

The Manuscripts that Never Were: In Search of the *Tārīkh al-Fattāsh* in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana¹

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Abstract: This article presents a fieldwork report conducted by the authors to locate certain manuscripts – namely copies of the chronicle titled *Tārīkh al-Fattāsh* – listed in recent catalogues of Islamic manuscripts from Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana

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¹ Our title echoes the influential two-part article published in this journal by David Conrad and Humphrey Fisher, “The Conquest That Never Was: Ghana and the Almoravids, 1076,” *History in Africa* 9 (1982), 21–59 and 10 (1983), 53–78.

published by the al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation and prepared by Bābā Yūnus Muḥammad. Unfortunately, after ten days of enquiry in the two countries, it became evident that the catalogues are inaccurate and that at least some of the manuscripts described do not exist.

Résumé: Cet article présente un rapport de terrain mené par les auteurs pour localiser certains manuscrits – à savoir des copies de la chronique intitulée *Tārīkh al-Fattāsh* – listés dans des catalogues récents de manuscrits islamiques de Côte d’Ivoire et du Ghana publiés par la al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation et dirigés par Bābā Yūnus Muḥammad. Malheureusement, après dix jours d’enquête dans ces deux pays, il apparait évident que les catalogues sont inexacts et qu’au moins certains des manuscrits mentionnés n’existent pas.

Introduction

In August 2015, with the financial support of the Research Board Award of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, we undertook a fieldwork trip in Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana within the framework of the research on the West African chronicle known as *Tārīkh al-Fattāsh* of one of the authors of this report.² The catalogues compiled by Bābā Yūnus Muḥammad and published by the London-based al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation report the existence of thirteen copies of the *Tārīkh al-Fattāsh* in private collections in Ivory Coast and Ghana.³

The recently published *Catalogue of the Islamic Manuscripts from the National Library of the Côte d’Ivoire* is a problematic work. The English title refers to manuscripts in the National Library, while the Arabic title *Dār al-wathā’iq al-waṭāniyya* might also refer to the National Archive. However, our first telephone enquiries to the National Library and the National Archive in Abidjan proved unsuccessful, as no one at either institution knew anything of the catalogue nor of the manuscripts. The National Archive does indeed hold some Arabic manuscripts, but after the civil wars in Côte d’Ivoire (2002–2007, 2010–2011) access to them is limited and much material has been misplaced.⁴ Eventually an unidentified office worker at the National Library told us that they do not hold

² On the *Tārīkh al-Fattāsh*, see: Mauro Nobili and Mohamed Shahid Mathee, “Towards a New Study of the So-Called *Tārīkh al-Fattāsh*,” *History in Africa* 42 (2015), 37–73.

³ Bābā Yūnus Muḥammad (prepared by) and ‘Ali ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Zakī (edited by), *Fihris makhṭūṭāt maktabāt Ghāna/Catalogue of Manuscripts in the Ghana Libraries* (London: Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 2000); Bābā Yūnus Muḥammad (prepared by), *Fihris al-makhṭūṭāt al-islāmiyya bi-dār al-wathā’iq al-waṭāniyya bi-dawlat Sāhīl al-‘Āj/Catalogue of Islamic Manuscripts in the National Library of Côte d’Ivoire*, 2 volumes (London: Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 2014).

⁴ Sean Hanretta, personal communication, 13 April 2015.

the manuscripts described in the multi-volume catalogue.⁵ Furthermore, the call numbers given in the catalogue do not follow the system of either the National Archives or the National Library.⁶

To ascertain the location of the manuscripts, we contacted the man who compiled the catalogue, Bābā Yūnus Muḥammad. However, he was unable to provide any clarification of the matter so we decided to get in touch with the al-Furqan Foundation directly.⁷ Mohamed Drioueche, head of the Projects & Publications Department, informed us that the manuscripts described in the catalogue are not in any centralized archive, as one might imagine from the title, but in various libraries throughout the country. Mohamed Drioueche kindly shared with us a list of the libraries that were believed to hold the manuscripts described in the catalogue and the correspondence with them. He also gave us the abbreviations used in the catalogue, in a document most probably originally intended to be part of the original publication but which was then left out by mistake.⁸ We discovered from this document that the copies of the *Tāwīkh al-Fattāsh* are from the following manuscript collections, reported according to the spelling of the list received from Mohamed Drioueche:

- Hajji Abdul Baqi bin Naji Library, Bondoukou, four copies, n°s ABN.AMS/5, ABN.AMS/37, ABN.AMS/54, ABN.AMS/79)
- Shaikh Boukar Kunti Library, Bouna, n° SBK.AMS/3
- Suleiman al-Alawi Library, Dabakala, n° SA.AMS/117
- Sheikh Hudu Salim Library, Odienné, n° SHS.AMS/109

We found some additional information about the libraries in the *World Survey of Islamic Manuscripts*, also published by al-Furqan, whose section on Côte d'Ivoire was compiled by the same Bābā Yūnus Muḥammad. Hajji Abdul Baqi bin Naji Library in Bondoukou (BP 22) is reported as having been established in 1971, hosting 486 manuscripts and is said to have been founded by the owner, "an itinerant Sufi scholar who inherited the collection from his late father, who died in 1970, and enriched it by purchasing about 283 manuscripts from individual owners in Bondoukou

⁵ Unidentified office worker at the National Library of Côte d'Ivoire, personal communication, 22 September 2014.

⁶ Sean Hanretta, personal communication, 13 April 2015; unidentified office worker at the National Library of Côte d'Ivoire, personal communication, 22 September 2014.

⁷ Bābā Yūnus Muḥammad did not clarify the locations of the manuscripts but merely underlined that some of the manuscripts were in the National Archives where they were catalogued "over twenty years ago" while he said that "most of the private collections in the country must have been displaced or destroyed during the civil war" (personal communication, 8 February 2015).

⁸ Mohamed Drioueche, personal communication, 5 May 2015.

and its surroundings.” As for Shaikh Boukar Kunti Library in Bouna, it is described as being at the “Madrasatul Irshad” where the owner, who founded it in 1970, stores 54 manuscripts “in a wooden box” including “manuscripts dating back to the fifteenth century.” Suleiman al-Alawi Library is claimed to be in Dabakala, “Cercle” de Tagouana (BP 417) and to be a very old library of 228 manuscripts: “[It] contains a number of old Islamic manuscripts which are autograph copies. About half of the manuscripts were written in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and the rest were either copied or written in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.” Lastly, Shaikh Hudu Salim Library is reported to be a collection located in Odienné, Sofon Zongo, and to include 251 manuscripts “established with the help of the owner’s students and children, because of the dearth of genuine Islamic books in the country.”⁹ In the past, the sections compiled by Bābā Yūnus Muḥammad in the *World Survey* have been questioned by Jean-Louis Triaud who in his “Deux bibliothèques arabo-islamiques en Côte d’Ivoire au début du XX^e siècle” found several problems in the entry on a collection in Mankono, including the conflation of two libraries, problems with names, dating of the libraries, contents, and terminology.¹⁰

At first sight the *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in Ghana Libraries*, published in 2000, seems to be easier to navigate. The following collections, reported following the catalogue’s inaccurate spelling, each hold a copy of the *Tāwīkh al-Fattāsh*:

- Limān al-hāj Abd al-Mūmin Library, Obuasi, Ashante region, n° 36
- Aḥmad Bāba al Wā’iz Library, Aboabo, Kumasi, Ashanti, n° 185
- ‘Ali ibn Muḥammad Barau Library, Salaghawi, Salagha, n° 157
- ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Ramaḍān Library, Dyinyama, Ashanti region, n° 53
- Ustaḍh Adam Library, Lamashegu, Tamale, n° 52
- ‘Umar ibn Bakr Library, Kete Krachi, Volta region, n° 702¹¹

None of those libraries is listed in the *World Survey* whose section on Ghana was compiled in 1990 by B.A.R. Brahimah.¹² However, three of the scholars

⁹ Bābā Yūnus Muḥammad, “Côte d’Ivoire,” in: Geoffrey Roper (ed.), *World Survey of Islamic Manuscripts*, 4 volumes (London: Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 1992–1995), volume II, 119–132.

¹⁰ Jean-Louis Triaud, “Deux bibliothèques arabo-islamiques en Côte d’Ivoire au début du XX^e siècle,” in: Christian Müller and Roiland-Rouabah Muriel (eds.), *Les non-dits du nom. Onomastique et documents en terres d’Islam: Mélanges offerts à Jacqueline Sublet* (Beyrouth: Presses de l’Ifpo, 2013), 161–246.

¹¹ Muḥammad and al-Zakī, *Fihris makhṭūṭāt maktabāt Ghāna*, 268–269 (entries 1745–1750).

