

HISTORY MATTERS

# A Hidden Repository of Arabic Manuscripts from Mali: The William A. Brown Collection

Mauro Nobili<sup>1\*</sup>  and Said Bousbina<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and <sup>2</sup>Center for Global Studies, Université Internationale de Rabat

\*Corresponding author: E-mail: [nobili@illinois.edu](mailto:nobili@illinois.edu)

(Received 27 May 2023; revised 19 June 2023; accepted 19 June 2023)

**Keywords:** West Africa; Islam; historiography; archives; research

William A. Brown was part of a pioneering generation of scholars interested in the study of West African Islamic history, along with Ivor G. Wilks, John O. Hunwick, Nehemia Levtzion, Paulo F. de Moraes Farias, Charles C. Stewart, David Robinson, Luis Brenner, and Lamin Sanneh. Brown's focus was the history of the Islamic theocracy, alternatively referred to as the Fulani empire of Masina, the Diina, or the Caliphate of Ḥamdallāhi, that emerged in the Middle Niger during the nineteenth century (1818–62). His PhD dissertation, titled 'The Caliphate of Hamdullahi, ca. 1818-1864: A Study in African History and Tradition', defended in August 1969 under the supervision of Philip D. Curtin, has remained for decades the major study on the topic.<sup>1</sup> This dissertation was unfortunately never transformed into a book, despite Brown revising it in 1978 and again in the early 2000s for publication with University of Wisconsin Press.<sup>2</sup>

'The Caliphate of Hamdullahi' is the result of a meticulous study of oral traditions and Arabic manuscripts that Brown collected, mostly, in three extended research trips in Mali. A vivid memory of Brown's trips to Mali is to be found in Bernard Salvaing's biography of the famous Malian traditionalist Almamy Maliki Yattara (d. 1998), whom Brown describes as a '[m]iddle-aged descendant of a Tuareg cast lineage acculturated to the Fulbe during the Caliphal period. Instructs elementary and intermediate students in Arabic and Islamic sciences. Assistant to the collector-traditionist Hampâté-Bâ. Particularly knowledgeable of the traditions of the Masina'.<sup>3</sup>

Yattara describes three missions he conducted with Brown in 1966, 1967, and 1968. The first, between the towns of Segou and San, as well in different locations in Masina, did not result in the collection of substantial manuscripts, with few exceptions in Segou, Ténenkou, and Dia.<sup>4</sup> Very different was the second season, during which Brown and Yattara spent most of their time in Timbuktu.<sup>5</sup> There, they had access to the famous library of Aḥmad b. Mbārak b. Barka b. Muḥammad al-Mūsā-ū-'Alī al-Takanī al-Wādnūnī

<sup>1</sup>W. A. Brown, 'The caliphate of Hamdullahi, ca. 1818-1864: a study in African history and tradition' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1969). More published works on Ḥamdallāhi are the classic A. H. Bâ and J. Daget, *L'empire Peul Du Macina (1818-1853)* (Dakar, 1955); B. Sanankoua, *Un Empire Peul au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle: La Diina du Maasina* (Paris, 1990); and M. Nobili, *Sultan, Caliph, and the Renewer of the Faith. Ahmad Lobbo, the Tarikh al-Fattash and the Making of an Islamic State in West Africa* (Cambridge, 2020); and M. Nobili and A. Syed (eds.), 'Ḥamdallāhi: a history from within', *Afriques*, 12 (2021): <https://journals.openedition.org/afriques/>.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Spear, personal communication, 9 June 2020.

<sup>3</sup>Brown, 'The caliphate', 243. On Yattara see his fascinating biography written with Bernard Salvaing: A. M. Yattara and B. Salvaing, *Almamy: Une jeunesse sur les rives du fleuve Niger*, Vol. 1 (Brinon-sur-Sauldre, 2003); and A. M. Yattara and B. Salvaing, *Almamy: L'âge d'homme d'un lettré malien*, Vol. 2 (Brinon-sur-Sauldre, 2003).

