

ARABIC LITERATURE OF AFRICA:
A PROGRESS REPORT

JOHN O. HUNWICK
WITH APPENDIX BY ALHAJI GARBA SA'IDU

In *Sudanic Africa* 4 (1993) John O. Hunwick and R.S. O'Fahey announced a joint project in collaboration with a number of other scholars, for the publication of a six-volume work under the general title *Arabic Literature of Africa*. O'Fahey compiled the first volume of this work in 1994, in the series *Handbuch der Orientalistik: erste Abteilung: Der nahe und mittlere Osten*, Band 13, published by E.J. Brill of Leiden.

The present writer (Hunwick) can now announce the publication of Volume II: *The Writings of Central Sudanic Africa*, which he compiled, and which came off the presses in late November 1995. It consists of xxvi + 732 pp., including 96 pages of indexes, and, of course, appears in the same series (Band 13: Volume II). The contents are as follows:

The Arabic Writings of Central Sudanic Africa: an Overview

1. The Central Sudan before 1800.
2. The Fodiawa: (1) Shaykh °Uthmān b. Muḥammad Fodiye
3. The Fodiawa: (2) °Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad Fodiye
4. The Fodiawa: (3) Muḥammad Bello
5. Sokoto (1): Other members of the Fodiawa and the wazirs
6. Sokoto (2): Other writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries
7. Kano since 1800 (1): Emirs and writers of the Tijāniyya *ṭarīqa*
8. Kano since 1800 (2): Writers of the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa* and unaffiliated writers (with Roman Loimeier)
9. Writers of Katsina, Zaria, Bauchi and Lokoja
10. Bornu, Wadai and Adamawa (with Hamidu Bobboyi)
11. Ilorin and Nupe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (by

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- Stefan Reichmuth and Razaq Abubakre)
12. Ibadan, Lagos and other areas of southern Nigeria (by Stefan Reichmuth and Razaq Abubakre)
 13. Polemical literature for and against Sufism (with Muhammad Sani Umar)
 14. King-lists, chronicles and other minor historical works

Although in a long preface I endeavoured to give acknowledgement to all those who had helped to make the volume possible, I realise nonetheless that in my haste to meet the publishing deadline, I overlooked some who had been crucial to the book's existence. Let me now make amends for seeming to have taken their roles for granted.

First, I would acknowledge with deep gratitude and thanks the fine contribution made by Stefan Reichmuth and Razaq Abubakre in the two chapters that they contributed. Chapters 11 and 12 open up entirely new vistas on the Arabic Islamic literature of southern Nigeria, and will make advanced research into Yoruba Muslim scholarship possible. Stefan Reichmuth kept in close touch with me as the chapters developed and handled all the major aspects of their formatting. He was able to spend some days with me in Bergen in March 1994, while email provided an ongoing link with me, whether in Evanston or back again in Bergen. The University of Bergen also generously facilitated the visit of another collaborator—Hamidu Bobboyi, who spent the month of May 1994 with me at the Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies.

Secondly, I must acknowledge the help and encouragement of Peri Bearman, Islamic Studies editor of E.J. Brill. She took a close interest in our larger project from the beginning. O'Fahey and I both owe her sincere thanks for her ongoing support and counsel, and I owe her special thanks for helping with the proofing of the early parts of volume II.

Thirdly, let me add an additional word of thanks to Roman Loimeier and Muhammad Sani Umar who shared with me in the writing of two chapters. Their help and continuing interest in the project is greatly appreciated.

Last, but by no means least, I would like to acknowledge

more fully my debt to the work of Murray Last, without whose labours in the 1960s my volume would have been much the poorer. He was, indeed, one of the pioneers of the collection and analysis of Arabic manuscripts in Nigeria. He began this when conducting research for his doctoral dissertation, and was an important member of the team that set up the Centre of Arabic Documentation at the University of Ibadan. He played a central role in establishing the manuscript collection of the Northern History Research Scheme at Ahmadu Bello University (together with Abdullahi Smith), and in making accessible the collection of the National Archives, Kaduna. Not only that, but he also built up at Ahmadu Bello University a collection of *ajami* writings (Hausa and Fulfulde works in the Arabic script)—an initiative that has, regrettably, not been built on in the intervening years.

