


# Mobility, Knowledge Transmission, and Authority in West Africa: Re-Reading Ivor Wilks' Fieldnotes "Conversations about the Past"

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**Abstract:** This article provides a select reading of the British Africanist Ivor Wilks' unpublished field notes, "Conversations about the past, mainly from Ghana, 1956–1996." Specifically, it focuses on Wilks' notes on the migration of Muslims in Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso, including his collection of interviews, diary entries, anecdotal observations, and ethnographic data. It offers new perspectives on the entanglements between mobility, knowledge transmission, and authority in the history of Muslim communities in West Africa that are normally taken for granted. While this article is not meant to be exhaustive, it highlights the possibility of using disparate notes and observations to stitch together the beginnings of a compelling story that centers mobility as a crucial aspect of the history of Islam in Africa.

**Résumé:** Cet article propose une lecture sélective des notes de terrain non publiées « Conversations about the Past, mainly from Ghana, 1956–1996 » de l'historien de l'Afrique britannique Ivor Wilks. Il se concentre plus précisément sur les notes de Wilks sur la migration des musulmans au Ghana, en Côte d'Ivoire et au Burkina Faso, y compris sur sa collection d'entretiens, d'entrées de carnet de terrain, d'observations anecdotiques et de données ethnographiques. Il offre de nouvelles perspectives sur les enchevêtrements normalement tenus pour acquis entre mobilité, transmission des savoirs et autorité dans l'histoire des communautés musulmanes d'Afrique de l'Ouest. Cet article ne se veut pas exhaustif mais il met en avant la possibilité d'utiliser des notes et des observations pour commencer à écrire une histoire captivante de l'histoire de l'islam en Afrique en soulignant le concept crucial de mobilité.

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## Introduction

In 1953, the British Africanist Ivor Wilks arrived in Accra, Ghana to begin a two-year exchange to teach philosophy at the University College of the Gold Coast (now the University of Ghana).<sup>1</sup> He would eventually establish himself as an academic who “devoted his career to what he described as the decolonization of West African history.”<sup>2</sup> For the next several decades, and especially until 1966, he travelled widely conducting research and oral interviews, as well as collected written material. He was invested in engaging with and incorporating indigenous voices and epistemologies in the production of new historical narratives on Ghana, and to a lesser extent neighboring territories. In this respect, Jean Allman notes, “Ivor’s careful listening and keen analytic eye resulted in the uncovering of vast collections of sources for African history and in the publication of an incredible corpus of research.”<sup>3</sup>

Part of this research would later become the basis of his magisterial, massive, and then Herskovits award-winning *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*.<sup>4</sup> This unrivaled volume, as well as his numerous other publications, brought new insights and renewed attention to the political and social history of the Asante.<sup>5</sup> But while Wilks is best known for his writing on the Asante, David Owusu-Ansah notes “a close reading of his earliest writings reveals his equal fascination with the history of Muslims in the vicinity from the Middle Niger and the fringes of the Akan forest.”<sup>6</sup> His interest in placing Muslim communities as crucial actors in shaping Ghana’s history led to several publications, including the booklet, *The Northern Factor in Ashanti History*, and his later monograph, *Wa and the Wala: Islam and Polity in Northwestern Ghana*.<sup>7</sup> Yet rather than curious side projects, Wilks’ “research and publication on Islam” according to Allman,

<sup>1</sup> For a biographical sketch of Ivor Wilks, see Nancy Lawler, “Ivor Wilks: A Biographical Note,” in Hunwick, John and Lawler, Nancy (eds.), *The Cloth of Many Colored Silks: Papers on History and Society* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 5–13.

<sup>2</sup> Akosua Adomako Ampofo, “In Memory of Professor Ivor Wilks,” *Ghana Studies* 18 (2015), 185.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Allman, “The Historic Legacy of Ivor Wilks” *Ghana Studies* 18 (2015), 176.

<sup>4</sup> Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The Structure and Evolution of a Political Order* (Cambridge University Press, 1975).

<sup>5</sup> For a list of Wilks’ publications, see “*Mu’allahafāt al-Shuyūkh*: I. The Writings of Ivor Wilks,” *Sudanic Africa* 12 (2001), 143–147.

<sup>6</sup> David Owusu-Ansah, “Off to Northern Ghana in the Morning’: Ramifications of a Trip,” *Ghana Studies* 18 (2015), 177.

<sup>7</sup> Ivor Wilks, *The Northern Factor in Ashanti History* (Legon, Institute of African Studies, University College Ghana, 1961) and Ivor Wilks, *Wa and the Wala: Islam and Polity in Northwestern Ghana* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

“especially on the great networks of the Dyula in West Africa and on Muslims in Asante and in Wa, is among the most distinguished in the field.”<sup>8</sup>

What may not be apparent is that a significant portion of the research Wilks produced and employed in his wide-ranging scholarship is accessible and preserved in his field notes, “Conversations about the past, mainly from Ghana, 1956–1996” on deposit at the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies at Northwestern University.<sup>9</sup> This material consists of oral histories, ethnographic notes, diary entries, reproduction of manuscripts, casual observations, and anecdotes that cover Wilks’ career. On the one hand, these field notes represent Wilks’ tireless and intensive research and documentation. On the other hand, they also represent an invaluable treasure of source material for new analysis on West African history.

Wilks’ notes on the Muslim communities of the Voltaic region of West Africa included in “Conversations about the past” offer new insights and perspectives. Many of these communities had previously acquired little scholarly attention, and against this lacuna, Wilks interviewed dozens of Muslim scholars to trace their intellectual genealogies and uncover the histories of several predominantly Muslim towns and villages. While he began this research in 1958, he was able to carry out much more intensive fieldwork with the establishment of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana in 1961. In addition to his interview notes, Wilks’ also documented and reproduced several *isnāds* or chains of transmission and Arabic manuscripts, and collected local histories (both oral and written), as well as generated ethnographic data.<sup>10</sup>

In more recent scholarship there has been a welcome departure from older conceptualizations of African Muslims as separate and distinct from the global ecumene of believers.<sup>11</sup> Part of this departure is related to both a more

<sup>8</sup> Allman, “The Historic Legacy,” 176.

<sup>9</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations about the past, mainly from Ghana, 1956–1996” [Unpublished Field Notes], Henceforth “Conversations.” These notes consists of four volumes. Copies are available in the Melville J. Herskovits Library of African Studies, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, USA, Rhodes House Library, Oxford University, U.K, and the Institute of African Studies Library, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana.

<sup>10</sup> I have followed the IJMES system of transliteration for Arabic words, except for those words that are now common in English scholarship, such as “Qur’an,” “Hajj,” “Qadiri,” or “Tijani.” The one exception to this is that I have transliterated imam as “*imām*,” to be consistent with Ivor Wilks’ notes. In instances where Ivor Wilks employs variant spellings, or drops the transliteration altogether, I have used the most common transliterated occurrence of these words in his notes, except when I am directly quoting from them.

<sup>11</sup> For an overview of old and new trends of the study of Islam in Africa, see Scott R. Reese, “Islam in Africa/Africans and Islam,” *Journal of African History* 55–1 (2014), 17–26.

critical approach to colonial sources, as well as the incorporation of local Arabic and ‘*ajami*’ sources.<sup>12</sup> This scholarship has contributed to a range of topics and themes through which the historical and contemporary complexity of Muslim practices, identities, and actions in Africa comes into much fuller view.<sup>13</sup> But within this larger trend of identifying and incorporating new sources, it is hard to classify where exactly sources like Wilks’ papers fit.

On one level, Wilks’ notes capture the processes in the production of new knowledge during the period of decolonization in an era of emerging African nationalist narratives. As the reflections and collections of a single scholar from the outside they are not a typical archival source for an analysis of African history. They are largely influenced by the interests, assumptions, and understandings of Wilks, who asked specific questions with the aim to produce particular types of histories. Yet, on another level, they also at times capture critical perspectives and voices beyond Wilks’ immediate concerns that can be reread to produce new insights and ask new questions. Thus, Wilks’ notes represent the work product of a scholar at the very beginnings in the formation of the study of Islam in Africa as an academic discipline, whose afterlives beyond their immediate context of production have the powerful potential for new analysis.

In this article, I offer a select reading of Wilks’ field notes to demonstrate that potential. Specifically, while the scholarship on Muslim communities has significantly expanded since Wilks’ research decades ago, there are several aspects within this scholarship that continue to remain under theorized,

<sup>12</sup> For an overview on new approaches and methods on using Arabic and ‘*ajami*’ sources, see Fallou Ngom and Mustapha H. Kurfi (eds.), “Ajamization of Islam in Africa,” Special Issue of *Islamic Africa* 9:1–2 (2017), 1–248, and Amir Syed and Charles Stewart (eds.), “From Texts to Meanings: Close Reading of the Textual Cultures of Islamic Africa,” Special Issue of *Islamic Africa* 9–1 (2018), 1–132.

<sup>13</sup> For some recent examples from West Africa, see Cheikh Anta Babou, *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853–1913* (Ohio University Press, 2007); Ghislaine Lydon, *On Trans-Saharan Trails: Islamic Law, Trade Networks and Cross-Cultural Exchange in Nineteenth Century Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); Bruce Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600–1900* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); Rüdiger Seesemann, *The Divine Flood: Ibrāhīm Niassa and the Roots of a Twentieth-Century Sufi Revival* (Oxford University Press, 2011); Rudolph T Ware, *The Walking Qur’an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Zachary Wright, *Living Knowledge in West African Islam: The Sufi Community of Ibrāhīm Niassa* (Brill, 2015); Ousmane Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa* (Harvard University Press, 2016), Dorrit van Dalen, *Doubt, Scholarship and Society in 17<sup>th</sup>-Century Central Sudanic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2016); Mauro Nobili, *Sultan, Caliph and Renewer of the Faith: Aḥmad Lobbo, the Tārīkh al-Fattāsh, and the Making of an Islamic State in the Nineteenth-Century West Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 2020); and Benedikt Pontzen, *Islam in a Zongo: Muslim Lifeworlds in Asante, Ghana* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

peripheral, or implicit. This includes a robust analytic and theoretical discussion on the role of mobility and travel in the transmission of knowledge, in the establishment of Muslim diasporas and settlements, and in the construction and performance of authority. Even a cursory glance at the history of Islam in Africa demonstrates that whether in the pursuit of Islamic learning, pilgrimage or trade, Muslim clerics, merchants, and students have traversed vast distances and, in the process, created intricate commercial and scholarly networks. In this respect, Wilks' notes on the migration of Muslims in Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso, and his collection of anecdotal and ethnographic data offers new perspectives on the entanglements between mobility, knowledge transmission, and authority in the history of Muslim communities in Africa that are normally taken for granted.

