

THE *KITĀB AL-TURJUMĀN*: A TWENTIETH-CENTURY HISTORIOGRAPHICAL (RE)MAPPING OF THE SOUTHERN SAHARA AND SAHEL *

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Abstract

Numerous *tārīḥs* (chronicles) were written in Timbuktu and its surrounding world from the seventeenth to the twentieth century CE. They constitute the Timbuktu *tārīḥ* tradition. The *tārīḥs* were embedded in different political projects, which became possible and necessary only under certain historical conditions. Hence, *tārīḥs* do not all belong to one single genre of historical literature. A chronicle that belongs to the Timbuktu *tārīḥ* tradition is the twentieth-century *Kitāb al-turjumān*. It sheds light on history writing in the Sahel during a crucial time, namely European colonial rule and the political realities it gave birth to thereafter. One of modern historians' most important tasks is precisely to identify, describe, and analyse the different genres within the *tārīḥ* tradition. We attempt to do that in the case of the *Kitāb al-turjumān*.

Key Words

Mali, West Africa, Sahara, historiography, colonialism, Islam, archives, colonial administration.

The *Kitāb al-turjumān fī tārīḥ al-Ṣaḥrā' wa al-Sūdān wa bilād Tinbukt wa Shinqīt wa Arawān wa nubad' an tārīḥ al-zamān fī jamū 'al-buldān* is a twentieth-century Timbuktu *tārīḥ* (chronicle). Authors writing in Timbuktu's *tārīḥ* tradition produced chronicles between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries CE.¹ However, beginning with Octave

* I thank my mentor Prof. Paulo F. de Moraes Farias for his guidance and the valuable suggestions he made on an earlier draft.

1 Seventeenth-century *tārīḥs* include the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān*, the *Tārīḥ ibn al-Muḥtār* (also known as the *Tārīḥ al-fattās*; however, these are two different chronicles: the former is a seventeenth-century chronicle and the latter nineteenth-century; see note 2), the text known as the *Notice historique* (which is available only in French as the 'Second Appendix' of O. V. Houdas and M. Delafosse (trans.), *Tarikh el-fettach ou Chronique du chercheur* (Paris, 1913)), and the lost *Durar al-ḥisān fī akhbār ba'd mulūk al-Sūdān* (this work is known from quotations of it in the *Tārīḥ ibn al-Muḥtār*; it may have been written earlier than the abovementioned *tārīḥs*, still in the first half of the seventeenth century). Nineteenth-century *tārīḥs* include *Tārīḥ al-fattās fī akhbār al-buldān wa al-juyūs wa akābir al-nāss wa ḍikr waqā' i' al-Takrūr wa 'azā'im al-umūr wa tafriq ansāb al-'abid min al-ahrār* and *Tārīḥ Azawād fī akhbār al-Barābīsh wa ḥurūb hum ma'al-Ruqaybāt, Haggār wa Afūgās, ḍikr ba'd akābirhim, wa duḥūl al-Naṣārā fī Tinbukt wa ḡayr ḍālik*. Twentieth-century *tārīḥs* include the *Kitāb al-turjumān* and *Jawāhir al-ḥisān fī akhbār al-Sūdān*. In addition to the *tārīḥs*, there are biographical dictionaries full of historical accounts. Among these figure the seventeenth-century *Nayl al-ibtihāj bi tafriq al-dībāj*, the eighteenth-century *Taḍkirah al-nisyān fī akhbār ba'd mulūk al-Sūdān* (which is essentially an account of pasha rulers), the *Diwān al-mulūk fī salāṭin al-Sūdān* (a history of the Pashalik of Timbuktu), the *Ḍikr al-wafayāt wa mā ḥadaṭ min al-umūr al-'izām*,

Houdas's edited French translation of the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān* at the end of the nineteenth century and until as recently as 2018, modern scholars have concentrated their attention on Timbuktu's famous seventeenth-century *tārīḥs* at the expense of later *tārīḥs* from Timbuktu.² The present article addresses this dearth of modern scholarship on Timbuktu's post-seventeenth-century *tārīḥs* by offering a reading of the *Kitāb al-turjumān*. The article's central concern is to discern what motivated Muḥammad Maḥmūd bin al-Ṣayḥ (hereafter bin al-Ṣayḥ), the author of the *Kitāb al-turjumān*, to write a history of the southern Sahara and Sahel.³ It will seek to situate the author and his work in historical context while delimiting the particular *tārīḥ* genre to which the *Kitāb al-turjumān* belongs. In addition, the article will compare the *Kitāb al-turjumān* with other works in the Timbuktu *tārīḥ* tradition, specifically the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān* and Timbuktu's biographical dictionaries.⁴

This article draws on Paulo F. de Moraes Farias's incisive and novel reading of Timbuktu's seventeenth-century *tārīḥs* to understand the *Kitāb al-turjumān* within the longer tradition of history writing in Timbuktu.⁵ Moraes Farias shows that the authors

the nineteenth-century *Faḥ al-ṣukūr fī ma'rifaḥ 'ayān al-Takrūr*, and the twentieth-century *Izālah al-rayb wa al-ṣakk wa al-ta'rīf fī ḍikr al-'ulamā' al-mu'allifīn min ahl Takrūr wa al-Ṣaḥrā' wa ahl al-Ṣinqīṭ* and *Al-Sa'ādah al-abadiyyah fī ta'rīf 'ulamā' Timbukṭ al-bahīyyah*.

- 2 Notable exceptions include M. Abitbol, *Mawlāy al-Qāsim: Tombouctou au milieu du XVIIIème siècle d'après la chronique de Mawlāy al-Qāsim b. Mawlāy Sulaymān* (Paris, 1982); and M. Nobili and S. Mathee, 'Towards a new study of the so-called *Tārīkh al-fattāsh*', *History in Africa*, 42 (2015), 37–43. Although a study of the seventeenth-century *Tārīḥ ibn al-Muḥtār*, Nobili and Mathee show that the introduction of 'Manuscript C', which had hitherto been read as an interpolation of the *Tārīḥ ibn al-Muḥtār*, is in fact the actual nineteenth-century *Tārīḥ al-fattāsh*. Importantly, it was Levtzion's pioneering research on Manuscript C that opened the door for Nobili and Mathee, see N. Levtzion, 'A seventeenth-century chronicle by ibn al-Mukhtar: a critical study of the Ta'rikh al-fattash', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 3 (1971), 571–93. The first and only in-depth study thus far of the nineteenth-century *Tārīḥ al-fattāsh* is proffered by M. Nobili, *Sultan, Caliph, and the Renewer of the Faith: Ahmad Lobbo, the Tārīkh al-fattash and the Making of an Islamic State in West Africa* (New York, 2020).
- 3 Note that the author's name is rendered as 'Ould Cheikh' in colonial documents and either 'Ould Cheikh' or 'Ould al-Shaykh' in much of the secondary literature.
- 4 This study was limited by three factors. First, it worked from only one copy of the *Kitāb al-turjumān*, the unique available copy in Mali, which is in the archives of the Institut des Hautes Etudes et de Recherches Islamiques-Ahmed Baba de Tombouctou (IHERI-ABT). See IHERI-ABT manuscript (MS) 762, M. M. bin al-Ṣayḥ, *Kitāb al-turjumān fī tārīḥ al-Ṣaḥrā' wa al-Sūdān wa bilād Timbukṭ wa Shinqīṭ wa Arawān wa nubaḍ 'an tārīḥ al-zamān fī jamī' al-buldān*, n.d., ca. 1955 (hereafter referred to as *KT*). However, according to the editor of the printed version, another copy is available in the Markaz Jihād al-Libiyīn li al-Dirāsāt al-Tārīḥīyyah in Libya; see H. M. al-Dālī, *Tārīḥ al-Ṣaḥrā' wa al-Sūdān wa balad Tinbukṭ wa Shinqīṭ wa Arawān fī jamī' al-buldān* (Tripoli, 2009), 19. Second, the son of bin al-Ṣayḥ is not prepared yet to provide me with a copy he showed me of what is apparently Part Two of the *tārīḥ*; personal meeting, December 2018. Note that at the end of *KT* it is stated, 'End of the index of Part 1 of the *Turjumān*'; see *KT*, 113. Third, the promiscuous interference of al-Dālī, the editor of the printed version, rendered that edition problematic to draw on as a secondary source.
- 5 As Bruce Hall puts it, Moraes Farias's reading has taught us to consider the primary sources for West Africa's precolonial history in more critical and careful way; see B. Hall, 'Rethinking the place of Timbuktu in the intellectual history of West Africa', in T. Green and B. Rossi (eds.), *Landscapes, Sources, and Intellectual Projects of the West African Past: Essays in Honour of Paulo Fernando de Moraes Farias* (Leiden, 2018), 239. See also S. Jeppie, 'Two examples of Sahelian book collectors over two centuries', in Green and Rossi, *West African Past*, 259; and M. Nobili, 'New reinventions of the Sahel: reflections of the *tārīḥ* genre in the Timbuktu historiographical production, seventeenth to twentieth centuries', in Green and Rossi, *West African Past*, 201–7.

of the seventeenth-century *tārīḥs* were not simply informants and providers of raw evidence, but intellectual innovators and politico-ideological actors who invented a new idea of the Sahelian past.

The chroniclers introduced synthetic historical narrative to Timbuktu literature. . . . [T]heir histories gaze on the past from a new and holistic point of view required by a novel type of political project [that] could not have emerged in earlier centuries and became pointless in the century that followed. One central feature . . . was the representation of the Soḡoy [Songhay] state as a continuous thread running across three successive dynasties. . . . In pursuit of this aim, the chroniclers put together lengthy kinglists. . . . At the core of the Timbuktu *ta'riḥ* genre of the seventeenth century AD lies an exercise in catastrophe management. . . . [T]he chronicles cater to intellectual and emotional needs . . . aim[ing] at comprehending disastrous events and coming to terms with painful losses. They make sense of the Moroccan invasion, which had abruptly destroyed the Soḡoy empire and which had reduced the Askya lineages to 'puppet' roles and had brought personal suffering to the literate urban patriciate and lowered its political and social standing. . . . This rendered their literature highly political and their politics highly dependent on consolidating the Soḡoy and Timbuktu past into a single and taut narrative, endowed with chronological depth and political continuity.⁶

Moraes Farias cogently makes the point that modern historians should appreciate the Timbuktu chronicles as the emergence of an innovative form of historical writing. Their combination of themes, harnessing together of sociologically diverse interests, and the bias of the interventions in history they attribute to God are testimony to it. This article examines the *Kitāb al-turjumān* as a prime example of this genre of innovative historical writing. Like the seventeenth-century chroniclers, bin al-Ṣayḥ was an ideological and intellectual doer. Drawing on Moraes Farias's point that the seventeenth-century chronicles could not have emerged earlier and became pointless later, this article suggests that the writing of the *Kitāb al-turjumān* became both possible and necessary only in the mid-1950s in light of the political realities created by the looming but certain departure of French colonial rule from the Soudan Français. It could not be written before that date, while its creation in the postcolonial era would have been highly improbable.⁷

In its aim to delineate bin al-Ṣayḥ's motive for writing the *Kitāb al-turjumān*, this article foregrounds the two leitmotifs of the *Kitāb al-turjumān*. The first is the presence of foreign powers, namely the Sa'dian dynasty and France, that invaded and conquered the Sahel at the end of the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, respectively. The second is the figure of Aḥmad bin Ādd, the patriarch of the Ādd clan in the town of Arawān, from which bin al-Ṣayḥ hails. Thus, Aḥmad bin Ādd's offspring and bin al-Ṣayḥ himself are integral parts of the second leitmotif. The two themes forcefully capture bin al-Ṣayḥ's motive for

6 P. F. de Moraes Farias, *Arabic Medieval Inscriptions from the Republic of Mali: Epigraphy, Chronicles and Songhay-Tuareg History* (New York, 2003), lix–lxxii. Moraes Farias summarized a section of this work in a book chapter, see 'Intellectual innovation and reinvention of the Sahel: the seventeenth-century Timbuktu chronicles', in S. Jeppie and S. B. Diagne (eds.), *The Meanings of Timbuktu* (Cape Town, 2008), 95–107.

