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ARABIC COLLECTIONArabic Materials for Ghanaian History

At the moment, the collection of Arabic manuscripts in the Library at the Institute of African Studies, Legon, contains about 450 manuscripts. More manuscripts are being collected all the time by our excellent and indefatigable collector, Al-Hajj 'Uthmān Ishāq Boyo. A catalogue of this important collection is being prepared. Most of the material has now been roughly catalogued and classified and is available in a card file.

Many of the items which are included in the collection, either as actual manuscripts or Xerox copies, are of considerable historical value. As one might expect, most of the manuscripts collected are from Northern and Central Ghana, although there is material from Ashanti and other places. In the absence of other written records, these manuscripts assume a special importance for the historian and sociologist. To give some indication of what this material is like, I thought it might be useful to translate a few specimens of it. Having no knowledge of place-names in Northern Ashanti and elsewhere in Northern Ghana, Mr. Stephen Andoh and Dr. Jack Goody have very kindly assisted me in this problem, and I am grateful to them for their many suggestions as to the right readings.

MANUSCRIPT AR 148 This is a single sheet, having an account of the Mande on one side and of the kings of Ashanti on the other. The section on Ashanti reads as follows:-

"The names of the kings of Ashanti (Assanti) which are preserved by the shaykhs who maintain the traditions of past events (ḥāfizīn).

The first of them was Osei Tutu (Antu). He was the one who fought with Ntim Gyakari, king of the land of Denkyira (Danghira). Then he fought with the enemy twenty times after that, according to what people say.

Then ruled Opoku Ware (Fuku Wari) who waged war one hundred and forty times against the enemy. It was he who killed Ameyaw (Hamiyawu) of Takyiman (Takima).

Then came Obodum (Budum) who killed his father after he had ruled for three days. His life was short after that.

Then ruled Osei Yaw who fought his enemies twenty times.

Then Osei Kojɔ (Kudhu). It was he who fought Ankara Fasɔ(?) and campaigned twenty times against the enemy.

Then Bonsu (Bansu): he fought against the land of Bontuku (Ghotogho) and the land of Kong (Kun) and killed the Sultan of Bontuku, who was called Adinkrah (Dinghara). He fought against the enemy twenty-two times. In all of that the people of Ashanti were never defeated once.

After him ruled Kwaku Dua (Kiwaku Duwa), and after him Karikari, who took the field against the people of Kumbi, (Kpembe) and the Ewe (Aybi = Ayigbe) country, that is, Yoruba (Yuruba), and Tawtaw (?). Then came his sister, Akyaa (Yaki ...), and she cheated (?? - reading ghalatat for ghalatat) the land of Ashanti twenty-two times. After her ruled Prempeh (Firinfi) the Great, who was captured by those Christians".

There is no indication of the name of the author or the date of composition of this manuscript, but as it mentions Prempeh, it could not have been written much after his deportation in 1896.

MANUSCRIPT AR 410 This is an extract from a printed book, Al-Kanz al-mufid lil-murid al-sadiq, written by Abu'l Fawz al-Hajj Ahmad Baba al-Wa'iz, and printed by the firm of Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi and Sons, Cairo, 1379/1950. The author is a prominent Tijani leader in Kumaŋi.

Aḥmad Bāba quotes a statement in his book by the famous Ghanaian poet, Al-Hājj 'Umar of Kete Krachi, which is of interest for the history of Hausa settlement in Kumasi and Ashanti territory (pp. 84-86):

"... Our shaykh, Al-Hājj 'Umar b. Abī Bakr B. 'Uthmān al-Kabbāwī - may God be pleased with him! - says ... 'What I know about the affairs of Ashanti is insignificant, but what I do know to be true is that not a single zongo (a special quarter for Hausas within a town) was known in that region, or in all of Ashanti territory until after the conquest of Kumasi in the days of Karikari, the Sultān of Ashanti. Before that time, the territory of Ashanti was closed - no Hausa man entered it, and no other person, unless he were a slave when they (Ashantis) purchased him. Their market was the village of Salagha, and they brought many things to it from J.ū.z. ghūrū (??). The people of Hausa, Moshi, Dagomba, Borgu, Nupe, and Wangara went there with whatever goods they had. At Salagha they joined the people of Ashanti; they bought and sold and then returned to their /own/ districts. They carried on in this way until the war took place between Karikari and the Christians (1874). He sent to Salagha /85/ for a learned man from among the Hausa, to help him with prayer. Mallām Bīnafī, al-Hawsāwī went to him, and remained, aiding him with prayer. He died there, and he was the first Hausa to enter Kumasi any time. Then, when the Christians had conquered the territory of Kumasi in the days of Karikari, the /Hausa/ people began to establish a zongo in Ashanti territory. But at Kumasi itself, they did not build a zongo until about the time when Prempeh was taken.

