

1880s, it was not clear who would become dominant and in what direction a promising scholarly career might lie.

It was in this context that Shaykh Muḥammad wrote several letters to Aḥmad al-Kabir and important Futanke disciples and kinsmen at the court. Two of these letters were written to Aḥmad al-Kabir in 1871-2; in them Shaykh Muḥammad requested aid for making the pilgrimage and congratulated Aḥmad al-Kabir on his victory at Gemukura.²³ The letter which is translated below, and which Shaykh Muḥammad wrote to his relatives in Segu at the end of 1874, reflects the close ties of kinship and the common concerns of the two regimes. The principal preoccupation of Saint Louis, the menace of the Madiyanke, was shared by Aḥmad al-Kabir.

The letter bears witness to the prestige and ambition of Shaykh Muḥammad. It contains an elaborate seal, a product undoubtedly of the pilgrimage. Indeed, Muḥammad uses a large seal at the beginning of his letter and a small one at the end. The text is in *saj'* or "rhymed prose."

TRANSLATION²⁴

[60r] Only God is sufficient.²⁵

Praise be to God as He deserves to be praised, and blessings upon our master Muḥammad, His Messenger and servant. May God be pleased with our

²³ The two letters are in BNP, MO, FA 5582, ff. 58 (dated 23 November 1871, requesting aid for the pilgrimage) and 62 (dated 9 January 1872, congratulating Aḥmad on his victory).

²⁴ From BNP, MO, FA 5582, f. 60.

²⁵ Literally "God is my sufficiency." These words, in the upper right-hand corner of 60r, seem to introduce the seal in which the same expression is used. The seal was probably acquired during Shaykh Muḥammad's pilgrimage, either while he was in the Holy Lands or during his passage in Morocco, cited in the letter. It does not appear in his correspondence with Segu in 1872 (BNP, MO, FA 5582, ff. 58 and 62), where a much cruder seal is used. The seal reads: "The humble servant of God, Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd ibn Muḥammad. I give my accounting to God, the only God upon whom I depend; He is the God of the throne. I give my accounting to God; whatever has been made by God is tidings to you so that your hearts may be calm in it. Victory is from none except God." The seal is found on several letters written in 1889-90 and contained in ANS 13G 143, *pièces* 120, 132 and 201. Shaykh Muḥammad also obtained a seal from the Muslim Tribunal in St. Louis, presumably through his close ties with Tamsir Ḥammād and Bū El Mogdad (see ANS 13G 173, *pièces* 36 and 38, dated 17 December 1875); it is presumably not the seal that appears here.

shaykh, Shaykh Sa'd Bū,²⁶ may he be pleased with us, and fulfill for him the inheritance of his father.²⁷

Thereafter: peace which is more delightful than the gentle breeze and more pleasant than the health of a healthy heart in the other life if God wills and "you will nothing save by the will of God."²⁸ To our maternal uncle Sa'd ibn al-Mufassir 'Abdul Tafsir²⁹ and his brother Ibrāhīm and all of their sisters in general and particularly Sella and Bariju and Fāṭima Rāsin³⁰ and others among the brothers. We are writing to you to inform you that God Most High has favored me by [allowing] me to return to our people from our pilgrimage and our visit to the best of mankind [the Prophet Muḥammad] (upon whom be the best of blessing and the purest peace). This was accomplished through your *baraka*, praise God for this. We are today preparing to return to Futa if God Most High wills it.³¹

Indeed I read the letter which you wrote me two years ago after our return from the pilgrimage [which came] by the intermediary of Mawlāy 'Umar

²⁶ The alternative reading of *shaykhuna al-shaykh sa'd abih* is "our shaykh, the shaykh in making him prosperous." The author uses the same formula in 5582, ff. 58 and 62.

²⁷ Probably a reference to Sa'd Bū's inheritance from his father, Muḥammad Fādih. It could also refer to Aḥmad al-Kabīr, whose inheritance from Shaykh 'Umar had been contested by his brothers.

²⁸ Qur'ān 76:30.