7 In its entry on bin al-Ṣayḥ, the biographical dictionary *Izālah al-rayb*, still busy being written in 1942, does not list KT. A. bin Abī al-A'rāf, *Izālah al-rayb* (Timbuktu, 2019), 198. The author's full name is Aḥmad b. Mbārak b. Barka b. Muḥammad al-Mūsā-u-Alī al-Takanī al-Wadnūmī al-Sūsī al-Tinbukṭī, known as Abu al-'Arāf or Bou'l-Araf, see J. O. Hunwick (comp.), *Arabic Literature of Africa, Volume IV: The Writings of Western Sudanic Africa* (Boston, 2003), 53.

writing the *Kitāb al-turjumān* and delineate it as a unique work within the larger and longer history of Timbuktu's chronicle tradition.

Despite its unique qualities, the *Kitāb al-turjumān* has rarely been the subject of systematic inquiry. John Hunwick's *Arabic Literature of Africa* mentions the time of the *Kitāb al-turjumān*'s writing (that is, after 1933), its genealogical tables, and the number of its chapters, noting that chapter 14 discusses the benefits of French rule.⁸ In 2009, al-Hādī al-Mabrūk al-Dālī produced a print version of the *Kitāb al-turjumān*; however, claiming editorial privilege, his text included changes, omissions, and a value judgment of the author. He noted:

I am reluctant to include in this [printed] edition some content [found in the manuscript] such as the internecine tribal wars, individual squabbles over the leadership of the region because they enflame tribal conflicts. The aim of editing is to present a clear and useful product. I have also made changes to the title of the *Kitāb [al-turjumān]* not found in the manuscript and added to the text. . . . I beseege God to forgive this *Shaykh* for praising the [French] enemy of the [Muslim] nation and [Islamic] religion.⁹

Bruce Hall is the first modern scholar to identify the *Kitāb al-turjumān* with political objectives.¹⁰ Hall meticulously shows how, as one of the most important representatives of the *bidan* ('whites') who claimed 'that the Niger Bend belonged to them', bin al-Šayḥ wrote the *Kitāb al-turjumān* to demonstrate the claim.¹¹

Ould al-Shaykh gave the standard account of the founding of Timbuktu, following the tradition laid down in numerous texts and current in the oral traditions. . . . In describing the way in which Timbuktu came to be populated, and the origins of the different people who moved to the town during its early history, Ould al-Shaykh wrote that the inhabitants were Arab and Tuareg. He then discussed how people came from different places . . . (Egypt, Morocco, Tuwat, Ghadames, etc.), and how different mosques and neighborhoods came to be built. . . . There is no mention of early black immigrants to Timbuktu from Wagadoo mentioned in the written histories that Ould Cheikh [*sic*] clearly relied on in other places. Nor is there any discussion of the black inhabitants in the town's history. This omission served Ould al-Shaykh's purposes in that it rendered Timbuktu white. As race entered into the politics of decolonization, we begin to see the geographical space of the Niger Bend itself turned into the object of racialized contestation.¹²

In addition to introducing a new synthesis of older materials, a new arrangement of well-known information from older works of local history, and a selective incorporation of other older local texts, the *Kitāb al-turjumān* ascribes to the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān* what it does not say, as this article will show later. All four acts clearly identify the chronicle with

8 Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa IV*, 59.

9 M. M. al-Arawānī, *Tārīḥ al-Šaḥrā' wa al-Sūdān wa balad Tinbukt wa Shinqīt wa Arawān fi jamā' al-buldān*, ed. H. M. al-Dālī (Tripoli, 2009), 9–10.

10 B. Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600–1900* (New York, 2011), 305–6.

11 This claim must be read in the context of Saharan irredentism through the Organisations commune des regions sahariennes (OCRS) created primarily to ensure French economic interests. However, the OCRS apparently allowed for the political and social concerns of the many *bidan* who supported irredentism to be put forward. For a detailed account of the OCRS and bin al-Šayḥ's role in it, see B. Lecocq, *Disputed Desert: Decolonization, Competing Nationalisms and Tuareg Rebellions in Northern Mali* (Leiden, 2010), 55–9.

12 Hall, *History of Race*, 305–6.

political objectives, although they do not unambiguously associate the *Kitāb al-turjumān* with the claim that the Niger Bend belonged to the *bidan* population of the region.¹³ However, via the two leitmotifs of the chronicle — foreign invading powers and Aḥmad bin Ādd — this article will examine what motivated bin al-Ṣayḥ to write a history of the Sahel.

Muḥammad Maḥmūd bin al-Ṣayḥ was born in the town of Arawān in 1910 and died in 1973 in Timbuktu. He studied the Islamic religious-intellectual tradition at the hands of many scholars and in turn taught many scholars. He was famous for his wit and his learning.¹⁴ His numerous *fatwās* and legal, theological, *Sūfi*, and polemical treatises and poems bear testimony to his status as a highly rated intellectual and prolific writer. He was recognized as such by fellow ‘*ulamā*’, colonial officials, and the local literati. He spoke, read, and wrote French and had extensive knowledge of French politics, history, and culture; his library contained works on French penal and criminal law, the *Petit Larousse Illustré*, and other French texts.¹⁵ He travelled widely for religious duties and his political agenda.¹⁶ In 1932, the colonial authority appointed him *qāḍī* for the Arawān community residing in Timbuktu, and he held this position off and on until 1949.¹⁷

In the 1950s, bin al-Ṣayḥ wrote the *Kitāb al-turjumān*, which he introduced as follows:

Since the science of history is among the most important [sciences] that people of reason engage in and among the most sublime that commands the attention of scholars . . . I wanted to collate what our predecessors have [preserved] of the history of the Azawād and of Arawān, its origins, of those who settled in it and its surrounding [neighbourhood] from days of yonder to this day; the lineage origins of every tribe and its current branches, the wars between them; an account of scholars, friends [of God], the pious, and descendants of the Prophet who arrived here [to settle]; the [Kel] Anṣār, the Barābīš, the ‘*Ajam* of the Tuāreg and others such as the [people of] the Sūdān and accounts of all [the peoples]. My dependence for this [task] was what I found transmitted from ancient works and earlier accounts. Whatever information’s spuriousness/inauthenticity

13 Bin al-Ṣayḥ does so in a petition: ‘If there exists a right to self-determination for a people, we would like to believe that we are allowed to make our aspirations known. We declare without restrictions that we already are and want to remain French Muslims [*Français musulman*] and an integral part of the French Republic. We manifest our formal opposition to being integrated in an autonomous or federalist Black Africa or North Africa. . . . We demand the incorporation of our country in the French Sahara of which we are part, historically, emotionally, and ethnically. . . . France has not found us under Soudanese domination. We have the strongest confidence that glorious France will not give us away freely to anyone.’ Lecocq, *Disputed Desert*, 55–6. The full text of the petition is in H. Claudot-Hawad (ed.), *Le politique dans l’histoire Touarègue*, Les Cahiers de l’Institut de Recherches et d’Études sur les Mondes Arabes et Musulmans (IREMAM) 4 (Aix-en-Provence, 1993), 133–53.

14 M. M. Dadab, *Kaṣf al-Ḥā’il fi Ta’rif bi Kutub Al-Fatāwā wa Al-Nawāzil* (unpublished manuscript, Timbuktu, 2001), 273. The original manuscript is in Timbuktu in the possession of the author, who provided me with photocopy in June 2009.

15 Lecocq, *Disputed Desert*, 54.

16 In 1955, he visited Saudi Arabia, the Levant, Iraq, France, Tunisia, and Algeria; Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN), Dakar, Afrique occidentale française (AOF) 320, ‘Rapport de voyage de M. Mohamed Mahmoud Ould Cheik, Cadi de Tombouctou’, n.d., ca. Nov. 1955. I thank Baz Lecocq for sharing this file.

17 According to Lecocq, bin al-Ṣayḥ had to resign his position in 1935 due to resistance from the local religious elite. Although he was reinstated in his functions, he resigned for good in 1949; see Lecocq, *Disputed Desert*, 54. Another colonial document states that he was appointed in 1931, 1936, and 1941, and that his mandate was not renewed in 1949; CADN Dakar AOF 320, ‘Notice de renseignements’, n.d., ca. Dec. 1956.

was clear to me, I did not transmit. I only included what was transmitted from the writings of our sages and scholars and the like, except that I have abridged some of that [transmission].¹⁸

The importance of history and what prompted bin al-Ṣayḥ to write a history of Timbuktu and the region immediately follow the passages praising God and offering salutations to the Prophet, as all Timbuktu's chronicles and biographical dictionaries do.¹⁹ However, in contrast to the latter, the introduction alludes to the sources it apparently drew on in writing the *Kitāb al-turjumān*, particularly in relation to the Sa'dian invasion and conquest of Songhay in 1591.

SA'DIAN INVASION AND CONQUEST

Sulṭān Māwlay Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī sent to him [Askiya Ishāq II] before Jawdar's [mission] an envoy with a letter [from him] pertaining to the salt mines at Taḡāz between Marrakesh and the Sūdān. In summary, [Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī demanded] that all who trade in salt to the different parts of the Sūdān should pay [to the Sa'dian State] for every consignment of salt an ounce of gold as a land tax to fund the Muslim soldiers [of the Sa'dian state] in their jihad against the [Portuguese] infidels and to protect the shore of [the Sūdān]. Sulṭān Māwlay al-Ḍahabī wrote to him only after consulting the scholars of his dominion. The juriconsults issued legal opinions (*fatwās*), drawn from the written texts of the jurists, that accorded him, as the *imām* of Muslims, complete jurisdiction over the [salt] mines and permitted commercial activity only with the explicit permission of the sulṭān [Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī] or his representative. Sulṭān Māwlay Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī sent the legal opinions (*fatāwā*) to Askiya Ishāq together with the letter. Askiya Ishāq did not respond positively to his demand nor carry out his instructions; rather he purposely tarried in his response. To the extent that the messenger delayed [waiting on Askiya Ishāq's response] Sulṭān Māwlay Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī comprehended as such Askiya Ishāq's thoughts [and] there and then resolved to despatch an army to the Sūdān. When the messenger returned from Askiya Ishāq to Sulṭān Māwlay Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī, he briefed him on what he [the Askiya] said; that he rejected [Sulṭān Māwlay Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī's demand] saying that Sulṭān Māwlay Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī is the ruler of a kingdom and he [Ishāq] the ruler of a kingdom. [He showed al-Ḍahabī] the pair of iron sandals and a spear [Ishāq II sent along] with his letter. This indicated that he was prepared] for war. At this point Sulṭān Māwlay Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī consulted with his advisors and consultants. Indeed, their gathering was a momentous day; they discussed the matter mutually until they unanimously agreed on dispatching [an army] to the Sūdān. However, even at this stage Sulṭān Māwlay Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī was still hesitant until the beginning of the year 997 *hijrī*/1591 CE. He then strengthened his resolve and [commissioned] work on the preparation of the war apparatus and the necessities the army required in terms of mobilization and fighting capacity/war readiness.²⁰

¹⁸ *KT*, 2.