<sup>4</sup>Yattara and Salvaing, *Almamy*, 177–81.

<sup>5</sup>Yattara and Salvaing, *Almamy*, 181–4.



al-Sūsi al-Timbuktī, better known as Aḥmad Būla'rāf (d. 1955).<sup>6</sup> A trader born in Gulimīm, Morocco, Aḥmad Būla'rāf settled in Timbuktu in the early twentieth century, where he became a famous book bibliophile and writer, authoring the chronicle *'Izālat al-rayb wa-l-shakk wa-l-tafrīt fi dhikr al-ūlamā' al-mu'allifin min ahl al-Takrūr wa-Ṣaḥrā'*.<sup>7</sup> He left his collection to his son Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. Abī al-A'rāf, an author himself whom Brown describes as an '[e]lderly descendant of Moroccan and Tuareg lineages. Retired instructor in Arabic. Owner of large library of Arabic [manuscripts]. A major source of written evidence and of traditional history of the Tuareg. Now an urban qadiri scholar and muqadd[a]m'.<sup>8</sup> Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh opened the door of his family library for Brown and Yattara, who describes is as 'fabulously rich'.<sup>9</sup> The two spent three days in the library, where they were allowed to examine, according to Yattara, the seemingly exaggerated number of 15,000 manuscripts.<sup>10</sup>

In Timbuktu, Brown also managed to get into the grace of another famous local scholar, Mūlāy Aḥmad [b.] Bābir al-Arawānī (d. 1997), the author of *'Al-Sa'āda al-abadiyya fi ta'rīf 'ulamā' Timbuktu al-bahiyya'*, the last great chronicle of Timbuktu.<sup>11</sup> Brown describes Aḥmad Bābir as '[p]art-Tuareg and part-Moor. Retired instructor in Arabic at the Ecole des Nomades of Timbuktu. Owner of a library of rare Arabic manuscripts. Elderly scholar with close connections to the Tuareg and the Moors of Timbuktu'.<sup>12</sup> Mūlāy Aḥmad Bābir showed from his library a large number of manuscripts, especially from the prestigious Kunta scholarly family of the Middle Niger and Azawād.<sup>13</sup> Eventually, Brown and Yattara returned to Timbuktu for the 1968 season, a trip for which not much information is available but included Yattara's wedding in the region of Mopti — a marriage that was facilitated by Brown's generous support for his Malian colleague.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to his these trips, Brown also conducted further research, which is unfortunately less documented: at the Malian National Archives in Bamako; in Morocco at the Bibliothèque Nationale du Royaume du Maroc and al-Maktaba al-Waṭaniyya li-l-Mamlaka al-Maghribiyya; in Senegal at the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN) and the Archives Nationales du Sénégal in Dakar; in Nigeria at the library of Waziri Junaidu in Sokoto; and in France at the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris and the Institut de France.

Some of the manuscripts Brown analyzed during his fieldwork were presented in sporadic publications in the late 1960s. In particular, an early paper presents a handlist of important manuscripts from the Kunta scholarly family he found in Timbuktu.<sup>15</sup> Another one, introduces a collection of juridical opinions from West Africa, written by Muṣṭafā b. Aḥmad b. 'Uthmān al-Ghallāwī.<sup>16</sup> In another article, Brown reconstructs a chronology of the Caliphate of Ḥamdallāhi based on an important local chronicle in the form of annals that he refers to as *'Tārīkh Fittouga'*, of which he analyzed two manuscript copies, one at IFAN and one in Timbuktu.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>6</sup>On Aḥmad Būla'rāf, see J. O. Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa. Volume 4: The Writings of Western Sudanic Africa* (Leiden, 2003), 53–7.

<sup>7</sup>The *Izālat al-rayb* has been recently edited by the Institut des hautes études et de recherches islamiques Ahmed-Baba de Tombouctou (IHERI-ABT); see Aḥmad b. Abī al-A'rāf al-Tiknī, *Izālat al-rayb wa-l-shakk wa-l-tafrīt fi dhikr al-mu'allifin min ahl al-Takrūr wa-Ṣaḥrā' wa-Shanqīt* (Tombocoutou, 2019).

