Sufism and the study of Islam in West Africa: The case of Al-Ḥājj ‘Umar*)

John Hunwick (Evanston)

The field of Islamic Studies in Africa south of the Maghreb and Egypt — that is the study of the evolution of Islamic ideas and the development of social and political institutions influenced by Islam — has had a hard time bringing itself to the attention of both Africanists and Islamicists. Africanists, often still influenced by essentially colonial ideas about how humanity should be divided up, tend to see Africa as being only that part of the continent where ‘indigenous’ religion and ‘traditional’ societies held sway until overtaken by Christianity and ‘modernity’, and have often behaved as if African societies that fall (to a greater or lesser extent) within Islam’s cultural domain are extrinsic to ‘real’ Africa and hence not worthy of the Africanist’s attention. Islamicists on the other hand, still often under the influence of an ‘Orientalism’ that was not free of racist overtones, have tended to assume that south of the lands of the Mediterranean there was no Islamic culture worthy of the name and no intellectual tradition fit for their study.

Rejected by both camps, the study of Muslim societies south of the Mediterranean fringe and their intellectual and spiritual traditions has had to struggle for recognition as something more than a merely exotic or peripheral field. French scholars, with their long-standing interest in predominantly Muslim areas of West Africa, have perhaps been quicker than others to take seriously the study of Islam in the non-Berbero-Arab African world. In 1984 a project entitled ‘La transmission du savoir dans le monde musulman périphérique’ was initiated in Paris dedicated to bringing the study of Islamic learning in eastern Europe, central Asia, sub-Saharan Africa etc into the mainstream of Islamic studies1) and in 1987 a specialist journal began publication — Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara.2)

While there have been a number of historical studies of Islamized societies in Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa over the past twenty-five years, there have been relatively few that have examined the intellectual and spiritual heritage of Islam in these regions and attempted to relate this to the heritage of the wider Islamic world. Of these few, one can number on the fingers of one hand the books that have been concerned directly with the Sufi legacy: Jamil Abun-Nasr’s The Tijaniyya (Oxford University Press, 1965) — in fact rather more of a political history than an intellec-

*) This review was originally written in 1990. A shorter version was published in International Journal of Middle East Studies, 23, iv (1991), 672-6.

1) The project publishes a twice-yearly ‘Lettre d’Information’.

2) Described as ‘cahiers annuels pluridisciplinaires’, it is directed by Jean-Louis Triaud.
tual or spiritual one, B. G. Martin’s *Muslim Brotherhoods in 19th-century Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 1976), Fernand Dumont’s *La pensée religieuse de Amadou Bamba* (Dakar-Abidjan, 1975), Louis Brenner’s *West African Sufi: the Religious Heritage and Spiritual Search* (Cerno Bokar Saâtif Taal (London : Christopher Hurst, 1984) and, more marginally C. C. Stewart’s *Islam and Social Order in Mauritania* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1973). Most recently, we have the collective volume of essays edited by Donal Cruise O’Brien and Christian Coulon, *Charisma and Brotherhood in African Islam* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1989), some of which (notably those of Brenner and Triaud) focus on intellectual and spiritual aspects of Sufi brotherhoods, while others continue to place the emphasis on social and economic functions. Finally, as this article was being written, there appeared the excellent study by R. S. O’Fahey of Ahmad b. Idris whose teachings inspired the creation of Sufi orders in the Sudan, Eritrea and Somalia: Enigmatic Saint: Ahmad ibn Idris and the Idrisi Tradition (London : Christopher Hurst/Evanston (Ill.) : Northwestern University Press, 1990). Surprisingly, to date there is not, to my knowledge, a major study in English of the intellectual and spiritual antecedents of Shaykh Uthman b. Füdi, the great mujahid, faqih, theoretician and practitioner of the Islamic state, let alone a study of the Sufi currents (Qādiri, Shādhili and Khalwati at least) which infused his thought and that of his brother ‘Abd Allāh and his son Muhammad Bello. Nor yet is there any book-length published study of the great Qādiri shaykh Sidi al-Mukhtar al-Kunti (d. 1811) or his son and inheritor of his spiritual and intellectual mantle, Sidi Muhammad (d. 1836)³.

Al-Hājj ‘Umar b. Sa‘id al-Füti, the Tijāni propagandist and mujahid (c. 1794–1864) is another major figure whose teachings are ripe for study. A scholar of wide learning from Futu Toro (modern Senegal) who spent five years at the feet of Sidi Aḥmad al-Tijāni’s disciple Sidi Muḥammad al-Ghāli in Mecca and returned to West Africa as a khalifa of the Tijāniyya, he not only carved out a large but rather fragile state in what is now Mali, but, perhaps more importantly, wrote a number of substantial books outlining his notions of Islamic reform and elaborating the teachings of al-Tijāni. His major work *Rimāh ḥizb al-raḥim ‘alā muḥür ḥizb al-raṣīm* whose title might suggest a handbook on jihād, is in fact a defense of the Tijāni Way and a detailed exposition of its teachings.⁴ This book still lies unstudied by Africanists and Isla-


⁴) He did write on jihād and in particular to defend his own attack on the Muslim state of Masina. This treatise has been carefully translated and edited by J.-L. Triaud and M. Mahibou, *Voilà ce qui est arrivé. Bayân mà waqa‘a d’al-Ḥājj ‘Umar al-Fūtī*, Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1982.
mists like a hard lump in the stomach — massive and undigested. Yves Marquet wrote an article on it in 1968 and since then a few chapters have been translated and two analyses of its contents published, but no full study of it has been undertaken. Indeed, it would require a Chittick or a Chodkiewicz to unpeal the intellectual layers of this work and place it in its true context in the history of Islamic thought.

One might have hoped that a recent book by the Princeton Islamicist and Africanist John Ralph Willis would fill that gap, at least in part. However, even a cursory glance reveals that Willis is neither a Chittick nor a Chodkiewicz. Even less is he a Massignon whose La Passion d' al-Hājj his study's sub-title seems to invoke. His book has been long announced. Already in 1985 it was advertised, as if published, among the ‘Books of Related Interest’ on the dust-jacket of the two volumes he edited under the title Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa. (London: Frank Cass). In some sense we have been waiting much longer (though we did not perhaps know it), since the present book turns out to be essentially a recasting of the author’s 1970 University of London Ph. D. thesis. He does not tell us this explicitly (nor does he list his thesis in the Bibliography), but both the content of the book and his acknowledgements make this clear.

Having then, in some sense, been waiting twenty years for the crystallization of Professor Willis’s thoughts on al-Hājj ‘Umar to take shape as a published book, one is bound to be somewhat disappointed to find that in the interval no new research appears to have been done. Indeed, very little new reading of any sort is apparent. Despite the fact that his bibliography lists David Robinson’s mastersily political and social history of al-Hājj ‘Umar’s jihād — The Holy War of Umar Tal (Oxford, 1985) and F. Dumont’s more introspective L’Anti-Sultan ou al-Hājj Umar du Fouta combattant de la foi (Dakar, 1974), their interpretations of al-Hājj ‘Umar’s life and thought are nowhere referred to in Willis’s text — not even a reference in the footno-


In discussing issues such as ijtihād and taqlīd and theories of tajdid, Willis could certainly have profited from looking at R. Peters, ‘Ijtihād and taqlīd in 18th and 19th century Islam’ (Die Welt des Islams, 20, (1980), 131–45), Wael Hallaq, ‘Was the Gate of ijtihād closed?’ (IJMES, 16 (1984), 3–41), John Voll, ‘Ḥadīth scholars and tariqahs: an ‘ulamāʾ group in the 18th-century Haramayn and their impact in the Muslim world’ (J. Asian and African Stud., 15 (1980), 264–73), my own ‘Ṣāliḥ al-Fullānī (1752/3–1803): the carer and teachings of a West African ‘ālim in Medina’ (in A. H. Green, ed., In Quest of an Islamic Humanism (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1984), 139–53) — al-Fullānī was regarded as a muqaddid of the 12th century of the ḥijra along with Murtuḍā al-Zabidi by some Indian scholars — and the translation of Michael Barry, edited with additional notes by myself, of Goldziher’s 1871 article on al-Suyūṭī and tajdid, (Muslim World, 68 (1978), 77–99 — Willis refers only to the original German version). Despite the sub-sub-title of his book which is a sort of tabarruk bi-Massignon, Willis does not indicate the existence of an English translation of La Passion d’Al. Hallaj by Herbert Mason (4 vols., Princeton University Press, 1982). In discussing tampering with the text of the Taʾrīkh al-fattāsh in nineteenth-century Masina, Willis refers us only to an unpublished paper of Levzioni’s which he ‘has in his possession’; Levzioni’s closely-argued article ‘A seventeenth-century chronicle by Ibn al-Mukhtar’ (Bull. SOAS. 34 (1971), 571–93) is ignored as is my earlier article on the same subject (Research Bulletin [Centre of Arabic Documentation], 5 (1969), 57–65), though a preliminary statement of mine published in 1962 is noted (see p. 55, n. 55). It is manifestly untrue that (p. 124, n. 53) ‘Maulana Muhammad Ali’s edition (of the Qurʾān) is the only rendition into English which has parallel Arabic passages’; even in 1970 there was also Yusuf Ali’s work and there have been many since.