¹⁹ IHERI-ABT MS 681, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sa'dī, *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān*, n.d., ca. 1656; see also the print edition, 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sa'dī, *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān*, ed. O. Houdas, (Paris, 1898). IHERI-ABT MS 3927, Ibn al-Muḥtār, *Tārīḥ ibn al-Muḥtār*, n.d., ca. 1670; see also the print edition, Maḥmūd Ka't, *Tārīḥ al-fattās fī aḥbār al-buldān wa al-juyūs wa akābir al-nāss wa ḍikr waqā'i' al-Takrūr wa 'aẓā'im al-umūr wa tafriq ansāb al-'abid min al-aḥrār*, ed. A. A. Maiga et al. (Bamako, 2015). Aḥmad Bābā al-Sūdānī, *Kifāyah al-muḥtāj li ma'rifaḥ man laysa fī al-dībāj* (Rabat, 2000), 68; A. Abī al-A'rāf, *Izālah al-rayb wa al-ṣakk wa al-taqrīz fī ḍikr al-mu'allifin min ahl al-Takrūr wa al-Ṣaḥrā' wa al-Ṣinqit*, ed. M. Diagayètè et al. (Timbuktu, 2019); A. M. A. Bāber, *Al-Sa'ādah al-abadīyyah*, ed. H. M. al-Dālī (Benghazi, 2001).

²⁰ *KT*, 8–9. The Sa'dian invasion and conquest of Songhay is covered in *KT*, ch. 5

Central to bin al-Ŝayḥ's long account of the Sa'ḍian invasion and conquest of Songhay is that Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī consulted the jurists of his kingdom to seek legal opinions (*fatwās*) regarding authority over the salt mines in Songhay territory. Bin al-Ŝayḥ makes the point that al-Ḍahabī obtained the approval of the jurists before proceeding with the invasion to confer it religious sanction. Therefore, Iṣḥāq II's refusal to surrender authority over the salt mines to the Moroccan ruler rendered him a rebel liable to be disciplined, hence the invasion. Interestingly, however, bin al-Ŝayḥ begins his account of the invasion not with Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī's envoy to Askiya Iṣḥāq II, but with appraisals of Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī and Askiya Iṣḥāq II and the conduct of Jawdar, the commander of the Moroccan army. For the appraisal of the three, he draws apparently on the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān*; for the overall account of the Moroccan invasion, he draws on the *Kitāb al-istiḳṣā li aḥbār al-maġrib al-aqṣā*, a late nineteenth-century Moroccan chronicle:²¹

What al-Sa'ḍi's mentions in the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān* about [Jawdar Pasha] fleeing from [the encounter with] Askiya Iṣḥāq bin Dāwūd, labelling Sulṭān al-Manṣūr Māwlay Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī's rule unjust and him unrighteous and Askiya Iṣḥāq II pious has no basis and is contrary [to the truth]. Rather the truth is as we found passed down [generation after generation] about the just rule of Sulṭān al-Manṣūr Māwlay Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī. As for the state of Songhay on the day [of the Battle of Tondibi] the addendum of the [*Tārīḥ*] *al-fattās* [and] what we read from the *Kitāb al-Istiḳṣā* spare us from [having to demonstrate] the precarious state [of Songhay], drowned in the commission of proscribed abominable acts. Askiya Iṣḥāq did not stay on the path of his predecessors in pursuing just rule.²²

The passage ascribes to the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān* the observations that Sulṭān Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī was unjust, that Askiya Iṣḥāq II was a just and a virtuous man, and that Jawdar Pasha fled from battle. However, with this ascription, bin al-Ŝayḥ distorts the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān*. The *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān* does not present al-Ḍahabī's rule as oppressive, al-Ḍahabī himself as an unjust ruler, Iṣḥāq II as a just ruler, or Jawdar as abandoning the battlefield. Rather, it supplicates God's mercy for al-Ḍahabī, mentions explicitly that Jawdar defeated Iṣḥāq II in 'the twinkling of an eye', and calls out Iṣḥāq II for the unjust execution of his pious brother Yimba.²³ It is inconceivable that bin al-Ŝayḥ did not know the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān*'s account of the two rulers and the Battle of Tondibi. As Hall shows, the *Kitāb al-turjumān* is scholarly in its extensive and critical use of historical references.²⁴ Bin al-Ŝayḥ would have read Timbuktu's older local histories as he relied on them. Why was it necessary for him to distort the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān* on the three points? His account of the invasion could have sufficed; why did he bring the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān* into his account? The answer lays in the status of the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān*. It has significance for the motive of the *Kitāb al-turjumān* in relation to the Moroccan invasion.

By the time bin al-Ŝayḥ was writing in the 1950s, Western scholars had been working on Timbuktu's seventeenth-century chronicles for over a half a century. Furthermore, they had

21 Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad bin Ḥālid al-Nāṣiri, *Kitāb al-istiḳṣā li aḥbār al-maġrib al-aqṣā*, Volume V (Casablanca, 1997).

22 KT, 8.

23 J. O. Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire: Al-Sa'ḍi's Tārīḥ al-Sūdān down to 1613 and Other Contemporary Documents* (Leiden, 2003), 15, 178–99.

24 Hall, *History of Race*, 306.

come to regard the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān* as the doyen of local sources on the Songhay Empire, its rulers and internal workings, and the Moroccan invasion.²⁵ Bin al-Ŝayḥ was aware of this. He could not simply ignore the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān* because its account of the invasion and its protagonists stands in contrast to that of the *Kitāb al-turjumān*. To put it differently, the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān*'s account of the Moroccan invasion was problematic for bin al-Ŝayḥ's motive in writing the *Kitāb al-turjumān*. How so, especially since the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān* — or the *Tārīḥ ibn al-Muḥtār* — does not condemn the invasion? In fact, as mentioned above, the author evokes God's mercy for al-Ḍahabī.

It was the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān*'s lack of explicitness that troubled bin al-Ŝayḥ and posed a challenge to his motive. Evoking God's mercy for al-Ḍahabī was not explicit in the text's designation of him as a just ruler. Reference to Iṣḥāq II's execution of his pious brother was not an unequivocal designation of him as corrupt — elsewhere it described Iṣḥāq II as generous in nature and copiously charitable. In other words, the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān* did not legitimate the invasion; it did not confer it with religious sanction.²⁶ For bin al-Ŝayḥ, the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān*'s 'failure' to explicitly describe al-Ḍahabī as righteous and Iṣḥāq II as cantankerous was tantamount to dismissing al-Ḍahabī as a just ruler and disputing Iṣḥāq II as a belligerent rebel who had to be reined in. But more importantly it cast aspersions, albeit implicitly, on the Sa'dian invasion of Songhay, thereby delegitimizing the conquest.

This distortion of the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān* aimed to expose it as an unreliable historical source for the Moroccan invasion. Interestingly, bin al-Ŝayḥ cites the *Tārīḥ ibn al-Muḥtār*'s mention of abominable acts, sexual debauchery, and Iṣḥāq II's failure to continue the just rule of his predecessors to support his own criticism of the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān*. Indeed the *Tārīḥ ibn al-Muḥtār* does give this account of Songhay during the reign of Iṣḥāq II.²⁷ But so does the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān*.²⁸ However, the *Tārīḥ ibn al-Muḥtār* equally notes Iṣḥāq II's generosity, tolerance, kindness, love for and kind treatment of scholars, and indifference to wealth.²⁹ With this selective reading of the *Tārīḥ ibn al-Muḥtār*, bin al-Ŝayḥ too distorts it. After all, if the most authoritative of the Timbuktu chronicles, the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān*, factually errs on major events, then all other local sources become questionable.

Both chronicles concur that Iṣḥāq II offered Morocco 100,000 *mitqāl* of gold and 1,000 slaves in return for the withdrawal of the Moroccan army to Marrakesh and the return of the land to the askiya, and that al-Ḍahabī flew into a rage, dismissed Jawdar on the spot, and replaced him with Pasha Maḥmūd bin Zarqūn who had strict orders to drive Iṣḥāq II

25 As Elias Saad notes, 'Timbuktu never produced a monument to its own history equal in wealth and detail to al-Sa'dī's chronicle,' see E. Saad, *Social History of Timbuktu* (Cambridge, 1983), 21. As Hunwick says, '[W]ithout [the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān*], our knowledge of the workings of one of Africa's greatest pre-modern empires would be considerably diminished . . . and our understanding of a notable Islamic civilization much impoverished. Indeed, the existence of this work helps Timbuktu to cease to be seen as just a legendary fantasy,' see Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire*, lxxv.

26 On the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān* and its sibling chronicles not legitimating the invasion, see M. Mathee, 'Probing the theological resources of a seventeenth-century *tārīḥ*: the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān* and *Ash'arī kalām*', *Islamic Africa*, 7:2 (2016), 159–84.

27 IHERI-ABT MS 3927, 103; Ka't, *Tārīḥ al-fattāṣ*, 205.

28 IHERI-ABT MS 681, al-Sa'dī, *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān*, n.d., ca. 1656, 185.

29 Ka't, *Tārīḥ al-fattāṣ*, 197–9; IHERI-ABT MS 3927, 95–7.

out of the Sūdān.³⁰ However, the *Kitāb al-turjumān* alone has al-Ḍahabī saying, ‘It is not wealth that I pursue, but I want God’s word to be supreme and to kill [whomever] spreads corruption in the land and acts arrogantly in it’.³¹

The discrepancy is one of a mundane language versus a religious one. The *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān*’s mundane account of al-Ḍahabī’s response shows military logic at work. Jawdar’s acceptance of Iṣḥāq II’s peace offer enabled the Songhay army to regroup; he declined to push for the total defeat of the Songhay army. This is in keeping with the objective of taking control of the salt mines to fund the Sa’dian state’s numerous military campaigns. In stark contrast stands the *Kitāb al-turjumān*’s religious language, by which the invasion was a jihad for God, intended to purify the land of corruption and injustice. Al-Ḍahabī demanded that the salt mines under Songhay jurisdiction come under his control in order for him to protect Muslim Songhay against Christian infidels.³² Al-Ḍahabī’s ostensible deep concern for God’s word is bin al-Ṣayḥ’s invention of a pietism inflected with authoritarianism. If, to borrow from Michel Foucault, ‘we can understand the discourse of the historian to be a sort of ceremony, oral or written, that must in reality produce both a justification of power and a reinforcement of that power’, then the religious grammar of the *Kitāb al-turjumān* was not intended ‘so much to record the past . . . as . . . to speak of power’s right’.³³ The religious language was intended to do the work of conferring religious sanction and legitimacy upon al-Ḍahabī’s decision to invade Songhay.

The *Kitāb al-turjumān*’s citing of Timbuktu’s earlier local histories should be understood in this light, as should its actual drawing on the Moroccan chronicle the *Kitāb al-istiṣā*. The extent to which it draws, albeit selectively, on a chronicle written in the belly of the power that invaded Songhay three centuries after the event is instructive. This Moroccan chronicle’s version of the invasion, conquest, and subsequent rule of Songhay fits what Moraes Farias calls ‘the barren accounts of Moroccan historians’.³⁴ Bin al-Ṣayḥ does, however, mention another local chronicle, the *Ṣanjah al-wazzān fī waqā’i ‘Arawān* written by bin al-Ṣayḥ’s paternal uncle Ṭālibna Sanbēr bin al-Wāfi Ṭālibna al-Arawānī (d. 1767).³⁵ He would have depended on it but for the fact that it got lost some time in the eighteenth century.