The Hausas came about that time with the Christian troops who captured Prempeh, and after his capture, the Hausas remained there, and built a small zongo. At that time their headman was Mallām Ibrāhima, known as Mallām Ghardī. He was the first to establish a zongo in Kumasi.

It lasted until the Yaa Asantewa disturbances (1901), when the Ashantis caused the Hausas to be besieged by a group of Christians, and the fright and hunger of the Hausas became intensified. So it was, until the second Christian conquest of Kumasi. The Hausas were saved from that difficult situation and they found a place for a zongo. It grew little by little; Mallam Ghardi was made amir (i.e. sarkin zongo), and he was the first amir of the zongo there. Then, when the number of people in the zongo grew, Mallam Ghardi was deposed. I do not know the reason for this. Then Mai Ghida was made amir. He was a great trader (read tājir for zājjār); in the course of his activities he ran up many debts with cattle traders, because he had wasted their money by squandering it. His creditors brought suit against him before the colonial administration (hukumat Inghilish). He was jailed, then deposed and expelled. He was succeeded by Mallam 'Uthman Kashināwī as amir. In his days the prestige of the sarkinate of the Kumasi zongo was enhanced. Buying and selling increased. Traders came from every side to the Kumasi zongo, and at that time the Hausa people derived a lot of money from it. Matters continued in this way until he ('Uthman) died. Then Mallam Salaw was made amir. He was from Katsina also and his first name was Husayn. He achieved good results in the Kumasi zongo in his days; the thieves fled from fear of Salaw - prior to that a lot of Moshi people had been stealing the property of the people. Today, he is alive and in control of the zongo.

As for the first /86/ zongo established in Ashanti territory, it was at Kintampo, then at Atebubu, then at Yefri (Yeji?), then at Kamandū (Akumadan?), then at Kumayi (Akuma near Nkwaben?), then Subinso (Subūsū), then Ejura, then Mampong, then Anshat (?), and then Nkoranza (Kuransā), and the establishment of zongos has continued until our own time. All of that took place after the penetration of the Christians into Ashanti territory. That is a short resume (khulāsa) of what I know about that matter. There is no doubt, uncertainty, or conjecture in it. What is short is sufficient and is better than what is long and amusing..."

Apparently, Al-Hājj 'Umar was personally acquainted with Mallam Salaw, as he wrote a poem in praise of him, a qasīda ending ending in rā, which begins "Bushra man ataka bashir". The collection includes several copies of this qasīda AR 16 (xii), AR 127, AR 239, AR 168.

In the preface of a short treatise on letter writing (one of the few representatives of the literary genre of inshā' from the Western Sudan), composed by al-Hājj 'Umar in 1877, (of which the Institute possesses a copy dated Safar 1306 October 1888) the author says that his family came originally from Kabba in Northern Nigeria, but that he was born in Kano (about 1850 ? ) and grew up there, emigrating to Ghana perhaps in the early 80's of the last century. He died in Kete Krachi on 17 Rabi' I 1353/30 June 1934. His epistolographic treatise is entitled Sharḥat al-wariqa fi 'ilm al-wathīqa, and the Institute's best copy is AR 313 (1306); others are AR 378 and 381.

Best known for his poetry, Al-Hājj 'Umar wrote on a wide variety of subjects, ranging from influenza ("Tunkuyawā "; AR 23, 131, 305), to satirical poetry, religious and praise poems, and other which register his protest against the European conquest of West Africa and the misdeeds of the colonial conquerors, or criticism of the disarray of local rulers and their incessant quarrels. Some of the more important of his poems from the Institute's collection are as follows:-

AR 27: Tanbīh al-ikhwān fī dhikr al-aḥzān, a long poem in rajaz metre (10 falā, about 150 lines) describing the collapse of religion and morals in Salagha and the misdeeds of its rulers, with a long and detailed description of the Salagha civil war with dates for some of the important events in the war. Written about 1891, this is a very important, if orthodox religious view of the events leading up to the civil war, the battle of Kumbi (Kpembe), etc. Here is al-Hājj 'Umar's description of the raiding, by the Sultans of Kpembe, of the market at Salagha:

In their town there was much snatching,  
 of salt, meat, alum and cowries  
 From the market place, and clothing, too;  
 You saw them on horseback, racing to the  
 Market for oppressive purposes.  
 They feared none of the townspeople.  
 In their eyes they were mere slaves;  
 They devoured what they had, by oppression.  
 Stole their cattle and goats,  
 Grabbed the grease from the hands of slavegirls,  
 And stared at them with scorn,  
 They disregarded the warning of God,  
 For they were dubious folk.  
 They drank wine and danced, exchanging conversation  
 Which exceeded all bounds. They treated the people  
 Like dogs, forgetting God's punishment.  
 Didn't they do precisely what they wanted  
 In their town ? They were evil.  
 They scomed the kings of the earth,  
 And treated their town as a pasture, where  
 They roamed like browsing beasts,  
 The town their grazing land for booty,  
 Well-provided with open space and water.  
 And they acted so tyrannically in public,  
 That they made their village like a cadaver,  
 On which they sat like vultures...

AR 3, 8, 139: Nazm al-la'ālī bi-akhbār wa tanbīh al-kirām,  
 a qasīda rhyming in mīm, giving considerable detail about towns in  
 Ghana, and elsewhere in West Africa, which had been occupied and  
 were being controlled by the Christians, along with an enumeration of  
 the misdeeds of the representatives of the colonial powers in each place.  
 Written about 1318/1900-01, this poem is important evidence about the  
 feelings of the conquered towards European colonialism.

AR 4,417: Mashrā mā al-khabar li-wāridīn wāriduhā bi'l-nazar, a poem on much the same theme, regretting the coming of the Christians to West Africa, and giving a list of the places taken by them, and advising the Muslims to place their trust in God. Dated 9 Muharram 1317/20 May 1899.

AR 16 (ii): Tal'al-munāfi'a fī dhikr al-munāzi'a, a qasīda rhyming in nūn alif, giving an account of the civil war in Salagha. Fairly short, to be read along with AR 27 above.

AR 109 (ii), 135: Yā Khalīlayya fa-'ajabā idh rā'ytā al-'ajabā, a qasīda ending in bā alif, criticizing the activities of a certain Musa, who claimed to be a mahdī, and his three companions, who were active in Northern Ghana and were making much money from their "missionary" activities. Dated 1322H./1904-05.

One of al-Hājj 'Umar's pupils, 'Alī b. Muhammad Baraw al-Salghawī, born at Salagha in 1302/1884-85 and who died at Accra in 1376/1956-57, wrote an interesting short poem (AR 7, AR 16 (xi), AR 408) entitled Fī naim dhū dhahab wa zalezalat Salagha, on the appearance of a comet in Salagha on 21 Shawwal 1298/16 September 1881, and on the earthquake there (i.e. the civil war) in 1891. He includes praise of his master, 'Umar; other poems by him, mostly on religious subjects are included in the collection<sup>1</sup>.

An event of the mid-1860's, which concerns the histories of both northwestern Ghana and Upper Volta, and is of general interest for Islamic history in this territory, is the jihad of al-Hājj Mahmūd, for which the Institute collection contains a certain amount of material. Mahmūd, a Qādirī leader, established a small state at Wahhābu, about 100 miles north-east of Bobo Dioulass in Upper Volta. AR 65 and AR 83, the same text, contain a poetical description of Mahmūd and enumerate his excellent qualities, whilst AR 66, Mas'ala 'inda'l-rajalayn, is a dialogue between two young men who discuss the causes and the rights and wrongs of Mahmūd's movement. AR 348 and



AR 349 include statements of various individuals in that region about the jihād, and AR 70 is another poem touching on it. Further information can be had from AR 77, an anonymous one-folio ms., which seems to have something in common with AR 66. It reads as follows:-

"Two men differ over the cause of the jihād of al-Hajj Mahmūd, so the Shaykh of the Time (?), gives them information about it. The most sound tradition has it that al-Hajj Mahmud, whose nisba (Arabic name usually indicating a geographical origin) was Tālū, had gone to Shaykh Taslīm (sic) Saghanughu, with his companions, for instruction. He (Mahmud) had a beautiful woman named Marya. But one of his companions had intercourse with her. /After that -/ neither one could stay in the same place as the other. For that reason, he (the companion) went to Shaykh Sīdīq at Safan, (Safane) and died /there/; but Mahmud remained with his brother Karamoko Yara, the blind walī of God, who could perform glorious feats and miracles, studying under him. God extended his knowledge, and /on one occasion/, when he saw the new moon of Ramadan, he told people about it, who denied it. He was angered at that. /This occurred/ after the death of his shaykh, who was the most learned man at Safan at that time. So he went to Sū'ūnu, but saw nobody who could equal his shaykh in knowledge. For this reason, he set off to see Imam Yahya ibn 'Abd al-Rahman in Bobo Dioulasso (Julasu), considering him to be a sea of knowledge. He studies under him as much as he could and attached himself to his sanad (chain of spiritual authorities or teachers), and adhered to his wird, the Qadiriya.