Not only are there startling gaps in Willis’s acquaintance with more recent writings in European languages (though he is full of references to the writings of Gibb,
Schacht, Goldziher, Wensinck etc.), but he seems to have stopped looking at sources in Arabic since he wrote his thesis. Thus, though he cites the 1966 *Catalogue des manuscrits de l'I.F.A.N.* (albeit with confusion in the names of the compilers) he does not note the ‘Supplément’ published by El-Hadjji Ravane Mbaye and Babacar Mbaye in *Bulletin de l'IFAN*, 37 (1975), 878–95, which lists a number of relevant items, including a huge commentary on al-Ḥājj ʿUmar’s *Safinat al-soʿāda*, a biography of al-Ḥājj ʿUmar with an account of his jihad, and a copy of the ṭawāḍ shāmāʿīl ahl al-ḥaqīqa which Willis only cites from a copy in a private collection. The author of this work, incidentally, is Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-ʿAbbās al-ʿAlawi al-Shinqiṭī, not the otherwise unknown Aḥmad b. Amm whom Willis names in his bibliography (p. 236). No mention is made either of the Segu state library, seized by the French in 1892 and now preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, of which a catalogue has been compiled by Noureddine Ghali, Sidi Mohamed Mahibou and Louis Brenner, *Inventaire de la Bibliothèque ʿUmarienne de Ségou*, (Paris : Editions du C.N.R.S., 1985), or of the archives of the Malian Arabic Manuscript Microfilming Project (held at Yale University Library and duplicated in several other U.S. locations). Though Willis has used materials from the Bibliothèque Nationale collection, reference to the catalogue would have revealed a good deal he missed. Robinson, on the other hand, exploits both sources very fully and a guide to material relevant to al-Ḥājj ʿUmar’s life and mission can be found in his ‘Sources’ (Robinson, *op. cit.*, 376–80).11) In his article ‘Notes sur l’origine de la ṭariqa des Tiğāniyya et sur les débuts d’al-Ḥaqq ʿUmar’ (*Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 37 (1969), 269) B. G. Martin referred to and quoted from a work on al-Ḥaqq ʿUmar’s karāmāt by Tierno Malik Dialo called *Matn al-ʿajāʾib* and said to be preserved in the Institut Fondamental d’Afrique Noire Cheik Anta Diop, Dakar. Willis (who lists Martin’s article in his bibliography but does not cite it in notes to his chapter on ʿUmar’s pilgrimage) does not follow this up, though it would seem to be a significant work in a study on ‘charisma’.12) Also somewhat surprising is Willis’s reference (‘Bibliography’, p. 237) to al-Bakkāʾi’s *Fath al-Quddūs*, which he tells us is ‘apparently of prime importance in interpreting the doctrinal objections of al-Bakkāʾi levelled against the Tijani’ and for which he lists a copy preserved in the Bibliothèque Générale, Rabat but annotates ‘not seen’. Why, one wonders, if the work is ‘of prime importance’, was it not seen, especially since the Rabat collection is one of the easiest of access in Africa and has a microfilming service? As one perceives in the concluding chapter of the book, al-Bakkāʾi is to be cast in the role of villain so it may not perhaps be surprising that the exposition of his arguments against Tijāni doctrines was not avidly pursued.


12) In fact, neither of the IFAN catalogues mentions such a work. It may perhaps be in the Fonds Curtin which has not yet been fully described. It is worth noting that there is a treatise of similar content in the Melville J. Herskovits Africana Collection at Northwestern University, Arabic MSS Paden/83.
Before leaving the question of source materials the reader must be warned that consulting the book's bibliography can be a frustrating experience. Many manuscript items are noted without any reference as to where copies are located even though (as with the anonymous al-Dir wa l-mughaf fi l-radd 'an al-Shaykh 'Umar—perhaps by the author of the Rawd shamâd il) they are cited with folio reference in footnotes. Perhaps the most frustrating entry is: (under Anonymous) — madh al-Hajj 'Umar b. Sa'id fi (sic) Massina,\(^\text{13}\) untiiled manuscript, undated! There are some anomalies in the list of works by al-Hâjj 'Umar himself. Five works are listed without reference as to where copies are to be found. One, al-Nush al-mubin (al-Nûsh al-mubin), has the annotation ‘(no date of publication given)’. Nor ‘place of publication’, one might add, since the book has never, to the best of my knowledge, been published. In the case of another, simply entitled Fatwa, (no date of composition), the reader is referred to an article by Omar Jah ‘where the title Risalat Shawq al-habib ila as'ilat Ibrahim al-Labib is given; and BNP, MS Arabe 5724, ff. 61-7 (on the status of dhimmis’). If Willis had referred to the published Inventaire of the Bibliothèque Nationale P[arís] he would have discovered that the work was composed in 1260/1844-5 and that its correct title is, in fact, Sawq al-habib etc.; furthermore, that five questions are answered, three of which are on the status of dhimmis while the other two are on Tijâni practices. Thirdly the entry entitled Kitab fima waq'a baina Shaykh 'Umar wa Ahmad b. Ahmad Lobbo and annotated as follows: ‘This work is attributed to Shaykh 'Umar by Muntaga Tal. An abridged version has been published in Egypt under the auspices of Saydou Nuuru Tal: al-Hajj 'Umar al-Futi sultan al-daula al-Tijaniyya bi-gharb Afriqiyya (sic) shai' min jihadi wa ta'rikhhayatahi (sic)’. It is, in fact, rather more complicated than that. In 1383/1963-4 the head of the Tijâni zawiya in Cairo, Muhammad al-Ḥâfiz al-Tijâni published privately an essentially polemical work entitled al-Hajj 'Umar al-Futi suultan al-daula al-Tijaniyya bi-gharb Ifriqiyya (etc.), which was divided into two books, the second of which was divided into two parts; each of these three divisions was separately paginated. Book I, of 20 pages, consists of an introduction by Muhammad al-Ḥâfiz followed by extracts from other books (including one by ‘the priest Trimmingham’) dealing with al-Hâjj 'Umar, and a biography of the man taken from the Kashf al-ḥijâb of Skiraj. Book II, Part 1 of 23 pages consists of a letter of Ahmad b. Ahmad, ruler of Masina to al-Hâjj 'Umar and two long replies of al-Hâjj 'Umar taken from texts provided by the well-known Tijâni muqaddam of Kano, Abu Bakr 'Atiq. Book II, Part 2 of 67 pages contains the text of al-Hâjj 'Umar's Bayân mâ waq'a baynanâ wa-bayn amir Masina Ahmad b. Ahmad, the text of which was sent to Muhammad al-Ḥâfiz by Shaykh Sa'id Nurü Tal. It is followed by a brief letter from al-Hâjj 'Umar to an unnamed addressee declaring that friendship and trade with the French is forbidden and that anyone who says it is lawful is a kafir.