²⁹ The letter suggests the impressive genealogical credentials of Shaykh Muḥammad. He was the son of Ḥafsa, the sister of Sa'd, from the Kan family of Mbolo Biran in central Futa. The Kan of Mbolo Biran were one of the leading religious and political families of the Islamic regime. For much of the nineteenth century they controlled the receipt of customs from the French, established close relations with St. Louis, and amassed a considerable fortune for themselves. It was quite probably these maternal relatives of Shaykh Muḥammad who initially gave him such excellent access to the Muslim collaborator milieu of St. Louis. See Robinson, *Chiefs and Clerics*, pp. 16, 28-9.

³⁰ Possibly the wife of Sa'd, and the daughter of Almamy Muḥammad Biran Wan of Mbumba. The Wan were another important family to which Shaykh Muḥammad was closely related.

³¹ Shaykh Muḥammad had apparently just returned from the pilgrimage, arriving in St. Louis after the last leg of his trip across the far western Sahara. He anticipated visiting his native Futa in the near future. The reference to *baraka* may reflect Aḥmad's assistance for the journey. For Paul Soleillet's observations of Shaykh Muḥammad, who accompanied him at the beginning of the French explorer's trip in 1878, see *Voyage à Ségou*, pp. 26-7, 43-6.

in whose hands I put some of our property. I left some gifts with him and he sent them to you in that year. I am preparing now to come to you if God Most High wills it, after I see the people and the brethren who are in Futa. As soon as the bearer of my letter reaches you, send me what you have mentioned in your [earlier] letter, a fine and precious slave girl.³²

Now as for my maternal uncle Biran³³, tell him that he owes me a fine servant.³⁴ Give greetings to our brother Aḥmad al-Mukhtār and tell him all of my news. And greet for me with joy the Commander of the Faithful and Sa'id Jeliya³⁵ and Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mujtaba and 'Uthmān Kūsā³⁶ and Belle Gede and 'Abdul Gede and the other brothers.

Now we heard that the Commander of the Faithful (may God make him powerful) has given you possession of the settlement of Guigne.³⁷ Praise and gratitude be to God. If indeed that is true, then seize the ten [men of the] Awlād Bū Sbā',³⁸ and humiliate them and treat them in a vile manner, because they robbed me on the road, took my money and made off with it and wanted to kill me. It was God who prevented them from doing that. And as for the

³² This standing order for a beautiful slave suggests the closeness of the relationship between the Umarians and Shaykh Muḥammad at this time. One of the most important means of recruitment for the Umarian regime was to send slaves in the company of recruiting envoys to Senegal. There was also a regular market for slaves in Senegal brought in from the east, the chief area of enslavement. Domestic slavery was widely practiced in Senegal and St. Louis, despite the liberal pronouncements of 1789 and 1848. See Robinson, *Chiefs and Clerics*, pp. 30-1, 111-15.

³³ A variation of Ibrāhīm. He was a Wan of Mbumba. Shaykh Muḥammad's paternal grandmother was a Wan.

³⁴ Written *sifsīr*, a *sofa* or valet.

³⁵ Aḥmad al-Kabīr's *wazīr* and author of the chronicle translated in Document 10.

³⁶ The author and compiler of Documents 7 and 10. This reinforces the probability that Shaykh Muḥammad stayed in Niore for some time during the period of residence of Aḥmad al-Kabīr and his entourage.

³⁷ Written *jike*. The Umarian installation there raised the question of relations with Saharan groups, which the shaykh was now about to treat. See Document 11B.

³⁸ A Saharan group who regularly preyed upon the allies of the French and increased the difficulty of making the pilgrimage via Morocco.

Regueibat,³⁹ set them free and don't take anything from them, because they were my companions on the road and were very kind to me. So show them nothing but kindness and good treatment.

What we have now in the way of news is that Ibrāhim ibn Almamy Muḥammad⁴⁰ and Muḥammad Sile⁴¹ together with the Damel fought with a great force against [60v] Aḥmad Mahdī who claimed that he was 'Īsā (peace be upon him), and that his father was the Mahdī.⁴² Aḥmad continued his war against them, but now the Governor of Ndar together with his forces⁴³ has resolved to join with them [Ibrāhim and Muḥammad Sile] in order to attack him [Aḥmad] and expel him from the land, and they will kill him if they capture him.⁴⁴ This is a true account of the situation. All of them are presently in Kajor.