He then prepared to make the pilgrimage, and when he reached one of the towns in Dakati (Daghātī, Dagarti) territory called Bura (or Damakura), he made his afternoon, sunset, evening, and morning prayers. They (people of Bura) surrounded him and gathered up the dust from his praying place and sent it with him to Makka and Madina and Syria.

In Syria he befriended 'Abd al-Rahīm, a descendant of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jaylānī, and renewed his wīrd with him. He prayed with him, and promised him ('Abd al-Rahīm) to return and to conquer that country, and if he conquered it, to build a mosque in every town. After completing his pilgrimage, he went back to Wā. The people there followed him, and he made a covenant with them to conquer those places. They followed him until he came to a town on the shore of the river (Volta ?), where he sat down under a rīmī tree, I mean at Banda, with his people, and set up his tent. They disliked that on his part, and a dispute took place between him and them. /Nevertheless/, the first to pledge allegiance to him were the Daghatī Dyula (Julā) and those people of Wā who were his pupils, Sīnu, Konāte, Traore, and his clerk Idrīs. It was he who examined me in their library (??). The Shaykh won a victory over the unbelievers, took them prisoner, and made his power felt in the remaining towns. He then went to Boromo and captured it... then to the town of the king of the unbelievers, and with the aid of Thānī Ibrāhīm, took it, and named it Wahhābu, and made it his capital. /Likewise/, he took Koho (Kūhu), the most glorious of those towns in resisting and in bravery, and renamed it Shukrallāh.<sup>2</sup>

As for the Hajj's close followers, /they were/ Nuḥu, Wahhābu, Dhamūku, Konāte, Bus'abā, 'Umaru, Bāmuru, Mukhtarū, Sabābu, Dhumā, Bāraka. They conquered Bura, then Firāji, A'da (or Wa'da), Kāsa'a, and Damakura. The unbelievers laid seige to Damakura until the /defenders/ were eating carrion, skins, and horses, for a period of twenty-five days. Then he /Mahmūd/ relieved them and conquered them. His people did not stop until he was ruling over all of the places, as 'Abd al-Rahīm in Syria had promised him. He took away from all the people of Safan the religious books which they possessed, which they had captured, and whose foundations they had denied, in order to glorify others than his Shaykh. He did that to give the lie to them /for the way they had treated him/ over the matter of the moon of Ramaḍān. However, he was giving legal decisions according to the Book, establishing the Truth, dividing the booty /canonically/ teaching religion and ordering the Good and forbidding the Bad, until he met God. His tomb is in his mihrāb, and I visited it many times when I was

with the Wazir Karamoko Shirbu, as his clerk (kātib), and when his /Mahmūd's / son was ruling, the ascetic servant of God, Mukhtārū. He extended his state, and the Christians supported him. Today the amirate is in the hands of their servant, that is Ṣādiq... but the imamate is in the hands of their descendants..."

Other interesting items in the collection are AR 240, Qit'a min ta'rīkh Takrūr, a portion, perhaps of some longer work, of a historical and geographical nature, including king lists and dates, discussions of wars between the bīdān and the sūdān, and frequent mention of the Fulani of Walata and elsewhere. In addition, there are many lists of kings and imāms from Dagomba, Mamprussi, Salagha, Gonja, Wā, and many other places in Northern Ghana, North Western Togo, and the adjoining parts of Upper Volta and Ivory Coast. 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.

B.G.Martin

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1. I would like to thank Sayyid Muḥammad Bāba Koforidua, the son of 'Alī Baraw al-Salghawī for his kind help in giving me information for this article.
  2. Shehu Aḥmadu of Masina named his capital Ḥamdallāh. Perhaps Mahmūd was following his example? It is also noteworthy that there is a ruined town called Wahhābu about 30 miles North East of Wā. What is the connection, if any, between this Wahhābu and the town of the same name in Upper Volta?