the result of the labours of Father Joseph Cuoq who lived for many years in West Africa. It was published in 1975 and covered all sources concerning West Africa, that is, the area to the west of the Nile and south of the Sahara. The book, which listed 25 writers not mentioned in the *Monumenta*, only dealt with Arabic sources. It provided crucially important testimonies on the medieval states of Ghana, Mali, Songhai, Kanem, Borno, etc.

As for the third work, it has a rather more complex history. It was the University of Ghana that took the initiative, in 1956, during the national effervescence on the eve of independence of this former British colony, to collect the material. John Fage established a provisional list of materials based mainly on the *Monumenta* (Hopkins and Levtzion, ix). Witold Rajkowski of London University translated a third of this material but died before he could complete it. This was then carried on by John Hopkins who, with Nehemia Levtzion, edited the translation and published it in 1981 under the title *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources of West African History*. The *Corpus* listed 66 Arab authors writing between the ninth and

seventeenth centuries, including Ibn Batuta. They supplied both first-hand and second-hand information on important periods of West Africa history. Apart from these older external sources, on which we have a certain amount of information, there are other internal sources in Arabic or in *ʿjami*, upon which some researchers have been working for some time.

The Muslims of sub-Saharan Africa began producing texts in Arabic in the medieval era. (The earliest known black African scholar who wrote in Arabic is Abu Ishaq Ibrahim al-Kanemi, who flourished around 1200 (Hunwick 1995:1). However, for a long time the work of these writers was not seriously studied. Several kinds of prejudice are responsible for this. First, the European Orientalists, as well as the Arab authors, who possessed the necessary linguistic abilities to study these texts, found the erudition of these writers of little interest and decided – with a few exceptions – that there was no point in pursuing them.

Second, the African researchers and Africanists specializing in the social sciences, either because they considered the Islamization of sub-Saharan Africa to be superficial or because they were mostly ignorant of the existence of a literature in the Arabic language or in *ʿjami*, did not integrate these works into their studies. One consequence for the historiography of Africa, is that there are few historians interested in sources in the Arabic language or in the *ʿjami* because they assume that most of the sources on Africa's history are either written sources in Western languages, or oral ones.

However, over the last few decades many commendable initiatives have been taken to reconstitute the Islamic library. They have taken the form of cataloguing and publishing collections of manuscripts in Arabic or *ʿjami* and, to a certain extent, the translation of some of them into Western languages.

As far as the collection and cataloguing of the manuscripts is concerned, the work carried out has varied from country to country. In Chad, Cameroon and Niger, there has been no rigorous work done in listing the manuscripts in Arabic or in *ʿjami* (Hunwick 1995:XII), whereas in Mauritania, Senegal, Nigeria and Mali, considerable progress has been made in listing these texts.

The situation of Mauritania differs from the rest of West Africa in that it is located in Western Sahara (between the Arab world and the Maghreb) and its population is largely Arabophone. The Arabic Islamic intellectual history of Mauritania, one of the richest of West Africa, was very little known for a long time, even in the Arab world (Stewart, et al. 1990:79). Now there are three reference works which have helped to make this history known: that of Al-Burtuli (1727/28-1805), called *Fath al-Shakur* (Al-Burtuli 1981), which was translated into French by Chouki al-Hamel (1992); the *Wasit* of Muhammad al-Amin Al-Shinguiti, written at the beginning of the twentieth century; and the more recent *Bilad al-Shinqit* of Al-Khalil al-Nahwi (1987).

In addition to biographical dictionaries, several inventories have been made in Mauritania, of which three deserve mention. The first is the provisional catalogue drawn up by Adam Heymouski, former curator of the Royal Swedish Library and Moukhar Ould Hamidoun, doyen of the contemporary Mauritanian historians (Heymouski and Ould Hamidoun 1965-1966). Only a few examples of this catalogue were printed in Arabic. It included a phonetic transcription, and, in alphabetical order, a list of 425 authors among the best known in Mauritania, as well as some 2,000 works by these authors, with a brief description of the theme of their manuscripts.

