Toward a Chronology for the Caliphate of Hamdullahi (Māsina*)

One of the more vexing problems posed in the study of events in the Caliphate of Hamdullahi during the revolutionary thirteenth century (1285-86/1882-83) has been that of chronology.

Traditionists usually cite 1233 H (1817/18) as the year in which Shaykh 'Ahmad b. Muḥammad b. Sa’īd Lobbo, al-Māsini, defeated the allied Bambara and Pulo armies and established the Dīna, or Islamic State, which was to become the Caliphate of Hamdullahi (al-Ḥamdu lillāhī).1 Dates are offered for the reign of the Lobbo dynasty and for the conquest of the Caliphate by Shaykh 'Umar b. Sa’īd Tall, al-Fūtī. Chronologies of the reign of the Tall dynasty at Bandiagara and for their rivals, the Kunta and Lobbo princes, are also commonly cited. This handful of dates, from the rise of the Dīna through the French conquest, constitutes the slender chronological framework into which researchers attempt to fit an abundance of events recounted by traditionists without dates and in no particular order.

Several manuscripts have recently come to light which may aid in establishing a chronological order and even specific dates for a number of important events hitherto undated.

One such manuscript, located in the Fonds Vieillard of the Institut Fondamental de l’Afrique Noire at Dakar,2 is a purported tāriḵh, or Chronicle, of the Fittuga3 during the thirteenth century. The

* This name is preferable to that of Māsina for the Pulo State since the Caliphate embraced a much larger region than that of ancient Māsina. Māsina constituted but one of its provinces, and perhaps not the most important one inasmuch as the capital, Hamdullahi, was not located there.

2. Fonds Vieillard, Cahier 4, “Māsina”.
3. A region of the Caliphate located on the right bank of the Niger, dominated by the Fittobé Pulo clan.
document was apparently discovered by Vieillard. It has been translated into French with marginal notes, probably by Vieillard himself.

The ṭārīkh is attributed to al-Mukhtar b. 'Ismā‘il b. Wadi‘at 'Allāh (Yirko Talfī).

Written in the style of the Chronicles of Walata and Nema, the document sets forth events, by year, in the region of “Sudanic Takrūr between Timbuktu and Jenne,” from 1201 to 1300 (1786/87-1882/83). It is principally concerned with wars, natural phenomena and catastrophes, and the deaths of rulers, saints, and scholars.

A second copy of the ṭārīkh came to light in Timbuktu. Additional copies are being sought for the purposes of collation and translation. It appears that there existed a tradition of chronicle-writing in many of the villages, towns, and regions of the Caliphate, and a number of similar manuscripts may be recovered.

This particular Chronicle presents some serious problems. The attributed authorship is doubtful. According to tradition and, indeed, to the Chronicle itself, Shaykh 'Ibn Yirkoy Talfī was captured and executed by Pulo and Kunta armies following defeat of the Futanké at the battle of Konna (in 1280 [1863/64] according to the Chronicle). Hence, he could not have written this ṭārīkh, apparently composed after 1300 (1882/83).

A cursory comparison of dates given for eclipses and appearances of comets with those cited in the Chronicles of Walata and Nema reveals curious discrepancies. Records of these phenomena support the dates of the Mauretanian ṭārīkh rather than those of the Fittuga Chronicle. Most strikingly, the Chronicle disagrees with tradition on the year in which the Dina was founded. Almost to a man, traditionists cite 1233 (1817/18) as the historic year, while the Chronicle places the event in 1232 (1816/17). Further, the author’s estimates of the reigns of the first three Lobbo khulafā‘ differ from those commonly and uniformly cited by traditionists.

This ‘new’ ṭārīkh must, therefore, be approached cautiously. It was, perhaps, a consideration of these problems which discouraged Vieillard from going ahead with his obvious first thought to publish an edited translation of the manuscript. Nonetheless, the Tarīkh Fittuga is the first such document to become available to modern scholarship and can be viewed as a basis for establishing a tentative chronology for the Caliphate.