This article is divided into two sections. In the first section, I begin with a short theoretical discussion on the relationship between mobility, knowledge transmission, and the construction of scholarly authority. Then I present two cases of individuals drawn from Wilks' notes to further explore, describe, and document this relationship on the ground. In the second section, I move from the examples of individuals, and use Wilks' notes to frame a discussion on the migration and settlement of three different scholarly families. Using their examples, I highlight the relationships between intellectual genealogies and kinship ties, the different and overlapping roles that scholarly lineages take on, and the various dimensions of their authority. While this article is not meant to be exhaustive, it highlights the possibility of using disparate notes and observations to stitch together the beginnings of a compelling story that centers mobility as a crucial aspect of the history of Islam in Africa.

### **Mobility, the Transmission of Islamic Knowledge, and the Construction of Scholarly Authority**

A look at contemporary Muslim educational practices highlights numerous possibilities, and at times, competing educational philosophies.<sup>14</sup> But regardless of this “constantly changing relationship between competing epistemologies,” this was always not the case.<sup>15</sup> Specifically, the intersection of European colonialism and Muslim modernists and reformist movements, along with the introduction of modern schools in the twentieth century, led to an epistemic shift in Muslim educational practices.<sup>16</sup> Previously, master/disciple relationships, deference, repetition, rote memorization, as well as

<sup>14</sup> Robert Launay, ed., *Islamic Education in Africa: Writing Boards and Blackboards* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Rüdiger Seesemann, “Epistemology or Ideology? Toward a Relational Perspective on Islamic Knowledge in Africa,” *Journal of African Religions* 6–2 (2018), 233.

<sup>16</sup> Louis Brenner, *Controlling Knowledge: Religion, Power, and Schooling in a West African Muslim Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Indira Falk Gesink, *Islamic Reform and Conservatism: Al-Azhar and the Evolution of Modern Sunni*

the body were central to the transmission of Islamic knowledge. In reference to these practices, Rudolph Ware notes in his wide-ranging study on the history of Qur'an schools in West Africa that "Islamic knowledge is embodied knowledge."<sup>17</sup> But this emphasis on internalizing knowledge was not just restricted to Qur'an schools. Instead, it was the basic assumption within the transmission of all the Islamic religious sciences, like Jurisprudence, and Sufism.<sup>18</sup> What it means to embody knowledge and how this connects to mobility is quite complex, and I will highlight a few key aspects before discussing how this system of knowledge worked on the ground.

One way to understand the importance of mobility in the pursuit of Islamic knowledge is to revisit William Graham's conceptualization and discussion of the *isnād* and *ijāza*. The *isnād*, literally to support, "takes the form of a list or 'chain' (*silsilah*) of individual transmitters who span the generation from the most recent reporter back to the Prophet or Companions."<sup>19</sup> Corresponding to the *isnād* is the *ijāza*.<sup>20</sup> After completing a specific text or learning a specific practice students would be granted an authorization, or an *ijāza* to teach someone else. In this scheme, it is only possible to become part of a chain of narration through the face-to-face personal contact between students and teachers. Often written, in an *ijāza*, "the teacher granting the certificate typically includes an *isnād* containing his or her scholarly lineage of teachers back to the Prophet or [sic] Companions, a later venerable shaykh, or the author of a specific book."<sup>21</sup> At its core, this personalized form of knowledge also presupposes, as Graham notes, "that truth does not reside in documents, however authentic, ancient, or well-preserved, but in the authentic human beings and their personal connections with one another."<sup>22</sup>

In practical terms the emphasis on personal bonds meant that to seek out the most accomplished teachers, students often traversed great distances. In this respect, Graham notes that "the journey, or *riḥlah*, tradition of personal study with outstanding teachers, wherever they might be, also rendered an intangible service to the continuity of Islamic tradition across the centuries."<sup>23</sup> Graham's conceptualization highlights that mobility

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*Islam* (New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2010); and Samira Haj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity* (Stanford University Press, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Ware, *The Walking Qur'an*, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Wright, *Living Knowledge*, 32–33.

<sup>19</sup> William A. Graham, "Traditionalism in Islam: An Essay in Interpretation," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23–3 (Winter 1993), 502.

<sup>20</sup> For a robust discussion on *ijāza*, see Reza Arjmand, "Jāzah: Methods of Authorization and Assessment in Islamic Education," in Duan, Holger and Arjmand, Reza (eds.), *Handbook of Islamic Education* (Springer International, 2018), 135–155.

<sup>21</sup> Graham, "Traditionalism in Islam," 511.

<sup>22</sup> Graham, "Traditionalism in Islam," 507.

<sup>23</sup> Graham, "Traditionalism in Islam," 512.

constituted the very foundation of traditional Islamic learning practices. Scholarly pathways often also coincided with well-worn commercial and pilgrimage routes and put in motion a range of actors who interacted at various nodes. While a detail analysis on the continuous formation of these nodes remains understudied, what emerges is that scholars and students on the move ensured that Islamic knowledge never remained static. Rather the unending pursuit of new teachers and learning centers in West Africa ensured the development of far-reaching intellectual networks across space and time, and the continuous flow of ideas and practices.

Wilks' notes are full of descriptions on the links between this orientation to knowledge and the spread of Islam, as well as on the relationship between authority and knowledge on the ground. In the remaining part of this section, I will analyze Wilks' notes on two different figures, whose lives demonstrate how mobility intersected Islamic learning in multiple ways, which opened the way for completely new futures. The first is the example of the famed Hausa scholar, al-Ḥājj 'Umar b. Abī Bakr b. 'Uthmān of Kete Kraye or Kete Krachi (d. 1934) in present-day Ghana, who established himself as one of the most important twentieth-century figures in the region.<sup>24</sup> The second is al-Ḥājj 'Uthmān b. Iṣḥāq Boyo (also known as Alhaji Boyo), who assisted Wilks for over a decade with his research as both a translator and a guide to several Muslim communities in the region.<sup>25</sup> What emerges from Wilks' notes is that both figures travelled extensively, and acquired esteem because of their learning. Their examples highlight the different pathways to acquiring knowledge, and the different performances of scholarly authority.

### *The Case of al-Ḥājj 'Umar of Kete Krayke*

In 1963, Wilks interviewed al-Ḥājj 'Umar's son, Malam Abū Bakr in Kete Krayke. This interview captures a family story that is shaped by migration, mobility, and learning. To begin, al-Ḥājj 'Umar's family did not have old roots in West Africa. In this respect, Abū Bakr begins his narrative with how his great-grandfather Sharif Ḥusayn migrated from Medina (Saudi Arabia) to Sokoto in present-day Nigeria to study under the famed scholar and state builder 'Uthmān dan Fodio (d. 1817).<sup>26</sup> After this initial migration, Sharif Ḥusayn "opened a school near Sokoto" and married a "Sokoto woman named Maryam," who gave birth to a son, 'Uthmān.<sup>27</sup> 'Uthmān subsequently

<sup>24</sup> For a biography of al-Ḥājj 'Umar of Kete Krayke and his writings, see John O. Hunwick et al. (eds.), *Arabic Literature of Africa, vol. 4: Writings of Western Sudanic Africa* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003), 586–594.

<sup>25</sup> For a biography of al-Ḥājj 'Uthmān b. Iṣḥāq Boyo and his writings, see Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa*, 576–579.

<sup>26</sup> Ivor Wilks, "Conversations," 15 June 1963, FN/8: Interview with Malam Abū Bakr b. al-Ḥājj 'Umar.

<sup>27</sup> Ivor Wilks, "Conversations," 15 June 1963, FN/8: Interview with Malam Abū Bakr b. al-Ḥājj 'Umar.

married and had a child named Abū Bakr, who moved to Kebbi and was engaged in the trade of “kola [nuts] between Kebbi and Kano.”<sup>28</sup> The issue of mobility, migration, and trade are all clearly evident in this description, and these themes would continue to play an important role in the life of al-Ḥājj ‘Umar.

Al-Ḥājj ‘Umar was born in Kano. According to Abū Bakr, “he started school...then he went to join his father in Kebbi, and after that he moved to Gobir to study *‘ilm* [knowledge, learning].”<sup>29</sup> Further, “it was in Gobir that he met Malam ‘Uthman dan Fataki, who became his tutor,” and after acquiring his basic education he moved back to Kano.”<sup>30</sup> Though his mobility was restricted within what was then known as Hausaland – present-day Nigeria, he eventually joined his father in trade and began to travel to other parts of West Africa. But his involvement in trade also overlapped with his continuous pursuit of Islamic knowledge.

His expanding network of travel brought al-Ḥājj ‘Umar to Gonja, and to the nearby trading and learning center of Salaga in Ghana. When he arrived in Salaga “all the malams [*imāms*, clerics] in Salaga tried to persuade him to stay there.”<sup>31</sup> This was likely because the clerics in Salaga wanted him to teach, since Abū Bakr notes that “he made a small school in Salaga,” and for the few years he resided in Salaga, he “no longer traded, but taught.”<sup>32</sup> Even though he had established a school, this did not mean that he only stayed in Salaga. Instead “he would also travel to visit other schools, ones in Kumase, Kintampo, and elsewhere.”<sup>33</sup> Like other clerics in the region then, al-Ḥājj ‘Umar not only constructed his own school, but he would also travel to other locations to teach. Mobility remained an important aspect in the lives of Muslim clerics even when they had established themselves in a particular town.