Now the cause of the two sides entering into this enmity is the terrible thing which was done by him [Aḥmad] in the first year to the people of Pete, when they [the Madiyanke] betrayed them and killed more than sixty men.⁴⁵ They came among them on the basis of safe-conduct. They stayed in the compounds until each one of the guests overpowered the host where he was staying and killed him. You have surely heard of this before now. They are now in the throes of a real civil war.

Greetings from Amina⁴⁶ and her daughter Fāṭima al-Zahrā.⁴⁷ As for her

³⁹ *Arkeybat*, a nomadic group inhabiting the southern Moroccan marches.

⁴⁰ Known as Ibra Almamy in the annals of the late nineteenth century Futa Toro, he was a Wan from Mbumba and a fairly consistent ally of the French; he made the pilgrimage to Mecca in 1893, at the expense of the colonial government. See Robinson, *Chiefs and Clerics*, pp. 89-98, 157.

⁴¹ A powerful elector from the town of Pete in central Futa.

⁴² See the Introduction to Section II, note 4.

⁴³ *'Asākir*.

⁴⁴ The Madiyanke were pressing into the environs of St. Louis and threatening the key areas of peanut cultivation. See Robinson, *Chiefs and Clerics*, pp. 86-97; Mamadou Diouf, *Le Kajor au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1990), pp. 249-52. The French-led coalition defeated the Madiyanke and killed most of the sons of the Mahdī in February 1875.

⁴⁵ The massacre at Pete, the village of Muḥammad Sile, occurred in 1873. See Robinson, *Chiefs and Clerics*, pp. 95-6.

⁴⁶ His wife who was the daughter of Tamsir Ḥammād Ndiay An of St. Louis.

mother Jelle,⁴⁸ upon her and our dead be mercy and [God's] pleasure, may she and they find Paradise and forgiveness. Al-Mufassir Ḥammād⁴⁹ greets you as does Ibn al-Miqdād⁵⁰ and Maryam Sy and Fāṭima Silla and her mother Raḥmata Allāh and Lamabba An and others from the sisters and brothers. Greet for me Aḥmad your son and Muḥammad and others, as well as the wives, particularly Layla.

Tell the Commander of the Faithful that I came with three men from the west from the city of Fez, who are disciples of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Tijānī and who wish to visit him. One is a *sharif* and the other two are wealthy and well known. He should honor them by receiving them and respect them greatly because they are truly of the people of the presence.⁵¹ One of them is named al-Ḥājj 'Ilāl. Another is Mawlāy Aḥmad -- he is in fact the *sharif*. He [Aḥmad al-Kabīr] should know that the two of them have been extremely kind to me in their land in the west. Whatever God wills. There is no power except from God. Peace be upon you all.

Muḥammad Maḥmūd Muḥammad.⁵²

Written in Ndar on the 11th of Dhu'l-Qa'da 1291 of the *hijra*.⁵³

⁴⁷ "Fāṭima the radiant," the name of the daughter of the Prophet.

⁴⁸ Amina's mother had probably recently passed away, and the author is seizing the occasion of this letter to inform relatives in Segu.

⁴⁹ The author's father-in-law.

⁵⁰ Or Bū El Moghdad, who served as the chief interpreter at the Direction des Affaires Politiques and backed up Tamsir Ḥammād at the Muslim Tribunal. See Robinson, *Holy War*, pp. 213-4.

⁵¹ That is, they are Tijaniyya leaders from Fez who are immersed in the presence of Aḥmad al-Tijānī and are visited by him in their dreams. See Abun-Nasr, *Tijaniyya*, pp. 51-7. Shaykh Muḥammad did not actually go to Fez on his way to or from Mecca and Medina. See ANS 13G 143, *pièce* 113.

⁵² A much smaller seal is appended at the end of the signature. It appears to read, *al-qāḍī ruhān*, which might be translated "the judge in spirit." This kind of seal was frequently used in lieu of a signature.

⁵³ 20 December 1874.