

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

The African e-Journals Project has digitized full text of articles of eleven social science and humanities journals. This item is from the digital archive maintained by Michigan State University Library. Find more at:

<http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/>

Available through a partnership with



Scroll down to read the article.

THE SAGHANUGHU AND THE SPREAD OF MĀLIKI LAW:a provisional note.

Ivor Wilks

Throughout the month of May, 1966 an Institute of African Studies team, consisting of Mr. J.J. Holden, al-Hājj ʿUthmān b. Ishāq Boyo, Mr. Cleophas Futuri, and myself, was able to work in Northern Ghana, Upper Volta, and Niger. In June we spent a further week continuing inquiries in the Sunyani-Wenchi area. Mr. Holden was engaged in following up his work upon 19th century Islamic movements in the area, with especial reference to the Zabarima incursions from Niger into the Voltaic region, whilst I was concerned primarily with further study of the spread of Māliki law in the same area, and particularly with the Saghanughu agency in this process. In the course of the expedition, however, we were able to obtain field data on other but related matters: on the jihād of al-Ḥājj Mahmūd Karāntaw, on Mūsā Sati, on the Fulani of Sey, on the Baghayughu of Wagadugu and Yendi; and - not obviously related - were able to examine the vast iron-smelting site at Numudaga, near Bobo-Dioulasso. All field notes are being deposited in the Library of the Institute of African Studies, and a number of Arabic works which we were able to borrow for copying have been accessioned in the IASAR series.

It will take considerable time to work through the data obtained. The following provisional note is intended therefore to do no more than indicate the main lines of the study of the spread of Māliki law

which I sought to further in the course of these field trips. I have to acknowledge my deep indebtedness to al-Hājj ʿUthmān b. Ishāq Boyo for his invaluable assistance not only in the course of these journeys, but over many years, and of course to the Institute of African Studies for its financial support.

Since 1962 I have been able to examine some forty West African asnād (sing. sanad), chains of authority for the transmission of learning. All are written in Arabic script and language. All are from Ghana, Ivory Coast, Mali or Upper Volta. Xerox copies of many of them are accessioned in the Arabic Collection, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana - IASAR/49; 50; 141; 142; 162; 163; 175; 232; 295; 338; 339; 427; 436-9; 444. Others I was able to copy in the field.

The asnād, often referred to colloquially as salāsīl, (sing. silāsila), constitute a scholar's ijāza, or licence to teach. Upon the satisfactory completion of the study of a given work, the student receives a copy of, or is allowed to copy, his teacher's sanad, to which his own name is then added. Such asnād or salāsīl are valued according to the esteem in which are held the teachers whose names appear in it. In consequence, a student who has read, for example, Imām Mālik's Muwattā' over a period of many months may subsequently spend two or three further months in re-reading it from a more famed teacher, in order to obtain a sanad through the latter. Ideally, asnād should incorporate assessments of the qualities of the various teachers named: ʿilm al-rijālāt. The West African asnād that I have seen sometimes give some indication of the esteem accorded to this or that figure; one is simply muʿallim, another is al-shaykh, al-walī, al-faqih, etc., etc. In general, however, an outstanding teacher tends rather to be remembered in unwritten tradition, or else commemorated in independent works, often in verse (e.g. IASAR/18; 95; 352).

The keeping of such asnād is a tradition of some antiquity in West Africa: Ahmad Bābā al-Tinbukī (d. 1627), for example, is reported as having passed on "the chain of authority of the Mālikī law school" to Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb of Marrakush...¹ Nevertheless, the practice might appear to have been restricted in its observance: that is,

1. See J.O. Hunwick, BSOAS, XXVII, 3, 1964, p.585.

in the forty *asnād* I have examined, the chains all converge upon one Muhammad al-Muṣṭafā b. ʿAbbās Saghānughu, who flourished in the mid-18th century, and whose grave at Boron in the northern Ivory Coast is still a considerable centre of pilgrimage. I know of no other corpus of comparable documents from elsewhere in West Africa².