Al-Ḥājj ‘Umar lived in Salaga for only a few years, and eventually migrated to Kete Krakye. But while he was welcomed in Salaga, the chief of Kete Krakye, thought al-Ḥājj ‘Umar “had come to take over his kingdom.”<sup>34</sup> In

<sup>28</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 15 June 1963, FN/8: Interview with Malam Abū Bakr b. al-Ḥājj ‘Umar.

<sup>29</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 15 June 1963, FN/8: Interview with Malam Abū Bakr b. al-Ḥājj ‘Umar.

<sup>30</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 15 June 1963, FN/8: Interview with Malam Abū Bakr b. al-Ḥājj ‘Umar.

<sup>31</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 15 June 1963, FN/8: Interview with Malam Abū Bakr b. al-Ḥājj ‘Umar.

<sup>32</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 15 June 1963, FN/8: Interview with Malam Abū Bakr b. al-Ḥājj ‘Umar.

<sup>33</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 15 June 1963, FN/8: Interview with Malam Abū Bakr b. al-Ḥājj ‘Umar.

<sup>34</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 15 June 1963, FN/8: Interview with Malam Abū Bakr b. al-Ḥājj ‘Umar.



this instance religious authority, as an alternative site of power could also be dangerous and created tension between al-Ḥājj ‘Umar and chief of the Zongo. Consequently, he went to the town of Gambaga, where again “he made a school” and “stayed for two or three years.”<sup>35</sup> It was only after the death of this Sarkin Zongo did al-Ḥājj ‘Umar return to Kete Krakye. But even after returning, he continued to travel and spent “two years in Walwale and taught.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, in highlighting clerical mobility, Abū Bakr explains, “my father moved backwards and forwards between Gambaga and Walwale a lot.”<sup>37</sup> Before long, al-Ḥājj ‘Umar decided to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, and during his journey he spent time in Sudan and Jerusalem.<sup>38</sup>

In Mecca, al-Ḥājj ‘Umar met a figure named Sharīf Ḥusayn, “who looked after the Prophet’s grave in Medina” and studied with him for over two months.<sup>39</sup> Sharīf Ḥusayn initiated al-Ḥājj ‘Umar into the Tijani Sufi order and made him a *muqaddam* (representative) of the order, which amounted to an *ijāza* to transmit its teachings and doctrines to others. This important North African Sufi order had already spread to large parts of West Africa, particularly under al-Ḥājj ‘Umar Fūtū Tall.<sup>40</sup> Yet rather than become part of any of the *isnāds* that were already in circulation in West Africa, it was al-Ḥājj ‘Umar’s travel to Mecca that brought him in contact with this order and provided him with an independent and different line of affiliation. Before arriving in Mecca, al-Ḥājj ‘Umar was the *muqaddam* of the Qadiri Sufi order. Abū Bakr explains how when his “father returned to Kete Krakye he called together all of his students to whom he had given the Qādiriyya wird [litany],”

<sup>35</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 15 June 1963, FN/8: Interview with Malam Abū Bakr b. al-Ḥājj ‘Umar.

<sup>36</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 15 June 1963, FN/8: Interview with Malam Abū Bakr b. al-Ḥājj ‘Umar.

<sup>37</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 15 June 1963, FN/8: Interview with Malam Abū Bakr b. al-Ḥājj ‘Umar.

<sup>38</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 15 June 1963, FN/8: Interview with Malam Abū Bakr b. al-Ḥājj ‘Umar.

<sup>39</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 15 June 1963, FN/8: Interview with Malam Abū Bakr b. al-Ḥājj ‘Umar.

<sup>40</sup> On the Tijaniyya, see Zachary Wright, *Realizing Islam: The Tijaniyya in North Africa and the Eighteenth-Century World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020). For al-Ḥājj ‘Umar Tall, see David Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal* (Oxford University Press, 1985); Madina Ly-Tall, *Un Islam Militant en Afrique de l’Ouest au XIXe Siècle: La Tijaniyya de Saïku Umar Futiyu contre les Pouvoirs traditionnels et la Puissance coloniale* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1991); John H. Hanson, *Migration, Jihad and Muslim Authority in West Africa: The Futanke Colonies in Karta* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), Mountaga Tall, *Al-Jawāhir wa-l-durur fī sīra al-Ḥājj ‘Umar* (*Les Perles Rares sur la Vie d’El Hadji Omar*) (Beirut, Albouraq, 2005), and Amir Syed, “Al-Ḥājj ‘Umar Tall and the Realm of the Written: Mastery, Mobility and Islamic Authority in 19th Century West Africa” (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2017).

and “explained to them that he had changed, and why.”<sup>41</sup> In this example, travel brought forth a dramatic change in the life of al-Ḥājj ‘Umar, and a significant shift in his Sufi affiliation.

When al-Ḥājj ‘Umar returned to West Africa, he not only established the Tijani order in Kete Krayke but he also became the main *imām* and judge of the town allowing him to deliver religious opinions. This is significant because his own father was not an *imām* either of Kete Krayke or any other town.<sup>42</sup> Thus, because of his immense learning, al-Ḥājj ‘Umar established himself as a religious authority without necessarily belonging to a particular lineage. In this regard, in a different interview, al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Limam Thani, another significant figure from Kete Krayke, notes that al-Ḥājj ‘Umar “himself was one of the most important malams in West Africa.”<sup>43</sup> Consequently, “even the Fulani of Massina used to write to him for copies of his works,” and “many people would visit Kete Krayke just to consult with al-Ḥājj ‘Umar. He was much respected by the pagan people. Even people would come from Asante to consult him and to obtain medicine.”<sup>44</sup>

The multiple valences that mobility can take is evident in the life of al-Ḥājj ‘Umar. On the one hand, his grandfather migrated from Saudi Arabia, and during his childhood he moved from place to place, and in the process acquired Islamic knowledge. This immense learning garnered him recognition by other scholars, which eventually led to his appointment as the *imām* of Kete Krayke. As the *imām* of Kete Krayke, the *muqaddam* of the Tijani, and the author of several works, he became the focus of visits from various people, including chiefs and students, from all over West Africa. On the other hand, because of the personalized nature of knowledge transmission, numerous students studied with al-Ḥājj ‘Umar at his many destinations and acquired knowledge from him. An Arabic document that Abū Bakr presented to Wilks gives a partial list of a few of these students to whom al-Ḥājj ‘Umar gave authorizations. Without specifying the exact texts that these students studied with al-Ḥājj ‘Umar, the document lists 58 students, along with place names, including Kumase, Salaga, Kintampo, Walwale, and Gambaga. Many of these

<sup>41</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 15 June 1963, FN/8: Interview with Malam Abū Bakr b. al-Ḥājj ‘Umar.

<sup>42</sup> Abū Bakr explains that his grandfather had mastered several different texts but was never an *imām*. Instead, he concentrated on trade. Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 15 June 1963, FN/8: Interview with Malam Abū Bakr b. al-Ḥājj ‘Umar.

<sup>43</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 16 June 1963, FN/63: Interview with Al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Limam Thani.

<sup>44</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 16 June 1963, FN/63: Interview with Al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Limam Thani. Muslim religious specialists were well known for their knowledge of medicine and mastery of esoteric sciences in the region, see David Owusu-Ansah, *Islamic Talismanic Tradition in Nineteenth-Century Asante* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991).

locations highlight the destinations that were frequented by al-Ḥājj ‘Umar and again highlight the importance of mobility in the transmission of Islamic knowledge. In this case, al-Ḥājj ‘Umar represents a mobile site of learning. Regardless of where his destination was, he continued to teach and transmit knowledge to a new generation of students, some of whom would go on to become important scholars on their own. In the process, this single individual created a diffuse network of intellectual affiliation and genealogy over a wide space.

### *The Case of al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān b. Ishāq Boyo*

Al-Ḥājj ‘Umar is one of the most celebrated figure in Wilks’ notes, but he is not the only figure who gives us insights into how this methodology of knowledge transmission works. Another individual is al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān. Before assisting Wilks with his research, al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān had mastered several Islamic religious sciences, including jurisprudence and Qur’anic exegesis. Over the course of two interviews with Wilks, al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān gave a detailed account of his own studies that is worth examining.

When Wilks first met al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān in 1959, he was living in Bonduku, Ivory Coast, but much of his training had occurred in several different towns in Ghana.<sup>45</sup> His account begins with “I started school in Kintampo when I was about eleven years old,” and “I studied under Imoru Kunadi Jabaghatay of Buna, who was then living in Kintampo.”<sup>46</sup> Al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān continues with “there were about twenty-four children then in the school,” and “I spent a year and half with Imoru Kunandi, and learnt to read the Qur’an.”<sup>47</sup> Like many other Muslim children in West Africa, al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān’s primary education began with learning the Arabic alphabet and then subsequently learning how to read the Qur’an.

In 1918, al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān’s father sent him away to Dunkwa, because, for unclear reasons, his stepmother would not let him “study properly.”<sup>48</sup> In Dunkwa he spent “four or five years” under al-Hamadu Kamaghatay, who had migrated from Bonduku.<sup>49</sup> In this town, he continued to study the Qur’an

<sup>45</sup> For an overview of Islam in Ivory Coast during the colonial period see Jean Louis Triaud, *Les Musulmans de Côte d’Ivoire à l’époque coloniale (1900-1960): un monde de Karamokos* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2021).

<sup>46</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 14 April 1966, FN/190: Interview with Al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān b. Ishāq Boyo.

<sup>47</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 14 April 1966, FN/190: Interview with Al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān b. Ishāq Boyo.

<sup>48</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 14 April 1966, FN/190: Interview with Al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān b. Ishāq Boyo.