Twenty years later, Ulrich Von Rebstock published the *Robkatalog der Arabischen Handschriften in Mauretanien*, the result of the work of a team at the University of Tübingen, together with the Mauritanian Institute for Scientific Research. This catalogue, which was written entirely in Latin characters, made a remarkable contribution to the list of Mauritanian Arab manuscripts. There are 2,239 listed manuscripts (Stewart 1990:180) of which the oldest is by an eleventh century author (Ould Cheikh 1987:111). They come from some hundred libraries and manuscript collections and cover the main regions of Mauritania, as well as a wide range of subjects. Sixty percent of the texts are about the following: *ad'iyya* (invocations), *adbkar* (litanies), *fatawi* (legal opinions), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *hadith* (science of traditions), *maw'iz* (exhortations), *nawazil* (juridical affairs), *Qur'an* (the Koran), *sira* (biography of the Prophet), *tasawwuf* (Sufism), *tahhid* (theology), *usul* (sources of law). Then there are linguistic and literary studies: *adab* (literature), *'arud* (metrics), *bayan* (rhetoric), *lughā* (language), *mantiq* (logic), *nahw* (grammar), *sh'r* (poetry). Finally, there are texts listed under the following themes: political ethics, astronomy-astrology, geography, mathematics, magic, medicine, and agriculture (Ould Cheikh 1987:111). This work is more detailed than the *Catalogue provisoire*, featuring as it does the name of the author, the title of the manuscript, the place where it has been filmed, the theme, the date of completion, as well as the library where it is located (Ould Cheikh 1987:110).

The third important work in this listing of Mauritanian manuscripts is the *Catalogue de manuscrits arabes* of the Mauritanian Institute for Scientific Research which, according to its chief compiler, Stewart (1990), constitutes the most complete study of Arabic literature and Islamic studies in Mauritania. Between 1975 and 1990, this Institute collected and bought 3,100 manuscripts in order to establish a national manuscript collection.

In 1988-89, these manuscripts were catalogued on the basis of bilingual data (Arabic/English). The compilers adopted a system of transliteration taking into account the specificity of Hasaniyya, the Arabic dialect spoken in Mauritania. The total volume of the catalogued manuscripts (some 1,546 pages of entries, plus 200 pages of index) is available for consultation at the Mauritanian Institute

for Scientific Research and at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (Stewart 1990:180). The themes covered generally reflect those of the Arabic literature of West Africa: a large number of works on jurisprudence, Sufism, the Arabic language, Koranic studies, literature, science of traditions and theology. To a lesser extent, they include texts on invocation, history, logic, ethics, mathematics, astronomy/astrology, medicine, esoterism, encyclopaedias, pedagogy, geography (Stewart 1990:183). According to Abdel Weddoud Ould Cheikh, it is in the towns of Shinqit, Tishit and Boutlimit that the most important collections of manuscripts were found. However, because of the rural exodus, the greater parts of the libraries that had been based in these towns are now in Nouakchott (personal communication 2001).

There has also been much recording and cataloguing of manuscripts in Mali. First, there was the work undertaken on the Umarian library of Ségou, known as the Archinard Collection (Fonds Archinard in French). The collection was seized by the French commander Achinard during the French conquest of the empire of El-Hadji Omar Tall and is now located in the National Library at Paris. An inventory of its contents was carried out by Ghali, Mahibou and Brenner (1985).