I append a typical *sanad* for reference, that of ʿAbd al-Rahman b. Shaykh Ḥamīd Tarawiri of Wā, in northern Ghana. Somewhat paradoxically, the forty *asnād*, whether for Imām Mālik's *Muwattʿ*, for ʿIyād's *al-Shifāʾ*, for al-Suyūṭī's *Tafsīr*, etc., all run back to Imām Mālik: that is, they are chains of teachers as such, rather than chains for the transmission of a specific work. The chains, however, are obviously incomplete. From Imām Mālik to Muhammad al-Muṣṭafā Saghānughu, inclusively, the *asnād* list the names of nineteen teachers³, - an insufficient number to span about ten centuries. The early parts of the chains, from Imām Mālik b. Anas (d.796) to ʿAbd al-Rahman b. al-Qasim (d.806/7) to ʿAbd al-Salām Sahnūn (d.854/5), are well known: they represent the spread of Imām Mālik's teachings from Madina through Egypt to Qairawān, where Sahnūn became *qāḍī* in 848. It is probably at this point that the break occurs: I incline to associate such figures as Shaykh Sīsā Kūru and Shaykh Tūru Kūru with late medieval Mali - with the period when Mansa Sulaymān (d. 1360) "brought lawyers of the Māliki school to his country"⁴ - while al-Hājj Sālīm Sūwārī, Muhammad Būni, and ʿUmar Fufana are well remembered Malian ʿulamāʾ of the 15th to 16th centuries. From the mid-16th century ʿUmar Fufana to the mid-18th century Muhammad al-Muṣṭafā Saghānughu transmission occurs through seven Saghānughu teachers, and one Tarawiri (Traoré), indicating the important position in the teaching field that the Saghānughu came to occupy in this period (and suggesting, incidentally, that the average age gap between a student and his teacher - a 'teaching generation' - was of the order of twenty-five years.)

-
2. I exempt from this remark the Tijāniyya and Qādariyya chains, which are common, but of a quite different character.
 3. A few have eighteen or twenty: such variations are often clearly due to a copyist's error.
 4. Al-ʿUmarī, *Masālik al-Absār*, ch.10.

'Saghanughu' is a nisba or identification name used by members of a Dyula lineage strongly represented in the northern and western Ivory Coast, and in western Upper Volta. To this day the Saghanughu retain their strong attachment to learning, providing numerous communities with imāms, qāḍīs, muftis, etc, and so forming one of the major components of the 'ulamā' class in the region. Indeed, I am indebted for much of the material in this note to al-Hājj Muhammad Marhaba Saghanughu, mufti of Bobo-Dioulasso whose knowledge of the spread of Māliki law in western West Africa - backed by the resources of his splendid library - is unexcelled.

The special status of the Saghanughu is acknowledged by the Malinke griots, who classify them among the five original Muslim lineages of the Mande world.⁵ They are to be regarded as a specialized 'clerical' lineage existing in symbiotic relationship with other Dyula groups whose association, historically, has been with commerce (Malinke dyula, 'trader'). The Dyula trading corporations of Mali, from the 14th century onwards, systematically extended the range of their activities and founded such southerly centres as Boron and Kong in the northern Ivory Coast, and Bi^{cū} (Begho) in Ghana, and there can be little doubt that the Saghanughu followed the traders in a religious and juristic capacity. The Ta'rikh al-Sudān suggests, for example, the presence of Saghanughu shaykhs as far south as Bi^{cū} by the end of the 15th century⁶. Earlier, in 1352, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa had visited the Malian town of Zāghari, lying north of the Niger in the Jenne region, and found it:

"large and inhabited by black traders called Wanjarāta. With them are a certain number of white men who belong to the schismatic and heretical sect known as the Ibadites; they are called Saghanaghu".⁷

5. See G. Dieterlen, Africa XXVII, 2, 1957, p.125.

6. See Monteil's corrections, Bull. IFAN, B XXVII, 3-4, 1965 p.490. The identification of al-Sa^cadi's Bitu with Bi^{cū} is one for which I intend to argue in a future paper.