<sup>8</sup>Brown, 'The caliphate', 238. On Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Būla'rāf, see Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa. Volume 4*, 57–8.

<sup>9</sup>Yattara and Salvaing, *Almamy*, 181.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>On Mūlāy Aḥmad Bābir, see Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa. Volume 4*, 61–3.

<sup>12</sup>Brown, 'The caliphate', 238.

<sup>13</sup>Yattara and Salvaing, *Almamy*, 181–2.

<sup>14</sup>Yattara and Salvaing, *Almamy*, 185–7.

<sup>15</sup>W. A. Brown, 'The Bakkā'iyya books of Timbuktu', *Research Bulletin, Centre of Arabic Documentation*, 3:1 (1967), 40–44.

<sup>16</sup>W. A. Brown, 'A monument of legal scholarship: the *Nawazil al-Takrūr* of al-Mustafa b. Ahmad al-Ghallāwī', *Research Bulletin, Centre of Arabic Documentation*, 3:2 (1967), 137–8; on Muṣṭafā b. Aḥmad b. 'Uthmān al-Ghallāwī, see C. C. Stewart, *The Arabic literature of Africa. Volume 5: The writings of Mauritania and the Western Sahara* (2 vols., Leiden, 2015), 622–3.

<sup>17</sup>W. A. Brown, 'Toward a chronology for the caliphate of Hamdullahi (Māsina)', *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, 8:31 (1968), 428–34. IHERI-ABT has also recently published the *Tārīkh Fittouga*; see al-Mukhtār b. Ismā'il b. Wadī'at Allāh b. 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Sillankī, *Mā waqa'a fi al-Takrūr al-Sūdāniyya mimma bayna Timbuktu wa-Jinnā* (Tombocoutou, 2019).

Throughout his early career, Brown collected reproductions of the manuscripts he identified during his fieldwork and archival trips in microfilm format. These microfilms were donated in 1979 to Moore Crossey, curator of the African Collection at Yale University Library, who oversaw the Malian Arabic Manuscript Microfilming Project (MAMMP).<sup>18</sup> Founded with the support of a National Endowment of the Humanities grant (RC-\*0771-78, 1977-1980), this project was ‘designed to assist in the preservation of Mali’s rich heritage of Arabic and African language manuscripts, and to make these more readily available to interested scholars’.<sup>19</sup> The final product of MAMMP was the collection of a total of fourteen reels of microfilmed manuscripts, copies of which were then deposited at the University of Illinois, Indiana University, University of Michigan, Michigan State University, Northwestern University, Princeton University, St. John’s University, University of Wisconsin, University of Birmingham, the School of Oriental and African Studies, and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.<sup>20</sup> Eventually, in 2002, the Center for Research Libraries (CRL) digitized all the microfilm reels.<sup>21</sup>

In 2021, the authors of this piece received a grant from the Cooperative Africana Materials Project (CAMP) to start reorganizing and cataloguing the MAMMP manuscripts and decided to start from what we defined as the ‘William A. Brown Collection’ — that is, the five reels donated by Brown and numbered as 8.1 through 8.5. The William A. Brown Collection is a heterogeneous corpus of Arabic manuscripts — with a few exceptions of documents in French — that deal with different topics. With the aim of showcasing this corpus and its richness, as well as celebrating the importance of Brown’s work of manuscript collection, the remainder of this article presents some of these documents that stood out during the work conducted so far, which consisted in reviewing thousands of microfilm frames from the entire William A. Brown Collection, identifying their content, and discarding the ones that are illegible.