It is above all, thanks to the sponsorship of the Al-Furqan Foundation, based in London, that the recording of the manuscript heritage has created renewed interest in Mali and elsewhere in West Africa. Established at the beginning of the 1990s by Sheikh Ahmad Zaki Yamani, the former Saudi Oil Minister, the *Al-Furqan li-Ihya al-Turath al-Islami* Foundation, as its name indicates, aims at rekindling the Islamic cultural heritage. It sponsored the publication of an encyclopaedia in four volumes covering the collections of manuscripts in most of the Muslim countries (Roper 1994). Entitled *The World Survey of Islamic Manuscripts*, the encyclopaedia identified the public and private collections of 'Islamic manuscripts' in the languages of Muslim peoples: Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Asian and African languages. The World Survey provides the locations, conditions of access as well as an overview of the number and themes of the manuscripts preserved in those collections. *The World Survey* includes many entries on sub-Saharan African countries.

Over the last decade and following the publication of *The World Survey*, the Al-Furqan Foundation has produced some 30 detailed catalogues in Arabic, with special emphasis on non-catalogued collections. These catalogues, of which almost half concern certain African countries, including Senegal (Kane 1997) and Nigeria (Muhammad Hunwick 1995, 1997, 2001), drew the attention of researchers to a large body of unpublished material, of which Mali takes the lion's share. Collaboration between the Al-Furqan Foundation and the Ahmad Baba Centre for Research and Historical Documentation at Timbuktu (CEDRAB) has made it possible to publish five volumes in Arabic between 1995 and 1998 that list the

9,000 manuscripts that constitute part of CEDRAB's collection. The first volume of 1,500 manuscripts was compiled by Sidi Amar Ould Eli and edited by Julian Johansen (1995). The second, third and fourth volumes, each listing 1,500 manuscripts and published in 1996, 1997 and 1998 respectively were compiled by a team of librarians of CEDRAB and edited by Abd Al-Muhsin Al-Abbas of the Al-Furqan Foundation (CEDRAB librarians, Al-Abbas 1996, 1997, 1998). The fifth volume, which is larger than the others, was compiled and edited by a team of CEDRAB librarians, and features 3,000 manuscripts (CEDRAB librarians 1998). Each of these documents was published with several indexes: of titles of manuscripts, names of authors, themes and names of transcribers, so that the contents of the work can be rapidly consulted.

The collaboration between Al-Furqan and the Mamma Haidara Commemorative Library of Timbuktu has also enabled the publication, in three volumes, of a catalogue of the manuscripts contained in this library, which was established more than five hundred years ago and is currently based at Timbuktu. Compiled by Abdelkadir Mamma Haidara and edited by Ayman Fuad Sayyid, the catalogue of this library's bequests lists 3,000 manuscripts (Haidara and Ayman 2000).

The Malian manuscripts can be divided into two categories: The first category includes texts in various fields of Islamic knowledge. The second category is made up of historical documents. In the first category are found texts on (*adab*), jurisprudence (*fiqh*), Sufism (*tasawwuf*) and the Koranic sciences (*'ulum al-qur'an*) predominate, but there are also texts on the *ijaza* (diplomas or authorizations to transmit exoteric or initiation knowledge), ethics (*akhlak*), invocations (*ad'iyya*), sources of religion (*usul al-din*), theory of law (*usul al-fiqh*), genealogies (*ansab*), history (*ta'rikh*), Koranic exegesis (*tafsir*), theology (*tawhid* and *'aqa'id*), science of traditions (*hadith*), mathematics (*hisab*), politics (*siyasa*), biographies (*tarajim*), the biography of the Prophet (*sira nabawiyya*), morphology and syntax (*nahw, sarf*), medicine (*tibb*), metrics (*'arud*), astronomy (*falak*), chemistry (*kimiya*), logic (*mantiq*), exhortations (*wa'dh wa irshad*). Their authors are Arabs and Africans.

Historical documents form a substantial part of these libraries (one out of three manuscripts in the Mamma Haidara Commemorative Library). They are the work of African writers and give information about social life and the customs of the peoples of the region, legal opinions (*fatwa*), financial transactions of all kinds, relationships between the *ulemas* and the merchants in different periods of history, as well as the relationships between the peoples of the region and those of other Muslim countries, like Morocco, Tunisia and Libya.

