

## MANUSCRIPTS II: SENEGAL BROTHERHOODS

*Fihris makḥṭūṭāt maktabat al-shaykh Mūr Mbāy Sīsī wa-maktabat al-ḥājj Mālik Sī wa-maktabat al-shaykh Ibrāhīm Niyās fī Sinighāl / Handlist of Manuscripts in the Library of shaykh Mor Mbaye Cissé, al-Ḥājj Malick Sy & Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse*, compiled and ed. by Ousmane Kane, London: Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation 1418/1997. 463 pp.

This an elegant and informative volume prepared from start to finish by an emerging Senegalese scholar, whose talents are already known to researchers in the field of Islam far outside the bounds of his home country. He is also a grandson through his mother of the celebrated Tijānī shaykh *al-ḥājj* Ibrāhīm Niasse, whose library is among those he catalogues in the *Handlist*. The fact that Dr Kane both compiled the original data and edited it into a published handlist has ensured quality control. Both the entries and the indexes are much more detailed and informative than those published for the Ahmad Baba Centre.

Of the three private libraries catalogued in this handlist, two were established by Tijānī leaders (Ibrāhīm Niasse and Mālik Sy), while the other was established by a leading Murīdī scholar (Mor Mbaye Cissé). This latter is by far the largest collection, totalling some 511 items, many, not surprisingly, by the founder of the Murīdiyya *ṭarīqa*, Shaykh Aḥmad Bamba (d. 1927). Next in order of magnitude is the library of Shaykh Ibrāhīm Niasse (d. 1975) with 252 items, a varied collection which of course includes some Tijānī material, while the library of Shaykh Mālik Sy contains a mere 41 items, only a small proportion of which are Tijānī-related.

Entries contain the following elements: title, author (including up to six generations of ancestors and multiple

*nisbas*), date of death, references (a full list of which is given at the beginning of the *Handbook*), the opening phrases of the item or the first verse of poetry, the closing phrases, copyist, subject (often divided into main heading and sub-heading, for example, *lughā: naḥw*), no. of folios, no. of pages, size of page, size of text, number of lines, type of script (Maghribī seems to be the sole option), physical state, observations. Under the latter heading we are often told the metre of a poem, or given a brief idea of the item's content, or information about the popularity of the book, its numerous printings, or the fact that it is a commentary on a certain work, etc. There are indexes of authors, titles, subjects and first lines of poems.

Excellent as this handlist is, it is not without its blemishes. One of the problems the compiler faced was the many works, especially works of verse, that have no clear title. Aḥmad Bamba wrote a large number of such works, generally running from two to five folios. The solution adopted was to turn the opening words of the poem into a title, which is the way in which some popular devotional poems are known in West Africa (for example, *Maqām<sup>un</sup> ladā*, *Yā għiyāth al-mustaghīthīn*, *Ḥayāt<sup>un</sup> bi-lā māl*, etc.). This seems an appropriate type of title to adopt when the work is well known and there are not too many such titles. It is a little more difficult when there are large numbers of such poems and their opening words are (a) unmemorable, and (b) sometimes obscure. A title such as *Abā wujūdu rabbinā wa'l-qidami kasbī mā minhu yajī<sup>o</sup> al-nadam* (item 90, p. 50), for example, though distinctive, sits heavily on the tongue. Some titles seem to have no connection with opening lines; for example, (p. 91): *Ām shahida lī bi-karamihi* for a poem that opens *Īlmī bi-anna ilāhī lā sharīka lahu*. Titles like *Sanat asash bushrā* and *Ām daksash*, and *Dhū 'l-Qa<sup>c</sup>da* also strike the reader as odd. Are these actual titles given by the author to his works? Or bestowed on them by later members of the community, or by copyists? If they have no

clear authority, it might have been better to stick to the more formal usage, which is to indicate the rhyming letter (for example, *Qaṣīda dāliyya*), perhaps followed by an indication of subject matter, for example, *fī madḥ al-nabī, fī 'l-wa<sup>c</sup>z*, especially since first lines are given anyhow. It is also rather inconvenient to have the same work given two different titles, even on the same page. The *takhmīs* by Ibn Mahīb on the *‘Ishrīniyyāt* of al-Fazāzī (a connection not made in the remarks) is first called *Kitāb Muḥammad b. Mahīb* and then *Takhmīs al-wasā’il al-mutaqabbila fī madḥ al-nabī*. Perhaps these were the titles found on the mss. concerned, but since the work has no formal title, it might have been better to give both items the same title (for example, *Takhmīs ‘Ishrīniyyāt al-Fazāzī*) with titles given by copyists indicated in the notes. One amusing slip caught this reviewer’s eye: the copy of *K. al-ṭarā’if wa’l-talā’id* of Muḥammad b. al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī described on p. 329 is said to have been copied in 730/1330. This must certainly be one of the saintly author’s miracles, since he was not born until c. 1178/1764-5.

Notwithstanding these minor problems, Ousmane Kane is to be congratulated on producing the first fully descriptive handlist of Senegalese manuscripts in a format, and with an attention to detail, that will provide a model for future labourers in this field. It is a pleasure to see West African Arabic manuscripts described with such loving care.

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