---

1. This is presumably the celebrated Shaykh al-Mukhtar 'Ibn Yirkoy Talfī (d. 1280) ("Yirkoy talfī" is the Songhay translation of the Arabic "wadī‘at 'Allāh," i.e., entrusted to God), a leader of the Tijānī party at Hamdullahi before the Umarian conquest and subsequently a principal adviser to Shaykh 'Umar and to his nephew, Shaykh 'Āḥmad al-Tijānī (d. 1304 (1886/87)), ruler of the successor Caliphate of Bandiagara.
Three additional ‘new’ documents may contribute to fixing dates for historic events in the Caliphate. One is an *ajwibat* attributed to ‘Abd ‘Allâh Ibn Fûdi, ‘Amir of Gwando. Two copies of the *ajwibbat* have been found: one is obviously quite old and was perhaps written in the thirteenth century; the other is a recent copy clearly made from the earlier one.

According to the manuscript, a certain ‘Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Lobbo, al-Mâsini, seemingly the head of a community of scholars, posed a series of questions to ‘Ibn Fûdi in the year 1231 (1815/16). ‘Ibn Fûdi is replying to those questions also in 1231. Subject matter ranges from interpretation of quranic verses to certain doubtful practices during the act of Prayer in the mosque. This latter point is particularly interesting since issues are raised which were also treated by Shaykh ‘Aḥmad in his book, *al-‘Idâṣirâr.*

For chronological purposes, this document, if genuine, is important for negative reasons. There is no internal evidence suggesting that Shaykh ‘Aḥmad was, as yet, the head of a political community. He is not addressed as ‘amīr, and there is no reason to assume that he was regarded by ‘Ibn Fûdi, at this point, as a political or administrative subordinate, as was to be the case. Rather, the tone implies that Shaykh ‘Aḥmad was, at this time, simply a scholar of some reputation dispensing instruction in a corner remote from Gwando. This accords with tradition which would have Shaykh ‘Ahmad established as a teacher in the vicinity of Jenne until his fateful encounter with the Pulo-Bambarra coalition. At any rate, the manuscript does establish the fact of communication between Shaykh ‘Ahmad and the Fûdi dynasty as early as 1231 (1815/16).

The second of these three manuscripts is a book attributed to Shaykh Sidi ‘Aḥmad al-Bakkā’î b. Muḥammad b. al-Mukhtâr, al-Kunti, al-Wâfî, of Timbuktu (d. 1281 [1864/65]). The book is entitled *Bughyât al-‘Ilfî fi Jawâb ‘alâ ‘Ibn Yirkoîa Talfî.* As its title indicates, the composition is supposed to be Shaykh al-Bakkâ’î’s reply to an earlier work by Shaykh ‘Ibn Yirkoî Talfî. A preliminary reading suggests that this may be a commentary on Yirkoî Talfî’s celebrated satirical poem commonly known as *Tabakkiyat al-Bakkâ’î.* In any event, it is clearly another tract in the series of works which was produced during the Qâdirî-Tijâni ideological ‘cold war’ which preceded the Umarian conquest of the Caliphate.

The interest here lies in the fact that the author states that he is

---

1. Recently identified among manuscripts in Paris. Additional copies have now been located at Tenenkou, Timbuktu, and Sofara in the Republic of Mali.
2. But there is some question as to whether *Tabakkiyat* is a poem or a prose composition bearing the same title and recently come to light in Dakar (J. R. WILLIS), Segu, and Timbuktu.
replying, at the beginning of 1265 (1848), to waraqāt composed by Yirko Talfi in 1264 (1847/48). Thus the manuscript, if genuine, confirms that a Tijānī party was established at Hamdullahi, and apparently openly so, as early as 1264 (1847/48).

Tradition does hold that a Tijānī faction existed at Hamdullahi from the time of the passage of Shaykh 'Umar on his way home from the pilgrimage until it was outlawed by 'Amīr al-Muminīn 'Aḥmad b. 'Aḥmad b. 'Aḥmad b. Muḥammad (1268 [1851/52]-1278 [1861/62] according to Fittuga). The tariqāt continued to exist, of course, as an underground movement and played an important, though as yet unclarified, role in the Umarian conquest.