¹² B.A.R. Brahimah, “Ghana,” in: Geoffrey Roper (ed.), *World Survey of Islamic Manuscripts*, 4 volumes (London: Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 1992–1995), volume I, 369–373.

reported as owners of manuscript libraries can easily be identified as prominent Ghanaian scholars, such as Aḥmad Bāba al-Wā'iz, a prominent *Tijāni* who passed away in 1982, 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Salghawī, known as Baraw (d. 1956–1957), and 'Umar b. Abī Bakr b. 'Uthmān al-Salghawī, known as Umaru Kirki (d. 1934).¹³

In truth, on reading both catalogues our first reaction was scepticism. If the data were accurate, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire would host a treasure-trove of manuscripts, some of them extremely rare. For example, the cases of *Tārīkh al-Fattāsh* and other, more recent chronicles from Timbuktu illustrate how unlikely are the holdings of the libraries described in the catalogues of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. For the *Tārīkh al-Fattāsh* we know of the existence of only eight copies, including fragments, in the Institut des Hautes Études et de Recherches Islamiques Ahmed-Baba (IHERI-AB) (Timbuktu/Bamako), the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Paris), the Institut des Recherches en Sciences Humaines (Niamey), the Boukhary Library (Banikan, Niafunke), plus three non-verified in IHERI-AB and Fondo Kati (Timbuktu). If we were to believe the catalogues of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, thirteen more copies would be available in those two countries. The *Izālat al-rayb wa-l-shakk wa-l-tafīr fī dhikr al-'ulamā' al-mu'allifīn min ahl al-Takrūr wa-Ṣaḥrā'* by Aḥmad b. Mbārak b. Barka b. Muḥammad al-Mūsā-ū-'Alī al-Takanī al-Wādnūnī al-Sūsī al-Timbuktī, known as Aḥmad Būl'arāf (d. 1955) and the *al-Sa'āda al-abadiyya fī ta'rīf 'ulamā' Tinbuktu al-bahiya* by Mūlāy Aḥmad [b.] Bābēr al-Arawānī (d. 1997) are two exceedingly rare manuscripts not found outside Timbuktu – with the exception of a copy of the latter made by the author in 1966 and donated to M. 'Umar al-Naqar at SOAS. This latter copy exists on microfilm and photocopy respectively at the Centre for Arabic Documentation of the University of Ibadan and in the Herskovits Library of Northwestern University.¹⁴ As for *Izāla*, there are three copies in IHERI-AB of Timbuktu, namely nos. 492, 991, and 4,989; a fourth copy is in the private library of the Timbuktu scholar Maḥmūd Muḥammad Dédéou, known as Hamou. IHERI-AB also holds three copies of the *al-Sa'āda al-abadiyya*, nos. 16, 2,752, and 11,733. Surprisingly, the catalogues of the Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire libraries list copies of these rare works, namely two copies of *Izāla* and one of *al-Sa'āda al-abadiyya*.

¹³ See, respectively: John O. Hunwick *et al.*, *Arabic Literature of Africa. Volume 4: The Writings of Western Sudanic Africa* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003), 612–619, 598–599, 586–594.

¹⁴ Aḥmad Bul'arāf al-Tiknī, *Izālat al-rayb*. On the *Izālat al-rayb*, see: John O. Hunwick *et al.*, *Arabic Literature of Africa. Volume 4: The Writings of Western Sudanic Africa* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003), 54; IHERI-AB, no. 2,752. Aḥmad Bābēr, *al-Sa'āda al-abadiyya*. On the *al-Sa'āda al-abadiyya*, see: John O. Hunwick *et al.*, *Arabic Literature of Africa. Volume 4: The Writings of Western Sudanic Africa* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003), 63.

Furthermore, what emerges from the catalogues is the enormous scarcity of local scholarly production, while the majority of the works come from the Southern Sahara between Mauritania and Northern Mali, or from Northern Nigeria. It almost appears that the entire scholarly production of those latter areas, as described in the already published materials (such as the al-Furqan catalogue of the IHERI-AB and the series *Arabic Literature of Africa*), is reproduced in the catalogues of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. A sample test from the Ghana catalogue is illustrated by the works on *Aqīda* and *Tawhīd*. Of 172 manuscripts only 14 (8.14%) are copies of unidentified works or existing as single copies in Ghana. That strongly contradicts our own experience with West African libraries that leads us to expect the extensive presence of unidentified works and of single copies in their collections.