May God’s mercy be on our paternal [great] uncle, *al-Qādī* Sanbēr son of *al-Qādī* Sīdī al-Wāfi. He compiled a work on the history of Arawān, its wars and events which he named *Ṣanjah al-Wazzān*

30 IHERI-ABT MS 681, al-Sa’dī, *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān*, n.d., ca. 1656, 181–2, 185–6; *KT*, 10. One *mitqāl* equals about 4.25 grams

31 *KT*, 10.

32 *Ibid.* 10. Interestingly, *KT* is contradicted by its main source for the Sa’dian invasion of Songhay, the *Kitāb al-istiṣā*: ‘Indeed the lands of the Sūdān have abundant minerals and [agricultural] produce and abundant in wealth to strengthen the [Sa’dian] army of Islam and the fighting arm of its armies.’ *KT* omits this piece although its account of the delegation Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī sent to Askiya Iṣḥāq II is taken almost verbatim from the *Kitāb al-istiṣā*. The *Kitāb al-istiṣā* states al-Ḍahabī’s advisors (notables and ‘*ulamā*’) initially rejected al-Ḍahabī’s plan to invade Songhay regarding it as undesirable and unfeasible while *KT* states they agreed immediately. See al-Nāṣirī, *Kitāb al-istiṣā* V, 113.

33 M. Foucault, ‘Historical discourse and its supporters’ and ‘Stories about origins’, in ‘*Society Must be Defended*’: *Lectures at the Collège de France*, trans. D. Macey (London, 2004), 66, 116.

34 Moraes Farias, *Arabic Medieval Inscriptions*, xlvii.

35 Hunwick gives the title as *Sanjat al-wazzān fī nawāzil Arawān*, see Hunwick, *Arabic Literature IV*, 151. Bäber has *Ṭabbah al-wazzān fī nawāzil Arawān* as the title, see Bäber, *Al-Sa’ādah al-abadiyyah*, 137.

fi waqā'i' Arawān as [recorded] in many narrations and in the *Fath al-ṣukūr fi dīkr 'ulamā' al-Takrūr*. However, this work got lost among the books of the jurist Sīdī 'Umar the son of our paternal Uncle, Sīdī Bēr when his camel strayed from him. If only I found it, it would have sufficed me from having to collate these scattered unbound pages.³⁶

His redundant reference to the lost chronicle, however, was aimed at linking bin al-Ŝayḥ and his family to history writing, demonstrating that they were qualified to write the region's history. Unfortunately, we will never know the account and appraisal of the Moroccan invasion contained in bin al-Ŝayḥ's paternal uncle's lost chronicle. We saw above that bin al-Ŝayḥ referred to pages and older transmitted histories he found in the handwriting of local scholars. That suggests he depended on local sources; however, the fact that he provides no titles or names of authors is instructive.

France is first mentioned in chapter 13 of the *Kitāb al-turjumān* under the heading 'An account of the entry of the French, the rule of the land, and the scholars' disagreement about them'. However, the detailed account of French rule is offered in a section of chapter 14 under the subtitle 'French rule of this region and an elucidation of its great benefit that only the intelligent can grasp'. If the title already indicates ibn al-Ŝayḥ's lauding of the French invasion and rule of Niger Bend/Azawād, the description does so much more explicitly.

Know that prior to the arrival of the French this Sudanic region, the Azawād and surroundings were [plunged in a state of] rampant killing, severe oppression, plunder, continuous bloodshed, violation of God's laws. . . . The destitute oppressed, the owner deprived [of his] right, the sincere advisor [regarded] ominous, the poor treated as a criminal, the fair judge undermined, the wrongdoer let off the hook, the vizier capricious and the ruler a tyrant. Between a defeated oppressor and suffocating oppression there was no one to help or show mercy. Until God brought this French state and gave it power over the Tuareg and Ḥasānī states. It [France] suppressed the tyrant and restored the rights [of the wronged], constructed the land, entrenched in it every commendable imperative. It extinguished the flames of war, shone the light of truth [that was] absent, oriented every faction to the best of its abilities and nourished [suckled] all the tribes with both its breasts. In summary: the arrival of the French to this land and their rule of it are the greatest favour and most beneficial gain compared to the situation the people found themselves in before. This reality the scholars know but the ignoramuses are oblivious of. The benefits of this state cannot be enumerated: the first being that it has the capacity to [administer] justice and [institute] reform of mundane and religious matters. . . . A testimony to the fairness is that they appoint Muslims as magistrates to adjudicate among themselves in accordance with their Islamic law and those who do not have law among the *majūs* [non-Muslims] of the Sūdān. Their capacity to reform mundane [matters] is not hidden to the uneducated let alone the intelligent. This [in light of the fact that] the Muslim state in the Azawād and the Sūdān had become weak, its power broken, and incapable of carrying out reform of both the mundane and religious. . . . [R]outes were unusable and unsafe. God redressed our weakness through the French state. They secured the routes . . . and ensured order and stability. They brought the far near through railways and the amazing wireless, provided water by digging wells. . . . All this, God be praised, the French state did. Through their reform of the religious and mundane spheres, the French achieved the fruits of dominion and the superiority of their opinion [among all nations]. God has promised the sincere reformers that they will inherit

³⁶ KT, I.

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والامير غشوع فهذا مظلوم بلا سبب وهذا مقتول بلا ذنب وهذا منسوب ماله وهذا محبب عياله بل اذ
 وانا صرنا جميعا مظلوم او ظالم جليل حتى جاء اليه بهذه الدولة العرنتاوية وحكمت امرها كالدولة
 التارافية والحسانية فجمعت المظالم ووثقت المظالم وعزت الارض واخامت فيها بل ممدوح فرضا لظلم
 والحيات تار العرب القديم واجلنت نور الحق العديم وردت كل معرفة التي النوع سعيها وارزعت كل قبيلة
 اوقلا نديها فخرج بذلك العلماء وجهلنا ذلك العرفه العلماء والحاصل ان دخول العرنتاوية في الارض
 وحكمه فيها اجر جايدة وانوع عابدة مما كانا يبه الناسا فيلهم وهذا يعلمه العلية ويجهله الجهلاء وان
الملك قبل ما نادى حوكمهم الكمد له معترف ذلك واخر بما هنالك وهو ايد هذه الدولة لا تحصى **وتسبب**
 ولا تستغنى اولها انها اهل اعدا واصلاح جميع الامور النبوية والدينية اما العدل جبال المشاهدة انهم
 ما اعدا الامم بين كلما تجد بين حتى انهم ما عد النعم ويتخذون المسلمين فقاتهم العقلاء بينهم بشرتهم
 ويتخذون فقاتهم كشرتهم بينهم وكلاما لا **شريعة** له من السودان العجمو يعلمون فيه سياسة وشدة
 وما يكون فيه نوجه ويقدم امره ويصلح ثنائه وهذا ما احسن السيرة التي تصلح امور البشر بحسن العدل والدين
 والنظر اما حوكمهم اهل اصلاح الامور النبوية فيما لا يخفى جاهل احريا فلا نادوا دولة العرنتاوية في ارضهم
 والسودان فضعفت وكسرت شوكتها ومجرت اصلاح الدين والدين جالفتي الايلة والنهب العالمة **مستبين**
 البرابغ والنوا واوا هتار واو اولاد علوشا والسكارا وجميع العرفا من كل جهة حتى ضاقت العرفا واتسع اثرها
 على المرافق **تلا** في الله ضعفت دولة العرنتاوية وبفوة صولتهم وكجو اهل الفساد وردوا **العدل**
 وامنعوا العرفا بين العباد واجروا الخير بين القبائل ما قريب ويعبد بالسياسة الدوابية والبراء الشديدة وعلموا
 اننا ذلك الهنلاء والعاقبة واسكننا ذلك النعم الضافية وقربوا الاعداء بالسك الجديدة والاسلاك العجيبة
 الجديدة وعجرو الارض ما واخلفوا اما كانا عليه هناء واما اصلاحهم **خصل** اصلاح الامور الدينية فهو ان اهل
 الدين كانوا فيلهم لا يتحكمون ما فامدة ينهم الاصلاح الدينيا بالهناء ورد الظلم وامن السبل وثبتوا القلوب
 بالصلاح الشوقا النبوية بهذا كله لله الحمد فد جعلته الدولة العرنتاوية فجم بلع بين الا ان يشتمت كل منا
 في دينه وفي تعليمه وفي دنياه جبال اصلاح العرنتاوية للدين والدينيا والواثمة الملك وفوة الشوقة ونفوة الخلعة
 ومساعدة العزيمة لان الله وعد المطمحين انهم يرثون الارض فلا تعالي عز من فانيلا وقد كتبنا في العزيم ما بعد
 الذكر ان الارض يرثها عبادي الصالحون فلا بعض العالم المراد **الصالحين** المتكلمين وهذه الدولة العرنتاوية
 ليسا **الظلم** الاما جبه اصلاح الارض وعمارته وكو كانت وتو كانت اهل جساد لما خامت الدولة ولا فونين لهم
 صولة واقتدوا على ذلك بقوله تعالي وما كانا ربك ليهلك العرني بظلم واهلها ما لجونا ونسلا الله الانبوي
 الملك غيرهم **تلا** الامم التي لا تعجل ولا تصلح البلاد ولا ترد الجساد وتحمد الله على ان جعل الملك لهذه الدولة
 العرنتاوية التي اولى بالعدل العباد ومنحة الامتدادوا صلحت السبل وامنت العرفا وفرت البعبد بالاء لان
 الحسنة واقفا ضد الخير والعدا بين القبائل واهل الخلاف حتى صاروا كالاخوان فيمكن كل صانع من صنعته
 واذت لكل اعدا في عمله بتسليم كل اعدا لهه فيما كان ما اهل الامارة جعلوه **آمير** او من كان ما اهل

Fig. 1: A page of the *Kitāb al-turjumān* entitled ‘French rule of this region and an elucidation of its great benefit that only the intelligent can grasp’. IHERI-ABT MS 762, 71. Reproduced by permission from the Institut des Hautes Etudes et de Recherches Islamiques Ahmed Baba de Tombouctou.

the earth saying, ‘We have stated in the *Zabūr* [a pre-Qur’anic revealed text] after the reminder that my pious servants will inherit the earth.’ Praise be to God for granting possession [of our lands to] this French state first in [dispensing] justice to the servants [of God]. . . . We [the traditional] *qādīs*, all of the family of al-Ṣayḥ Aḥmad bin Ādd, and the entire population of

Arawān under our jurisdiction. . . are recipients of her [France's] love known for her victories, strength, abundant good, and mighty state.³⁷

The complete account is much longer.³⁸ However, this excerpt effectively captures the motive behind the writing of the *Kitāb al-turjumān*: lauding French colonial rule. Prior to the arrival of France, an absence of order on an existential scale characterized the southern Sahara and Sahel.