There is a mystery item at the end of the list of al-Hâjj 'Umar's works: Tafsir Lubab al-tawil fi ma'ani 'l-tanzil with the parenthesis ‘composed 14 Rajab 1245/9th January, 1830’. No information is given on where we might consult a copy of this

\(^{13}\) Apart from the 'ayn, no diacritical marks are shown in Willis's book. When citing references to Arabic titles or other words I give them in the form in which they appear in the book.
work. The title is exactly the same as that of a well-known \textit{tafsir} written by ‘Ali b. Muḥammad al-Baghdādi, known as al-Khāzin (d. 741/1341). On p. 188, n. 5 Willis lists works cited by al-Ḥājī ‘Umar on a particular point in the \textit{Bayān} and among these is the ‘\textit{tafsir al-Khāzin}’ which Willis then parenthetically notes as ‘Commentary by Shaykh al-Ḥājī ‘Umar on the “Lubāb al-ta‘wil . . . of . . . al-Khāzin”. In the absence of any information on the location of a copy of this alleged work of al-Ḥājī ‘Umar which cannot logically be a \textit{tafsir} on a \textit{tafsir} (though possibly a ḥāshiyya or a \textit{ta‘liq}), one would be prudent not to add such a title to the list of al-Ḥājī ‘Umar’s writings. Finally a correction to the bibliography entry ‘Mukhtar b. Wādi‘at Allāh [Shaykh Yarki Talfi]’. First, it should be pointed out that though the spelling ‘Yarki’ may seem to be a ‘correct’ transliteration of the Arabic letters in the name, it does not represent how the name is pronounced and helps to conceal the fact that the full name is merely the Songhay equivalent of the Arabic byname Wādi‘at Allāh (his ‘given’ name was Ābū Bakr). The correct spelling should be ‘Irkoy’ (or Yirkoy), meaning ‘our lord’ (or more simply ‘God’) in Songhay, while ‘talfi’ means ‘repository’; hence Irkoy Talfi means ‘God’s repository’ (or ‘one in whom God has put His trust’) as does Wādi‘at Allāh. Secondly, Willis gives the following introduction to the man’s works: ‘Shaykh Yarki Talfi was the author of several books and treatises, many of which have not come to light. The following list is likely to represent only a small portion of this author’s total literary accomplishment’. He then lists ten titles, for only one of which does he give us information on where a copy could be consulted, while for two others he indicatos where he got the title from. But what about the rest of the total literary accomplishment which is postulated? In fact, had the author consulted the \textit{Inventaire} referred to above he would have discovered more than twenty poems of Yirkoy Talfi tucked away in various volumes. The \textit{Tabkiyyat} (elsewhere \textit{Tabakkiyat} — correctly \textit{Tabkiyat}) \textit{al-Bakka‘ī} is used extensively in Chapter IX and it is only when we consult n. 43 on p. 224 that we discover what copies the author consulted. The last item listed for this al-Mukhtar b. Wādi‘at Allāh, \textit{Tuhfah fi ma‘rufat ahwāl al-rija‘l}, is perhaps not by him at all. The \textit{Inventaire} lists a copy of a work of this title in the BNP, MSS arabes, 5588, ff. 129b–142a and they attribute it to Al-Mukhtar b. Ābī Bakr b. Sa‘īd. My own examination of the item confirms this\footnote{The manuscript names ancestors in eight further generations back.} and shows that it is a collection of biographies of celebrated Sufis based on al-Shā‘rānī’s \textit{Tabaqāt} and the \textit{Ibtihāj al-qulūb} of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abd al-Ḥādīr al-Fāsī. While the above by no means exhausts the problems I have with this book’s bibliography (e.g. listing of a sixth volume of Brockelman’s \textit{Geschichte der arabischen Literatur} edited by E. Selzgin \textit{(sic)}, Leiden, 1966, or the \textit{Ma‘jīm} \textit{(sic)} \textit{al-Fihris} \textit{(sic)} \textit{ləlfəz} \textit{(sic)} \textit{al-Qur‘an al-karīm} by Muḥammad Fawā‘id \textit{[leg. Fu‘ād]} ‘Abd al-Lāfī \textit{[leg. al-Bāqi] ?!}), they provide a solemn warning about the standards of scholarship we can expect from the book itself.

Let us start with the title itself, especially the second and third elements of it. The sub-title \textit{The Passion of al-Ḥājī ‘Umar} clearly invites a comparison of al-Ḥājī ‘Umar with al-Ḥallāj (and perhaps of Willis with Massignon!). There is little basis for this, apart from both al-Ḥājī ‘Umar and al-Ḥallāj being Sufis. Al-Ḥallāj was a
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deeply ascetic, creatively imaginative mystic only marginally involved in politics and strongly oriented towards martyrdom. Al-Ḥājj ‘Umar, on the other hand, though a skilled exponent of Sufi doctrines many of which originated in the creative imagination of Ibn ‘Arabi, himself contributed nothing original to Sufism. He was strongly drawn to militant political action and the implementation of a zāhir/sharī’i vision of Islam and died as a defeated warrior fleeing his pursuers, not as a martyr to ecstatic mystical excesses.

Herein lies one of the main problems of the book, in that Willis is determined to portray al-Ḥājj ‘Umar as a true mystic and martyr inexorably moving towards a pre-figured doom, attacked and betrayed by cunning and unscrupulous enemies. In attempting to do this he ends up writing what amounts to a hagiography. This is the world according to al-Ḥājj ‘Umar where Segu is ‘the great Bambara bastion of infidelity’ (p. 2, cf. p. 98), ‘one of the last redoubts of Sudanese (sic) unbelief’ (p. 8), where Farabanna is a ‘sanctuary of unbelief’ (p. 131) and where al-Ḥājj ‘Umar ‘made inroads into the domain of kufr’ (p. 145) and ‘swept away most of the conceits which had puffed up the pride of animist practice’ (loc. cit.). It is a world where (to quote the Preface) ‘through a primary inspiration [al-Ḥājj ‘Umar] became the momentum of Islamic revival — leaves the trodden path of imitatio nabi as the guideline of his mission is subsumed under a beatifying principle’.

To achieve his effect Willis makes use of a studied linguistic archaism — ‘ancientry’ (pp. 48, 131), ‘to be refit of’ (p. 80), ‘to quest’ (p. 80), ‘to attaint’ (p. 40) — sometimes downright inventing words, for example the verb ‘to derelict’ (p. 31), the verb ‘respite’ with the meaning ‘recompense’ (p. 98), and strained metaphors, sometimes strangely mixed (e.g. ‘Tijanis were seen to flood their ideological framework with a new significance — to clothe its rough walls with specious materials’ (p. 148)). In this account al-Ḥājj ‘Umar’s enemies have no redeeming qualities. Aḥmadu Aḥmadu, ruler of the Masina state based on Hamdullahi defended his Islamic integrity in an exchange of letters with al-Ḥājj ‘Umar, but according to Willis ‘throughout this bitter exchange, the Massenanke’s position had been soiled by specious lower qualities which deceived an innocent public into an admiration of his views’ (p. 185). The latter’s father who had claimed to be the twelfth of the ‘true caliphs’ of Islam was, in pursuit of this to ‘abandon himself to the most deplorable excesses’ and ‘with a boundless ambition barely concealed, blunted his integrity by tampering with certain passages in the Ta’rikh al-fattash so as not to delay his fame’ (p. 45). On a letter of Shaykh al-Bakkā’i of Timbuktu to Aḥmadu Aḥmadu [Ahmad al-Shaykh b. Aḥmad Lobbo], planning collaboration against al-Ḥājj ‘Umar, Willis comments: ‘Thus the villain and his accomplice prepare their trickery’. (p. 169). Earlier (p. 98) we had been warned that we would ‘savor more of [al-Bakka’i]’s cunning as the narrative proceeds’, that ‘Ba Lobbo [Aḥmadu Aḥmadu] seems also to have set out to rake up grievances against the Shaykh’ and that ‘[he] and his supporters set every influence at work to have the Shaykh put to death . . . [his] hostility darkened his every step’ (p. 98). It is not hard to detect in whose camp Professor Willis has pitched his tent.

The second sub-title An Essay into the Nature of Charisma in Islam also calls for some comment. In fact, there is absolutely no discussion of what charisma is, of what it might mean ‘in Islam’ or, indeed, of how the notion of charisma might be
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applied to al-Ḥājj ‘Umar.\(^{15}\) Weber, the great exponent of the concept in modern sociology is ignored. Even Bryan Turner, who has useful chapters on ‘Charisma and the Origins of Islam’ and ‘Saint and Sheikh’ in his Weber and Islam (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1974), is bypassed. Despite this, the word ‘charisma’ is splashed about at various places in the book: e.g. ‘[al-Ḥājj ‘Umar’s] persona and charisma provided the binding element of this great [administrative] edifice’ (p. 146); he has ‘amazing force and charisma’ (p. 147); ‘cannons were put to good effect . . . impregnating (?!?) the Shaykh’s charisma’ (p. 175); the mystic-*mujaddid* notion ‘becomes the starting point for the transmission of the charismatic quality as an hereditary faculty communicated through the genes’ (p. 44). Are we here in the presence of a faint echo of Weber’s theory of the routinization of charisma? Unfortunately, we shall never know, as the matter is not touched on again by Professor Willis. In the concluding section of the book (p. 221) we are told that ‘the charismatic leader knows no bounds until the bounds are met’. Quite a conclusion! But then, since the book has no stated thesis, it is perhaps unfair to ask for conclusions.