The many manuscripts found in Mali are mostly the heritage of great intellectual centres like Djenné, Timbuktu, Gao, etc. Gao (or Kawkaw) was, according to the Arab author Muhallabi, who died in 990 (Cuoq 1975:77), the capital of a small Islamic principality of the Niger Bend during the tenth century. It became

a flourishing commercial, political and intellectual centre during the medieval period and attained its apogee as the capital of the Songhai empire under the reign of the Askia dynasty (sixteenth century). Its most famous ruler, Askia Muhammad Touré, went on pilgrimage to Mecca in 1496 and visited Egypt. He was named Caliph (Muslim sovereign) of the Sudan (country of the black people) by the Abassid Caliph al-Mutawakkil and by the Sharifian Ruler of Mecca (Hiskett 1985:35). As proved in many texts by Muslim scholars of the period which have come down to us, Askia Muhammad greatly contributed to spreading the culture and the teaching of Islam. He consulted two renowned Arab scholars on how to govern his country in conformity with Islamic precepts. One of them was Abd al-Karim al-Maghili (who died in 1504), who replied to Askia Muhammad's questions in the form of *fatwa*. The questions and responses have been translated into English (Hunwick 1985).

Among the contributions of Al-Maghili to sub-Saharan Islam was the fundamental idea that in each century a Muslim reformer, versed in the religious sciences, would appear and lay down what was allowed, forbid what was illicit, preside over peoples' destinies and settle their quarrels (Hiskett 1985:36). This idea influenced many political movements led by Muslim scholars in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some of which led to the creation of Islamic theocracies.<sup>5</sup>

The other scholar consulted by Askia Muhammad Touré was Jalal al-Din Suyuti (who died in 1505). One of the greatest scholars of the Arab-Muslim world of his time, Al-Suyuti is reported to have written several hundred treatises. There is no evidence that he visited sub-Saharan Africa, but we know that he met Askia Muhammad in Cairo during the latter's pilgrimage to Mecca and that he subsequently exchanged correspondence with him, providing him with advice on the administration of Islamic law (Hiskett 1985:37).

Djenné is another great Islamic centre in the Mali of today. Although there is not full agreement about when it was founded, we know that it was one of the major centres of Arabo-Islamic culture before Timbuktu. According to al-Sa'adi, when the twenty-sixth sovereign of Djenné converted to Islam during the thirteenth century, the town already had 4,200 Muslim *ulemas* (Hunwick 1999b:19, Touré 1999:1).

As for the town of Timbuktu, which was originally a Tuareg encampment (at the end of the eleventh century), in the fifteenth century it became an important hub in trans-Saharan trade and a great Islamic centre. It had flourishing colleges – in the medieval meaning of the term, in other words, communities of teachers and students living together with the objective of transmitting or acquiring religious knowledge (Hiskett 1985:40-41) and enjoying royal privileges (Touré 1999:3). The best known of these colleges (Djingerey-ber, Sankoré and the Oratory of



Sidi-Yahya) were already operating at the beginning of the fourteenth century. The Djingerey-ber College was founded between 1325 and 1330 by the Emperor of Mali on his return from a pilgrimage to Mecca (Touré 1999:3). Under the leadership of the Sanhaja Berbers, Sankoré was built between 1325 and 1433 (Touré 1999:3). Finally, the Oratory of Sidi Yahya or the mosque of Mohamed Naddah was built right at the beginning of the fifteenth century (Touré 1999:3). These colleges maintained relationships with other universities in North Africa and Egypt which recognized their curriculum and their authorization to transmit knowledge (Touré 1999:1). They were to a large extent designed on the model of Al-Azhar (Hiskett 1985:41).