<sup>49</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 14 April 1966, FN/190: Interview with Al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān b. Ishāq Boyo.

until he “could recite it” likely from memory.<sup>50</sup> During his tenure in Dunkwa, mobility also played a crucial role in his education, and it is worth quoting his explanation of why at length. After explaining that al-Hamadu was not “a great man of learning,” al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān says,

in this period I often accompanied al-Hamadu to Elmina, where he had a house, and where he would go for funerals and such matters. We walked there from Dunkwa. Al-Hamadu had about fifty or sixty students, and a dozen or so might accompany him. On the way we would meet with other malams, and al-Hamadu – ‘who was proud and loved me’ – would ask them to teach us. We might spend ten or twenty days with such a malam. Our whole journey might take two or three months.<sup>51</sup>

In this description, we get a sense of the number of students a typical scholar would have – fifty or sixty – and during a cleric’s travels, some of his students would accompany him. Although al-Hamadu traveled for specific reasons, for his students these travels were an opportunity to meet other scholars and study with them. These temporary sojourns, which lasted a few months, again highlight the role mobility has played in connecting students with different teachers across the landscape of West Africa. In this case, it is clear again that travel and learning were intimately connected, and this theme is further highlighted in al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān’s subsequent descriptions.

In perhaps 1924, al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān returned to Kintampo, and this time his teacher, al-Hamadu moved with him. In Kintampo, al-Hamadu initiated al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān into the Tijani Sufi order, but soon after al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān stopped his studies with him. He explains, “when we were staying in Kintampo, my knowledge was as great as his,” and he “therefore allowed me to go to any other malams.”<sup>52</sup> There are two interesting points here. First, after studying with al-Hamadu and other clerics during his travels, al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān achieved a degree of knowledge that was equivalent to his teacher. In order to further his studies, he subsequently had to find more accomplished teachers. Second, to continue his studies with other scholars, he had to first acquire the permission of al-Hamadu, highlighting that the personal bonds between students and teachers were also built on reverence and respect.

<sup>50</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 14 April 1966, FN/190: Interview with Al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān b. Iṣḥāq Boyo.

<sup>51</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 14 April 1966, FN/190: Interview with Al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān b. Iṣḥāq Boyo.

<sup>52</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 14 April 1966, FN/190: Interview with Al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān b. Iṣḥāq Boyo.

Having acquired al-Hamadu's permission, al-Ḥājj 'Uthmān began his studies "with Karamoko Haruna Watara," who "was from Bonduku" but had migrated and was "living in Kintampo."<sup>53</sup> He notes, "I read many book [sic] with him, for example, the *Muwatṭā* of Imām Mālik; the *Risāla* of Ibn Abī Zayd; the *hadīth* of al-Samarqandi, the *'Iziyya* of Imām Mālik; and the *madhī* of al-Hamziya. I was given a *silsila* for *Muwatṭā*. They do not give them for the other books."<sup>54</sup> Here, al-Ḥājj 'Uthmān highlights some of the major texts of Islamic jurisprudence, works of hadith (the actions and sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad), and poetry.<sup>55</sup> In reflecting on his studies, he points out that after completing the *Muwatṭā* of Imām Mālik ibn Anas (d. 795), Karamoko Haruna wrote him an *ijāza* for this text, thus making him part of his intellectual genealogy (*silsila*). Further, al-Ḥājj 'Uthmān also explains how he would still travel to different towns and study with other scholars. After completing several texts, including the ones he mentions, he departed to Mecca to perform the Hajj.

In 1949, after living in Kintampo for fifteen years, al-Ḥājj 'Uthmān arrived in Mecca and spent the next three years continuing his studies with several different scholars. One of the scholars that he met was from the Timitay or Timite lineage of Bonduku, al-Ḥājj Quds (see next section), who was also traveling at the same time. The two of them had never met in West Africa, and it was only through their mobility that they came to know each other in Mecca, far away from home. This meeting had further implications for al-Ḥājj 'Uthmān's scholarly pursuits. He explains that al-Ḥājj Quds "was going to Cairo, and that whatever he learned there he was willing to teach me when he returned to Bonduku."<sup>56</sup> In this example the intellectual connections that West African scholars created with other parts of the Muslim world through their travel is quite clear. Further these itinerant scholars ensured that the transmission of Islamic knowledge continued to flow from the different centers of Islamic learning.

<sup>53</sup> Ivor Wilks, "Conversations," 14 April 1966, FN/190: Interview with Al-Ḥājj 'Uthmān b. Ishaq Boyo.

<sup>54</sup> Ivor Wilks, "Conversations," 14 April 1966, FN/190: Interview with Al-Ḥājj 'Uthmān b. Ishaq Boyo. These texts form the basis of educational practices in West Africa, and many other individuals explain how they studied the same texts. For instance, see Ivor Wilks, "Conversations," 26 May 1966, FN/217: Interview with Al-Ḥājj 'Abdallah, and Ivor Wilks, "Conversations," 17 June 1966 FN/71: Interview with Karamoko Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm. I will also explain the transmission of a few of these texts in the section below.

<sup>55</sup> Bruce S. Hall and Charles C. Stewart, "The Historic 'Core Curriculum' and the Book Market in Islamic West Africa," in Krätli, Graziano and Lydon, Ghislaine (eds.), *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 109–174.

<sup>56</sup> Ivor Wilks, "Conversations," 14 April 1966, FN/190: Interview with Al-Ḥājj 'Uthmān b. Ishaq Boyo.

Al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān returned once again to Kintampo to his former teacher Karamoko Harunu, but soon moved to Bonduku on the return of al-Ḥājj Quds. For the next several years, he lived with al-Ḥājj Quds in Bonduku and read the “*Muwattā* again with him, and started *tafsīr*. This was the *tafsīr* of al-Suyūti and Sāwī.”<sup>57</sup> After reading the *Muwattā* again and a work on Qur’anic exegesis or *tafsīr*, al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān “was given new *silsilas*” or *isnāds* and became part of the chain of narration of al-Ḥājj Quds.<sup>58</sup> Like other West African students, for al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān, there was always incentive to restudy a text in order to gather as many *isnāds* as one could. Each chain of transmission carried within it a particular and different intellectual genealogy, and was often thought to carry its own blessings or *baraka*.<sup>59</sup>

After completing these works, Al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān began reading *al-Shifa*’ of Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ (d. 1149), an important biographical work on the life of the Prophet Muḥammad, but he was not able to finish it because of his research with Wilks. He explains, “I am still reading it, and I will go back to Bonduku sometime to complete it.”<sup>60</sup> Although al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān had studied other difficult texts and had mastered the Arabic language, it was not possible for him to simply read *al-Shifa*’ without the guidance of an authorized teacher, and in this case al-Ḥājj Quds. Thus, he explains, “I will need four to six months to complete [it],” but in order to finish it he would need to be in Bonduku in the presence of his teacher.<sup>61</sup>

“One day I shall hope to teach” was the reason al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān gave for having traversed such great distances in order to acquire Islamic knowledge and the *isnāds* and *ijāzas* that went along with the texts he had completed.<sup>62</sup> A central theme in this testimony was that a student had to travel to study with noteworthy teachers. After having surpassed the teachers in one location, a student then had to travel to find new teachers. Al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān’s

<sup>57</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 14 April 1966, FN/190: Interview with Al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān b. Ishaq Boyo.

<sup>58</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 14 April 1966, FN/190: Interview with Al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān b. Ishaq Boyo.

<sup>59</sup> For instance, Wilks notes “A student who had read, for example, Imam Malik’s *Muwatta*’ over a period of many months may subsequently spend two or three further months in re-reading it from a more famed teacher, in order to obtain a sanad through the latter.” See Ivor Wilks, ‘The Transmission of Islamic Learning in Western Sudan,’ in Goody, Jack (ed.), *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 172.

<sup>60</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 14 April 1966, FN/190: Interview with Al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān b. Ishaq Boyo.

<sup>61</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 14 April 1966, FN/190: Interview with Al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān b. Ishaq Boyo.

<sup>62</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 14 April 1966, FN/190: Interview with Al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān b. Ishaq Boyo.

extraordinary mobility and the relationships he cultivated with several scholars were ultimately also pivotal for Wilks' ability to conduct his research on Muslim communities in the Volta region.

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The examples of the famed scholar al-Ḥājj 'Umar and al-Ḥājj 'Uthmān highlight how mobility was embedded in this methodology of Islamic knowledge transmission. This epistemology of knowledge transmission made reading texts secondary to the face-to-face personalized teaching between students and teachers. Thus, students would traverse great distances in order to study specific texts, with specific teachers. Since knowledge was personalized the locations of knowledge transmission were also mobile. As clerics such as al-Ḥājj 'Umar traveled, they continued to transmit knowledge in all the destinations that they went. Consequently, Muslim scholars established highly mobile systems of knowledge transmission, with multiple nodes and sites of transmission that moved with them. At the same time, these Muslim scholars constructed their authority through their knowledge, and in the case of al-Ḥājj 'Umar sometimes that put them at odds with political elites. The next section further explores questions on the relationship between knowledge and authority.

### **Mobility, Lineage, Knowledge Brokers, and Spheres of Authority**

The role of genealogy and lineage in creating familial connections across wide geographic areas has been an important theme throughout the history of Islam. Through intermarriage with local populations, certain lineages adapted to local political circumstances and established themselves as authoritative sites for religious learning and transmission. At the same time, these diasporic populations continued to maintain connections with other family members, who may have also adapted to very different social and political structures in different regions.<sup>63</sup>

Once established, the genealogy of these groups became an important marker of identification, differentiation, and structured their relationships with others. Passed down from generation to generation, affiliation based on lineage was pivotal in political negotiations and demarcating obligations and roles within different groups. Yet the way obligations and social and political relationships unfolded over time in the history of Islam is contingent on geographic location.

<sup>63</sup> One notable example is the Hadrami of Yemen and their vast intellectual and commercial networks throughout the Indian Ocean. See Engsang Ho, *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). For a different example, see Anne Bang, *Sufis and Scholars of the Sea: Family Networks in East Africa, 1860–1925* (Routledge, 2003).