This latter point brings me to two other considerations. As I noted in the preface to the volume, 'ignoring the literature in Fulfulde and Hausa would give an unbalanced picture' of the Islamic literature of Central Sudanic Africa. Nevertheless, it was not possible to do any more than furnish some basic information on such writings by authors who also wrote in Arabic, when such information was readily available. Both available time and my own language limitations dictated this. It is clear, however, that there is a large 'submerged' Islamic literature in these two languages (and some in Nupe and Yoruba) which ought to be documented and explored in the same way as the Arabic literature has been. Only a thorough combing of manuscripts in existing collections combined with intensive field collection of other such manuscripts and information on their authors will provide an adequate material basis for the fuller biographical and bibliographical study that is needed. I have therefore decided to propose such a project and seek funding for it. My collaborators, Hamidu Bobboyi and Muhammad Sani Umar have both expressed enthusiasm for it, and it is they who would bear the main burden of carrying out such a project in Nigeria, and hopefully Cameroon. It will certainly take several years to bring such a project to fruition, but eventually we would hope to have a special volume in the *ALA* series devoted to this literature.

Partly related to language issues, but more perhaps to

publishing economics, is the question of the access that Muslim scholars in Nigeria might have to *ALA*, II, which chiefly deals with the scholarly production of the *'ulamā'* of that country. Given present Nigerian economic realities, it is unlikely that any copies of the book will be imported there; nor yet, if they were, could many individuals, or even libraries, afford to purchase them. With the permission of the publishers, therefore, I have broached the question of a Hausa translation of the work with Abdullahi Mahadi, director of the Arewa House Research and Documentation Centre, Kaduna. He is enthusiastic for the idea and has promised to propose the project to the Board of Directors of Arewa House in the near future. I am hopeful, therefore, that a Nigerian version of the book, in Hausa, will eventually appear, just as an Arabic version of *ALA*, I, already in preparation, will appear in the Sudan.

Research in Nigeria, Summer 1995

The second part of this report concerns the research tour I undertook in Nigeria between 1 July and 16 August 1995 to check the data I had in my book manuscript and to fill gaps. My base was Arewa House, Kaduna, and from there I made trips to Jos, Maiduguri, Kano, Zaria and Sokoto. Arewa House has for the past several years been in the competent hands of Abdullahi Mahadi, professor of History at Ahmadu Bello University. Considerable funding has been raised for capital projects (museums of the northern states, a library), though the current budget remains tight. The papers of Abdullahi Smith are preserved there in a separate room, and recently the papers of the late John Lavers were acquired and a separate special collection established. The Arabic manuscript collection is kept in boxes in the centre's archives. Almost the entire collection at present consists of photocopies of items from other collections (University of Ibadan, National Archives, Kaduna, and the Jos Museum), but it thus has the advantage of offering access to items that might at some time be no longer be available in their original repositories, and of saving researchers from some journeys.

At the National Archives, Kaduna, the majority of the holdings are original manuscripts collected largely in the 1950s and 1960s, though there are a few copies of king-lists and other items relating to Nigerian history from the Jos Museum. The keeper of the collection, Malam Musa Muhammad, was able to locate almost every item I asked to see, even in cases where I presented him with a faulty class mark, or even none at all. There is now a catalogue of some 746 manuscripts published by the Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, London, and a second part will appear in 1996.¹

In the Jos collection, where I spent only a few hours, the Arabic manuscripts are kept in a glass case in the Museum's library. As of August 1995 there was no curator of Arabic manuscripts. The former curator, Jamiu Oluwatoki, has renumbered some of the items and drawn up a hand-written list of the entire collection, giving both old and new numbers when there had been changes. When I visited, about one-third of the manuscripts had been taken to Lagos for microfilming; one-third had already been done, and the final one-third were to be microfilmed in the near future. The Al-Furqān Foundation is considering publishing a hand-list.