The third manuscript is a fragment of a letter, presumably written by Muḥammad al-Makkī, a son of Shaykh 'Umar and substantial author in his own right, and 'Aḥmad al-Tijānī, the Shaykh's nephew, to 'Aḥmad al-Kabīr, al-Madani, Shaykh 'Umar's eldest son and designated heir. The letter is a report to 'Aḥmad al-Madani of Shaykh 'Umar's last triumphal campaign which culminated in his victory over the Pulo armies at Tiawal and his entry into Hamdullahi. Presumably, therefore, the account was written at Hamdullahi in 1278 (1861/62) or 1279 (1862/63) for the edification of the Futanké garrison remaining at Segu under the command of 'Aḥmad al-Madani who was made governor of Segu by his father before he opened the Māsina campaign.

The chronological significance of the document is that it cites specific dates for the campaign from the march out of Segu until the entry into Hamdullahi. In general, it supports the dates given by the majority of the traditionists.

Assuming that these manuscripts are not spurious, they constitute important aids for the establishment of a tentative chronology so urgently needed in the historiography of the Caliphate of Hamdullahi.

---

A TENTATIVE CHRONOLOGY OF THE CALIPHATE OF HAMDULLAHI IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY
(Based on Tarikh Fittuga)

1201 (1786/87)  Famine in the Fittuga.
1202 (1787/88)  'Alī Samba b. 'Ismā'īl, chief of the Sangare, i.e., the Fittuga, died.
1218 (1803/04)  The Kel Tadmakkat vanquished the Sangare of Fittuga.

---

1. Some claim that his father, 'Amīr al-Muminīn 'Aḥmad b. 'Aḥmad b. Muḥammad, outlawed the tariqat earlier.
2. Also known in the Māsina as Amadou Sekou and lamdo juulbe, i.e., 'Commander of the Faithful' in Fulfulde.
Hammadi Bodejo (Hambodéio) conquered the towns of Arkodia and Sa.

Shaykh Siddî al-Mukhtar al-Kabîr b. 'Aḥmad b. 'Abî Bakr, al-Kunti, died.

The Bambara of Segu attacked and defeated Sungojo (a province of the Futtuqa), capturing its chief, Muḥammad b. Banna b. 'Abd al-Raḥîm, the Arma.

Mālam 'Ibn Sa'id came from Sokoto and incited the people of the Guimbala (a large region on the right bank of the Niger embracing the Futtuqa) against the Tuareg. The Guimbala was defeated and Mālam 'Ibn Sa'id departed.

Shaykh 'Aḥmad defeated the Pulo-Bambaran coalition, founding the Dīna.


Galajo b. Hammadi Bodejo went to Timbuktu to meet Shaykh Siddî Muḥammad.

Appearance of a Diawando faqih, al-Ḥusayn Koyta in Baki (apparently in dissidence from Hamdullahi).

Al-Ḥāj b. Sa'id, nephew of Shaykh 'Aḥmad, defeated the forces of al-Ḥusayn and executed him.

Battle of Teleginde between Fulbe and Tuareg.

Revolt of Galajo b. Hammadi Bodejo.

Battle of 'Andukuway between Fulbe and Tuareg. Fulbe conquered Bamba. Shaykh Siddî Muḥammad, al-Kunti, died.

Solar eclipse.

Arma expedition from Timbuktu to the Futtuqa was defeated at Dara.


Battle of 'Ibisa between Fulbe and Dogon.

The Kel Tadmakkaat raided the town of Goundam.

Battle of N'giri Toya between Fulbe and Tuareg.

A comet appeared.

Hamdullahi attacked the Kaarta, liberating the Diawambé there.

Death of Shaykh 'Aḥmad.

Death of Shaykh Siddî al-Mukhtar al-Ṣaghîr, al-Kunti.

Death of 'Uthmân al-Qâ'id, chief of the Arma of Timbuktu.

Death of al-Ḥāj b. Sa'id, nephew of Shaykh 'Aḥmad.

Death of Sirim Ag Badu, chief of the Tengerigif.

Death of the 'Imām 'Aḥmad, son of Shaykh 'Aḥmad. Battle of Tuju, or Tugu, between Fulbe and Dogon.

Death of Gouro Malado.

Revolt of Farimaké against Hamdullahi was crushed.

Al-Ḥāj 'Alî b. 'Ibrâhîm, al-Sankari, the noted faqih, died.

Death of Alfa Nuḥ b. al-Ṭāhir.