To be sure, the *Kitāb al-turjumān* is not alone in this gloomy description of the region and milieu. The eighteenth-century chronicle the *Dīkr al-wafayāt* speaks of internecine warfare, food shortages, disease, and plunder that prevailed at the time of its composition. Disorder was pervasive and ubiquitous, and included assassinations of political and military elites, often grotesquely and by treachery, and the frequent and arbitrary removal of pashas from power, in one case after only three days.³⁹ In addition to the chronicles, we find for example a scholar in a one-page pamphlet welcoming the arrival of the French and praising the economic and political changes they apparently brought.⁴⁰ However, among the chronicles, the *Kitāb al-turjumān* is unique in its total condemnation of the local while advancing an unbridled praise for the French invader — as it did for al-Dahabī. The seventeenth-century chronicles distribute 'praise' and 'blame' to both the Sa'dian state and the last Askiya rulers of Songhay, the former for the social and political upheavals their invasion brought and the latter as moral culprits and catalysts for the invasion. However, as Moraes Farias shows, the chronicles were centred upon the task of making historical sense of the invasion in line with their political project, which was 'aimed at reconciliation between three elites, aimed at a closer, less unequal political integration of the . . . Arma, the Askiyā lineages, and the urban patriciate of Timbuktu and Jenne'.⁴¹

Unlike the seventeenth-century chroniclers who rehabilitate the Sa'dian invasion for the sake of a new era of concord between the Sahelian communities and the invaders, bin al-Ŝayḥ embraces it to the complete exclusion of the Songhay elite and everything local.⁴² He then turns on the Arma, laying the deplorable state of affairs in the Sahel at their hands when, from 1617 onwards, they appointed and removed the pashas ruling

37 *Ibid.* 70–2. See Fig. 1

38 *Ibid.* The full account spans pages 70–2 and 97–100.

39 IHERI-ABT MS 3315, *Dīkr al-wafayāt wa mā ḥadaṭ min al-umūr al-izām*. See also, Abitbol, *Mawlāy al-Qāsim*; M. Abitbol, *Tombouctou et les Arma: De la conquête marocaine du Soudan nigérien en 1591 à l'hégémonie de l'empire peul du Maçina en 1853* (Paris, 1979); S. M. Cissoko, 'Famines et épidémies à Tombouctou et dans le Boucle du Niger du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle', *Bulletin de l'Institut fondamental d'Afrique noire*, 30 (1966), 806–21; M. Tymowski, 'Famines et épidémies au Soudan nigérien du XVIe au XIXe siècle: causes locales et influences extérieures', *Hemispheres*, 5 (1988), 5–27.

40 IHERI-ABT MS 12574, Sīdī bin Muḥammad Būtalimīt, *Maktūb fī al-tarḥīb li al-Dawlah al-Faransiyyah fī duḥul hā wa siyāsāt hā wa iqtisādha ilā al-bilād al-takrūrīyah min al-bīdān wa al-sūdān*. See also Maktabat Mamma Haydara al-Tidhkāriyya (MMHT) MS 3747.

41 Moraes Farias, 'Intellectual innovation', 96–8.

42 Moraes Farias, *Arabic Medieval Inscriptions*, lxxiv–lxxvii. According to Lansine Kaba, the Arma underwent a cultural mutation through marriage to local women and adoption of the Soḡoy language and other local practices, but they still stuck to their distinctive collective identity. In this way they could reinforce alliances between their social category and the more influential conquered groups; see L. Kaba, 'Archers, musketeers, and mosquitoes: the Moroccan invasion of the Sudan and the Songhay resistance, 1591–1612', *The Journal of African History*, 22:4 (1981), 473.

Songhay. Their practice of appointing the ruling pasha was an appropriation and usurpation of the exclusive power of the just and pious Sa'dian *sulṭān*. In so doing the Arma abandoned a just and God-fearing leadership that guaranteed durable stable political authority and rule. This marked the demise of the state, leading to insecurity, lawlessness, and moral degeneration. Therefore, only a state could restore order and stability and — in the process — respect, benevolence, the rule of law, mercy, dignity, compassion, security, safety, growth, tribal relations, and religion in the Sahel. France was that state. Hence it was both a religious obligation and a social imperative — as well as being logical — for the inhabitants of the region to accept and embrace the French invasion, conquest, and rule of the Sahel. If the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān* aimed at a closer, less unequal political integration of each of three elites to effect reconciliation, the *Kitāb al-turjumān* aimed at complete subordination of locals (both elites and commoners) to French colonial power.

To demonstrate the status and role of France, the *Kitāb al-turjumān* resorts to Qur'ānic verse and metaphor. For example, the verse 'and we (God) have declared in the Psalms after the reminder that the earth will be inherited by God's righteous servants' depicts France as a righteous servant of God and a fulfilment of His promise. Breastfeeding as a metaphor presents France as the mother who nourishes her children and the local populations of the Sahel as suckling infants who cannot survive without their mother. In drawing on Qur'ānic verse and metaphor the *Kitāb al-turjumān* is unique; Timbuktu's earlier and contemporary historical sources do not do the same.⁴³ France is presented as more than a state; it is a saviour. The language of the French invasion is unmistakably more religious than that of the Sa'dian invasion.

Bin al-Ṣayḥ's embrace and lauding of French colonial rule extends to other literary genres. In 1938, he composed a poem in praise of the French which he translated into French and sent to Colonel Bertrand, the commandant de cercle of Timbuktu:

The price of the hearts of free men is the good deed. Authority on the basis of the good deed is a known thing. The recognition of a good deed is equally a good deed. Recognizing good deeds is a habit of the virtuous. Here among the French there is a government which performs good deeds publicly and secretly, in justice and in policy, by mercy and kindness, with benevolence and respect. Her compassion and her benevolence have satisfied all Muslims in every country. Before her coming, our countries were in a state of anarchy and misery. Peace was something unknown and unimaginable there. [Rather, we knew] fighting and pillage, war and the abduction of women and children into captivity [as well as] the stealing of goods, the rape of our women, and sale of free men. Our lands were unproductive, and famine reigned. Education was devalued and scholars were despised. . . . God brought the French for the good of the fearful peoples; they arrived to get rid of injustice and polygamy.⁴⁴

43 As Shamil Jeppie points out, the *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān* does not cite Qur'ānic verses or prophetic traditions that exhort believers to learn from the Prophets and from either a specific past or the past in general. The *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān* — as well as the *Tārīḥ ibn al-Muḥṭār* — is not conceived within the frame of sacred history. S. Jeppie, 'Tarikh and beyond: on Tarikh al-Sudan of al-Sa'di (c. 1655) and the writing communities of the middle Niger valley' (paper presented at the Great Books on Africa – Africana in Basel Public Lecture Series, Basel, Switzerland, 27 Mar. 2007).

44 Hall, *History of Race*, 304. Bin al-Ṣayḥ reiterated his praise for France in 1955 in an interview with Radio Tunis, CADN AOF Dakar 320, 'Traduction de l'interview donnée par le Cheikh Mohamed Mahmoud, cadi de Tombouctou, aux émissions arabes de Radio Tunis', 20 Sept. 1955.

However, bin al-Ŝayḥ was not simply a praise singer for the French. As Hall puts it, ‘it would be a mistake . . . to see Ould al-Shaykh as just a French puppet’.⁴⁵ True, the political discourse he advanced was parochial insofar as it agitated for keeping the Niger Bend region, or the region known as the Azawād, under white (*bidan*) control and refused incorporation into a future Black-dominated state. However, he sincerely believed that he agitated for the genuine aspirations of the *bidan* populations of the Sahel that would otherwise be neglected under a Black-dominated country.⁴⁶ As Hall says, ‘his project reflected the deep misgivings of Arab and Tuāreg elites about the changes threatened by decolonization. Ould al-Shaykh played an important role in articulating the problems faced by these elites.’⁴⁷

The *Kitāb al-turjumān*’s enumeration of the benefits of French colonial rule is hyperbole.⁴⁸ Tribal strife, wars, disease, plundering, and the many other ills did not summarily come to an end, nor did the French repair or secure all routes, or build or fix schools, at least to the degree bin al-Ŝayḥ claims. To be sure, as a superior military force the French established order; however, they did so in line with their needs and interests. Their appointing of Muslim scholars and notables as judges to adjudicate their own disputes in line with Islamic law, which bin al-Ŝayḥ sees as evidence of their fairness, was in reality part of policy to keep Islamic activity under their watchful eye and control.⁴⁹ In his critique of how the French dealt with slavery in the Niger Bend, what he terms ‘defending slavery, the moral order of inequality *c.* 1893–1940’, Hall writes that

although slavery was officially abolished in Soudan in 1908, colonial authorities did little to encourage the liberation of slaves in the northern, desert-edge parts of the territory where colonial authority was most precarious. In these areas, the colonial administration developed policies designed to ensure that slaves remained subject to their masters. Faced with a League of Nations enquiry into the question of slavery in colonial territories in the 1930s, the French regime presented the investigators with a fiction of benevolent colonial emancipation policies that concealed their reliance on slavery as the basis of both the economic and political stability of French rule in the Niger Bend and other Sahelian territories.⁵⁰

45 Hall, *History of Race*, 303.

46 Traditional religious scholars of the western and southwestern Sahara have written about the question of chaos and the absence of the state (a phenomenon known as *al-saybah*) since the seventeenth century and into the colonial era. See, Y. w Barā’ah, *Al-Majmu’ah al-kubrā al-šāmilah li fatāwā wa nawāzil wa aḥkām ahl ḡarb wa junūb ḡarb al-Šaḡrā* (1st edn, Nouakchott, Mauritania, 2009), 121–7.

47 Hall, *History of Race*, 303.

48 For French colonial conquests in West Africa, see L. T. Medinah, ‘Massina and the Torodbe Tukuloor Empire until 1878’, in J. F. Ade Ajayi (ed.), *UNESCO General History of Africa, Volume VI: Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880s* (Berkeley, 1989); D. Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tall* (Oxford, 1985); and K. Forstner, *The Conquest of the Western Sudan: A Study in French Military Imperialism* (London, 1969).

49 For more on the French colonial intelligence services keeping meticulous tabs on Muslim clerics, their students, their books, their Sufi affiliations, and so on, see R. Launay and B. F. Soares, ‘The formation of an “Islamic sphere” in French colonial West Africa’, *Economy and Society*, 28:4 (1999), 497–519. The French appointed Muslim judges to areas where Muslims were a minority, and even to areas where they were non-existent, to apply Islamic substantive law texts to legal disputes as they viewed Islam as a stepping stone between animism and European civilization. See D. C. O’Brien, ‘Towards an Islamic policy in French West Africa, 1854–1914’, *The Journal of African History*, 8:2 (1967), 303–16; and D. Robinson, ‘French Islamic policy and practice in late nineteenth-century Senegal’, *The Journal of African History*, 29:3 (1988), 415–35.

50 Hall, *History of Race*, 209. Sandra Greene shows that in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries most European governments had delinked their economic and political goals from the zeal of Christian

Moreover, bin al-Ŝayḥ was oblivious to or knowingly denied the order and relative stability the region experienced under the Caliphate of Ḥamdallāhi (1818–62). For example, the letters of Ghadames slaves in the late nineteenth-century Niger Bend open a window on relatively autonomous and high-status slaves living in the circum-Saharan world.⁵¹ According to Hall, ‘the extension of the authority of the jihadist state of Hamdullahi as far as Timbuktu in the 1820s resulted in a period of some prosperity for the western parts of the Niger Bend’.⁵² Elias Saad argues that during the reign of the Ḥamdallāhi Caliphate

the commerce of Timbuktu became a major beneficiary. At a later time, it was even claimed that the city attracted many merchants and settlers that it was restored to its previous size under Songhay. This does not seem true, but a measure of growth is certainly evidenced by Barth’s observations concerning the extensiveness of storage buildings at Kabara.⁵³

In fact, the starvation that afflicted Timbuktu in 1844 was the result of an economic blockade Ḥamdallāhi imposed on the city after failing to maintain control of it.⁵⁴ The above is not meant to refute bin al-Ŝayḥ’s narrative, but to offer a nuanced picture as opposed to the black-and-white picture he presents in the *Kitāb al-turjumān*. Ironically, the gloomy picture the *Kitāb al-turjumān* sketches of the Sahel prior to and at the time of the arrival of the French contradicts and even negates bin al-Ŝayḥ’s description of his family as paragons of virtue and custodians of knowledge and order in Arawān. On that ironic note, we come to the second leitmotif of the *Kitāb al-turjumān*, al-Ŝayḥ Aḥmad bin Ādd, progenitor and patriarch of the Ādd clan.