In Maiduguri there were two collections: that of the Centre of Trans-Saharan Studies, University of Maiduguri, and that of the Borno College of Legal and Islamic Studies (BCLIS). The former collection continues to grow, to judge by its handlist, though how many are originals and how many are copies of items in other collections I had no time to determine. The information provided in the handlist was minimal, and being entirely in transliteration, was sometimes difficult to interpret. The collection of BCLIS was kept in the office of the principal, Malam Abdullahi Muhammad, and seemed to consist mainly of market editions of local works.

The high point of my visit to Maiduguri was the series of meetings I had with Shaykh Sharīf Ibrāhīm Ṣāliḥ, a Tijānī shaykh in his early fifties, of Arab ('Shuwa'—a term he dislikes)

1 *Fihris Makhtūṭāt Dār al-Wathā'iq al-Qawmiyya al-Nayjīriyya bi-Kadūnā*, compiled by Bābā Yūnus Muḥammad, ed. and annotated by J.O. Hunwick, London: Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation 1995.

descent. He is an eloquent Arabic speaker, and a man of wide learning, especially in *ḥadīth* and Sufism, though a glance at the list in *ALA*, II of works he has written will show that he is also learned in *tawḥīd*, *fiqh* and history.² A few of his ninety-five works have been published, and he gave me permission to photocopy all the unpublished material for the Northwestern University library collection of Nigerian Arabic manuscripts. The project has now been approved by the curator of the Melville J. Herskovits Library of Africana, David Easterbrook, and the work of photocopying will begin in 1996. Shaykh Sharīf (as he is universally known) has an extraordinary library of Arabic printed books (I would estimate 5-6,000 volumes) and a fine collection of Arabic manuscripts, many of which he obtained in the central Arab world (he has another house and library in Cairo). He is building a large mosque and *madrasa* next to his house. For *ALA*, II I made extensive use of a manuscript version of his *al-Istidhkār li-mā li-‘ulamā’ Kānim-Barnū min al-akhbār wa’l-āthār*—a major *fihris* of Tijānī shaykhs from whom he obtained *ijāzas* or through whom his major *ṭarīqa* lines go back.³

The situation of the collections in Bayero University, Kano, and the Northern History Research Scheme (NHRS), Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, is little different from what I reported in 1988.⁴ Nothing appears to have been added, and no more sophisticated lists of their holdings are available than those then mentioned. At Bayero University the theses presented in the last 5-7 years are not generally available in the Research Room; many were said to be still held by departments. In Kano I also visited the Kano State History Bureau where Alhaji Garba Sa’idu presides over research into Arabic documents. He has assembled an interesting collection of letters from the archives of the Wazir of Sokoto and the Emir’s Palace and is attaching English summaries to each item. He holds a wealth of historical knowledge in

2 In the list of his works, no. 82 should read *Taḥqīq fī ḥudūth al-hayūlā* (not *hiyūlī*) *al-ūlā*, see *ALA*, II, 414.

3 He told me that Vol. I is in press in Cairo.

4 J.O. Hunwick, ‘Notes on some collections of Arabic manuscripts in Nigeria’, *History in Africa*, xv, 1988, 377-83.

his memory, especially about Nigerian mahdism, and in interviews recounts appropriate parts of it, interspersed with Fulfulde poetry.⁵

My visit to Sokoto was too brief to allow me to examine either the collection of the Sokoto State History Bureau (SSHB) or the Centre of Islamic Studies (CIS), University of Sokoto. The latter institution is now headed by Sambo Wali Junaid, son of Waziri Junaid, and its handlist has been updated to reflect additions to the collection since 1988. I was able to meet Waziri Junaid through the good offices of his son. Although very frail, he is mentally alert and took an interest in the project, and it is to him that I have dedicated the finished volume. His extensive library, which includes a considerable number of items in Fulfulde, was recently catalogued under the direction of Hamidu Bobboyi, and the Al-Furqān Foundation will eventually publish a hand-list of it. The Sokoto State History Bureau collection, which has been re-classified, has been similarly catalogued for publication. From the handlist prepared I was able to see that a number of items I noted in 1987 were not included in the reclassified list, and the presumption is that they have been lost. In order to establish the titles of some works of which the SSBH copy was the unique manuscript, I therefore resorted to reporting the old numbers in *ALA*, II, hoping that researchers will try to locate other copies. The same is true of a few items in the NHRS that were reported in the *Interim Reports*, but did not figure in the published catalogue of 1984.