Notwithstanding our scepticism about the accuracy of the catalogue, our need to collect information on the copies of the *Tārīkh al-Fattāsh* listed in the catalogues of manuscripts from Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire practically compelled us to plan a fieldwork trip to those two countries, so in the evening of 30 July 2015 we met up in Abidjan. In front of us awaited a long trip of more than 1,350 km along dusty roads, and interviews with many people in different languages, mainly Arabic but French, English, and Jula as well, not forgetting, Hausa and Akan with the help of interpreters. Unfortunately, however, we found no manuscript libraries.

Fieldwork in Côte d'Ivoire

The Côte d'Ivoire part of the fieldwork was greatly facilitated by two former students of the Zaytuna University in Tunisia who were in Tunis with Mohamed Diagayeté while he was studying for his PhD. They were Moussa Sanguisso from Burkina Faso who is an independent scholar, and Moussa Konaté from Côte d'Ivoire who is currently a researcher at Institut d'Histoire, d'Arts et d'Archéologie-Africains - Université Félix Houphouët-Boigny and an instructor at the Institut International d'Imamat in Abidjan. Moussa Sanguisso welcomed us in Côte d'Ivoire and helped us to reconnect with Moussa Konaté. Informed of the aims of our mission, Konaté decided to join us on our trip, contacting local scholars and notables and thereby making our research in Côte d'Ivoire possible.

Early in the morning of 2 August 2015 we left Abidjan for the north of Côte d'Ivoire. Our goal was to enquire about the collections of manuscripts described in the *Catalogue of the Islamic Manuscripts from the National Library of the Côte d'Ivoire* in Bondoukou, Bouna, Dabakala, and Odienné.

As we arrived at our first destination of Bondoukou around 2 o'clock in the afternoon, we met *shaykh* 'Aqīl Kamara, director and professor at

the madrasa al-Mubajjī.¹⁵ He denied the existence of any Haji Abdul Baqi bin Naji Library in Bondoukou and said that he knew no scholar of that name. *Shaykh* Kamara also drove us to see another local scholar, the director of the Madrasat Banī Taymiyya, *shaykh* Amadu Timité known as Quddūs. At his house, we met another Muslim scholar called Ibrāhīm ‘Abd Allāh Bamba. Although he now lives in Abidjan he was originally from that area and is well acquainted with local Muslim scholars. Neither *shaykh* Quddūs or Ibrāhīm ‘Abd Allāh Bamba could provide us with any information on Hajji Abdul Baqi bin Naji nor his library. Quddūs promised us he would ask Muḥammad Kolonga Timité, the *imām* of the main mosque, and said he would make enquiries with other local notables. Disappointed by our first attempt to locate the manuscript library, we decided to go on to Bouna to make the best use of our time. We would return to Bondoukou later during our trip.

We left Bondoukou and drove the 174 km north towards the town of Bouna where the *imām* of the main mosque, *al-ḥājj* ‘Abd al-Razzāq Kamara, a man who is well known locally as a “traditional teacher” welcomed us. After an exchange of greetings with the *imām* and some other notables of the town, we inquired about the Shaikh Boukar Kunti Library and his Madrasatul Irshad. Neither the *imām* nor the other notables who were with him knew anything about this library, its owner, his family, or his school. The *imām* even telephoned a local “marabout” called Hamadoun Sidibe from Burkina Faso. Sidibe was described to us as well acquainted with the Muslim community of Bouna, having lived there for thirty-four years. However, Sidibe too was unable to provide us with any information about the Shaikh Boukar Kunti Library. He did however mention that the only people called Kunta who have sometimes visited Bouna are from Mali, but they have never settled in the town and own no manuscript library. *Imām* Kamara also promised to inquire further about our search and, surprisingly, after the *maghrib* prayer in the main mosque, he asked the muezzin to make a public announcement asking if anybody by the name of Kunta were present, or if anybody had ever heard of anyone of that name in the town. Nobody responded.

The *imām* insisted that we spend the night in Bouna under his hospitality and wait until the next morning in the hope that somebody might furnish information on Shaikh Boukar Kunti or the Madrasatul Irshad. However, in the morning of 3 August 2015, when we went to meet the *imām*, he confirmed what he had told us the night before: no Shaikh Boukar Kunti was known in the town, nor had any Madrasatul Irshad ever existed in Bouna. He added that there are only three *madrasas* in town today,

¹⁵ As we carried out most of the interviews and compiled our field notes in Arabic, we decided to report the names of the people interviewed in Arabic, except when they requested otherwise.

two named Madrasat al-'ulūm al-shar'īya (one elementary and one advanced) and the other al-Madrassa namūdhajīyya al-islāmiyya (elementary only).