THE CLAN OF AḤMAD BIN ĀDD

We hail from the lineage of al-Ḥasan bin ‘Alī; our [Arab] ancestors came to West Africa with the Islamic conquests [of the region] during the second and third centuries [*hijrī*]. Our clan was called the *Ahl al-Sūq*. When the Tuāreg *mulattimūn* gained power in the region, political rule passed to them; however, religious authority in terms of the issuing of legal opinions, judicial decrees, and education remained in our hands to this day, not through inheritance as only those who are qualified [assume that duty]. Our ancestors regarded marriage of [our male] scholars and judges to the daughters of the Tuāreg royal house [as] an imperative to unify authority. Thus, our mothers hailed from the Tuāreg so much so that we ourselves became an integral part of the Tuāreg.⁵⁵

missionaries to abolish both slavery and the slave trade, see S. E. Greene, ‘Christian missionaries on record: documenting slavery and the slave trade from the late fifteenth to the early twentieth century’, in A. Bellagamba, S. E. Greene, and M. Klein (eds.), *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade, Volume II* (Cambridge, 2016), 50.

51 B. S. Hall and Y. D. Addoun, ‘The Arabic letters of Ghadames slaves in the Niger Bend, 1869–1900’, in A. Bellagamba, S. E. Greene, and M. Klein (eds.), *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade, Volume I* (Cambridge, 2013), 1.

52 B. S. Hall, ‘Mapping the river in black and white: trajectories of race in the Niger Bend, northern Mali’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2005), 127.

53 Saad, *Social History*, 217.

54 Nobili, *Sultān, Caliph, and the Renewer of the Faith*, 178.

55 CADN Dakar AOF 320, ‘Un quart d’heure avec S. E. le Cadi de Tombouctou’, interview with Radio Tunis, 20 Sep. 1955.

In this 1955 interview with Radio Tunisia, bin al-Ŝayḥ emphasized his family's Arab origins from the paternal side and descent from the lineage of Prophet Muḥammad, underscoring their status as *šurafā*. Marriage into the ruling Tuāreg house showed the family's 'royal' Tuāreg pedigree, hence its political status. In short, by highlighting his family's Arab-Tuāreg genealogy, bin al-Ŝayḥ communicated their elite genealogical-political-religious status. What bin al-Ŝayḥ said in the interview about his family permeates the *Kitāb al-turjumān*, echoing his motive for writing a history of the Sahel.⁵⁶ In fact, so pivotal is the family lineage to the historiographical aim of the *Kitāb al-turjumān* that it appears on the opening page of the chronicle, just after the title and even before the conventional praising of God and salutation of the Prophet. The lineage begins with Aḥmad bin Ādd (d. 1634 CE), the progenitor and patriarch of the family and the spiritual, intellectual, and political founder of the town of Arawān. Aḥmad bin Ādd was born in the Saharan town of Sūq sometime during the second half of the sixteenth century. He left Sūq on a spiritual sojourn to the Sūdān, becoming a holyman. The *Kitāb al-turjumān* states that his father and grandfather had likewise undertaken the spiritual sojourn to the Sūdān a few years earlier, while Aḥmad was still very young.⁵⁷ He finally settled in the town of Arawān, some 220 km north of Timbuktu. In Arawān, he married the daughter of the Maghsharan Tuāreg chief. The marriage solidified his status as the religious-intellectual authority of the town. Aḥmad bin Ādd's spiritual sojourn marks his otherworldliness, while his marriage to the daughter of the Tuāreg chief reflects temporal power. However, in line with what motivated bin al-Ŝayḥ to write the *Kitāb al-turjumān*, it was not sufficient for al-Ŝayḥ Aḥmad bin Ādd to be merely a saint. He had to be the unrivalled saint of the Sūdān. The *Kitāb al-turjumān* seeks to establish this status.

ENCOUNTER WITH JAWDAR

It has been related that he [Sulṭān Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī] entrusted Jawdar that when he meets the pious *walī* [saint], al-Ŝayḥ Aḥmad bin Ādd on entering [Songhay], he consults with him [regarding the invasion] for he is the unrivalled *walī* of the region. It has been narrated that he [al-Ḍahabī] wrote a note to him in this vein, which we narrated on the authority of righteous scholars virtuous and pious. The reason [that] Sulṭān Māwlāy Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī wrote to al-Ŝayḥ Aḥmad bin Ādd is that he heard much about al-Ŝayḥ Aḥmad bin Ādd worshipping in the open deserts, as he heard of other scholars and saints, [and since] he intended to invade the land [of Songhay] wherein he [al-Ŝayḥ Aḥmad bin Ādd] lived. He [Sulṭān Aḥmad al-Ḍahabī] took pieces of raw meat and wrote the name of a saint of the famous saints of the Sūdān he knew among them al-Ŝayḥ Aḥmad bin Ādd. He then threw the pieces into the fire. The fire consumed all the pieces except the piece with the name of al-Ŝayḥ Aḥmad bin Ādd on it. The fire did not consume [the piece of meat with al-Ŝayḥ Aḥmad bin Ādd on it]. It remained in the fire in its [original] form. . . . So, the Sulṭān [al-Ḍahabī] said, 'Indeed this [al-Ŝayḥ Aḥmad bin Ādd] is the greatest [saint] in the Sūdān. He instructed Jawdar not to enter [Songhay] except with his [al-Ŝayḥ Aḥmad bin Ādd's] permission and wrote [a note/letter to him [al-Ŝayḥ Aḥmad bin Ādd]].⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *KT*, 3–7.

⁵⁷ However, elsewhere in *KT* it states that they left Sūq after its destruction at the hands of the army of Askiya Muḥammad. See *KT*, 4.

⁵⁸ *KT*, 9.

9

السلطنة اوتديم وبعث السلطان مولانا احمد الزهبي الي اسكيا السلطان بتلوا الفناو مع الامة قبل يداعبه
 اسكيا السلطان صاحب ولم يقف عن ملامه بما فعل في الجواب وبعث الي الرسول فذكر السلطان مولانا احمد
 الزهبي لما انصرت عليه اسكيا السلطان وبعث على ترهيم العسكر الي السودان ثم رجع الي الرسول امر اسكيا
 السلطان الي السلطان مولانا احمد الزهبي وبعث اليه بما قال ولما اشتهق وقال ان السلطان مولانا احمد الزهبي
 اسيرنا حية وهو اسيرنا حية وبعث له صفة الجواب فمرسلناو نعلمه من عهده اذرة علم الحرب وبعثه الي
 كسور السلطان مولانا احمد الزهبي اعيانه دولته واهل البلاد والمثورة فكيف في يوم اصحابهم ذلك
 يوما مشهورا وتبعوا وضوا في ذلك صحتهم ان يقوا على البعث الي السودان فبعثوا في انصرو السلطان مولانا
 احمد الزهبي في يوم جلا وبيوخم الاخرى اليه كانت سنة صبح ونسبح وتسمي حانة بحرية في يوم عزمه
 هو مشغل فتجسس اليه الحرب وما يحتاج اليه الجيش من اذنة السفر ومهماته واهل الغواد ان يفوا
 حصر الغيايل وما يبتا جونا اليه مرطاب والمخيل والسجل وان شغل هو بتفريخ والتهرب والامواج
 والمجملات التي تملها والبار وهو الاضطر وغير ذلك ولم يستود ايامه الا في ثلاث سنين ثم امر بالاج
 المضار والامام لواءه فاستسبع في يخرج من الاحمال ولا تغفل من مر اكثر في اليوم الساج من كسر
 سنة الحجة سنة ثمان وتسعين وتسعمائة وتزلزل العساكر وضربت ايشيقا وخيلا ورجلا
 وجمعتها عشرون الفجا ومعهم من المعليسي العبا بحرية وغيره بالجموع اشداه وعشرون الفجا
 وفي علمه ذلك له الباشا جود وحشد ازره بجلا من اعيانه الدولة فاختر منهم من يعلم بحربه ويرى
 كفايته ويختبر مرطاب كل بازان وكوماي من الخيل كل عتيق وجره اذ في انصرا في سنة ثمان وتسعين
 في الحج وبعث سنة تسع وتسعين وتسعمائة وحسن انه عبر الي جود انما الفتي للولي الصالح الشيخ مير احمد
 ابن اده انا في سنة ثمان وتسعين في حال دخوله في سنة وولي الفهم وبعث كتابا وبعث في سنة ثمان وتسعين
 وعصر الزمان ونباه العلماء العدل من اهل العزل والبرم وسبب كتب السلطان مولانا احمد الزهبي
 ايشيق احمد دلج كيار ونباه مع ما تقدم انه لم يسم بغير الشيخ احمد اذ وتغير في العباوت واراد غزو البلدة الذي
 هو فيها ويبيع بكثير من العلماء والاصحاب في سنة اواخر غزوه اخذ فطحا من العلم ايشيق وكتب على
 كل فطحة اسم صاحب من المشهور عنده في السودان وكان منهم الشيخ احمد اذ في سنة ثمان وتسعين في انصرا
 فاكنت انما كل الفطحة الا الفطحة المكتوب عليها اسم الشيخ سير احمد اذ في سنة ثمان وتسعين فبعث
 في انصرا على الجبال التي فيها عبي بلان الله سبحانه الفطحة على صاحبها ففعل السلطان ان هذا
 هو كبر من في السودان فاصر جود راه لا يدخل الا في سنة وكتب له فانكم حال السلطان وصلاحه
 صديقه من خص من ساء بهاشا وكتب ايضا لفا في سنة ثمان وتسعين في سنة ثمان وتسعين في سنة ثمان وتسعين في سنة
 الناس على لزوم الجملة في سنة ثمان وتسعين في سنة ثمان وتسعين في سنة ثمان وتسعين في سنة ثمان وتسعين في سنة
 ولما انصرا من اذنة ثمان وتسعين جعلوا في جمع عايشة الصلوة ثم علم في سنة ثمان وتسعين في سنة ثمان وتسعين في سنة
 حتم اذ في سنة ثمان وتسعين في سنة ثمان وتسعين في سنة ثمان وتسعين في سنة ثمان وتسعين في سنة ثمان وتسعين في سنة

Fig. 2: A page of the *Kitāb al-turjumān* entitled ‘The account of Jawdar’s departure from Marrakech and his encounter with al-Šayḥ Aḥmad bin ʿAdd, his experience with Askiya Iṣḥāq, and related matters’. IHERI-ABT MS 762, 9. Reproduced by permission from the Institut des Hautes Etudes et de Recherches Islamiques Ahmed Baba de Tombouctou.