In Sokoto I also met with the former director of the CIS, Umar Bello, who now directs a small research organization called The Islamic Academy. He has published texts and translations of Qāḍī °Abd Allāh's *Risāla ilā 'l-mu°āṣirīn* and the untitled intellectual biography of Muṣṭafā al-Turūdī by °Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Ḥājj. It was he who pointed out to me that the spelling 'Fūdī' is essentially a *vox nihil*. At best it is a pedantic transliteration of فودي. I have therefore adopted the spelling 'Fodiye' which best corresponds to the pronunciation of the

5 See appendix to this report for his comments on parts of Chapter V of *ALA*, II.

epithet in Fulfulde.

Although my visit to Nigeria was extremely useful, both for solving outstanding problems and adding new material, it became clear to me that there remains much that could be done over an extended visit of several months, but which was impossible to accomplish in six weeks shared between six locations. There are, for example, many twentieth-century writers (including some still living), for whom my biographical data are sketchy or non-existent. Several people told me they could obtain biographical data, but in almost every case, were unable to do so before I moved on or left the country. It is my hope that Nigerian scholars, seeing the evident lacunae, will make the effort to gather such data, as well as new titles by known scholars and information about other not included in *ALA*, so that in a few years time it may be possible to produce a supplement to this volume.

Appendix:
The Comments of Alhaji Garba Sa'idu

Alhaji Garba's comments were sent to me with an accompanying letter mailed from Kano in early November. By then the book was already in press. He had kindly made some verbal comments on the passages concerning his father Sa'īd b. Ḥayāt al-Dīn and his grandfather Ḥayāt al-Dīn b. Sa'īd b. Muḥammad Bello, and I did, indeed, modify my draft. However, the comments he later sent me go well beyond those remarks and present interesting information on the Nigerian Mahdist movement. The document has not been edited, other than the correction of obvious typographical errors; the footnotes are my own. His comments refer to material on pp. 154-84 of *ALA*, II.

joh.

It is factual that Khadija the daughter of the Shehu composed many poems in Fulfulde in addition to the Commentary of the Mukhtasar of Sheikh Khalil in Fulfulde.⁶ Her work also aided

6 See *ALA*, II, 161 for Khadija bt. °Uthmān. The sole source on her life, the

Mahdiya for in another Fulfulde poem, she alleged that the Mahdi shall appear on the Nile and his wars shall reach Kordofal!

Abdurra'uf son of Bello, grandson of the Shehu,⁷ who was termed as the wealthiest among the Torankawa during his time, or one of the wealthiest, lived during the reign of Abdurrahman Danyen Kasko (1891-1902), the son of Amiral Muminina Atiku and the grandson of the Shehu. He was said to be in possession of huge herds of cattle, flocks of sheep and goats and gangs of slaves who worked his large farms. He possessed hundreds of granaries (*rumbuna*).

In contradiction to the idea that Sa'id son of Muhammad Bello never mentioned anything concerning the Mahdiya, the latter in his 'Kaasil Muhabbati [*Ka's al-maḥabbā*]' or other Fulfulde poems mentioned the Mahdi in many places.⁸ He wrote 'Bai'ati laka wajibatun', etc., in the 'Kaasil Muhabbati', which was quoted by his son Hayatu in his letter to the Mahdi. He quotes, 'Wa nas'alu Maulana Bi Jahika an naraa,' etc. He had composed as I mentioned before, other 'ajami' poems that are known.