Wilks' papers offer unprecedented details on the history and emergence of several different clerical families in Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso, including the Saghanughu, Kamaghatay, and Timitay. A close examination of his ethnographic notes and oral historical research demonstrates how mobility, knowledge, and lineage become intertwined in the creation of religious specialists with their own set of authority over time. These religious specialists became the brokers of knowledge and played instrumental roles in Muslim education. They also became identified as a corporate scholarly group based on their kinship ties, and formed a variety of relationships with local ruling elites and others, and in the process carved out their own spheres of authority.<sup>64</sup> Migration and mobility then led to the establishment of complementary and entangled sets of authority in the different Muslim towns that is not always accounted for in studies on West Africa.<sup>65</sup>

### *The Case of the Saghanughu*

One of the significant clerical groups that Wilks' gathers information on is the Saghanughu. He conducted several interviews with al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Marhaba Saghanughu in 1965 and 1966, an important intellectual, author, and former Muslim judge.<sup>66</sup> He also collected numerous *isnāds* and *ijāzas* and local histories of this scholarly family. Using this research, Wilks later concluded that many of the chains of narration for Islamic law in Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso pass through members of the Saghanughu family. Specifically, Wilks analyzed forty chains of transmission of three core texts of the West African curriculum: 1) *Muwatta'* of Imām Mālik, 2) *al-Shifa'* of Qāḍī 'Iyād, and 3) *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī (d. 1460) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505).<sup>67</sup> Wilks explains that all the chains "converge upon one Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā b. 'Abbās Saghanughu, who flourished in the mid-eighteenth century, and whose grave at Boron in the northern Ivory Coast is still a considerable center of pilgrimage."<sup>68</sup> In keeping with the entanglements of mobility, migration, and knowledge transmission, Muḥammad

<sup>64</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *The Crown and the Turban: Muslims and West African Pluralism* (Routledge, 1996) and Nehemia Levtzion, *Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa: A Study of Islam in the Middle Volta Basin in the Pre-colonial Period* (Oxford University Press, 1968).

<sup>65</sup> Mauro Nobili, "Reinterpreting the Role of Muslims in the West African Middle Ages" *Journal of African History* 61–3 (November 2020), 327–340; and Mahir Saul, "Islam and West African Anthropology" *Africa Today* 53–1 (2006), 3–33.

<sup>66</sup> For a biography of al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Marhaba Saghanughu and his writings, see Hunwick, *Arabic Literature of Africa*, 553–562.

<sup>67</sup> Ivor Wilks, "The Saghanughu and the Spread of Maliki Law: A Provisional Note," *Research Bulletin* (Centre of Arabic Documentation: Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan) 2–2 (July 1966), 11–17.

<sup>68</sup> Wilks, "The Saghanughu and the Spread of Maliki Law," 12.



al-Muṣṭafā became one central node in what was a larger network of scholarly practices that had deeper roots in West Africa.

In reconstructing the intellectual genealogy of Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā, Wilks provides additional information on the Saghanughu. He notes that the “Saghanughu’ is a *nisba* or identification named used by members of a Dyula lineage strongly represented in the northern and western Ivory Coast, in western Upper Volta,” who “retain their strong attachment to learning” and are “among the five original Muslim lineages of the Mande world.”<sup>69</sup> The chains of transmission include the figure of al-Ḥājj Sālim Suware, who Wilks places in the late fifteenth century.<sup>70</sup> This figure is tied to the canonization of numerous intellectual and teaching traditions throughout West Africa, including a specific orientation toward the acquisition of Islamic knowledge and relationship between non-Muslims groups.<sup>71</sup> As part of the eponymous “Suwarian” tradition, the Saghanughu, like other Dyula and Jakhanke groups, are part of this larger intellectual genealogy. They also represent the peripatetic practice that are common in Islamic knowledge practices in West Africa. Specifically, when Dyula populations began to migrate from Mali for trade and establish “such southerly centres as Boron and Kong in the northern Ivory Coast, and Bi’u (Begho) in Ghana,” the “Saghanughu followed the traders in a religious and juristic capacity.”<sup>72</sup> In these new Dyula settlements, it was usually the Saghanughu who became the central religious figures.

As Wilks’ subsequent published research demonstrates, his focus during his interviews with al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Marhaba was on analyzing the genealogy of key Saghanughu figures, reconstructing the history of their migration from Mali, and documenting the history of the emergence of several important learning centers. For instance, in an early interview conducted in Legon on 31 July 1965, Wilks asks several questions on a work that al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Marhaba had written.<sup>73</sup> He asks to learn more about the different places mentioned in the work, such as “Ghudwara” in Ivory Coast or “Manku” in Togo.<sup>74</sup> He also asks about Muṣṭafā Saghanughu, who eventually

<sup>69</sup> Wilks, “The Saghanughu and the Spread of Maliki Law,” 13.

<sup>70</sup> There is some disagreement with this date. See Lamin O. Sanneh, *The Jakhanke Muslim Clerics: A Religious and Historical Study of Islam in Senegambia* (London: University Press of America, 1989), 16–18.

<sup>71</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Al-Ḥājj Salim Suwari and the Suwaris: A Search for Sources,” *Transactions in the Historical Society of Ghana*, New Series 13 (2011), 1–79, and Lamin Sanneh, *Beyond Jihad: The Pacifist Tradition in West African Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>72</sup> Wilks, “The Saghanughu and the Spread of Maliki Law,” 14.

<sup>73</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 31 July 1965, FN/179: Interview with al-Hajj Muhammad Marhaba Saghanughu.

<sup>74</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 31 July 1965, FN/179: Interview with al-Hajj Muhammad Marhaba Saghanughu.

taught in Boron in the Ivory Coast, where he is also buried. A central topic of this interview is on the important learning center, Kong. In this respect, Muḥammad Marhaba explains that after the death of Muṣṭafā “people from Kong took his son, ‘Abbas, to stay with them. Then from Wa, Buna, Bonduku and other places, everyone went to Kong for study.”<sup>75</sup> The kinship relationship between ‘Abbās and his well-known father, Muṣṭafā, as well as the importance of personalized knowledge, meant that the presence of ‘Abbās made Kong a learning center that students from different towns came to study in.

In the following year, Wilks conducted several additional interviews with Muḥammad Marhaba. They were connected to the previous interview in that he gathered additional information on the role of the Saghanughu in the transmission of knowledge. Specifically, Wilks focuses his discussion on the key figure Muṣṭafā Saghanughu and his descendants, including ‘Abbās. But while the field notes largely give crucial genealogical and historical details that establish the prominence of this scholarly lineage, they also give interesting anecdotes on authority and obligation. For instance, when ‘Abbās migrated to Kong, Muḥammad Marhaba notes “there was already a Kunatay mosque in Kong when the Saghanughu went there. A dispute arose between the Saghanughu and the Kunatay about the mosque.”<sup>76</sup> This testimony indicates that there was already a Muslim group in Kong – and the arrival of another scholarly family, the Saghanughu, created a problem. The dispute was resolved through the intervention of scholars from Massina who “pronounced the Saghanughu to be in the right,” and a new Saghanughu mosque was built.<sup>77</sup> Though the details of this dispute are sparse, it demonstrates how mobility and migration amongst Muslim scholarly elites could create the potential for conflict based on competing authority.

The resolution of these conflicts based on migration and mobility often led to negotiated roles and obligations. For instance, Muḥammad Marhaba provides an interesting anecdote about the relationship between the Saghanughu and the Sissay. He explains,

In Kong when the Saghanughu imam goes to the mosque, the Sissay must lead him. They carry the wooden *mumbar* from which the imam says the *khuṭba*. The Sissay do the same here in Dar al-Salam. Anywhere you find Saghanughu, you find Sissay as well. These are the people of Sissi Kuri in the chains for learning we have talked about.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 31 July 1965, FN/179: Interview with al-Ḥajj Muḥammad Marhaba Saghanughu.

<sup>76</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 8 May 1966, FN/180: Interview with al-Ḥajj Marhaba Saghanughu.

<sup>77</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 31 July 1965, FN/180: Interview with al-Ḥajj Marhaba Saghanughu.

<sup>78</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 11 May 1966, FN/183: Interview with al-Ḥajj Muḥammad Marhaba and others.

In this example, Muḥammad Marhaba is speaking about the Friday congregational prayer. He explains that the Sissay have a specific role in carrying the pulpit (*mumbar*) to the mosque, for the sermon (*khutba*). As alluded to, the Sissi Kuri are an important part of the Saghanughu genealogy, and Wilks in other interviews with Muḥammad Marhaba provides additional details on them. These genealogical relationships established in the past also manifests themselves in rights and social obligations on the ground in new contexts. Those obligations are not simply restricted to Kong, but in every town where the Saghanughu and Sissay live, including in Dar al-Islam, a Saghanughu town not from Bobo-Dioulasso. In specific reference to Dar al-Islam, Muḥammad Marhaba also notes that there are several other groups: “there are Baro, who are the landowers; Saghanughu; Sissay; Bamba; Tarawiri; Jabaghatay; Turi; Jani, like Sahnunu from Jenne; and so on.”<sup>79</sup> There are no subsequent details on these other groups in Wilks’ field notes, but it is likely that all these different groups had also established interdependent relationships of obligation based on their lineage.

The theme of rights and obligations also appears in a few other interviews that Wilks’ conducted with Muḥammad Marhaba. For instance, in an interview conducted in Bobo-Dioulasso on 9 May 1966, Wilks begins with a long discussion on the children of Muṣṭafā Saghanughu. He further documents Muḥammad Marhaba’s chain of transmission in Qur’anic exegesis, which consists of prominent Saghanughu scholars from the region. In reference to *tafsīr*, Muḥammad Marhaba explains, “Up to this time I myself have taught *Tafsīr* to two hundreds and fourteen pupils.”<sup>80</sup> This statement indicates again the wide impact an individual scholar could have, and how they could link numerous students to their chains of transmission. In the process of documenting the diffusion of the Saghanughu family, Wilks also asks a range of different questions. For example, he asks, “What is the relationship between the Saghanughu and the Baghayughu?”<sup>81</sup> The Baghayughu or Baghayogo are a Soninke Muslim scholarly family who have long played a role in the transmission of Islamic knowledge from Mali throughout West Africa.<sup>82</sup> Wilks’ question centers on the relationship between two historically influential and important Muslim lineages, particularly in Burkina Faso where the interview was conducted. Muḥammad Marhaba’s response is quite interesting. He notes,

<sup>79</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 11 May 1966, FN/183: Interview with al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Marhaba and others.