The narrative of the fire not consuming the piece of meat with Aḥmad bin Ādd's name on it while consuming the pieces with the names of other saints of the Sūdān affirms him as the Sūdān's unrivalled saint. But more importantly it invests and confers Aḥmad bin Ādd with a type of power that political temporal power had to consider. He has the Moroccan *sultān* provide Jawdar with a letter to present to Aḥmad bin Ādd. The letter seeks Aḥmad bin Ādd's approval for the invasion; Jawdar had to consult the saint first, before proceeding. This linking of temporal power to spiritual power, the *sultān* to the *walī*, is a legitimation of the invasion to which Aḥmad bin Ādd, the unrivalled saint of the Sūdān, was pivotal. The Sa'dian invasion of Songhay hinged on his approval. However, bin al-Ṣayḥ lets this symbiosis between the spiritual-*cum*-religious and the temporal play out in most intriguing and dramatic fashion.

When Jawdar meets Aḥmad bin Ādd, he mistakes him and his two companions as spies for Iṣḥāq II and therefore imprisons them in heavy chains.⁵⁹ However, Aḥmad bin Ādd miraculously frees himself from the chains to do the ritual ablution (*al-wuḍū'*) at the time of prayers. With this act, it dawns upon Jawdar that the man in front of him is the saint whom al-Dahabī instructed him to consult. Jawdar falls in front of Aḥmad bin Ādd, kisses his head and hands, and begs for forgiveness for imprisoning the Ṣayḥ and his companion. He hands over the letter to Aḥmad bin Ādd, who immediately blesses the invasion but instructs Jawdar not to touch the town of Arawān. The miracle was performance, an embodiment of the saint's power.

Jawdar's forgetting of al-Dahabī's instruction about al-Ṣayḥ Aḥmad bin Ādd further brings out the motive of the *Kitāb al-turjumān*. Had Jawdar recognized Aḥmad bin Ādd from the outset, he would not have imprisoned him, which in turn would have precluded the performance of the miracle. As supernatural performances, the meat incident and the freeing from the chains are active and passive displays of Aḥmad bin Ādd's spiritual status and power. In the case of the French, the written word — Qur'ānic verses and poetry — replaced the performance of miracles. Beyond legitimizing the Moroccan invasion, the *Kitāb al-turjumān*'s construction of Aḥmad bin Ādd's spiritual station also invests his offspring with status and authority. Hence religious, intellectual, judicial, and political authority runs in the Ādd family and offspring from Aḥmad bin Ādd's arrival at the end of the sixteenth century to bin al-Ṣayḥ's day at the end of the 1950s.

The picture that the *Kitāb al-turjumān* presents of Aḥmad bin Ādd and his offspring including the encounter with Jawdar Pasha are not found in any of Timbuktu's large chronicles. The *Nayl al-ibtihāj*, the biographical dictionary of the famed sixteenth-century Timbuktu scholar Aḥmad Bābā al-Sūdānī, has no entry on Aḥmad bin Ādd, whether as a holyman and scholar or as an ordinary individual.⁶⁰ Yet the two men were contemporaries — Aḥmad Bābā died in 1627 while Aḥmad bin Ādd died in 1634. However, two twentieth-century Timbuktu biographical dictionaries, the *Al-Sa'ādah al-abadīyyah* and the *Izālah al-rayb*, list him as a scholar and spiritual luminary.⁶¹ Two relatively unknown

59 *Ibid.* 4.

60 This text was completed in 1598, with an addendum, the *Kifāyah al-muhtāj li ma'rifah man laysa bi al-dībāj* added in 1605. A. B. al-Sūdānī, *Nayl al-ibtihāj bi taḥrīz al-dībāj* (2nd edn, Tripoli, 2000), 16.

61 Bāber, *Al-Sa'ādah al-abadīyyah*, 135–6; al-'Arāf, *Izālah al-rayb*. However, Aḥmad Bāber, the author of the *Al-Sa'ādah*, omitted bin al-Ṣayḥ from the biographical dictionary ostensibly because bin al-Ṣayḥ allegedly

twentieth-century histories — one written by a great grandson of al-Ŝayḥ Aḥmad bin Ādd, the other related by a great grandson do offer an account of al-Ŝayḥ Aḥmad and his sons — related the second.⁶²

ARAWĀN AND THE CREATION AND LEGACY OF THE ĀDD CLAN

Al-Ŝayḥ Aḥmad bin Ādd remained on his spiritual sojourn until the army of Māwlāy Aḥmad al-Dahabī liberated the Sūdān. . . . [H]e intended to decide on a space to live and worship. So, he returned to Arawān and settled there. At the time Arawān was surrounded by many people living in tents and straw homes in the deserts. He then built a mosque and a home for him and Šāliḥ bin Abī Muḥammad and married a woman from the Maghsharan. . . . [The place then] became famous as a place of worship, devotion, reform, knowledge, and spiritual-cum-political authority. Anyone from among the Maghsharan and others who had the ability built a house [in Arawān did so]. Aḥmad bin Ādd's settling in Arawān was at the beginning of the eleventh century [*hijrī*/end of the sixteenth century CE]. Everyone from among the Maghsharan and the like who heard that he settled there resolved to visit [Arawān] and settle there. After only four years, Arawān had a large palace and [was] completely built.⁶³ In a short period people flocked [to Arawān] for commerce until its fame spread far and wide. When Jawdar came to know of all this in the year 1007 *hijrī*/1598 CE, he sent the Commander 'Abd al-Mālik to Arawān to collect [the tax of] a tenth from the traders accompanied by a number of Arma [soldiers].⁶⁴

The town of Arawān features prominently throughout the *Kitāb al-turjumān*. Chapter 1 provides an account of its founding by the Maghsharan Tuāreg in the eleventh century CE when they encamped there during the rainy season, erecting tents, and straw houses in the desert, thus not settling. However, chapter 6, 'The end of Aḥmad bin Ādd's spiritual sojourn and his settling in Arawān', ascribes Arawān's actual, albeit second founding to the arrival and settling of Aḥmad bin Ādd there at the end of the sixteenth century CE. The town owns its spiritual existence, political order, economic activity, and knowledge tradition to that man of *barakah* (God's grace) and clairvoyance. After bin Ādd's demise,

refused to pray behind Bāber's teacher al-Ŝayḥ Abū al-Ḥayr al-Arawānī because the latter was Black. However, I have argued elsewhere that bin al-Ŝayḥ's alleged treatment of Abū al-Ḥayr is not sufficient to explain the omission. The alleged incident, I argue, was in fact a rumor created by *bidan* elites in postcolonial Mali having to, in a Black-dominated Mali, distance themselves from bin al-Ŝayḥ's controversial racialized political discourse; see M. S. Mathee, 'Muftis and the women of Timbuktu: history through Timbuktu's fatwās, 1907–1960' (PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, 2011), 247–8. I draw on the fact that Bāber completed his *Al-Sa'ādah* in November 1962, two years into the independence of Mali, and that he wrote his chronicle the *Jawābir al-ḥisān* after the creation of Mali. In both works, Bāber embraces the nascent Malian state and embellishes its attributes: 'Then commenced the nascent rule of Mali in the year 1380 (1960). Their rule of these lands now is one of benevolence, consolidating order and extinguishing dissension from hearts. Their rule is firm and upright.' In contrast, both works devote only a few lines to France with no mention of the many benefits of French rule. See al-Arawānī, *Al-Sa'ādah*, 69; A. B. al-Arawānī, *Jawābir al-ḥisān fī aḥbār al-Sūdān*, ed. H. M. al-Dālī (1st edn, Benghazi, 2001), 52–3, 83. Although *KT* does not mention Mali — as it was written before its establishment — it would have rejected Mali, as we saw above.

62 MMHT MS 319, Āli al-Arawānī, *Tārīḥ Sīdī Aḥmad Ag Ādd wa tārīḥ awlādih*, n.d., ca. 1900; and IHERI-ABT MS 621, Abū al-Ḥayr al-Arawānī, *Tārīḥ Arawān wa Tawdammī*, n.d., ca. 1900.

63 'Palace' refers to quarters for the governor, in this case the Arma.

64 *KT*, 11–12.

the spiritual, political, and economic leadership of Arawān — and religious and intellectual authority over its residents — passed to his offspring. For the next 300 years, *iftā* and *qaḍā* in Arawān — that is, the issuing of juristic legal opinion and binding legal rulings — were in their hands. This religious and intellectual influence that extends after al-Ŝayḥ Aḥmad bin Ādd to his offspring speaks to family as a leitmotif of the *Kitāb al-turjumān*. If Timbuktu, as presented by the seventeenth-century *tārīḥs*, is the creation of numerous scholars, families, and traders who came from all over West and North Africa, Arawān in contrast is the creation and legacy of one man and his descendants. On this basis, bin al-Ŝayḥ can write that the departure of the Ādd family from Arawān in the twentieth century marks the town's economic and intellectual retrogression and therefore its social demise, as its population declined and the Azalaï salt caravans became its only visitors.

However, the abovementioned *Tārīḥ Arawān wa Tawdannī* disputes written by bin al-Ŝayḥ's contemporary, Abū al-Ḥayr bin 'Abd-Allah disputes the gloomy picture the *Kitāb al-turjumān* offers of Arawān with the departure of the Ādd family.⁶⁵ It speaks of bustling activity, the proliferation of building, and traders from Ghadames, Tuwāt, and elsewhere who brought great varieties of cloth, clothing, and abundant fruit to Arawān, selling, buying, and profiting handsomely. In other words, Arawān was not beholden to the Ādd clan.⁶⁶ The *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān* mentions Arawān twice in passing, namely as the abode of the Maghsharan Tuāreg during the rainy season and in reference to the Moroccan army's march east of it.⁶⁷

MOST LEARNED SCHOLAR

As for knowledge, its people have withered away in this region especially in Timbuktu where scholars have become extinct, the last one being the erudite jurist al-Suyūfī. . . . Since his death not one scholar worth mentioning remains in Timbuktu; yes, from what I saw resembling [scholars] there is among them one scholar, namely Al-Muṣṭafā Konate, the son of the great scholar Alfā Muḥammad Konate. However, he is afflicted with [mental] conditions. . . . Following him in status is al-Muṣṭafā bin Bābā Ŝarfī. . . . Among [the rest] are two intelligent, pious youths with proper comprehension and capacity for law, language, and syntax. Both are our students. [The first] Sīdī Yaḥyā bin al-Imām Bānī hails from a family of scholars [and] studied under my tutelage the jurisprudence of al-Imām Mālik . . . and other texts, but did not complete [his studies]. . . . The second youth [is] the intelligent and mature, erudite jurist San Moi, the son of Alfā Sa'īd, the *amīr* of Timbuktu at the time the French entered Timbuktu, . . . who when he heard of me after my coming to [settle in] Timbuktu studied under me and does not want to part from me, completing under my tutelage a comprehensive and meticulous reading of the *Muḥṭaṣar Ḥalīl*. . . . [H]e is more deserving of the title *faqīh* (jurist) than [the so called] jurists I saw who do not know their wrist joint (*kū'*) from their ankle joint (*bū'*). . . . He read to me *al-Manhaj al-muntaḥab fī qawā'id al-madḥab* but did not complete [the study of] these books. . . . [Thus, the demise of knowledge in] Timbuktu, which once had uncountable scholars and used to be of the largest precincts of knowledge, a locus of writing and comprehension. To God we belong and to him is our return.⁶⁸

65 See note 62.

66 IHERI-ABT MS 621, al-Arawānī, *Tārīḥ Arawān wa Tawdannī*, n.d., ca. 1900, 2–5.

67 IHERI-ABT MS 681, al-Sa'dī, *Tārīḥ al-Sūdān*, n.d., ca. 1656, 13, 179.

68 KT, 107–8.

The leitmotifs of Aḥmad bin Ādd and bin al-Ŝayḥ's lineage and the of town of Arawān find their completion in bin al-Ŝayḥ himself as a figure in the *Kitāb al-turjumān*. In this, the *Kitāb al-turjumān* is unique among Timbuktu's *tārīḥs* and biographical dictionaries. The authors of the latter do not figure in their own works. The role bin al-Ŝayḥ allots himself in his chronicle is that of the most learned scholar of Timbuktu and the region. From the citation above, his desire and quest (and later his claim) to be the most learned scholar is apparent. In this vein, he asserts that scholars became extinct in Timbuktu after 1945, following the death and mental affliction of the last two scholars.