## The manuscripts

This presentation of some of the outstanding materials from the William A. Brown collection focuses on broad categories of manuscripts, namely: ‘correspondence’; the writings of ‘Umar b. Sa‘īd b. al-Mukhtār b. ‘Alī b. al-Mukhtār b. ‘Alī b. Mukhtār al-Fütī al-Ṭūrī al-Gidiwī al-Tijānī, known as Al-Hajj ‘Umar (d. 1864);<sup>22</sup> and the writings of members of the Kunta scholarly lineage.

## Correspondence

A large share of the manuscripts of the William A. Brown Collection comprises correspondence from the Middle Niger, providing a window into the religious, political, social, and economic life of the region in the nineteenth century. There are about 150 letters displaying more than 15

<sup>18</sup>Malian Arabic manuscript microfilming project: inventory lists’ (unpublished list, Yale University, 1979), 219. Not all the manuscripts Brown used in his work were in fact donated to the MAMMP. For instance, surely the ones from IFAN, Waziri Junaidu, BnF, and the Institut de France are not reproduced in MAMMP.

<sup>19</sup>L. Brenner and D. Robinson, ‘Project for the conservation of Malian Arabic manuscripts’, *History in Africa*, 7 (1980), 329.

<sup>20</sup>Brenner and Robinson, ‘Project for the conservation’, 330.

<sup>21</sup>Center for Research Libraries (CRL), Malian Arabic manuscripts microfilming project, <http://catalog.crl.edu/record=b2862995~S1>.

<sup>22</sup>On Al-Hajj ‘Umar, see the monographs D. Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal: The Western Sudan in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1985); J. R. Willis, *In the Path of Allah Umar: An Essay Into the Nature of Charisma in Islam* (London, 1989); M. Ly-Tall, *Un Islam militant en Afrique de l’ouest aux XIX siècle: La Tijaniyya de Saïku Umar Futiyu contre les pouvoirs traditionnels et la puissance coloniale* (Paris, 1991); J. H. Hanson, *Migration, Jihad and Muslim Authority in West Africa: The Futanke Colonies in Karta* (Bloomington, IN, 1996); A. Syed, ‘Al-Ḥajj ‘Umar Tāl and the realm of the written: mastery, mobility and Islamic authority in 19<sup>th</sup> century West Africa’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 2016). See also Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa. Volume 4*, 214–22.

identifiable people among senders and recipients. The focus here will be on three main figures that occur repeatedly, Ibrāhīm b. Abī Bakr (Ibrahim Bokar), Abū Bakr b. Ḥāmid (Bokar Hamidou Kolado), and Aḥmad al-Bakkāy b. Muḥammad b. al-Mukhtār al-Kuntī al-Wāfi (d. 1865).<sup>23</sup> Their letters shed light respectively on topics related to justice, politics, and religion. Lastly, a unique manuscript will be presented that consists of a miscellanea of letters written by rulers and notables of the Caliphate of Ḥamdallāhi.

Ibrāhīm b. Abī Bakr (Ibrahim Bokar) was the qadi of Mopti.<sup>24</sup> Contextual evidence suggests that he occupied this function during the 1870s through the 1890s. His correspondence sheds light on the juridical system of the region, with Ibrāhīm b. Abī Bakr intervening extensively in the private and public spheres. A cursory analysis of numerous letters, in which he appears as sender or recipient, show him deliberating on family matters (divorce, domestic violence), public law (disputes between people, arrests, investigations, search for individuals who had been condemned for crimes), and financial issues (commercial transactions, purchase or selling of slaves, real estate). Some other letters are located at the intersection between the juridical and political spaces. These letters show Ibrāhīm b. Abī Bakr corresponding with chiefs and governors of the Middle Niger and Fouta Djallon, including the sons of Al-Hajj ‘Umar, Aḥmad al-Kabīr al-Madanī (d. 1898) and Aguibou (d. 1907), and his nephew, Aḥmad al-Tijānī (d. 1887). Their relationship was multifaceted, including moments of tension, support, and attempts to intrude in the work of the qadi, who at times acted as enforcer of the rulers in collecting taxes.