<sup>80</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 9 May 1966, FN/181: Interview with al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Marhaba Saghanughu.

<sup>81</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 9 May 1966, FN/181: Interview with al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Marhaba Saghanughu.

<sup>82</sup> Andreas W. Massing, “Baghayogo: A Soninke Muslim Diaspora in the Mande World” *Cahiers d’Études Africaines* 44, Cahier 176 (2004): 887–922.

The Baghayughu and the Saghanughu are intimately connected. The Baghayughu Imam of Wagadugu died just recently and I was called to the funeral. But I did not go because I knew of your visit to Bobo-Dioulasso. But I would not go to Wagadugu to teach, because it is not my place.”<sup>83</sup>

After this statement, Wilks did not ask any further questions to clarify these points as the interview was interrupted by lunch. But what can be gleaned is this: despite the intimate relationship between these two lineages, it appears that they demarcate space in a specific way. While Muḥammad Marhaba could visit Wagadugu and also participate in a funeral, he could not go there to teach. Even though he was a scholar, his capacity to teach was restricted to certain locations, especially in relationship to the dominance of another scholarly lineage. Interestingly, in the chains of transmission that Wilks documents on the Saghanughu there is no evidence of Baghayogo scholars. These lineages largely had separate intellectual genealogies, and it is likely that in order to maintain that separateness they placed restrictions on who could teach and where. Thus, while mobility was the basic scaffolding of the transmission of knowledge, other cultural and social factors could place limitations on teaching.

After lunch, Wilks continues his interview on a brief discussion on the history of the Saghanughu in Bobo-Dioulasso. The story consists of numerous waves of migration of different groups, including the Watara who took political authority over Bobo-Dioulasso for a period from the former Sanu ruling lineage.<sup>84</sup> Muḥammad Marhaba notes that the Sanu are Bobo-Dyula and “the first Bobo to become Muslim was Chitere Sanu.”<sup>85</sup> Chitere’s son “‘Abd al-Qādir studied under the Saghanughu,” and eventually “he built the central mosque.”<sup>86</sup> The Saghanughu in this account play a role as teachers to the Sanu. But despite their role as teachers, Muḥammad Marhaba notes that a grandson of ‘Abd al-Qādir, “Ṣāliḥ Sanu, is imam of the central mosque today.”<sup>87</sup> Crucially, he notes that “the Saghanughu, as strangers, could not build the central mosque, but they helped and they taught.”<sup>88</sup> In this case, despite the prominence of the Saghanughu as

<sup>83</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 9 May 1966, FN/181: Interview with al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Marhaba Saghanughu.

<sup>84</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 9 May 1966, FN/181: Interview with al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Marhaba Saghanughu.

<sup>85</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 9 May 1966, FN/181: Interview with al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Marhaba Saghanughu.

<sup>86</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 9 May 1966, FN/181: Interview with al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Marhaba Saghanughu.

<sup>87</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 9 May 1966, FN/181: Interview with al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Marhaba Saghanughu.

<sup>88</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 9 May 1966, FN/181: Interview with al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Marhaba Saghanughu.

scholars in Kong, who migrated to Bobo-Dioulasso, the Sanu had established their authority by building the central mosque and laid claims to being the lineage of the *imāms*. The role of first-comers played an important role in the region, and, as a consequence, arriving first granted the Sanu certain privileges and rights, even if the Saghanughu were a much more firmly established scholarly lineage.<sup>89</sup> In this respect, an existing Muslim group curtailed the authority that the Saghanughu could have in this town. However, the Saghanughu did build their own mosque, which according to Muḥammad Marhaba was the first mosque. But again because the Saghanughu were strangers, despite their mosque being the first mosque, it was not designated as the central mosque, where Friday prayers were likely held.

Eventually, Wilks walks with Muḥammad Marhaba to the “Saghanughu quarters near the central mosque.”<sup>90</sup> In a diary entry, Wilks notes that the “Saghanughu quarters form a very large complex of buildings, with the mosque somewhere near the centre.”<sup>91</sup> He further explains that the famed al-Ḥājj ‘Umar Tall helped build the mosque while he was a student, and therefore, despite its smallness, the residents in the quarter do not wish to demolish it. Finally in reference to this mosque, Wilks also observes “they still start and finish *Tafsīr* classes in this mosque, though the sessions in between may be held elsewhere.”<sup>92</sup> His observations highlight that the Saghanughu play the essential role as transmitters of Islamic knowledge, and the mosque that they built is the site where the classes for Qur’anic exegesis begin. But there is also an acknowledgment that given the nature of the personalized nature of knowledge transmission, teaching also takes place outside of the mosque.

This brief glimpse on the Saghanughu highlights a history of migration and scholarship in places like Kong in the Ivory Coast, and Bobo Dioulasso and Dar al-Islam in Burkina Faso. Over time, the Saghanughu lineage came to play a central role in the transmission of Islamic knowledge and their intellectual genealogies reflect their influence in the region. At the same time, however, different members of the Saghanughu based on their seniority wielded different sets of authority among other Saghanughu.<sup>93</sup> Further the Saghanughu also established different forms of rights and obligations in

<sup>89</sup> For discussion on the authority of first occupants, see Mahir Saul and Patrick Royer, *West African Challenge to Empire: Culture and History in the Volta-Bani Anticolonial War* (Ohio University Press, 2002), especially chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>90</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 9 May 1966, FN/181: Interview with al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Marhaba Saghanughu.

<sup>91</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 9 May 1966, FN/181: Interview with al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Marhaba Saghanughu.

<sup>92</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 9 May 1966, FN/181: Interview with al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Marhaba Saghanughu.

<sup>93</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 9 May 1966, FN/181: Interview with al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Marhaba Saghanughu.

these various towns, and also had different levels of authority, while maintaining their roles as teachers. Clerical families like the Saghanughu also developed different sets of relationship with political elites, and this is a point that is further captured in Wilks' notes on several other scholarly lineages including the Kamaghatay and Timitay.

### *The Case of the Kamaghatay and Timitay*

At the early stages of his research in 1959, Wilks arrived in Namasa in present-day Burkina Faso to piece together the history of the important trading entrepôt Begho or Bighu. Since the fifteenth century, Muslim migrants and merchants had come to this region seeking gold, kola nuts, and salt.<sup>94</sup> When these itinerant populations eventually formed communities in different towns, such as Bonduku and Kong, Begho became a central node in linking them to merchants to the North and East in present-day Mali and Nigeria.<sup>95</sup> But in the mid-sixteenth century, Begho collapsed, and as a consequence several populations that had settled there, including Muslim scholarly families, dispersed across present-day Ghana and the Ivory Coast.<sup>96</sup>

On the collapse of Begho and the scattering of Muslim religious specialists, in a later interview, Wilks gathered information from Seku Khalidu Bamba in Bofie on 22 June 1966. The last *imām* of Begho was Limam Šāliḥ who migrated to Buna. On this point, Seku Khalidu explains that “when Limam Šāliḥ went from Bighu to Buna, the people of Buna saw that he was a very learned man. They made him *imām* of Buna, and he was *imām* there until he died.”<sup>97</sup> The common theme of the relationship between learning, authority, and migration is quite clear in this account. Specifically, an individual from Begho was able to establish himself in a completely different town because of his learning, and then his descendants continued to maintain authority in subsequent generations.

But the Bamba was not the only lineage to disperse from Begho. Seku Khalidu notes that there were actually “nine tribes with different *nasabs* [lineages].”<sup>98</sup> He continues and explains: “The first Banba. The second Kamaghatay. The third Timitay. The fourth Gbani. The fifth Jabaghatay.

<sup>94</sup> For a recent overview of the history of Begho based on archeological excavations, see Merrick Posnansky, “Begho: Life and Times,” *Journal of West African History* 1–2 (Fall 2015), 95–118; and Ivor Wilks, “The Northern Factor in Ashanti History: Begho and the Mande,” *Journal of African History* 2–1 (1961), 25–34.

<sup>95</sup> Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 411.

<sup>96</sup> Wilks, “The Transmission of Islamic Learning in Western Sudan,” 99.

<sup>97</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 22 June 1966, FN/1: Interview with Seku Khalidu Bamba.

<sup>98</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 22 June 1966, FN/1: Interview with Seku Khalidu Bamba.

The sixth Tarawiri. The seventh Kuribari. The eighth Watara. The ninth Kawntay which is Kamara.”<sup>99</sup> From Seku Khalidu’s account, these scholarly families also held authority in Begho on a rotating basis. He notes “the rule was going round all the nine sections.”<sup>100</sup> But a succession dispute, particularly among the Kamaghatay and a sub-group among the Gbani, the Kumbala, led to “war among themselves.”<sup>101</sup> Before its collapse, Begho was a center then not only of trade but also of scholarship.

This memory of Begho as a sacred place of scholarship is also evident from Seku Khalidu’s account. He notes that, “My father showed me where the mosque was in Bighu. He used to send me there to collect soil from the old mosque. We used it to make medicine and to pray with, like the pilgrims who come back with sand from the mosque of Medina.”<sup>102</sup> More than three hundred years after the collapse of Begho, the memory of its importance played a role in the practices of its migrants. In this case, there is a special emphasis placed on the soil of where the mosque in Begho once stood that continues to inform medicinal and ritual practices. Further, to emphasize the significance of Begho, Seku Khalidu draws a parallel between this mosque and the mosque of the Prophet Muḥammad in Medina, one of the most sacred sites of Islam.

Many of the lineages that Seku Khalidu refers to form a large part of Wilks’ research, and this is a testament to how, after the collapse of Begho through migration, many of its former scholarly families became quite influential elsewhere. This was certainly true for Namasa, which is a few kilometers away from the old town of Begho. In this regard, one of the first people that Wilks meets and subsequently interviews through an interpreter is Karamoko Ya’qūb b. Sa’id Kamaghatay.<sup>103</sup> With the collapse of Begho, Karamoko Ya’qūb explains that people are “scattered everywhere,” and therefore it is not difficult to find “Begho people in Kpon and Bonduku in the Ivory Coast, in Asiakwa and Fante in Gold Coast.”<sup>104</sup> The Kamaghatay lineage represents one group of “Begho people.” Exploring the history of their migration to Namasa highlights how itinerant populations transformed the political and social makeup of their new surroundings.