This is a tiresome and pretentious book, but since the available secondary literature on al-Ḥājj ‘Umar is small, and since Willis’s attempt to examine the spiritual side of al-Ḥājj ‘Umar may be looked to by some as an antedote to Robinson’s social history approach to the man and his career, some further comments and corrections are necessary. The organization of the book is that of a simple chronologically arranged ‘walk through’ the life of a man who was ‘born to a religious calling’ (p. 78) and whose final incineration at the cave of Digimbiri ‘was the Shaykh’s hearthstone to greatness — the eruption of an enduring legend’ (p. 222). Prior to the bio/hagiographical chapters come three introductory ones on ‘The ‘Umarian Jama‘a’, ‘Jihad fi Sabil Allāh’ and ‘The Turudiyya and the Seal of Jihad’, the first of which he tells us is ‘based on’ a 1967 article of his and the second of which he fails to tell us is an almost verbatim reprint of a 1978 article, both of which appeared in the Journal of African History. Now one may well ask how it is possible to describe al-Ḥājj ‘Umar’s *jama‘a* before discussing the man’s intellectual and spiritual formation and the reasons for his assuming a leadership position. The answer is, essentially, that the chapter says little about the formation and internal dynamics of his community, but is rather a kind of historical geography of the regions in which it operated — Futa Jallon, Dinguiray, Kaarta, Segu. Regrettably, this is not illustrated by a map and to find one’s way around, it is necessary to go to the excellent series of maps in Robinson’s book or the lesser (but still useful) set in Roberts’s. Willis’s only map is on the endpapers (same map repeated); it shows North Africa and a huge nearly blank Sahara, but stops short at Timbuktu. Al-Hajj ‘Umar’s theatre of operations, which lay directly to the south of this, is therefore totally excluded! This is not my only problem with chapter 1. While he draws extensively on the writings of men who visited these areas such as Mage, Galieni, Soleillet, Bayol, Barth and Lenz, he also shows a curious dependence (frequently acknowledged in footnotes) on the work of Elysée Reclus, an armchair geographer who wrote a 12-volume *Nouvelle Géographie*

\(^{15}\) A group of British and French scholars have recently been trying to grapple with the definition of charisma in an African Islamic context. For the results, see Cruise O’Brien & Coulon, *Charisma and Brotherhood in African Islam*. 
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Universelle of which the final volume (Paris, 1887) concerns West Africa. This leads Willis to some peculiar statements such as Gumbu being 'inhabited largely by Bambara peoples who spoke Arabic and some Fulfulde' (p. 7) or the invention of mythical peoples such as the 'Awlad Tishit' and the 'Awlad Walata' who are described as 'Berber trading groups' (p. 10). The mystery is resolved when we turn to the pages of Reclus, for in many cases Willis is not simply drawing on Reclus, but is merely translating him. A single example will suffice. First Willis (p. 5):

Bakel... a great ethnic crossroad at the ethnological nexus between Berber and Sudani strains. Downstream Berbers occupied the right bank of the river; upstream lived the Sudani Guidimakha, a mercantile race ('People of the Rock'), ethnically related to the Khassonké, who resided on the left bank. Still higher in the region, the Sarakholle, Bambara and Torodbe and shared the country'.

Reclus (p. 262) reads:

Bakel se trouve à peu près exactement sur la limite ethnologique entre les Maures ou Berbères et les populations noires. En aval les Maures occupent la rive droite du fleuve; en amont vivent des nègres, les Guidimakha ou "Gens des Rochers" parents des Khassonké de la rive gauche; plus haut encore les Sarakolé, les Bambara, les immigrants toucouleurs se partagent le territoire.

Derivative though it is, Reclus's original is much to be preferred. No confusing 'ethnological nexus', whatever that might be; 'Berbers' is merely a once-used gloss for 'Maures' rather than a standard term for them, and the 'Sudani Guidimakha' are not being absurdly stereotyped as 'a mercantile race'. (This is not his only 'ethnic' stereotyping. On p. 170 he talks of 'nomadic Berbers (sic), whose preference for brigandage approached the level of an ethnic vice').

As we move into Chapter 2 we encounter another trait of Willis's writing: a penchant for portentous but empty generalisations. He postulates what he calls a 'strict canon' of hijra and jihād (following the Prophet's model) and asserts that it was 'assailed' by 'deviations' such as Mahdism and 'mujaddidism' and other 'departures of a greater range'. Apart from the folly of trying to set up an ahistorical 'pure type' which becomes perverted, he fails to tell us how and why his pure canon of hijra and jihād became so 'perverted', much less what the other 'departures of a greater range' might have been. What he seems to be trying to do is what Muhammad al-Hājj did very eloquently in a now much cited article of 1967 (which Willis eventually refers us to), that is to show how traditions about the mujaddid who is to appear at the head of each century became linked to Mahdist theory in that the Mahdi would...

16 Guidimakha is, in fact the name of a region on the borders of Senegal and Mali to the north of the R. Senegal. It is mainly inhabited by speakers of Soninke. The name is said to mean Makh of the mountains, where Makh is the name of an eponymous ancestor who settled in the Assaba highlands in the north of the region. See J.-H. St-Père, Les Sarakollé du Guidimakha (Paris, 1925), p. 1.

be the final mujaddid (see al-Suyuti’s articulation of this in the article by Goldziher translated in The Muslim World referred to above), and how finally this became entangled in some minds with the hadith about the ‘twelve true caliphs’ and an expectation that the 13th century of Islam would be its last. For Willis ‘the Mahdist notion, tinged with an heroic complexion, pervaded by a late Shi‘i influence, entered the canon of revivalist thought’ (p. 33), This is simply nonsense. Later, he employs an oracular style — dramatic and grandiloquent (and to this reviewer’s mind, derogatory) — to describe how such ideas took root among West African Muslims:

Usman dan Fodio was not the first mujahid to feel the lure of the Mahdist concept, nor was he the last to succumb to it. There were eager intelligences everywhere prepared to seize on these expectations. Shi‘i and Sufi accretions spirited along that thoroughfare of Muslim communication [the hajj route] fertilized the notions anew — added a touch of mystery much to the Sudanese taste and linked to their thaumaturgical standards. Still there were others who perceived no need to dilute the pure strain of Prophetic tradition — who could preach a concept of jihad untainted by philosophical accretions. (p. 36, emphasis added)

In pursuit of his quest to portray al-Hājj ‘Umar as the mystic par excellence lost in visions and beset by voices, Willis even resorts to fictional sources. On p. 30 he quotes a passage from ‘The Story of Solima’ contained in Winwood Reade’s The African Sketch Book (2 vols., London, 1873) about how al-Hājj ‘Umar on reading a life of the Prophet in Mecca was so struck by the parallels between the pre-Islamic Arabs and the modern ‘Foulas’ that the idea came to him in a flash that he should be the Muḥammad of his nation. Admittedly Willis labels it ‘possibly apochryphal’, though on p. 150 he gives it again and this time calls it one of the ‘countless legends circulated about this most controversial wali’ (the same view he held in his 1967 article). In fact it is part of a Victorian Arabian Nights-style fantasy which Winwood Reade warns the reader (I, 317) is ‘entirely fictitious’. Winwood Reade was an adventurer and a popularizer (later a newspaper correspondent) whose actual knowledge of al-Hājj ‘Umar was so scanty that he thought he had been taken prisoner by the ‘Sheik of Timbuctoo’, sewn up in the skin of a black ox and cast into the Niger. It is difficult to resist one more prime example of portentous verbiage. In the context of the spurious tales of al-Suyūṭi’s naming Askīya al-Hājj Muḥammad the 11th ‘true caliph’ of Islam, after whom one more would appear in West Africa (to which I shall return), Willis comments:

> From this point forward, to put claim to the mujaddidiyya became an ineradicable instinct in Islam and Muslims from this region, fully aware of the plasticity of the concept, found a means of advancing their reputation abroad and conceiving of a world beyond the Western Sudan. Shi‘i and Sufi elements in the renovator concept began to jostle for ascendancy, and this

18) Jamil Abun-Nasr, in his The Tijaniyya: a Sufi Order in the Modern World (Oxford, 1965), pp. 140–1, quotes the same tale and describes it as ‘a legend . . . well known among the Fulanis in West Africa during the second half of the nineteenth century’.
explosive mixture enlarged their view and revolutionized their vision of the unseen world.