Abū Bakr b. Ḥāmid (Bokar Hamidou Kolado) was described in a colonial source as ‘a marabout, friend of Ahmadou-Cheikou’, referring to Aḥmad al-Kabīr al-Madanī, ruler of Bandiagara between 1864 and 1892.<sup>25</sup> Abū Bakr b. Ḥāmid was the Fulani leader of a revolt against the French in the area of Bandiagara in 1896.<sup>26</sup> His letters are all connected to this uprising and are devoted exclusively to the topic of jihad, intended here as the war against the French, often presented as ‘*naṣārā*’ (Christians), ‘unbelievers’, and ‘enemies of God’. In his writings, Abū Bakr b. Ḥāmid used consistent rhetoric to recruit followers, mostly Dogon chiefs, based on religious arguments (the duty of all Muslims to chase the French, as unbelievers, from the Land of Islam) as well as temporal ones (the risks of servitude, humiliation, and the misappropriation of wealth). Abū Bakr b. Ḥāmid’s revolt was eventually defeated by the combined efforts of the French and the ruler of Bandiagara, Aguibou, who had been enthroned by the invading army in replacement of Aḥmad al-Kabīr al-Madanī.

The correspondence involving the famous Kunta scholar Aḥmad al-Bakkāy are mostly dogmatic. A letter sent to Aḥmad b. Aḥmad b. Aḥmad Muḥammad Lobbo, known as Aḥmad III (d. 1853), the third ruler of Ḥamdallāhi, concerns the German traveler Heinrich Barth (d. 1864) and his stay in Timbuktu in 1853–4.<sup>27</sup> Aḥmad al-Bakkāy had decided to protect Barth from the threats of Aḥmad III and hosted him under his protection, arguing that defending a Christian living in the lands of Islam was a duty for every Muslim. This incident offered the Kunta scholar an opportunity to provide a lesson in religious conduct and politics to the ruler of the caliphate.

<sup>23</sup>On Aḥmad al-Bakkāy, see Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa. Volume 4*, 118–34.

<sup>24</sup>CRL, Malian Arabic manuscripts, reel 8.1, no. 184.

<sup>25</sup>Le Lieutenant Gatelet, *Histoire de la conquête du Soudan Français (1878-1899)* (Paris, 1901), 354.

<sup>26</sup>See J. M. Bradshaw, ‘The Bandiagara Emirate: warfare, slavery and colonization in the Middle Niger, 1863-1903’, (unpublished PhD thesis, Michigan State University, 2021), 157–60. For a broader history of the kingdom of Bandiagara, see I. Barry, *Le Royaume de Bandiagara (1864-1893): Le pouvoir, le commerce et le Coran dans le Soudan Nigérien au XIXe siècle* (unpublished PhD thesis, Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, 1993).

<sup>27</sup>CRL, Malian Arabic manuscripts, reel 8.1, no. 72. This letter is edited, translated, and commented upon in M. Diagayété, *Barth à Tombouctou. Lettre d’Aḥmad al-Bakkāy al-Kuntī à Aḥmad b. Aḥmad, émir du Māsina (1854)* (Paris, 2019). Barth’s stay in Timbuktu is discussed in A. Zebadia, ‘The career and correspondence of Aḥmad Al-Bakkāy of Timbuktu, from 1847 to 1866’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1974), 224–325. See also Barth’s multivolume journal: H. Barth, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa: Being a Journal of an Expedition Undertaken under the Auspices of H.B.M.’s Government in the Years 1849-1855*, 5 volumes (London, 1857).

In other letters, Aḥmad al-Bakkāy wrote in his capacity as leader of the Qādiriya order in polemics with members of the Tijāniyya. One of these letters, dated July 1854 and addressed to a prominent member of this order in Marrakesh, Muḥammad al-Kansūsī (d. 1877), is particularly illustrative.<sup>28</sup> Aḥmad al-Bakkāy opens a long epistolary exchange about an ideological conflict with followers of the Tijāniyya that will continue under Al-Hajj ‘Umar. The correspondence aims to prove the superiority of one order over the other, criticize some aspects and tenets of the other order by demonstrating its non-conformity with Islam, and to affirm or dispute the rank of the founding leaders — ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jilānī (d. 1166) and Aḥmad al-Tijānī (d. 1815) — as *awliyyā* (Friends of God).