<sup>99</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 22 June 1966, FN/1: Interview with Seku Khalidu Bamba.

<sup>100</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 22 June 1966, FN/1: Interview with Seku Khalidu Bamba.

<sup>101</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 22 June 1966, FN/1: Interview with Seku Khalidu Bamba.

<sup>102</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 22 June 1966, FN/1: Interview with Seku Khalidu Bamba.

<sup>103</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 19 December 1959, FN/49: Interview with Karamoko Ya’qūb b. Sa’id Kamaghatay.

<sup>104</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 19 December 1959, FN/49: Interview with Karamoko Ya’qūb b. Sa’id Kamaghatay.

The migration of Begho people to Namasa had several important intellectual and political consequences. During Wilks' interview, Karamoko Ya'qūb explains some of these new dynamics and says,

In Namasa you have the chief's people and the karamoko's people. The chief's people are Hwela. The karamoko's people are kamaghatay. But we are all one people; the Kamaghatay are the karamokos for the Hwela. The Hwela ancestors came down from the sky at Kwame tenten. Then they moved here...it is the Kamaghatay who are the limams for the Hwela. Yūsuf Kamaghatay was the first limam. He came back from Mecca and built the mosque here.<sup>105</sup>

In describing the origins of Namasa, Karamoko Ya'qūb highlights the migration of two different groups of people and their different roles in the town – in this case, the Hwela who migrated from Kwame Tenten (Twin Hills) to Namasa. They arrived before the Kamaghatay, established themselves as the chiefs of Namasa, and subsequently held political authority over the town. While Karamoko Ya'qūb does not explain what other populations existed in the town and what their roles and obligations were in relationship to the Hwela, the arrival of the Kamaghatay put them in the position to establish themselves as the *karamokos* (clerics) of the town and serve as the *limams* (*imāms*) for the Hwela. As the *imāms* of Namasa, members of the Kamaghatay lineage would likely be responsible for leading prayers, offering religious council, making legal rulings (in the absence of appointed jurists), teaching and presiding over religious ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, and naming ceremonies. In this example, like elsewhere in West Africa, there was an interdependent relationship between the Hwela and the Kamaghatay – but also the emergence of different spheres of authority.<sup>106</sup> Specifically, one group wielded political authority while the other group carved out an additional, new sphere of religious authority.

But while minority Muslim populations have long created reciprocal and interdependent relationship with non-Muslim ruling elites in West Africa, the case of Namasa is more complex. Though the Hwela maintained their traditional role as chiefs, at some point they had also converted to Islam. On this topic, during Wilks' interview, Karamoko Ya'qūb cites the existence of two different books, one in Arabic, and the other in English.<sup>107</sup> Wilks was

<sup>105</sup> Ivor Wilks, "Conversations," 19 December 1959, FN/49: Interview with Karamoko Ya'qūb b. Sa'id Kamaghatay.

<sup>106</sup> For a discussion on this point in Korogho, Ivory Coast, see Robert Launay, *Beyond the Stream: Islam and Society in a West Africa Town* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>107</sup> Ivor Wilks, "Conversations," 19 December 1959, FN/49: Interview with Karamoko Ya'qūb b. Sa'id Kamaghatay.



granted permission to view and copy the English text, *History of Namasa*, which is a collection of oral historical accounts compiled by an unknown author. The text is rich in details about different wars the Hwela had with their neighbors, and it also gives an account of several Namasa chiefs, including their important diplomatic roles in relation to trade and agricultural production. One telling passage of the text reads, “The Namasa tribe has now converted to Mohammedanism, but succession to the Stool is matrilineal, while ordinary Mohammedan inheritance is by patrilineal.”<sup>108</sup> This description highlights that even though the Hwela converted to Islam, their conversion did not alter their traditional political structure. Instead, the Hwela simply absorbed and reconfigured Islam into their older social and political system, and thus chieftaincy continued to pass through matrilineal descent.

The *History of Namasa* is silent on the presence of the Kamaghatay in Namasa, but Wilks’ subsequent ethnographic work and interviews with Limam Kara Imoru and Karamoko Ya’qūb in 1962 provide additional details on their history. Describing his own genealogy, Limam Kara explains how he is the seventh *imām* of Namasa. He details several of the previous *imāms*, and how they lived, ultimately tracing his lineage back to the important figure-head of Yūsuf Kamaghatay who was the first *imām* of the town approximately four hundred years earlier.<sup>109</sup> Yūsuf Kamaghatay himself is reported to have had extraordinary mobility. He performed the pilgrimage in Mecca and visited Baghdad where he was initiated into the Qadiri Sufi order.<sup>110</sup> But while there were already Muslims present in Namasa, the arrival of Yūsuf Kamaghatay added a new dimension. He is reported to have established the Qadiri order, as well as the central mosque, which at the time of Wilks’ interview remained a significant part of Muslim life in the town.<sup>111</sup> Wilks’ interlocutors suggest that while the Qadiri order remained important in the town, there subsequently emerged adherents of the Tijani Sufi order. But to ward of any speculation that the relationship between the followers of these different Sufi brotherhoods was disharmonious, they also note the following: “But we all use the same mosque for prayer.”<sup>112</sup> With the building of this

<sup>108</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 19 December 1959, FN/49: Interview with Karamoko Ya’qūb b. Sa’id Kamaghatay.

<sup>109</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 8 February 1962, FN/21: Interview with Limam Kara Imoru and Karamoko Ya’qūb Kamaghatay.

<sup>110</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 8 February 1962, FN/21: Interview with Limam Kara Imoru and Karamoko Ya’qūb Kamaghatay.

<sup>111</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 8 February 1962, FN/21: Interview with Limam Kara Imoru and Karamoko Ya’qūb Kamaghatay. In a different interview Karamoko Ya’qūb suggests that “the Kamaghatay were the first Muslims in Namasa and now the Hwela have followed them. Islam was brought here from Begho,” see Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 14 May 1962, FN/259: Interview with Karamoko Ya’qūb b. Sa’id Kamaghatay.

<sup>112</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 8 February 1962, FN/21: Interview with Limam Kara Imoru and Karamoko Ya’qūb.

mosque, the Kamaghatay lineage became established as the *imāms* of Namasa.

After Wilks interviewed Karamoko Ya'qūb for the first time in 1959, he traveled to Bonduku in the Ivory Coast the following day. This is also where he first met by chance al-Ḥājj 'Uthmān Boyo, who was studying under al-Ḥājj Quds of the Timitay family and was also known as Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Timite.<sup>113</sup> On reflecting on this meeting, Wilks notes,

I walked around the streets of Bonduku, admiring the traditional architecture and looking particularly at the mosques, some of which were in the old Sudanese style and some in a modern style that reminded me of the smaller mosques in Cairo. I was approached by an elderly Muslim who opened a conversation in French.<sup>114</sup>

The conversation soon turned to English, and after learning that Wilks was interested in the history of Islam in the region, al-Ḥājj 'Uthmān offered his services, and three years later he officially became his research assistant.

In Bonduku, Wilks met with Limam Baba 'Ali Timite. He explains, "He was extremely aged but a very big and well-built man, bronze in colour. He had to be carried out from his room and assisted in order to sit up and greet me. A number of his elders gathered around him. They told me that the limam was over 130 years of age."<sup>115</sup> During this meeting, it was the deputy *imām* Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Timite who spoke on his behalf. Wilks notes that after the interview this figure "wanted to walk round the town with me and show me the mosques. He was greeted by everyone in the streets with great deference."<sup>116</sup> He informed Wilks that Bonduku was a town that was roughly 550 years old. But he also explained, "Don't write that it was less because then other towns will claim to be older than we are."<sup>117</sup> There is no subsequent explanation on this statement, but it may be that the date of when a town was established mattered in how people perceived it as a center of learning and authority. In describing the population of the town, he further explained, "the Muslims of the town came from different places. Some of

<sup>113</sup> Ivor Wilks, "Conversations," 20 December 1959, FN/106: Interview with Limam Baba 'Ali Timite and Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Timite.

<sup>114</sup> Ivor Wilks, "Conversations," 20 December 1959, FN/106: Interview with Limam Baba 'Ali Timite and Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Timite.

<sup>115</sup> Ivor Wilks, "Conversations," 20 December 1959, FN/106: Interview with Limam Baba 'Ali Timite and Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Timite.

<sup>116</sup> Ivor Wilks, "Conversations," 20 December 1959, FN/106: Interview with Limam Baba 'Ali Timite and Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Timite.

<sup>117</sup> Ivor Wilks, "Conversations," 20 December 1959, FN/106: Interview with Limam Baba 'Ali Timite and Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Timite.

them came straight here from Mande, but others came from Begho.”<sup>118</sup> There is no additional explanation of who these other Muslims were in the account. But despite the different migratory pathways of the Muslim residents in Bonduku, like Namasa, according to this account there is only one lineage that had established itself as the lineage of the town’s *imāms*. In this regard, Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Timite explains “the Timite are the family of the limams. They came first from Mande to Begho, and from there to Bonduku.”<sup>119</sup> In this example, the authority of the Timitay was partly attached to the fact that they were the first Muslim population to migrate to Bonduku and establish themselves.