I am bound to say that I prefer plain old social and economic theories of historical causation to ineradicable instincts, explosive mixtures and visions of the unseen world.

Although such high drama and obfuscation scarcely diminish throughout the book, let me, in discussing Chapter 3 get down to some technical details, especially as regards interpretation of Arabic texts. On p. 79 Willis refers us to the Kitāb al-rimāḥ of al-Ḥājj ʿUmar, vol. i, 180 for a statement that ʿUmar studied with ʿAbd al-Karim al-Nāqīl ‘over a period of several months’ and that he conferred some wāirds on him in 1230/1823. Firstly, the Arabic text says ‘a complete year plus extra months’ (sana kāmilat wa-ziyādat ashkur). The second problem is that 1230 of the ḥijra is not equivalent to 1823 CE, but rather to 1814–5. Not impossible, or even unlikely since ʿUmar was about 20 years old at that time, but the date is not given in the Rimāḥ and one would like to know where Willis got it from. Later (according to Willis in 1241/1825) ʿUmar prepares to depart on pilgrimage in the company of ʿAbd al-Karim. According to Willis (p. 81), who follows the interpretation of B. G. Martin (‘Notes sur l’origine’, 278), illness struck ʿAbd al-Karim and a rendez-vous in Futa Jallon was made dependent on ʿAbd al-Karim’s renewed vigor. ʿAbd al-Karim then turned up in Massina at the invitation of Shaykh Ahmad and the rendez-vous was changed to that place. ʿUmar went there only to find that ʿAbd al-Karim ‘had been given over to some sinister fate (some said assassination, others that it was in the environs of Massina that he closed his eyes)’. This account (according to Willis’s footnote) is based on three sources: mid-20th century traditions collected by Ba and Daget and published in their L’Empire peul du Maçina, Musa Kamara’s (mid-20th century) Arabic account and al-Ḥājj ʿUmar’s own account in the Rimāḥ. The key passage in the Rimāḥ, however, makes it clear that the one who fell sick was ʿUmar, and no sinister touch is given to his failure to meet up with ʿAbd al-Karim in Massina. ‘Al-Ḥājj Umar says (Rimāḥ, I, 181):

wa-ʿaraḍa li maraḍun fa-rajaa’ [ʿAbd al-Karim] ilā l-waṭan fa’nṭażaranā mā qadar Allāhu lahu, thumma sāfarā ilā arḍ Māshina bi-niyyat intizārī, thumma raddāni ilāhu sāliman wa-kharajtu fi atharīhi li-ulhiqahu fa-mā qadar Allāhu baynanā ’l-liqā’. A sickness came upon me, so he [ʿAbd al-Karim] returned home and awaited me as long as God decreed. Then he traveled to the land of Māshina [Maçina] intending to await me. Then God returned me to good health and I went off in his tracks to catch up with him. But God did not decree a meeting between us.

I cannot see why this version written by the principal actor should not be preferable to versions collected from oral testimony a century and a quarter after the event and after the development of a fully fledged hagiographical tradition relating to al-Ḥājj ʿUmar. It is clear that such a tradition would not wish to allow ʿUmar to be incapacitated and would, on the other hand always be willing to cast aspersions on the name of Shaykh Ahmad.
A second faux pas occurs a little later in the pilgrimage journey (p. 83) when, again following Martin, Willis has ‘Umar passing through ‘the country of Tuwaq (Martin: ‘Tawaq’) in the region of Ahir’. This is based on an obvious typographical error in the printed text of the Rimâh (loc. cit.): wasalnâ arâ al-tawâq [read: al-tawâ-riq !!!] Ahir, i.e. ‘we reached the land of the Tuaregs, Ahir’. Muḥammad al-Ḥāfiz has precisely this reading in his pamphlet referred to above, p. 9. Another case of Willis essentially following errors made by Martin can be seen on p. 84, again translating the Rimâh:

We [Muḥammad al-Ghali and I] talked together a little, and he made me very happy when he had scrutinized me, treating me generously and with sincerity. He presented me with the copy of Jawähir al-maʿâni which I have today so that I might look at it and that I might remain with him until I had completed the duties of the hajj and upon completion of the rituals that I might go with him to Madina.

A proper translation would read:

We discussed for a while and he was highly pleased with me and when he perceived my sincerity, he honored me by presenting me with the copy of Jawāḥir al-maʿānī which I [still] possess, so that I might examine it. I stayed with him until we had completed the acts of ḥajj and after the completion of the rituals I travelled with him to Madina.

One more translation in this chapter calls for attention. It occurs on pp. 85–6 and derives from K. al-Rimâh, I, 183 and again follows Martin very closely. Since it is a very long passage, I will indicate only the serious errors, line references being to the translation, not to the page:

1.4 For ‘he gave me an ijaza and it was written’, read: ‘he dictated an ijaza to me and I wrote it down’.

ll. 7–8 For ‘the miserable one before Allâh’, read: ‘the one in need of God’.

l. 10. (and l. 58) For ‘al-Hūsni’, read: ‘al-Ḥasani’

ll. 18–19 (and 1.53) For ‘Ṣalât al-Fâtihâ whenever he stipulates the purpose, external or internal’, read: ‘Ṣalât al-Fâtihâ, intending [to honour] both its exoteric and its esoteric rank’.

ll. 25–7. For ‘I have authorized him to create as a muqaddam whomsoever seeks [to be such] up to the number of sixteen men, each one of which serves as muqaddam over four [others], read: ‘I have authorized him to appoint as muqaddam sixteen men from among his disciples (reading: min tâlabihī/tullabihī (plurals of tâlib) not man tâlabahu), each of whom may initiate four others’.

l. 35 (top of p. 86). For ‘[acting] sympathetically towards their weaknesses’, read: ‘acting kindly towards the weak among them’.

ll. 46–8. For ‘... all that is contained in the Jawâhir al-maʿânī of our Master’s dhikr, I have given him permission to give his dhikr what is beyond the Ḥizb al-bahr’, read: ‘I have given him permission to use all the dhikr of our master that are in the Jawâhir al-maʿânī and to give them [to others] except for the Ḥizb al-bahr’.

ll. 53–6 Martin: ‘Ceci termine ce qui lui a été dicté. J’ai terminé ce qui lui a été dicté de ma propre écriture : Louange à Dieu [etc.]’. Willis: ‘[This] completes what has [been] dictated to him. That, after I have concluded what has been dictated to
him in my own writing. Praise be to Allāh . . . [etc.]. Read: 'Here ends what he dictated to me — may God Most High be pleased with him. Then, after I had finished [writing] what he dictated to me, he wrote in his own handwriting: Praise be to God . . . [etc.].'

The section from which these quotations is taken is one headed 'The Eastern Experience' and in it Willis again shows his love of archaism and mystification. For him there seems to exist a quasi-mythical land called 'The East' — rather as it did for many 19th-century European romantics — monolithic and mysterious (he even compares the haji for Africans to the Grand Tour of Europe for the English). Hence African pilgrims sought contacts [in Arabia] who could 'breach the intimacy of Eastern society' (pp. 80-1), al-Ḥājī 'Umar stayed there for three years, storing up impressions of the East', (p. 84), and at last 'we reach the climax of his Eastern experience' (p. 86) for he had advanced from being 'one who held no prominence on the Eastern religious scene' (p. 87) to being one who 'etehes his cipher on the memory of the East' (loc. cit.). Here we have in just a few pages most of the Eurocentric clichés about the central lands of Islam that Edward Said chided Orientalists for — and rightly so — a decade ago. Alas this, among much else, seems to have passed Professor Willis by.