A unique manuscript collected by Brown is a miscellanea of correspondence related to the Caliphate of Ḥamdallāhi called *‘Diwān rasā’il Tinbuktu’*.<sup>29</sup> This collection comprises four (possibly five) letters from the founding leader of Ḥamdallāhi, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Būbū b. Abī Bakr b. Sa‘īd al-Fullānī, known as Aḥmad Lobbo (d. 1845);<sup>30</sup> two other letters from his son and successor Aḥmad b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Lobbo (d. 1853);<sup>31</sup> and others written by notables of Timbuktu, including Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. ‘Uthmān al-Kābarī, known as San Shirfī (d. 1863), a very influential figure of his time who combined the role of emir and qadi of Timbuktu, and imam of the city’s Great Mosque.<sup>32</sup> These letters cover issues of taxation and discord among the inhabitants of Timbuktu, and among some of the city’s notables and Ḥamdallāhi.

### Taxation and slavery

Some manuscripts provide detailed information on the taxation practices of the region. Many documents record the collection of taxes on the harvest of the main crops: rice, millet, and corn. Quantities, places, names of people (taxpayers, collectors, and the one who sent the order) are recorded with extreme detail, like in the case of the incomplete document that reports: ‘Aḥmad Bādāda brough 532 measures (*ṣā’*) of pure rice and 840 measures of millet. As for Ḥammadi Bāsuka, he brought 400 measures minus 3 of rice and 65 measures of pure rice. From the harvest of Aḥmad Šāliḥ, Saka brought 3000 measures minus 12’.<sup>33</sup> These manuscripts often take the shape of *rasm* (official documents), without a specific recipient but displaying the formula: ‘for all who become aware of this document, know that...’. Others are letters addressed to governors that list the quantities of crops received. Others still are *amr* (orders) to chiefs of villages, towns, or clans, reporting the amount of crops to pay.

A large number of manuscripts also deal with the issue of slavery, not from a theoretical point of view — that is to say, to argue for the legitimization of such practice or the fight for its abolition — but from a ‘technical’ standpoint. These manuscripts document institutional as well as individual practices of ownership, trade, exchange, and donation of slaves. Some documents are very detailed deeds of sale where the names of sellers, buyers, the individuals who were sold, and prices are

<sup>28</sup>CRL, Malian Arabic manuscripts, two copies, reel 8.1, no. 211a and reel 8.2, no. 4. On these disputes see Zebadia, ‘The career and correspondence’, 326–558; S. Bousbina, ‘Tabkiyat Al-Bakkay: Une lettre « lacrymogène » de Yerkoï Talfi à Aḥmad A-Bakkay. Le plaidoyer d’un défenseur de la Tijaniyya’, in O. Goerg and A. Pondopoulo (eds.), *Islam et sociétés en Afrique subsaharienne à l’épreuve de l’histoire. Un parcours en compagnie de Jean-Louis Triaud* (Paris, 2012), 101–14; H. A. Diakite, ‘Al-Mukhār b. Yerkoï Talfi et le califat de Hamdallah au XIXe siècle: édition critique et traduction de Tabkīt al-Bakkay. À propos d’une controverse inter-confrérique entre al-Mukhtār b. Yerkoï Talfi (1800-1864) et Aḥmad al-Bakkay (1800-1866)’ (unpublished PhD thesis, École Normale Supérieure de Lyon, 2015).

<sup>29</sup>CRL, Malian Arabic manuscripts, reel 8.2, no. 7. The Institut des Hautes Etudes et de Recherches Islamiques Ahmed Baba de Tombouctou now holds both the original manuscript (no. 813) and a photocopy (no. 283).