1278 (1861/62) Battle of Tiawal; fall of Hamdullahi to al-Haj 'Umar.
Death of 'Amir al-Muminin 'Ahmad b. 'Ahmad b. 'Ahmad b. Muhammad.
Fall of Timbuktu; city rejects al-Haj 'Umar's governor, Magha.
Revolt of Farimaké and Fitituga against al-Haj 'Umar; submit to Shaykh al-Bakkâ'i.

1280 (1863/64) Battle between armies of Shaykh Sidi 'Ahmad al-Bakkâ'i and the Futanké under Tierno 'Umar near Dâr al-Salâm; al-Bakkâ'i defeated.
Battle of Mani-Mani; defeat of Futanké and death of Tierno 'Umar.
San Sirfu, qadi of Timbuktu, died in the battle.
Battle of Segé between the Kunta under Sidi b. Muhammad al-'Amin, cousin of al-Bakkâ'i and the Futanké; Kunta triumph.
Siege of Futanké at Hamdullahi by Pulo-Kunta coalition.
'Disappearance' of al-Haj 'Umar al-Futu at Degembere.
Sack of Sofara, the Kunari, and Konna by the Futanké under Shaykh 'Ahmad al-Tijâni.
Battle of Konna between Futanké and Pulo-Kunta coalition; Futanké defeated.
Death of al-Mukhtar b. Wadi'at 'Allah (Yirkoy Talîf) after the battle of Konna.

1281 (1864/65) Death of Shaykh Sidi 'Ahmad al-Bakkâ'i, al-Kunti, at Sare Dina.
War between Fulbe under Ba Lobbo and the Kunta-Tuareg under al-Bakkâ'i b. Muhammad al-'Amin, successor of Sidi 'Ahmad al-Bakkâ'i and son of al-Bakkâ'i's paternal uncle.
Battle of Tummay between Fulbe and Kunta; Kunta defeated. Al-Bakkâ'i established capital at Sare Seini.

1283 (1866/67) Battle of Wanjaka; Fulbe capture town under Ba Lobbo.
Battle of Tina between Fulbe under Ba Lobbo and Kunta under al-Bakkâ'i; Fulbe beaten.
Death of 'Abd al-Salâm b. 'Abî Bakr b. Muhammad b. Šaliḥ (Abdessalam Bori Hamsallah).
Shaykh 'Ahmad al-Tijâni raided the Sebera; clashed with Ba Lobbo.
Battle of Sina Saju between the Fulbe under Ba Lobbo and Futanké; Fulbe beaten.
Died 'Abd 'Allah b. 'Abî Bakr b. Muhammad b. Šaliḥ (Allaye Bori Hamsallah).
Shaykh 'Ahmad al-Tijâni established himself at Say where he built a 'fort'.

1284 (1867/68) Cattle epidemic.
Shaykh 'Ahmad al-Tijâni established his capital at Bandiagara.

1287 (1870/71) Fulbe of Mâsina attacked Shaykh 'Ahmad al-Tijâni near Bandiagara and were defeated.


1289 (1872/73) Shaykh 'Ahmad al-Tijâni sacked Sare Yamu.

1290 (1873/74) Shaykh 'Ahmad al-Tijâni raided Tenenkou and took away the population as captives.
Battle of Ninari between Shaykh 'Aḥmad al-Tijānī and the Fulbe of Māsina; the Pulo-Kunta coalition was defeated. Al-Bakkāʾi b. Muḥammad al-'Amin died and was succeeded by his son, 'Abidīn b. al-Bakkāʾi.

1291 (1874/75) Battle of Nemende between Shaykh 'Aḥmad al-Tijānī and the Pulo-Kunta coalition; Futanké defeated.

1292 (1875/76) Fandaguma Ag Širim raided Sare Yamu.

1293 (1876/77) War between the Kunta and the Kel 'Antašār.

1297 (1879/80) Revolt of Fulbe of Māsina against 'Abidīn b. al-Bakkāʾi, led by Muḥammad b. 'Abī Bakr (Mamadu b. Ham Bori), a nephew of Ba Lobbo. 'Abidīn fled to Kigiri; succeeded by his cousin, 'Abidīn b. Sūfī 'Aḥmad al-Bakkāʾi, who defeated the Fulbe and drove Ba Lobbo to Bobola.

1298 (1880/81) Ba Lobbo invaded the Farimaké.

1299 (1881/82) Battle of Yumayra between the Futanké and Pulo-Kunta coalition; Futanké defeated.