The two richest chronicles on the history of the region, *Tarikh al-Sudan* and *Tarikh al-Fattash*, were written by scholars of Timbuktu. Translated in 1913 by Octave Houdas and Maurice Delafosse, Mahmud Ka<sup>c</sup>ti's *Tarikh al-Fattash fi akhbar al-buldan wa al-juyush wa akabir al-nas* (The researcher's chronicle, serving the history of the towns, the armies and the principal personalities) is a basic source for the history of the great empires of the Western Sudan (Ly 1972:471).

The other work, which is by Abdarraḥman al-Sa<sup>c</sup>di, is entitled *Tarikh al-Sudan*, Sudan being the name given by Arab authors to the regions south of the Sahara. When Al-Sa<sup>c</sup>di used the term Al-Sudan he referred to sub-Saharan Africa and more particularly to the region of the Middle Niger. The book is a monumental account of the history of Timbuktu and Djenné, describing in detail the origin of the Sonni dynasty, as well as that of the Askia, who succeeded it. The *Tarikh al-Sudan* also contains a fascinating analysis of the decline of the Songhai empire in the aftermath of the Moroccan Invasion. It was translated into two Western languages: into French by Octave Houdas and Maurice Delafosse at the beginning of the twentieth century (Al-Sa<sup>c</sup>di 1964), and into English by Hunwick (1999b) who has translated the essential part of the text. Hunwick's translation is accompanied by notes that include the latest findings of African historiography and it concludes with the collapse of the Songhai empire in 1613, that is, two decades after the Moroccan invasion. In an annex to Hunwick's work there are some important documents that have also been translated, including the description of West Africa by Hasan b. Muhammad al-Wazzan al-Zayyati, more often known as Leo Africanus, correspondence between the Moroccan sovereign Al-Mansur and the Songhai sovereigns, and personal accounts of the Moroccan invasion of the Songhai empire.

Senegal is another country that has a rich Arab-Islamic intellectual tradition, with numerous colleges in the pre-colonial period. During the 1930s, the French colonial administration supported the idea of collecting and interpreting historical knowledge about the regions that it controlled. Thus, numerous colonial administrators took to compiling and translating sources of information in Arabic

and *ʿjami*. In some cases, historical sources were compiled at the request of colonial administrators, for example the two manuscripts edited by Siré Abbas Soh at the request of Maurice Delafosse (1870-1926) and translated with the help of Henry Gaden (1867-1939) (Pondopoulo 1993:96).

The creation of an Islamic studies department at the French Institute for Black Africa (IFAN) also contributed to the effort to collect Arabic sources. One of its directors, Vincent Monteil, drew up a provisional list of Arab-African manuscripts which was published in 1965, part of which is dedicated to Senegalese manuscripts (Monteil 1965:539-541 and 1966:671-673). After independence, IFAN was renamed the Fundamental Institute for Black Africa and is now affiliated to the University of Dakar. A great effort to collect and catalogue Arabic and *ʿjami* manuscripts has been made by the IFAN researchers who published, in 1966, a *Catalogue des manuscrits de l'IFAN*, listing the Vieillard Gaden, Brévié, Figaret, Shaykh Musa Kamara and Cremer collections. These collections contain manuscripts in Arabic, Fula and Voltaic languages (Diallo et al. 1966).

Amar Samb was among these researchers – as well as being the director of IFAN – and he was the author of a work devoted essentially to the contribution of Senegal to Arabic literature. He reviewed a good dozen of what he called literary schools established by Senegalese scholars who had taught the Arabic language to thousands of disciples and made a significant contribution to Arabic literature. He cited the schools of Dakar, Thiès, Kaolack, Saint Louis, Touba, Louga, Ziguinchor and others (Samb 1972). His work was completed by Ousmane Kane and John Hunwick who listed, in Senegambia alone, more than a hundred authors and their works, which were mostly in Arabic (Kane and Hunwick 2002 a,b,c,d).