In Chapter V on the 'hijra' of al-Ḥājī 'Umar, Willis takes what might be called the conventional view of the matter. He sees his hero as having grown in importance to a point where Almami 'Umar of Futa Jallon (who succeeded the more sympathetic Almami Babakar [Abū Bakr] in 1843) felt that his presence at Jegunko was a threat to him. On his return from a visit to Futa Tore he was met with a 'torrent of hostility' from the Almami who 'decried him as the crovmed decries the pretender' (p. 114) Hence 'the Shaykh's program was in agitation, had reached a critical period, and he was forced to his reliance on Allāh'. In deliberate imitation of the Prophet, he made a hijra out of Futa Jallon to Dinguiray in the land of the ruler of Tamba to the immediate east of Futa Jallon. Robinson (op. cit., p. 126) has quite a different interpretation, but it is one that Willis does not even take the trouble to note — much less to discuss. Robinson points out that only in a single internal source is this move portrayed as a hijra and that though Almamy 'Umar of Futa Jallon certainly wanted al-Ḥājī 'Umar out of his territory and would have welcomed a conflict between him and the ruler of Tamba which might lead to the overthrow of the latter and open up trade between Futa Jallon and lands to Bure and Kankan, he did not subject al-Ḥājī 'Umar to any open persecution in Jegunko. On the other hand, al-Ḥājī 'Umar may have moved into Tamba territory as a deliberate provocation, since Tamba was non-Muslim territory. Certainly a hijra from a land of Islam to a non-Muslim land is the reverse of normal practice and Robinson considers that representing the move as an ideological act may be an ex post facto interpretation by 'Umarians. Hijra or no hijra in a technical sense, the move soon led to hostilities which could legitimately be proclaimed a jihād and the early stages of this struggle are recounted in Chapter VI. It is not correct, however, to say that the maxim 'the [religious] status of a land is the status of its ruler' (hukm al-balad hukm sulṭānīh) is a 'Maghilian dictum' (p. 128 and in similar vein, p. 177). Al-Maghili does not use the expression in any writings of his that I am acquainted with, though of course the rule lies at the bottom of the dichotomy dār al-islām/dār al-ḥarb. Where it originates in that particular form I do not know, but in West Africa the phraseology is first used by Shaykh 'Uthman b. Fūdī and it is him that al-Ḥājī 'Umar quotes on the matter.
Chapter VII, entitled 'The Mystic Shaykh' forms an interlude between the conquest of Kaarta and the taking of Segu and looks at how others, including his own circle viewed him and how he saw himself. The opening paragraph deals with what Willis calls 'inroads into the domain of kufr', by which he means the proscription of various practices deemed 'pagan' and the institution of others deemed 'Islamic'. Among the former he appears to count the use of tobacco and he muses in n. 1, p. 160-1: 'Inasmuch as there is no interdiction against smoking tobacco to be found either in the Qur'an or the Sunna, Shaykh 'Umar's position on this question must be attributed to some personal dislike, possibly due to its widespread use in pagan societies...'. It would, of course, be surprising if there were any interdiction against smoking in the Qur'an or the Sunna since the use of tobacco was only introduced into the Muslim world (from the New World via Europe) in the late 16th century. Its usage was, however, the subject of heated debate among Muslim fiqh, especially in Egypt and the Maghrib, and in the 17th century numerous fatwâs and counter-fatwâs were issued. Much of the debate about its lawfulness centred around the question of whether any analogy could be made between its properties and effects and those of the best-known forbidden substance — alcohol. The 'illa (causal link) in such cases was the effect the substance had on the mind, the line being drawn between 'what is not mind-altering' (mâ lâ yughayyib al-‘aqîl) and what is. The former is lawful, the latter is not. It was, of course, extremely difficult to draw a clear line in the case of tobacco, whether smoked, chewed or drunk in an infusion. Many scholars at the very least, classified it as a substance of 'doubtful lawfulness' (shubha) which the devout would not wish to indulge in. Other arguments were made, in particular that smoking tobacco gave the smoker an offensive smell and bad breath and that 'smoking parties' (a common communal form of enjoying the substance in the Maghrib) were occasions for men and women to mingle and for unlawful acts to take place. Smoking in particular, became associated with degeneracy and was considered a sign that a man had lost his 'moral virility' (muruwâ). It is against this background that we must judge al-Hâjî 'Umar's prohibition of tobacco (which was also a general Tijâni position) rather than its association with 'pagan' custom, though it may have proved a useful identity marker, since to be a Muslim was, in al-Hâjî 'Umâr's eyes, to be a Tijâni; hence to be a smoker was, ipso facto, to be a non-Muslim.

The discussion of al-Hâjî 'Umar's position on jihâd raises the whole question (untouched by Willis or any other writer on al-Hâjî 'Umâr so far) as to what kind of legal decisions he was himself making and what authority he claimed for them. As Willis points out (pp. 154-5), he clearly did not believe in slavish adherence to a particular madhhab and he devoted an entire chapter of the Rimâh to this question. It is not, I believe, correct to attribute this position solely to the influence of al-Sha 'râni. Chapter 8 of the Rimâh cites a host of authorities on this question, beginning with Zarrûq. Indeed, the rejection of taqlîd in favor of jihâd based on a scrupulous examination of the corpus of sunna was widely advanced in the late 18th and early

19) I owe some of the above details to ongoing work by Dr 'Aziz Batran of Howard University on fatwâs concerning tobacco usage. I am grateful to him for letting me read his draft.
19th centuries. I examined this question in my article on Šāliḥ al-Fullānī, cited above. Šāliḥ himself was from Futa Jallon and studied there and elsewhere in western Africa before settling in Medina and becoming associated with the group of hadīth scholars centred there. Interestingly, among his pupils were two Shīnqitis, one of them no less a person than Muḥammad al-Ḥāfiz (d. c. 1830), the Idaw ‘Alī propagandist for the Tijānī Way. It is not unlikely, therefore, that al-Ḥājj ‘Umar formed his own views on this question not only from his own extensive reading, but through contact with like-minded scholars in the Haramayn, and through his own initiator into the Tijānī Way, ‘Abd al-Karim al-Nāqil, a pupil of Mawlūd Fāl, the favoured disciple of Muḥammad al-Ḥāfiz. We may also note that al-Ḥājj ‘Umar devoted another chapter of the Rimāḥ (no. 10) to a different kind of argumentation for rejecting the tyranny of the madhhab system — one which we must suspect he thought particularly applicable to himself. The argument of this chapter is, as usual, essentially summed up in the chapter heading: ‘Informing them [sc. opponents of Tijānī doctrines] that the Friend of God who has received illumination (al-wāli al-maṣtuḥ ‘alayhi) is not bound by any specific madhhab among the madhhabs of the muṭjahādin [Abū Ḣanīfa, Mālik, al-Shāfī’ī and Ibn Ḥanbal], but indeed pursues the truth with God wherever it leads’. Here al-Ḥājj ‘Umar is asserting a juristic authority over and above simple ʿītihād based on interpretation of textual authorities. This claim to direct divine inspiration can only be made by one who is perceived to have charismatic authority (in the original sense of ‘charism’ — a favour bestowed by God) and herein lies the essence of the ‘nature of charisma in Islam’. Regrettably, Willis does not analyse this chapter. The apparent need for such a defense of charismatic authority in legal matters does, however, cause one to wonder what kind of legal pronouncements al-Ḥājj ‘Umar may have been making and what kind of opposition there was to them within his community. It offers a fruitful line of inquiry for future research.