<sup>30</sup>On the founder of Ḥamdallāhi, see: Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa. Volume 4*, 208–11; M. Diagayeté, ‘Aḥmad Lobbo (1776-1845): his works and correspondence’, *Annual Review of Islam in Africa*, 12:2 (2015), 67–70; and Nobili, *Sultan*.

<sup>31</sup>On Aḥmad II, see Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa. Volume 4*, 211–12.

<sup>32</sup>On San Shirfī, see Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa. Volume 4*, 51–2; and Nobili, *Sultan*, 233–4.

<sup>33</sup>CRL, Malian Arabic manuscripts, reel 8.1, no. 63.



recorded. Others are attestations of ownership through which governors recorded the possession of a slave by a new master: 'Let those who read this document know that the victorious Emir, Muhammad b. Aḥmad b. Abī Bakr, made Ibrāhīm b. Abī Bakr master (*mallaka*) of a slave named Māmā'; or 'Let all the prefects and qadis who have knowledge of this document know that the Commander of the Faithful, Zayn al-ʿAbidin b. Aḥmad al-Bakkāy b. Shaykh Sīdī Muḥammad al-Amīn... made Tumu Barka Njobbo the absolute master (*tamlīkan tamman*) of the female slave sold by 'Uthmān Ghālī'.<sup>34</sup> Some others are certifications of donations of slaves, lists of prices, and enumerations of slaves belonging to *bayt al-māl* (the public treasury), like the following one: 'Here are the male slaves of the people of Wūtaka who belong to the public treasure: Tinu, Kakā Tinu, Kāsum Yero, Mūsā, another Kāsum, Bāba and Alayida. They are seven men, and with them are two women, Māmā and Kunadi, and two young slaves'.<sup>35</sup> One of the documents stands out in this corpus: an act of manumission of a slave, Sutura, freed by one Abū Bakr Nūmnke in front of several witnesses, including the sons of the owner, and the abovementioned qadi Alfa Ibrāhīm b. Abī Bakr.<sup>36</sup>

### The Writings of Al-Hajj 'Umar

Al-Hajj 'Umar, prominent West African scholar, leader of the Tijāniyya order in the region, and leader of an Islamic revolution between the Upper Senegal and the Middle Niger between the 1850s and the early 1860s, is also well represented in the collection, which contains several of his works. For instance, there are copies of his '*Sayf al-ḥaqq al mu'tamid fīmā waqa'a bayna al-shaykh 'Umar al-Fūtī wa-Aḥmad b. Aḥmad*' (also known as '*Bayān mā waqa'a baynanā wa-bayn amīr Māsina Aḥmad b. Aḥmad b. al-shaykh Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Lobbo*'), a polemical and legal work in which the author explains the reasons for his war against the last ruler of the Caliphate of Ḥamdallāhi, known as Aḥmad III (d. 1862),<sup>37</sup> and of '*Hidāyat al-mudhhibīn ilā kayfiyat al-khalāṣ min ḥuqūq Allāh wa-al-'ibād ajma'īn*', a collection of responses to questions asked by several of the author's companions on subjects of theology.<sup>38</sup>

The collection also comprises some biographical work on Al-Hajj 'Umar, including a chronicle on the beginning of his revolution written by his disciple and secretary 'Abd Allāh 'Āli,<sup>39</sup> and a biography written by one Sīdī Muḥammad b. Sīdī 'Abd Allāh b. Sīdī Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ṣaghīr al-'Alawī al-Tishīfī.<sup>40</sup>

### The Writings of the Kunta

The majority of the works written by members of the Kunta in the Brown Collection, with the exception of those by the abovementioned Aḥmad al-Bakkāy, are works of the famous shaykh and leader of the Qādiriyya order, al-Mukhtār b. Aḥmad b. Abī Bakr al-Kuntī al-Wāfī (d. 1811).<sup>41</sup> Among these manuscripts, in prose or verse, on *tasawwuf* (Sufism), *tawhid* (monotheism),

<sup>34</sup>CLR, Malian Arabic manuscripts: reel 8.1, no. 83; reel 8.1, no. 783.