Later that morning we drove back to Bondoukou where we met the *imām* of the main mosque, Muḥammad Kolonga Timité, at around 11:30. Sitting in a room full of other aged notables of Bondoukou, we received the same answer as in Bouna, “nobody named Hajji Abdul Baqi bin Naji is to be found in Bondoukou and nobody knows anything of this library.” The *imām* himself even went to the post office in person to verify the address (BP 22) given in the *World Survey* as belonging to Hajji Abdul Baqi bin Naji. Even that attempt proved unsuccessful, for *Imām* Timité found that BP 22 belongs to a certain Sina Moro who has nothing to do with the library!

The enquiries in the first two towns in Côte d'Ivoire were disappointing. Nobody knew anything about the libraries, the manuscripts, or even the names of the scholars who it was claimed owned the manuscripts. Disillusioned by what we had found we suspected that we would not find any manuscripts in the other two towns on our itinerary in Côte d'Ivoire, Odienné and Dabakala, both huge distances away at the ends very long and bad roads. We decided to call off our search when our preliminary telephone enquiries there too met the same fate. Moussa Konaté rang up the *imām* of the main mosque of Dabakala, Vaida Diaby, who informed us that he did not know any Suleiman al-Alawi in Dabakala and that to his knowledge the library about which we were enquiring does not exist. Moussa Konaté also contacted the *imām* of the quartier d'ancienne aviation of Odienné, Mamadou Coulibaly, to whom the name Shaikh Hudu Salim meant nothing and who insisted there was no large manuscript library in the town. On the evening of 3 August 2015 we therefore took our leave of Moussa Konaté. Moussa went back to Abidjan, and we crossed the border between the towns of Soko in Côte d'Ivoire and Sampa in Ghana. Our hope that the situation in Ghana would be different was soon to be frustrated.

Fieldwork in Ghana

After seven hours on the bus, in the middle of the night of 4 August 2015 we reached Kumasi where our fieldwork in Ghana was to start. The plan was to visit Kumasi, Obuasi, and Dyinyama in the Ashanti Region, then to move towards Tamale, Salaga, and Kete Krachi, hoping that the data in the *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in Ghana Libraries* was reliable. The Ghana part of the trip depended substantially on the help of Mahmud Muhammad Amin, who had been a student at the University of Cape Town when Mauro Nobili was a post-doctoral fellow there. Mahmud Amin is the son of a well-known local Muslim scholar, Muhammad Amin. Muhammad Amin lives in Tarkwa Abo, Western region and is the *nā'ib* of the *imām* of the Gurma people, and director of the local *madrassa*. Mahmud Amin's role as our

intermediary was crucial, opening the doors of the houses and schools of Muslim scholars both in the Ashanti region and in Accra.

On the morning of 5 August 2015 we visited the family of Aḥmad Bābā al-Wā'iz in the Kumasi area of Aboabo. We were welcomed into the mosque-*madrasa* where they have a school for Qur'ānic memorization that for the past seventeen years has turned out both male and female memorizers (*huffāz*). They then showed us the *Madrasa al-Waṭaniyya al-Islāmiyya* founded by Aḥmad Bābā al-Wā'iz himself. The family of Aḥmad Bābā al-Wā'iz warmly helped us with our inquiry and we managed to carry out extensive interviews with some of its members. First, *shaykh* Yūsha', the third son of Aḥmad Bābā al-Wā'iz – and the eldest among the ones still living. Now retired, *shaykh* Yūsha' is still fully committed to the organization of the *madrasa*. We also met another of the sons of Aḥmad Bābā al-Wā'iz, *shaykh* Bashīr Bābā who wrote a biblio-biography of his father.¹⁶ Last, we met Muhammad Sani Waliyu Allāhi b. Yūsuf Niasse, who studied at the *madrasa* and eventually became its caretaker. All of them agreed in their answers: many people visit them, but nobody could remember a scholar ever working to catalogue the manuscripts. They do have a library of published materials that we saw, and they hold some manuscripts written by Aḥmad Bābā al-Wā'iz in “boxes” which we did not see and which have never been catalogued.