The matter of al-Ḥājj ‘Umar’s political authority as an Islamic leader to whom an oath of allegiance (bayʿa) was due was also one that exercised the minds of some of his followers, especially those who belonged to the Būdān (‘Maures’!). Ahmad al-‘Alawi21) raised the problem in his al-Dir’ wa ’l-mighfar fi ’l-radd ‘an al-Shaykh ‘Umar (‘The Mail-coat and Helmet in defence of al-Ḥājj ‘Umar’) apparently in reply to those who asserted that allegiance could only be given to a man of Quraysh (as did al-Bakka’ī whom Willis later quotes on this issue (p. 204)) and he appropriately tries to make a claim of such ancestry for al-Ḥājj ‘Umar. But this is not, as Willis seems to think (p. 151 and ‘Glossary’, p. 232 where he defines Shurafa* as ‘the descendants of Muḥammad through his people, the Quraysh’ — a meaningless statement), a claim of Sharifian ancestry. For this he would need to claim descent from al-Ḥasan or al-Ḥusayn, the sons of ‘Alī and Fāṭima the Prophet’s daughter, not merely a general Quraysh genealogy. Al-‘Alawi makes a much more interesting — not to say controversial — claim for al-Ḥājj ‘Umar, which Willis usefully draws our attention to: that is that the first four caliphs of Islam all united in themselves

the exoteric and the esoteric\textsuperscript{22}) caliphates — i.e. both political leadership (the caliphate in its normally understood meaning) and spiritual headship (in Sufi terms usually called the \textit{qubāniyya}) and that in no other ‘caliph’ were these two roles united until al-Ḥājj ‘Umar. This does not, as Willis states, necessarily have ‘an underlying tone of Shi’i sentiment’ in it, even if it may have some remote ‘Alid sentiment (the writer’s \textit{nisba} proclaims ‘Alid descent!’). It is quite normal for all virtues, temporal and spiritual, to be ascribed to the four \textit{khulafa’ rāshidūn} (the fourth of whom was ‘Ali) and al-‘Alawi’s arguments are a clever way of attempting to link al-Ḥājj ‘Umar with them and to hint that he is the only true successor of theirs over the past twelve centuries. This claim of ‘caliphal’ status for al-Ḥājj ‘Umar was no doubt intended also as a counterblast to the rulers of the Hamdullahi state whose founder Shaykh Aḥmad asserted that he was the twelfth of the ‘true caliphs’ of Islam whose coming had been foretold by no less an authority than al-Suyūṭī.

The mention of this claim brings me back again to Willis’s discussion of al-Suyūṭī’s influence in West Africa and the alleged role of Askia Muhammad (ruler of Songhay, 1493–1528) in the development of millenarian ideas and claims to the title of \textit{mujaddid}. First, let it be said that not only does Willis ignore my discussions of al-Suyūṭī’s relations with the Askia (as well as al-Maghili’s) in \textit{Sharī’a in Songhay}, he also ignores Elizabeth Sartain’s important study \textit{Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī} (2 vols., Cambridge, 1975) and her more specific study “Jalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī’s relations with the people of Takrūr,” (\textit{J. Semitic Stud.}, 16 (1971), 193–8). Willis claims that Askia Muḥammad was ‘one of the earliest enthusiasts of the messianic craze (sic!)’. He appears to think that he made ‘messianic claims’ in which he ‘mingled the two extremes of revivalist sentiment in Islam: the desire to rekindle the faltering spirit of jihad, and an attempt to revive the universal caliphate through the purifying principle of tajdid’ (p. 42). In support of this he cites material from the first chapter of the published version of the \textit{Ta’rikh al-fattāsh}, which elsewhere he acknowledges to be an early 19th-century forgery and for which he excoriates Shaykh Aḥmad of Masina for promoting. In Willis’s account ‘... upon his return [from his pilgrimage] to the Sudan [sc. West Africa] the Askia was to lay claim to the universal Caliphate in the name of his shari‘i connection’.\textsuperscript{23}) He goes on to refer to the Askia’s meeting with al-Suyūṭī in which the latter told him he was the 11th of the twelve ‘true caliphs’ of Islam (the 12th of whom would be a certain Aḥmad who would dwell in Masina in the 13th century of Islam, 1785–1882), again depending on the forged chapter of the \textit{Ta’rikh al-fattāsh}. This is hardly a ‘messianic claim’ nor yet is it true that he laid claim to the universal Caliphate. Askia Muhammad did, indeed, meet with al-Suyūṭī in Egypt and it was most probably al-Suyūṭī who secured him an audience with the fainéant ‘Abbāsid caliph in Cairo, as he had done for another unnamed ruler of Takrūr (West Africa) in 1484. The ‘Abbāsid caliph invested him as his deputy for West Africa, as other caliphs of Cairo had invested other Muslim rulers from distant lands of Islam in earlier times. The clearest account of this comes from a now apparently lost work entitled \textit{Naṣḥat ahl al-Sūdān} by an author simply known as al-‘Imām al-Takrūrí which is quoted by al-Ifrā‘i in his \textit{Nuzhat

\textsuperscript{22}) Willis (p. 152) translates as ‘explicit or implicit’.

\textsuperscript{23}) That is, his alleged investiture by the Sharif of Mecca.
The aforementioned al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Sukya [sc. Askiya] travelled to Egypt and the Ḥijaz in the late 9th century (A.H.) intending to make a pilgrimage to the Sacred House of God and to visit the tomb of his Prophet — upon whom be blessing and peace. In Egypt he met the ‘Abbāsid caliph and he asked him to authorize him to rule the bilād al-sūdān and to be a viceroy (khalīfa) for him there. The ‘Abbāsid caliph delegated him authority over the affairs of those regions and made him his lieutenant (nāʾib) over the Muslims [who dwelt] beyond him. . . He also met in Egypt. . . Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī and took from him his theological teachings and learned from him about what is lawful and what is forbidden. He also heard lessons of his on the precepts and prescriptions of the sharīʿa and benefited from his advice and admonitions.\(^\text{24}\)

Such a course of events is certainly the technically correct one. Despite his puppet status, the ‘Abbāsid caliph in Cairo was still recognized both by the Mamlūk sultans who controlled him and by other Muslim rulers as the successor to the successors of the Prophet and nominally the supreme Islamic ruling authority who alone had the right to appoint others as his deputies to govern various distant lands of Islam. With the Ottoman conquest of Egypt in 1517 all this came to an end; but it was still in place in 1497–8 when Askiya Muḥammad made his pilgrimage. There is no evidence that the Askiya laid claim to the ‘universal caliphate’. Indeed, the above passage suggests quite the opposite. Chroniclers of the 17th century were freely to describe him as amīr al-muʿminin and as a ‘true khalīfa in Islam’\(^\text{25}\) while yet acknowledging that his authority was derived from elsewhere. By then, of course, the term amīr al-muʿminin had long since ceased to be regarded as the sole prerogative of the caliph. The Ottomans with the sanction of the Sharīf of Mecca had claimed inheritance of the Great Caliphate by virtue of their being the dominant power in the Islamic world and protector of the Holy Places.\(^\text{26}\) It is this new situation that is no doubt reflected in al-Sādi’s version of events which has the Askiya being invested by the Sharīf of Mecca. In all this, however, I can see no ‘messianic claims’ nor yet any claim on the Askiya’s part to be a mujaddid, though al-Muḥtār al-Kuntī was late to designate him as a mujaddid of the 10th century A.H. in the political sphere (with others in other spheres of endeavor). Al-Suyūṭī wrote a treatise on


\(^{\text{25}}\) e.g. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sāʿdī, Taʾrīkh al-Sūdān, ed. O. Houdas, Paris, 1898, 73).

the theory and history of the *mujaddid* idea and 'hoped' he would be the *mujaddid* of the 9th century. His work circulated in West Africa and was known to al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī. It was al-Maghili, however, who seems to have done most to popularize the notion in his 'Replies' to the Askiya, though he in no way suggests that Askiya Muhammad was a *mujaddid*. Though his discussion remains at the level of theory, there can, in fact, be little doubt that he was trying to point the finger at himself, since for him the *mujaddid* must be an outstanding scholar, not a man of government. Whatever the Askiya may have claimed for himself or others have claimed for him, al-Maghili, in addressing him initially simply as *al-ḥājj al-amīr* makes it quite clear that he saw him as no more than a regional ruler; his usage of the term *amīr al-muṣlimīn* later in the 'Replies' to refer to the Askiya, moreover, shows that he considered him to have legitimate authority to rule derived from the Caliph.