7. Ed. Defremery and Sanguinetti, iv, pp.394-5.

The Wanjarāta traders are, of course, the Dyula, who are still widely known by the alternative name Wangara. The structural resemblance between the mid-14th century community of Zāghari, where Ṣaḡhanaghū Ibadites lived in association with Wangara traders, and present communities such as Kong, where Ṣaḡhanaghū ^ʿulamā' co-exist with the Dyula traders, suggests strongly that Ibn Battūta's Ṣaḡhanaghū and the modern Ṣaḡhanaghū are one and the same - early Ibadite affiliations having been relinquished under pressure of West African Māliki orthodoxy. It may or may not be of significance, that while Ibn Battūta's white Ibadites must certainly have been of Maghribi background, in at least one extant version of their tradition (IASAR/246) the Ṣaḡhanaghū attach their genealogies to Andalusian Umayyad ones.

In the second half of the 18th century the Ṣaḡhanaghū appear to have entered into a particularly dynamic phase of activity, and the impact of their teaching became felt in many communities throughout the Voltaic region. Symptomatic of this was the establishment of new Ṣaḡhanaghū imāmates: that of Kong by ^ʿAbbās b. Muḥammad al-Mustafā (died 1801), of Bobo-Dioulasso by Sa^ʿid b. Muḥammad al-Mustafā in 1774/5, and later, of Dār al-Islām (Upper Volta) by Maḥmūd b. Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Mustafā in 1849/50. To the Ṣaḡhanaghū teachers in such centres came students from other towns, from Bonduku, Buna, Banda, Wa, Safane and the like. Completing their studies, with their licences to teach, they returned to their towns, opened schools, and taught new generations of students to whom they in turn issued asnād. In this way new teaching dynasties arose, like the Bamba ^ʿulamā' of Banda, the Timiti of Bonduku, and the Tarawiri of Wa.⁸ This process may be reconstructed in detail through a study of the proliferation of the chains of transmission from the time of Muḥammad al-Mustafā onwards,⁹ though field data are necessary for the introduction of a geographical dimension, since the asnād seldom note the teachers' towns.

The important part played by the Ṣaḡhanaghū in the spread of Māliki teachings in the later 18th and 19th centuries is, then, clear. Their relationship, however, to the 19th century Islamic revolutionary movements -

8. For Imam Sa^ʿid of Wa, who studied in Kong c. 1800, see my note in Research Review, Inst. of African Studies, Legon, II, 2, 1966, pp.65-6.

9. I am currently investigating the possibility of the use of a computer in this exercise.

to the mujaḥidūn of the region - remains to be assessed. There are certainly suggestive links. Thus al-Ḥājj ʿUmar al-Fūtī is creditably said to have studied ʿarūd, qāfiya, manṭiq and bayān (prosody, rhyme, logic and eloquence) under Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafa Saghanughu (d. 1825/6) in Bobo-Dioulasso¹⁰, while Muḥammad al-Abyād b. Abī Bakr b. Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafa taught Muḥammad Kārāntaw whose son and pupil al-Ḥājj Maḥmūd created the Muslim state of Wahabu.

The problem of the availability of Māliki teachings - of the availability of the actual books and of scholars to expound them - has always been a pressing one for West African Muslim communities. While all members of a society, as individuals, may correctly observe the prayers, the fast, etc., the society as such can only regulate its affairs in accordance with Islamic precepts in so far as it has access to the sources of law, and to expositions of them. On the basis of field work carried out between 1962 and 1966 I hope to be able to give some account of the Saghanughu agency in the spread of Māliki teachings, and to attempt an assessment of the sociological importance of this for select West African Muslim - and non-Muslim - communities.

-
10. Al-Ḥājj Umar al-Fūtī is said to have assisted in the construction of the mihrab of the Saghanughu mosque in Bobo-Dioulasso, which is still preserved though the remainder of the building has been reconstructed. The Fulani poetical biography of al-Ḥājj ʿUmar, by Muḥammad Aliyu Tyam, also refers to a visit to Kong.