But his description of his contemporaries among the jurists in Timbuktu is obvious in its will to insult. The Arabic proverb of one not knowing the wrist joint from the ankle joint denotes sheer stupidity. The remainder of the scholars of bin al-Ŝayḥ's day do not even come close to the value of the two students under his tutelage, he claims. However, with his coming to Timbuktu, knowledge and learning were given a lifeline, the potential of restoring Timbuktu to its former glory as a centre of knowledge. But nothing is certain even with these two students since they have not completed their reading of legal and other texts. Hence, he concludes with the Qur'ānic phrase 'Innā lillāhi wa innā ilayhi rāji'un' to announce the death of scholarship. Thus, with bin al-Ŝayḥ's attribution of the most learned scholar status to himself, his historiographical motive is served. The *Kitāb al-turjumān* — and his other religious writings — becomes an authoritative source of the region's history.

However, the presence according to local sources of many acclaimed scholars belies bin al-Ŝayḥ's claim of the 'death' of scholarship in Timbuktu. There are too many scholars to mention, but one could take as an example Abū al-Ḥayr bin al-Ḥill of Arawān. The twentieth-century biographical dictionary the *Al-Sa'ādah al-abadīyyah* describes him as the unrivalled scholar of Takrūr, its chief jurist, teacher, and *mufti*, unmatched by any covetous competitor.⁶⁹ A *fatwā* refers to him as the remaining representative of the pious predecessors of jurists and as the authority for the jurists and people of his day, an epithet given only to scholars of the highest calibre in knowledge as well as piety.⁷⁰ Bin al-Ŝayḥ was well aware of Abū al-Ḥayr's status. He therefore patronizingly describes him as a student whom God has tried with a penchant for adjudicating disputes in Arawān; the inhabitants of Arawān came to him, but only after bin al-Ŝayḥ and his family left the town.⁷¹

A colonial administrator in Timbuktu judged bin al-Ŝayḥ to be a potentially dangerous man who 'delights in intrigue, chicanery, and obstruction [procédure], very sure of his knowledge, which he deems far superior to that of the other cadis or notables. . . [He is] very ambitious, wishing to play the role of cadi general or mufti of Timbuktu.'⁷² In official correspondence and interviews, he referred to himself as 'Cadi of Timbuktu', which was wrong as he was the *qāḍī* of only the Ahl Arawān in Timbuktu. Interestingly, in the *Kitāb al-turjumān* he never refers to himself as *qāḍī*, still less as 'the

69 Bāber, *Al-Sa'ādah al-abadīyyah*, 88. The phrase 'covetous competitor' plausibly refers to bin al-Ŝayḥ.

70 IHERI-ABT MS 5964, Ibn 'Ālin al-Jaknī al-Timbuktī, *Fatwā fi al-ḥilāfāt al-zawjīyyah*.

71 *KT*, 25.

72 CADN Dakar AOF 320, 'Notice de renseignements', n.d., ca. Dec. 1956.

Qāḍī of Timbuktu'. It will come thus as no surprise that bin al-Ŝayḥ had many enemies, indeed as another colonial record confirms.⁷³ Muhammad 'Alī Ag Attaher, chief of the Kel Entsar, accused him of being in cahoots with French officials in the Niger Bend to ruin his name.⁷⁴ Many thought of him as controversial, quick tempered, and sometimes cantankerous. However, it is very plausible that bin al-Ŝayḥ's enemies exaggerated his misdemeanours and even invented some.⁷⁵

CONCLUSION

The departure of France from the Soudan Français, marking the transition from colonial rule to postcolonial realities, had important implications for the Sahel. The *Kitāb al-turjumān* was written at the cusp of this development. Put differently, the French departure is sufficient to explain why and how bin al-Ŝayḥ wrote a history of the Sahel. But the *Kitāb al-turjumān* also enables the rethinking of the place of the Timbuktu's *tārīḥ* tradition in the intellectual history of West Africa beyond the seventeenth-century *tārīḥ*s. It offers insights into local Africans' dialectical reception of and engagement with French colonialism, and of Western modernity more generally. It is an invaluable addition to what has become known as the Islamic library of Africa alongside bin al-Ŝayḥ's many other writings straddling the colonial library.⁷⁶

Moraes Farias sees the whole of the Timbuktu *tārīḥ* tradition as inseparable from the pursuits of political projects. Like the seventeenth-century *tārīḥ*s, later texts had ephemeral success but ultimately failed to meet their political objectives. Moraes Farias had initially argued that Timbuktu's seventeenth-century *tārīḥ*s had no literary posterity. Their sudden birth as a genre was followed by the equally sudden demise of the whole *tārīḥ* tradition.⁷⁷ However, Moraes Farias put forward a modified argument in 2018.⁷⁸ A careful reading of all Timbuktu post-seventeenth-century *tārīḥ*s shows the absence of a unified *tārīḥ* genre covering the period from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. The post-seventeenth-century *tārīḥ*s do not share common political aims or generic properties with the seventeenth-century *tārīḥ*s, which aimed at reconciling three social elites characteristic of a very particular historical period, and which pursued this aim by means of particular literary devices appropriate to that specific historical and cultural context. There are simply no *tārīḥ*s written after the seventeenth century that can be said to belong to the same

73 CADN Dakar AOF 320, Service des Affaires Politiques, 'Renseignements concernant le nommé Mohammed Mahmoud Ould Cheikh, Cadi des Ahel Araouane (Cercle de Tombouctou)', n.d., ca. 1955.

74 Hall, *History of Race*, 306–7.

75 For example, the story that bin al-Ŝayḥ refused to pray behind al-Ŝayḥ Abū al-Ḥayr; see note 60.

76 The Congolese philosopher Valentin Mudimbe first spoke of the colonial library as a 'body of writing by colonial scholars that creates a system of representation of African societies'. Quoted in O. Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa* (London, 2016), 9. Opposed to the colonial library, Mamadou Diouf speaks of the Islamic library in Muslim Africa which has a longer history and a broader demographic and cultural scope; see M. Diouf, *Historians and Histories: What For? African Historiography Between State and the Communities* (Calcutta, 2003), 8.

77 Moraes Farias, 'Intellectual innovation', 97.

78 P. F. de Moraes Farias, 'Timbuktu historical chronicles and the recycling of tradition' (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association of the United Kingdom, Birmingham, UK, 11 Sept. 2018).

genre as those of the earlier period. The *Kitāb al-turjumān* is further distinguished as representative of a distinct genre by what Moraes Farias calls the ‘local inherited knowledge’ that features within it. In addition to its selective drawing on Timbuktu’s seventeenth-century *tārīḥs*, the *Kitāb al-turjumān* does not draw on other local written sources (e.g. the *Tadkirah al-nisyān*) or oral sources (Tuāreg folklore, Songhay oracy, etc.) as the seventeenth-century *tārīḥs* did. The result is that they do not share common political properties. If the seventeenth-century *tārīḥs* aimed at political reconciliation, the *Kitāb al-turjumān* aimed at political exclusivism. Yet in their different genres all Timbuktu *tārīḥs* engage in the pursuit of political projects. As Shamil Jeppie wrote, ‘What must be stressed is not the banal point that Africa had a history before colonialism, but that there were styles of historical writing and practices to ensure its continuity before colonial modernity introduced its modalities of knowledge, historical and otherwise.’⁷⁹

On the role of family in Muslim historiography, the *Kitāb al-turjumān* echoes Mamlūk-era chronicles. Yossef Rapoport shows that many Mamlūk-era chronicles ‘can be read like memoirs in which historians talk about their families’ and demonstrate an autobiographical bent devoted to the self-representation of the author.⁸⁰ If, to draw on Rosenthal, the *Kitāb al-turjumān* is a local Muslim history expressing a deeply felt desire for a place in the global *ummah* while simultaneously expressing a specifically local identity, it further centres the family within the local.⁸¹ Aḥmad bin Ādd, the Ādd clan, and finally the place of bin al-Ŝayḥ in the *Kitāb al-turjumān* qualifies bin al-Ŝayḥ to fit the Indian historian Sir Jadunath Sarkar’s (d. 1958) description of historians who ‘mainly produced histories that pandered to regional, religious, family, or caste pride [and who] . . . tried to prove the veracity of legends with the help of documents’.⁸² The *Kitāb al-turjumān* was not so much a history of the southern Sahara and the Sahel as it was an attempt by bin al-Ŝayḥ to write history in line with the aspirations of the *bidan* of the Niger Bend.⁸³ The *Kitāb al-turjumān* shows that history, to draw on Marc Bloch, is ‘the science of men in time’, and bin al-Ŝayḥ exploited the climate of the time for his political motives.⁸⁴ Finally, we may begin to wonder whether the *Kitāb al-turjumān* belongs to what Partha Chatterjee calls ‘the Early Modern’ as a category of transition. Chatterjee identifies the Early Modern with elements of thought or practice, ‘as innovations that . . . represent novel ways of comprehending or coping with the unfamiliar . . . aris[ing] within different social strata — among elite groups or the literati’; Subaltern Studies calls it ‘nationalist mythmaking’.⁸⁵ The political and intellectual history the *Kitāb al-turjumān* offers of the

79 S. Jeppie, ‘History for Timbuktu: Aḥmad Bula’rāf, archives, and the place of the past’, *History in Africa*, 38 (2011), 401–16.

80 Y. Rapoport, *Marriage, Money and Divorce in Medieval Islamic Society* (Cape Town, 2005), 12.

81 F. Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, (2nd rev. edn, Leiden, 1968), 150.

82 D. Chakrabarty, *The Calling of History: Sir Jadunath Sarkar and his Empire of Truth* (Chicago, 2015), 278–86.

83 This understanding of history writing was articulated by the Hindutva ideologue Vinayak Savarkar; see V. Chaturvedi, ‘Rethinking knowledge with action: V. D. Savarkar, the Bhagavad Gita and histories of warfare’, in S. Kapila and F. Devji (eds.), *Political Thought in Action: The Bhagavad Gita and Modern India* (Delhi, 2013), 174.

84 M. Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft*, trans. P. Putnam (Manchester, 1954), 27.

85 P. Chatterjee, *The Black Hole of Empire: History of a Global Practice of Power* (Ranikhet, India, 2012), 73.

Sahel and the Azawād reflects to an extent Van Ess's notion of Islamic ideologies.⁸⁶ However, Moraes Farias's reading of Timbuktu's seventeenth-century historiography shows that Van Ess's Islamic ideologies are not sufficient to appreciate the close relationship between Muslim historiography and politics. What we can say with certainty is that bin al-Ŝayḥ practiced what al-Mas'ūdī (d. 945 CE) calls the historian's craft with finesse. Like the woodcutter by night, he mixed the weighty with the trivial in the service of his political objectives.⁸⁷

86 J. van Ess, 'Political ideas in early Islamic religious thought', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 28:2 (2001), 151–64.

87 Quoted in T. Khalidi, *Islamic Historiography: The Histories of Mas'ūdī* (Albany, 1975), 5.