In the afternoon of the same day we went to the Islamic Council of “Ulama” of the Ashanti Region and to Mallam Mohammed Mahey Ibrahim. Mallam Ibrahim spoke to us but the secretary of the council was away and he could not, either, help us in identifying the libraries or the scholars mentioned in the catalogues. Mallam Ibrahim volunteered his opinion that the list of scholars looks very strange and, apart from Aḥmad Bābā al-Wā'iz and 'Umar Karkī, he could not identify any of the mentioned scholars. He focused his attention on his own hometown of Salaga and on Shaikh Maḥmūd Ibn 'Abdallah listed in the catalogue. He could not, however, remember anybody with those names. At this he decided to telephone a certain individual whose name we unfortunately did not learn but who was a local man. He was described as knowing the scholars of the region of Salaga very well, but his answer too was that he knew of no Shaikh Maḥmūd Ibn 'Abdallah. Mallam Ibrahim stressed that there might have been some problem of record keeping, so perhaps the memory of those scholars and their libraries had faded away; or perhaps mistakes had been made in producing the catalogues. It was of course also conceivable that we were dealing with a case of fraud...

¹⁶ Alhaji Yushau Ahmad Babal Waiz (Arabic) and Hussein Yushau Babal Waiz (English), *Tamām al-Minna/Fulfilled Ambitions* (Kumasi[?]: published by the authors, s.d.). I thank the author for giving to us some copies of this book during our meeting in Kumasi. One copy has been donated to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Library.

Having exhausted our sources in Kumasi, on 6 August 2015 we moved on to Obuasi. In the suburb of Tutuka we met the *imām* of the local *jum'ā* mosque, now an old man and completely blind, called *mallam al-hājj* Abū Bakr. He had previously been *imām* at another *jum'ā* mosque of Obuasi, the Wangara mosque (the third and last being the Hausa mosque). *Mallam al-hājj* Abū Bakr could not remember anyone by the name of Limān al-hājj Abd al-Mu'min in Obuasi but he added that he could not be sure due to his advanced age. He called his eldest son, the current *imām* of the Wangara mosque, *imām* Sirāj for confirmation. In reply to our question, he told us he knew of no Limān al-hājj Abd al-Mu'min, answering straightforwardly in Arabic, "*ghayr mawjūd*" meaning, roughly, "no such person ever existed!"

Discouraged and suspecting that similarly to those for Côte d'Ivoire the Ghana references too were inaccurate, we decided to forget about the other four locations. Those were Dyinyama which, perhaps because of spelling mistakes in the catalogue we never located; Tamale, Salaga, and Kete Krachi. On 7 August 2015 we moved on to Accra to meet the chief *imām* of Ghana, 'Uthmān Nūḥ Sharbutū.¹⁷ The next day we reached his location in Fadama, Accra, but were able to speak only to his spokesman, *al-hājj* 'Abd al-Laṭīf. He prevented us from meeting the *imām* saying that the *imām* would not have been able to tell us anything more than what we had already found out during our trip to the areas where the libraries were supposed to exist.

Our last meeting, at about noon, was at the Ahlu Sunnat wal Jama'at. There we met *shaykh* 'Abd al-Raḥmān, the assistant of *shaykh* 'Umar Ibrahīm Imām, the head of the foundation. Unfortunately, we received the same answer. *Shaykh* 'Abd al-Raḥmān knew nothing about the manuscripts, the libraries, nor had he heard of Bābā Yūnus Muḥammad.

Final Observations

These intense ten days of travel and interviews proved to be unproductive, but illuminating. We could not find any manuscripts, nor any of

¹⁷ Our suspicion was confirmed. Warner Tjon Sie Fat, a PhD candidate at Leiden University, was kind enough to visit the area of Lamashegu in Tamale on our behalf and enquire about "Ustadh Adam Library" in January 2017. He was told that around 1998–2000 one Ustadh Adam was the caretaker of the library of the local Islamic Students Society. Tjon Sie Fat noted that the attendance register runs from 1991, around the time when the library was most probably open. The library hosts printed Arabic (95%) and English books (5%) but no manuscripts – let alone a copy of the *Tārīkh al-Fattāsh*. The name Bābā Yūnus Muḥammad is not to be found in the register and local people do not remember anybody cataloguing the books of the library (personal communications, 22, 23, and 25 January 2017). We are grateful to Warner Tjon Sie Fat for his tremendous help.