Mallam Mojail mentioned in your book, is Hayatu's younger brother, who died at Kano while on his way proceeding to meet his brother, Hayatu.⁹ Ahmadu Duduwa one of his brothers had already left with him (Hayatu). He died with him during the battle of Dikwa. For all Hayatu's children born at Sokoto travelled to him and joined him except one called Jabbo. The latter died at Kasarawa village, a suburb near Sokoto in 1950s.

It is also incorrect to say that Hayatu established himself at Adamawa first before settling at Balda but passed through Yola, Garwa, Marwa and Bogo, where he spent about six (6) months

⁷ *Arf al-rayḥān* of Wazir Junayd, makes no mention of a commentary on the *Mukhtaṣar*.

7 See *ALA*, II, 178-9. I was not able to come across any biographical information about him. If he was alive in the last decade of the nineteenth century, he must have been born close to the end of Muḥammad Bello's life.

8 For Sa'id b. Muḥammad Bello, see *ALA*, II, 179-80. The list there includes reference to a poem on the expected Mahdi.

9 See *ALA*, II, 181. I was not able to record any biographical information.

before halting at Balda, a No Man Land. You will refer to my 'Effect of Mahdism' for further detail. 'Effect of Mahdism' and 'Mahdiya' were presented during seminars at Bayero University, Kano by myself. Hayatu first came to Kano during the reign of Emir Abdullahi Maje Karofi (1855-1882) but was persuaded to return as a result of letters received from his uncle Amiral Muminina Ma'azu and Nana Maryam Uwaddaje, the daughter of the Shehu. He made another attempt to come through Kano but was again persuaded to return. In his third attempt, he did not come to Kano but followed another route, passed through Kafin Wali in Zaria, Babari in Bauchi, Ashaka, Fika, Kukawa in Borno; Mubi, Yola, Garwa in Adamawa; Marwa, Bogo in Funange or Eastern Adamawa and finally settled at Balda in No-Man-Land occupied by hill dwellers called Baldabu respectively. There he established a ribat when attacked by the neighbouring tribesmen such as Mousgun, Tufuri and so on who live in the north east, east and south east of the area. He could not pass to the east because the road was unsafe due to wars in Kotoko land. Balda was established as a ribat in about 1878/9. It became a strong ribat after three (3) years.

The Mahdi Mohammed Ahmad Ben Sayed Abdullahi of Sudan (1881-85) wrote to him from Ghader¹⁰ and he accepted the message. The Mahdi's letter was accompanied by another letter from Muhammadu Dadare (known also as Modibbo or Faqih Dadari) one of the leading Fellata Ulema who migrated from Sokoto during the reign of Amiral Muminina Atiku (1837-1842). He was said to be one of the Shehu's disciples who came from Mali. He died during the reign of the Khalifa (1885-1899) at the age of over one hundred and twenty (120) years.¹¹ The person who brought the message was Haj Abubakar and Dadare's colleague. The Mahdi appointed Sheikh Hayatu as his AMIL [*ʿāmil*] in the Western Sudan and Sokoto Caliphate.

After averting attacks from the raiding tribesmen he was attacked by Mandara and neighbouring Emirates and was successful in averting all attacks. It happened that his messengers

10 Jabal Qadr?

11 R.S. O'Fahey and I intend to publish an article on this interesting figure in a future issue of *SAJHS*.

to the Mahdi and the Khalifa passed through Rabeh's town situated south of Abeshr (Wadai) while proceeding or returning. For, according to the history Rabeh was with Zubayr Pasha. He fled westward from Fasher (Dar For), when Sulayman son of Zubayr Pasha submitted to Gessi Pasha, the Italian General after his father's departure and detention at Egypt. Under [these] circumstances Rabeh moved westward and engaged Bagirmi. Rabeh from his town heard about the successes of Mahdi's troops, the Ansar against Anglo Egyptian troops. Rabeh then communicated with the Khalifa and the latter advised him through messengers to contact the Amil of the Mahdi, whenever he happened to move westwards. He sent him two (2) messengers. Rabeh did not contact Hayatu immediately but when he found Bagirmi tough and [was] in need of an ally he sent delegates to Hayatu and requested the latter to join him. The messengers came with a bride, Hauwa, the daughter of Rabeh. Hayatu moved from Balda to meet Rabeh. The two met at Amja in 1893. He was only corresponding with him before that. Hayatu had earlier travelled to Menjaffa [in Bagirmi] to restore Burku Manda Yusuf to the throne that he, the latter inherited from his father. He did not help him however when his uncle came again and ousted him again. That incident took place one or two years before Rabeh's arrival.