Another IFAN researcher was El-hadji Rawane Mbaye, formerly director of the Islamic Institute of Dakar and coordinator of the pilgrimage to Mecca up until 2001. He spent most of his professional life studying the Arabic literature of Senegal and was the co-author, with Babacar Mbaye, of a supplement to the catalogue of IFAN manuscripts (Mbaye and Mbaye 1975), as well as of two doctoral theses, one a round-up of Islamic teaching in Senegal (Mbaye 1975) and the other a biography of the Senegalese scholar Al-Hadji Malick Sy (who died in 1922) as well as a translation of two of his writings (Mbaye 1993).

More recently, Thierno Kâ and Khadim Mbacké (1994) produced a new catalogue of IFAN manuscripts that listed recently collected materials and was mainly concerned with Senegambian authors. Khadim Mbacké (1996) has translated into French a hagiography of Ahmadou Bamba entitled *Minan al-baqi al-qadim fi sirat Shaykh al-khadim*, written by his son, Bachirou Mbacké.

However, it has to be said that there is little interest on the part of social science researchers in this poorly understood part of African history. The valuable work of translating and editing carried out by a group of researchers from the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), IFAN and the Cheikh Anta Diop University is an important exception. It features the masterpiece of the Senegalese scholar Sheikh Muusa Kamara entitled *Zubur al-basatin fi tarikh al-samadin* (Flowers from the gardens in the history of the black people), an alternative title of which is *intisar al-mawtur fi tarikh bilad Futa Tur* (Triumph of the oppressed through the study of the history of Futa Tur). The first volume of this work (out of the four yet to appear) was coordinated by J. Schmitz and published in 1999.

Like the great historical works such as *Tarikh al-Sudan* and *Tarikh al-Fattash*, the *Zubur al-basatin* is very long (1,700 pages), written partly in Arabic and partly in *ʿjami*. It constitutes a major source of information on economic and social life in the valley of the Senegal river, giving first-hand accounts of political organization and land tenure in the Middle Valley of the Senegalese River, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. When it appeared, researchers once again realized the utility of Arabic and *ʿjami* sources in reconstituting the history of West Africa. Important as it is, however, the *Zubur al-basatin* is not the only work of Sheikh Muusa Kamara. He is also the author of various texts in Arabic and Pulaar on such different fields as history, geography, the hydrology of the Senegal river from Guinea to Saint Louis, literature, sociology, anthropology, jurisprudence, traditional medicine, Sufism, etc. (interview with Abdou Malal Diop 1999).

As in Senegal, the colonial administrators of Nigeria were also interested in historical sources and made a considerable attempt to collect and translate them. However, it was in the post-colonial period that really serious efforts were made to reconstitute the sources in non-Western languages. Among the many bodies that were involved were the Jamaʿat Nasr al-Islam (JNI), the Northern History Research Scheme, the Centre for Islamic Studies of Uthman Dan Fodio University and Arewa House of Kaduna.

The Jamaʿat Nasr al-Islam was founded by Ahmadu Bello, Prime Minister of Northern Nigeria between 1960 and 1966, with the idea of federating all Muslims who were mostly members of Sufi brotherhoods and antagonistic to each other. Striving to unify them on the basis of their common heritage of the jihad of the nineteenth century led by his great grandfather Uthman Dan Fodio, Bello encouraged the translation and publication of writings by the intellectuals who had led the jihad (Paden 1986:550-551).

Moreover, on the initiative of Abdullahi Smith, professor of history at the University of Ibadan, then at the Ahmadu Bello University, a new generation of historians, mainly Nigerians, tried to break with colonial historiography, starting with re-readings of the jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio. This generation of students

of Abdullahi Smith, among whom were Yusufu Bala Usman, Abdullahi Mahadi, Murray Last and Mahmud Tukur, exploited a substantial amount of Arab sources. The historical research laboratory, called the Northern History Research Scheme of the Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, participated in this effort to promote the sources in non-Western languages in the history of Nigeria.