<sup>35</sup>CLR, Malian Arabic manuscripts, reel 8.1, no. 128.

<sup>36</sup>CLR, Malian Arabic manuscripts, reel 8.1, no. 37.

<sup>37</sup>CLR, Malian Arabic manuscripts, reel 8.1, no. 26. This work is translated and commented in S. M. Mahibou and J.-L. Triaud, *Voilà ce qui est arrivé. Bayān mā waqa'a d'al-Hāgg 'Umar al-Fūtī. Plaidoyer pour une guerre sainte en Afrique de l'Ouest au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, (Paris, 1983). See also the analysis of this work in A. Syed, 'Political theology in nineteenth-century West Africa: Al-Hajj Umar, the *Bayān Mā Waqa'a*, and the conquest of the caliphate of Ḥamdallāhi', *The Journal of African History*, 62:3 (2021), 358–76.

<sup>38</sup>CLR, Malian Arabic manuscripts, reel 8.1, no. 64.

<sup>39</sup>CLR, Malian Arabic manuscripts, reel 8.1, no. 24. On 'Abd Allāh b. 'Āli, see Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa. Volume 4*, 230.

<sup>40</sup>CLR, Malian Arabic manuscripts, reel 8.1, no. 66

<sup>41</sup>On this scholar, see Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa. Volume 4*, 68–94.

'*aqida* (creed), and *nasa'ih* (advice) are: '*Kashf al-lubs fī mā bayna al-rūḥ wa-l-nafs*'; '*Jadhwat al-anwār fī al-dhabb 'an awliyā' Allāh al-akhyār*'; '*Nuḍār al-dhahab fī kull fann muntakhab*'; '*al-Kawkab al-waqqād fī faḍl dhikr al-mashā'ikh wa-ḥaqā'iq al-awrād*'; '*Fath al-Wadūd bi-sharḥ Tuhfat al-mawdūd*'; and '*Junnat al-murid dūn al-marīd*'.<sup>42</sup>

Among other Kunta scholars represented in the collection are the less known Muḥammad b. Bādī b. Bāy al-Kuntī (d. 1960), author, among others, of the fascinating 1949 '*Al-Shumūs al-ṭawālī' bi-ḥalam mā uḥditha 'ind al-qubūr min manākir al-badā'ī*', refuting the claims of one Muḥammad b. Umayya to be able to speak to the dead.<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusion

The exploration of the William A. Brown Collection in the MAMMP microfilm repository remains at its beginning. The authors of this contribution have completed the early, daunting stage of the work, involving the reorganization of the collection which will be soon made available on the CRL website. Our first assessment is that the collection represents a corpus of primary sources of major relevance, including unique and unpublished manuscripts. Even a glance at the collection will open new research questions for scholars interested in the history of the Middle Niger. The collection will certainly provide material for broadening and deepening understandings of the region, its intellectual and economic life, its political and economic systems, and the social life of its inhabitants between the late eighteenth and the early twentieth centuries.

This article has offered its authors a double opportunity. First to showcase the William A. Brown Collection, provide an introduction to its holdings, and advertise its materials to a wider audience. At the same time, this article is also a tribute to Brown, whose work went beyond his role as an outstanding scholar. Through his painstaking and relentless work of collecting these primary sources, he also preserved a heritage that would have otherwise been extremely difficult to access, especially due to the unfortunate state of the affairs in Mali, and might have as well disappeared without leaving any trace.

<sup>42</sup>See, respectively, CLR, Malian Arabic manuscripts: reel 8.2, no. 1; reel 8.2, no. 2; reel 8.2, no. 8; two copies, reel 8.3, nos. 1 and 2; reel 8.3, no. 3; reel 8.3, no. 31a.

<sup>43</sup>CLR, Malian Arabic manuscripts, reel 8.3, no. 4. On Muḥammad b. Bādī, see Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa*. Volume 4, 141–3.