the libraries we were looking for, and nobody knew anything about the cataloguing process. Furthermore, while we realized that some of the scholars referred to in the catalogue of manuscripts from Ghana are well-known (Aḥmad Bābā al-Wā'iz, Umaru Karki, 'Alī b. Muḥammad Baraw), in Côte d'Ivoire we were unable to trace any reference to any of those said to be in possession of libraries. In the future, a more accurate analysis of private collections in Côte d'Ivoire will be available thanks to Moussa Konaté. Spurred on by the negative results of our trip, he applied for and was recently awarded an Endangered Archives Program Pilot Project (EAP915) to produce a list of libraries in possession of Arabic manuscripts in the regions of Bondoukou, Mankono, Bouaké, and Kong.¹⁸

What then did our trip tell us about the accuracy of the catalogues? How were they produced? Were all our informants wrong? In fact we checked only a small percentage of the manuscripts described in the catalogues, but even so our fieldwork casts grave doubt on the credibility of the data provided in the catalogues. How many of the described manuscripts really do exist? Should we wonder too about the other recently published catalogue on Burkina Faso libraries by the same author who produced the other two catalogues?¹⁹ When we returned from our trip we contacted Sali Shahsivari, Managing Director of al-Furqan, and shared with him our

¹⁸ http://eap.bl.uk/database/overview_project.a4d?projID=EAP915;r=11478.

¹⁹ On his way back to Mali, Mohamed Diagayeté decided to stop off in Burkina Faso for two days to make a preliminary survey of the libraries claimed to be in Bābā Yūnus Muḥammad (prepared by), *Fihris al-makḥḥūṭāt al-islāmiyya bi-maktabāt dawlat Būrkinā Fāsū/Catalogue of Islamic Manuscripts in Burkina Faso Libraries*, 2 volumes (London: Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 2014). As in the case of Côte d'Ivoire, the list of libraries is absent from the catalogue, but we received it from Mohamed Driouèche. The result was the same as for Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana – nothing. On 17 August 2015, in Ouagadougou, Diagayeté met up with another of his former colleagues in Tunis, Mohamed Konfé. Konfé's father, promoter of the Institut El Nour de l'Enseignement et de l'Éducation Islamique, and one of the most famous scholars of Burkina Faso, made no mention of the libraries described in the catalogue. Furthermore, Konfé's father knows Djibo, where his *madrassa* is located and where according to the catalogue two libraries exist, namely al-Hajj Dambiri Katsina, and al-Hajj Sahabi Aliyu. Konfé knows of neither of them. He added that there are two well-known Dambiri in Djibo, a butcher and a transporter, neither of them scholars. In Ouagadougou, Mohamed Diagayeté also met Oualillahi Kindo, dean of the Université Privée de Ouaga, who denied all knowledge of any of the people mentioned in the catalogue. On 18 August 2015 he moved on to Bobo Dioulasso where he met Abdoul Malik Djénépo who works for the ONG Ligue des Musulmans d'Afrique. Djénépo knows of no manuscripts in Bobo Nana's palace. As for *shaykh* Mohamed Marhaba, claimed to be in possession of manuscripts mentioned in the catalogue, he is not known locally as the owner of a manuscript library, which is confirmed by Yaya Sanou, an acquaintance of the family of *shaykh* Mohamed Marhaba whose sons are no longer in Bobo Dioulasso.

concerns about the catalogues from Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. He kindly replied trying to provide possible explanations for our lack of success in locating either the libraries or the manuscripts. First, he pointed out that "[t]he world of manuscripts is dynamic, in a sense that many existing collections either move around or disappear." Then he added that "[s]ome of the owners of manuscripts [special collections] sometimes conceal information regarding their collection, due to them being over-protective about their treasures." He went on to say "these catalogues were produced several years ago, hence in the interim things might have changed." While this is true, for scholars or libraries to leave absolutely no trace in the respective locations is in fact quite rare. Most importantly, he concluded by adding an argument that seemed rather more convincing. "In such cataloguing projects," he said, "al-Furqan commissions respective scholars in the field, trusting their knowledge, expertise and ability; therefore in cases of inaccurate data the responsibility falls first and foremost on the author or whoever compiled or edited the catalogues."²⁰ Yet for scholars who wish to invest their time and resources in locating and, they hope, making use of the material described in the catalogues, the catalogues themselves are the only starting points for their research. It is therefore fair to say that a more accurate review process is the least we would expect.

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