Along the same lines, the Centre for Islamic Studies of the Usman Dan Fodiyo University of Sokoto listed some 300 dissertations and theses on Islam in Nigeria that have been presented in Nigerian and other universities (Sifawa 1988). They are mainly written in English but some are in Hausa and Arabic. They cover various fields, including general works on Islam, its expansion in the different regions of Nigeria, the biographies of some Islamic personalities, in particular the Fodiawa (disciples and descendants of Uthman Dan Fodio). There are some fifty translations from Arabic into English, and rather fewer into Hausa, of commentaries and critical analyses of the thoughts of certain authors. The whole is dominated by the three leading Fodiawa, Uthman Dan Fodio, Abdullahi Dan Fodio and Muhammad Bello. Finally, to conclude the contributions on Nigeria, the work of two authors, Ali Abu Bakr and Kabiru Galadanci, should be noted. They have created syntheses, analyzing works in Arabic and listing their authors (Abu Bakr 1972; Galadanci 1982).

At the same time, the Arabic Literature of Africa Project, directed by Sean O'Fahey and John Hunwick should be mentioned. Noting that the Arabic literature of Africa is very little known, these two authors, with the help of collaborators in Africa and elsewhere, undertook the ambitious project of listing all the authors who contributed to the Islamic scholarly tradition of sub-Saharan Africa, as well as their works (in Arabic, Pulaar, Swahili, Hausa, etc). This work has resulted in the production of two volumes dedicated respectively to the Nilotic Sudan up until 1900 (O'Fahey 1994) and central Sudan (Hunwick 1995). A third publication in two volumes, covering Swahili literature and East Africa, and a fourth one on West Sudan have been completed and are in the press. Two more volumes should terminate the series and these will be dedicated to Nilotic Sudan and Western Sahara respectively. The volumes on the Arabic literature of Africa are mainly concerned with texts in Arabic and, to a lesser degree, in *ʿjami*. As a didactic tool, modelled on the *Geschichte* of Carl Brockelmann, *Arabic Literature of Africa* features the authors, their writings and the scholarly tradition to which they belong. In the same spirit, J. Hunwick and S. O'Fahey created in 1999 the Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (ISITA), based at Northwestern University, Evanston, USA, which strives to mobilise a community of researchers around programmes for pre- and post-doctoral fellowships, conferences and publications. This institute constitutes the beginning of an effort to study systematically the Islamic thought of sub-Saharan Africa.

Two journals have made a decisive contribution to reconstituting the Islamic library. One is *Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara* which, published by the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris, is bilingual (English/French) and the product of the tropical Islamic laboratory of that institution. Founded and directed by Jean-Louis Triaud, this journal was started following an international conference on 'Religious Agents South of the Sahara', organized by the laboratory. Over the years, *Islam et Sociétés* has produced 20 issues and created a space for exchanges between African, American, European and Asian researchers on sub-Saharan Islam and become a valuable tool for sub-Saharan researchers and scholars of comparative religion. Each issue contains, in an annex, a bibliography of recent books and articles on Muslim African societies. *Islam et Sociétés* also publishes many reviews accounts of unpublished texts (B.A. and Ph.D. theses presented in various universities and difficult of access). It features many critical studies of Arabic sources and Arabized intellectuals of sub-Saharan Africa.

The second journal is *Sudanic Africa: A Journal of Historical Sources*, of which there are both printed and electronic versions (<http://www.hf-fak-uib.no/smi/sa>).<sup>6</sup> It was created in 1990 by John Hunwick and Sean O'Fahey. Its main function is to publish original documents in Arabic or African languages on the history and culture of Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa. Like *Islam et Sociétés*, *Sudanic Africa* has also published numerous biographies of Arabized intellectuals of sub-Saharan Africa in the eleven issues that have appeared so far.

After this review of the state of research on these Arabists in Africa, let us now look at the historical origins of this intellectual tradition.