Hayatu was in peace with Borno before Rabeh and observed the treaty up to the time when Borno attacked his camp during engagement with Rabeh and killed one of his imams Mallam Jalo while praying, when Rabeh's troops fled. He stayed with Rabeh after that and both made a ribat at Dikwa together with Muhammadul Amin (of Mali) and Yusuf Babikr (of Mandara) who were before at Balda. His main reason for joining Rabeh was to enable him to continue Hijra for Bormi and Balda were by then mere villages.

The question of Hayatu being under Rabeh's thumb or detained in Dikwa as claimed by Muhammad Alhaj,¹² both statements are incorrect for even the Arab or rather Sudanese

12 Muhammad Ahmad al-Hajj, 'The Mahdist Tradition in Northern Nigeria', Ph.D. dissertation, Ahmadu Bello University 1973. See pp. 135-7.

followers amongst Rabeh's people respect him as the Khalifa or Amil of the Mahdi. What happened was the incident reported in my earlier account concerning the Emir of Kano, Aliyu's letter to both Hayatu and Rabeh following the defeat of Rabeh's troops under Babikr in Katagum by the Eastern Emirs after annexation of Bedde. As those who defeated his lieutenant Babikr were earlier defeated by Bormi at the battle of Lajoga (?1891). He regarded the defeat as a conspiracy and from then started to show signs of mistrust. This made Hayatu's warrior son to leave Rabeh's camp with half his father's followers, a year before Hayatu's death.

As explained in 'Effect of Mahdism', while proceeding to Sokoto from Yerwa (Maiduguri), Mallam Sa'idu was persuaded by Moi Disa (Emir of) Fika¹³ to settle in his Emirate and agreed to do so for some time after reporting the matter to the political officer in charge of the division, etc., etc., etc. He was only accompanied by his servants and horseboys, viz. Hamman Dija, Isa Jam Na'i, Gorgel, Gabdo, Kachallah Risku and settled at Dumbulwa (not far from the site of Bormi), an area where there were a lot of hyenas but fertile alluvial soil on Gongola river bed. The so called three thousand followers mentioned by Letham (later Sir J.G.) came from the neighbouring Emirates and most of them were descendants or remnants of Bormi Ansar who preferred to live with the son of their leader than under the neighbouring chiefs. Gabdo became Mr (later Sir H.R.) Palmer's horse boy who later travelled with him to Gambia when [Palmer was] transferred to that place as Governor. Risku was handed to the Shehu of Borno, Sanda Kari and died in Gamboru during the reign of Shehu Sanda Shehu Kiarimi (1917-37 Dikwa and Potiskum & Maiduguri 1937-19[67]).¹⁴ Gorgel turned as a trader and lived in Kayori between Potiskum and Gashua, now in Yobe state. The rest left for Jamari Region of Cameroons. Mr H.R. Palmer supported by the Alkali of Fika, Mallam Yakubu Halilu¹⁵ of Fogolawa, Kano, were the initiators of his deportation and

13 Idris, *reg.* 1902-22.

14 See John N. Paden, *Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto: values and leadership in Nigeria*, London: Hodder & Stoughton 1987, 340 n. 49.

15 See *ALA*, II, 380, 574, 577. Palmer translated his history of Fika.

detention from 1923 to 1959 and responsible for the calamities that happened to him!

The statement that he was allowed to take residence in Kano is wrong. The fact was that he was transferred to Kano under Order No. 35 of 1945 under the same condition mentioned in Ordinance No. 118 of 1924.

The deportation and detention was struck out after a debate in the House of Assembly in 1959.

(signed Alhaji Garba Abubakar Sa'idu)