Finally, after this long digression, we come to chapters VIII 'Dissension in the Niger Bend' and IX 'The Collapse of Hamdullahi' which review the polemics between al-Ḥājj ʿUmar and Aḥmadu Aḥmadu of Hamdullahi on the one hand, and between al-Ḥājj ʿUmar and his associates and al-Bakkāʾi, the Qādirī shaykh of Timbuktu on the other. On the first exchange of polemics we already have the text and French translation of the summation by al-Ḥājj ʿUmar, the *Bayān mā waqḍaʾa* in the version of Triaud and Mahibou referred to above (and ignored by Willis), but on the second it is useful to have some extracts from the *Tabkīyat al-Bakkaʾi* and other items, as well as al-Bakkāʾi's indignant and often stinging attacks on al-Ḥājj ʿUmar (some of which have ill-disguised 'racist' overtones) and the Tijānī Way, though because this is a book about a 'hero' the closing section of the book is the one that contains the refutation of al-Bakkāʾi's arguments and allows the ʿUmarian viewpoint to triumph. These arguments are made by Irkoy Talfi, the erstwhile Qādirī disciple of al-Bakkāʾi who espoused the Tijānī Way and, with the zeal of a neophyte, rose in defence of his new spiritual master against his old. His arguments, not surprisingly, are mainly derived from the writings of al-Ḥājj ʿUmar, in particular the *Kitāb al-Rīmāḥ*, but the cut and thrust of this intellectual jousting is well brought out by Willis in his final chapter which is arguably his best.

Before concluding, I would like to draw attention to a number of errors of fact, some minor, others of some importance: p. 53, n. 28 defines the Hausa word ʿajami as 'in a non-Arabic script, in this case Fulfulde'; it would be more correct to say 'in a non-Arabic language written in the Arabic script'; p. 55, for Nicholson, *A Literary Review of the Arabs* read *A Literary History of the Arabs*; p. 88, for Tadḥkirat al-ghāfilīn ʿan gabh fa-bahra ikhtilaf al-muʾminin, read Tadḥkirat al-ghāfilīn ʿan qubh ikhtilaf al-muʾminin and the word  ghāfilīn should be translated as 'the heedless' rather than 'Cunning Peoples'; p. 90, for 'Hanifi madhhab', read 'Hanafi madhhab'; p. 99, n. 1 for 'Taʾrisk' read 'Taʾrikh'; p. 100, n. 24, the reference to 'Ghana Arabic Archives' should read 'University of Ghana, Institute of African Studies'; p. 101 n. 38, for 'gardes du Buy' read 'gardes du Bey'; p. 101, n. 48, for 'Taʿsals' read 'Taʿsis'; p. 103, n. 67, references to 'Ibadan Archives' should be to University of Ibadan Library, Arabic MSS, 82/712, 82/254 etc.; same ref., no location in the Ibadan collection is given for 'Abd al-Qādir b. Gidado's *al-Mawāḥib al-rabbāniyya*, whereas there are two copies at 82/243 and 82/537; p. 124, n. 53, for 'the roots *hrb* and *qtl* read 'the roots *krb* and *qfl*'; p. 125, n. 61, the book title *Salm al-ridun* should read *Sullam al-
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ridwân [li-dhawq ġalāwat al-imān]; p. 146, it is not clear how al-Ḥājj ‘Umar could be the ‘inheritor of the qutb (“pole”) of al-Tijāni’ and perhaps ‘qutbāniyya’ is intended; p. 159, for ‘illum, asrar, tajaliat, fiudat, read ‘ulūm, asrār, tajalliyāt, fuyūdāt; p. 178, the term al-mukhāllitūn for people who ‘mix’ un-Islamic practices with their practice of Islam is not used by al-Maghīlī, though he is responsible for popularizing in West Africa theories of takfīr which ‘Uthman b. Fudī later built on; p. 189, n. 6, the unidentifiable Hashīyyat (sic) al-Bīnān is in fact the Hashīyat al-Bānānī written by Muhammad b. Ḥasan al-Bānānī of Fez (d. 1194/1780), its full title being al-Fāṭḥ al-rabbāni fi mā dhahāla minhu al-Zurğānī, see GAL, ii, 84, S ii, 98, EI (New Edn.), art. ‘al-Bānānī’; same note, ‘Abd al-‘Utbi should read ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-‘Utbi; p. 190, n. 22, the reference to Muhammad al-Ḥājjī’s book al-Ḥājjī ‘Umar sułṭān al-dawlat al-tijāniyya should be to Book 2, Part ii, p. 26, where he refers to both the Miṣbāḥ al-arwāḥ and the Ajwibat Askīyā; p. 195 for Afrijit read Aqrājījt, usually spelled Akreijījt which lies some 80 km. SE of Tishit; p. 198, it is hardly fair to call the people of Tuwat ‘another nomadic element’ since Tuwat is a settled oasis and a nodal point for trans-Saharan trade; p. 206, for al-Barazakh al-Makṭum read al-Barazakh al-makhṭūm and for “Sealed Barrier” I would suggest ‘Ultimate Link’, since al-Ḥājj ‘Umar himself (Rīmāḥ, II, 4) defines the term (as applied to Ahmad al-Tijānī) as ‘the intermediary (wāṣīṭa) between the prophets and the Friends of God such that none of the Friends (walī), either of greater or lesser rank, receives an effusion (fayd) from the ‘plane’ (ḥadra) of a prophet except through his mediation’; while the term makhṭūm is to be understood in relation to the idea of the seal (khāṭīm) of something being its finest expression (hence the expression khāṭīm al-misk for ‘the ultimate’ in quality, the imagery coming from the sealing of a container of fine wine with musk whose perfume diffuses into the wine); more mundanely, p. 209, for zin-diqa, read zandaqa; p. 211, the last sentence of the second quotation from the Rīmāḥ should read: ‘The second respect [in which the 12th century of the ḥijra is similar to the Prophet’s age] is that the followers of this Friend of God, this mujaddīd, this Seal, summon men to virtue and command what is good and forbid what is evil, just as the Companions of that Prophet who sealed [prophecy] and eradicated [unbelief] themselves commanded what is good and forbade what is evil and believed in God alone and made jihād upon the erring nations, so do these [followers of the Friend of God etc.] fight the lesser jihād against the soul and base inclination (hawā) and the devil’;28) p. 224, n. 44, (a) it should be noted that many of the authorities quoted by Irkoy Talfi are quoted through the Rīmāḥ, of al-Ḥājj ‘Umar, (b) the Kathm al-awliyāʾ of al-Ḥākim al-Tirmidhī is the subject of an extensive analysis by Muhammad Ibraheem al-Geyoushi, Islamic Quarterly, 15 (1971), 17–61, (c) the Tabaqāt al-awliyāʾ is more likely to be the work of this name by al-Sha’rānī than a work by al-Sharnūbī, (d) the word ‘masīfāt’ in the title of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Futūḥāt should

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27) See further, Rīmāḥ, II, 15ff. According to Ibn al-‘Arabī, a barzakh ‘is less of a barrier than a membrane. For him it is an imaginary line dividing two opposites, e.g. existence and non-existence, but partaking of both, see William C. Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 14–15.

28) I am following here the text given in the Rīmāḥ, II, 18, rather than the Tabkiya, which is not accessible to me.

Finally, readers should beware of the ‘Glossary’ p. 228–32 which will certainly lead the uninitiated astray. Some entries are ludicrous, e.g. the Īkhwān al-Ṣafā’ are described as ‘a religious faction in early Islam of uncertain identity but great influence’, a zindiq is ‘one who holds two (presumably contradictory) beliefs at the same time, a hypocrite’; others are plain wrong, e.g. muwāla does not mean ‘one who befriends another’ but ‘the act of befriending’, nisba does not mean ‘one’s genealogical origin’ but relates a man to a tribe, town, country, creed etc., while nasab means genealogy; a Christian is not a mushrik (see under shirk), but merely a kāfir; nabi does not only mean the Prophet Muḥammad, but any prophet; there is no such creature as a Ghayath — what is meant is Ghawth; finally, something has slipped out of place — Isa is not, of course, ‘a community of Muslims with a spiritual leader who may also be a temporal leader’. This definition (whether you agree with it or not) was evidently meant to accompany the term jamā‘a (as it did in Willis’s Glossary to his 1979 ‘The Writings of al-Ḥājj ‘Umar and Shaykh Mukhtar b. Wadi‘at Allah’)29 which turns out to be the source of most of his definitions.

Sadly, this is not the book on al-Ḥājj ‘Umar’s life and thought that we have been waiting for. The gap on the shelf remains. It deserves to be filled with a serious study of al-Ḥājj ‘Umar’s mysticism and the Islamic roots of the Tijānī teachings he expounded, not least their relationship to the teachings of that most brilliant spiritual successor of al-Ḥallāj — Ibn al-‘Arabi.30

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30) Since writing this article I have learnt that Dr Bernd Radtke of the University of Utrecht has begun a systematic study of the sources of al-Ḥājj ‘Umar’s K. al-Rimāḥ.
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