But an account from a member of the Kamaghatay paints a different, and rather, unclear picture. On 17 June 1966 in Legon, Wilks interviewed Karamoko Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm to get a better sense of a manuscript he acquired in Bonduku. The work, *Isnād al-Sūdan*, was written by Karamoko ‘Abbās Kamaghatay of Bonduku and largely traces his history. After discussing this manuscript, where Karamoko Yūsuf also translates parts of this work, Wilks asks him whether he knows the details of another manuscript that has a list of *imāms*. Karamoko Yūsuf replies, “Yes. It is a list of the Kamaghatay *imāms* of Bonduku. The Kamaghatay ruled Bonduku and they were the *imāms*. The Timitay were on their way to Mecca and they stayed at Bonduku and opened a school there.”<sup>120</sup> The testimony seems to contradict the information that Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Timite provided a few years earlier on *imāms* of the Timitay, a position he himself held. But in that interview, there is no additional information that can be gleaned about the Timitay and their relationship to other Muslim lineages in Bonduku, and their relationship to political authority. However, Wilks notes that after Karamoko Yūsuf made this claim, “al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān Boyo said that the Kamaghatay own the Friday Mosque of Bonduku, though the Timitay are the *imāms*. Karamoko Yūsuf seemed unhappy about this, but said that he will tell us the full story later, but that now he has to go to Friday prayer.”<sup>121</sup> This short testimony does not completely clarify the position of these two lineages in Bonduku, but it does seem to suggest that they had different sets of religious authority in the town. Before the interview ended, Karamoko Yūsuf did, however, acknowledge the influence of Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Timite in Bonduku stating that “[most] Bonduku Qādiriyya go through al-Ḥājj Quds,” but nonetheless to

<sup>118</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 20 December 1959, FN/106: Interview with Limam Baba ‘Ali Timite and Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Timite.

<sup>119</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 20 December 1959, FN/106: Interview with Limam Baba ‘Ali Timite and Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Timite.

<sup>120</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 17 June 1966, FN/71: Interview with Karamoko Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm, of Bonduku and Domaa Ahenkro.

<sup>121</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 17 June 1966, FN/71: Interview with Karamoko Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm, of Bonduku and Domaa Ahenkro.

differentiate the Kamaghatay from the Timitay he also states “our *isnad* for Qādiriyya goes through Kintampo and Begho.”<sup>122</sup>

This example of the Timitay and Kamaghatay in Bonduku reveals how Muslim lineages that dispersed from Begho sometimes made competing claims to authority and created differing political and social relationships in their new settings. But this is not the only example. Wilks conducted an interview with Imām Adama Timitay and others in Maluwe, a Gonja town in Ghana, on 10 April 1964, which provides a different perspective on the relationship between the Timitay and Kamaghatay. In reply to Wilks’ question on the lineage of the *imāms* of Maluwe, Imām Adama Timitay explains, “The *imāms* are always drawn from the Timitay family. Maluwe comes under the chief of Bole, but the *imam* of Bole does not make the Maluwe *imāms*. Maluwe makes its own *imāms* for Maluwe. The Bole *imāms* are from the Kamaghatay; the Maluwe *imāms* are Timitay.”<sup>123</sup> In this short quotation, there are two adjacent towns, Maluwe and Bole, and the former comes under the political jurisdiction of the latter. Yet there are two scholarly families that represent the *imāms* of each town, respectively. Imām Adama Timitay specifies that the Kamaghatay *imāms* of Bole do not have authority in selecting the *imāms* of Maluwe, but rather the selection of *imāms* falls under the jurisdiction of the Timitay. These two lineages seem to mark their religious authority separately through spatial segregation, while coming under the influences of the same political authority.

While this account does not give additional information on the Kamaghatay, the role of the Timitay may have been a role ascribed to them from the very beginnings of the establishment of this town. In this respect, Imām Adama Timitay explains, “The Maluwe Timitay are the same as the Bonduku Timitay. They all come from Mande to Bego and Bonduku.”<sup>124</sup> But in suggesting that they are the same Timitay from Begho, he also dispels that the Timitay in Muwale are direct descendants from those in Bonduku. Instead, he highlights a different history of migration of members of the Timitay to Anyima in Ghana.<sup>125</sup> Then he explains, “The Timitay were in Anyima when Jakpa sent for them. Jakpa established them as *imāms* of Maluwe.”<sup>126</sup> In this example, the Timitay had established themselves in a different town. But a chief “Jakpa” who is likely Sumaila Ndewura Jakpa, the

<sup>122</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 17 June 1966, FN/71: Interview with Karamoko Yūsuf b. Ibrāhīm, of Bonduku and Domaa Ahenkro.

<sup>123</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 10 April 1964, FN/110: Interview with Imām Adama Timitay et al.

<sup>124</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 10 April 1964, FN/110: Interview with Imām Adama Timitay et al.

<sup>125</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 10 April 1964, FN/110: Interview with Imām Adama Timitay et al.

<sup>126</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 10 April 1964, FN/110: Interview with Imām Adama Timitay et al.

founding figure of the Gonja kingdom, asked them to come to Maluwe and established their position and authority.<sup>127</sup>

The role that chiefs would often play in establishing clerical lineages in their towns is summarized well by al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān in a different interview he helped conduct with Wilks. This was especially true when Muslim scholars crossed through different territories on their journey to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. In a diary entry after this interview with al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān, Wilks notes,

Al-Ḥājj ‘Uthmān Boyo remarked that people often stay many years at one place when they are making the pilgrimage. Limam Bakuri of Wa stayed about 30 years at Wenchi. Often a chief would keep you for years to make prayers for him, before allowing you to proceed. Sometimes a chief would not let you go at all, like the Sissay in Aalembele. Shehu Timitay was kept as a malam in Bonduku, or Begho, when he was passing there on the pilgrimage.”<sup>128</sup>

The religious and spiritual authority that chiefs perceived that Muslim scholars had could inhibit their mobility. In these instances, Muslim scholars would settle in a town, with their religious roles enshrined through the protection of ruling elites.

The examples of Bonduku, Maluwe, and Bole highlight how members of the Kamaghatay and Timitay migrated from Begho and established themselves as the lineage of the *imāms* in new towns. As the lineage of the *imāms*, they wielded religious authority over their Muslim communities, but they did not necessarily have political authority in their respective towns. Instead, the exercising of political authority often fell into the hands of a separate lineage, which often also represented chiefs. The *imāms* function as prayer leaders and teachers, and the chiefs overlook the daily administrative affairs of the town. Further, these new political and religious configurations were the consequence of Muslim migration, which introduced a new sphere of authority while ensuring existing political institutions, like chieftaincy, remained intact.

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Wilks’ notes demonstrate the emergence of numerous scholarly families. While it is true that any individuals could become part of the circuits of knowledge transmission and then perform their religious authority, it was more often the case that religious authority eventually coalesced within

<sup>127</sup> J. A. Braimah et al., *History and Traditions of the Gonja* (University of Calgary Press, 1997).

<sup>128</sup> Ivor Wilks, “Conversations,” 12 May 1966, FN/187: Interview Al-Ḥājj Muḥammad Marhaba.

specific scholarly lineages. This was certainly the case of the Saghanughu, who established themselves in Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast. This was also the case of numerous lineages that scattered after the collapse of Begho, including the Kamaghatay and Timitay. The authority of these different scholarly lineages was intertwined within the specific towns that they had settled in. Yet what forms of authority they had largely depended on the type of relationships they created with others, as well as when and for what reasons they had migrated. Their authority was in relation to other groups, including other Muslims. Almost always, however, these Muslims scholarly groups carved out their own sphere of authority that was different and distinct from political authority.

## Conclusion

Ivor Wilks' field notes "Conversations about the past" capture aspects of his research in West Africa, particularly during the 1960s. They highlight his eclectic interests on Asante and Muslim populations in Ghana and the greater Volta region (including in Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso), as well as in Niger. His focus was to document the histories of many of the collectivities that he encountered in numerous towns, with a particular eye to local political structures and relationships, as well as document their social and cultural life. These notes of hundreds of pages of interviews, ethnographic data, anecdotes, diary entries, as well as Arabic manuscripts present a treasure of immense value for contemporary historians. This material is similar to the largely untapped collections of other pioneering figures on the study of Muslim societies in African history, such as Louis Brenner (Michigan State University), Charles Stewart (University of Illinois – Urbana Champaign), Mervyn Hiskett (Northwestern University), and David Robinson (Michigan State University). These hidden collections represent enormous potential and a useful starting point to ask new questions on West African history.

In the case of Wilks' notes, a select reading on his research on Muslim communities specifically reveals the important relationship between mobility, knowledge, and authority in the formation of individuals and collectivities in West Africa. Taking into consideration the personalized nature of Islamic knowledge transmission, travel was central aspect of Islamic learning. Students such as al-Ḥājj 'Umar of Kete Krayke and al-Ḥājj 'Uthmān Boyo traversed great distances to study and, in the process, acquired authorizations that made them part of multiple intellectual genealogies. Depending on their mastery over Islamic knowledge, they subsequently established themselves with authority and prestige. The mobility of both students and scholars crisscrossing through the landscape of West Africa and beyond helped establish highly complex intellectual networks, with many different nodes of transmission and points of convergence. Capturing this emphasis on

mobility, one of Wilks' main interlocutors on the Saghanughu, Muḥammad Marhaba, quite aptly said, "You know, knowledge never stays in one place."<sup>129</sup>

These documents also reveal how different scholarly lineages became the brokers of Islamic knowledge and authority. The migrations and dispersion of these families to different towns came to define their important roles in establishing mosques, teaching, and offering religious services as *imāms*. Lineage and kinship ties, for example of the Saghanughu, Kamaghatay, Timitay, became the basis of corporate identities of authority that structured a variety of different, as well as competing, relationships with others. Taking the numerous details Wilks provides, mobility works on many different levels in this region of West Africa, as different lineages and scholarly families became established as important nodes for both the transmission of knowledge as well as the sites of religious power.

At the same time, the relationship between migration, religious authority, and political authority is quite complex. In any number of towns there can be waves of migration over a period, and consequently there can be a hierarchy of religious and/or political authority, and the existence of multiple different competing lineages. In these towns there were different spheres and layers of authority that become interdependent. Yet it is hard to glean exactly what processes were involved in creating these interrelationships, what forms of negotiations took place, and how exactly these lineages became authoritative in the first place only from Wilks notes.

While the documents in "Conversations about the past" open new avenues of inquiry and questions, the shifts in topics within a single interview, an emphasis on some issues over others based on Wilks' research interests, and scant allusions to internal dynamics with the various communities he documents mean that there are numerous gaps. To learn more about, for instance, the processes of knowledge transmission, the construction of authority, and the negotiation between political and religious elites in these different towns requires additional follow-up ethnographic and oral historical research, as well as an engagement with locally produced Arabic primary source material. In terms of the latter, there are numerous Arabic sources, including those Wilks collected and copied as part of his work with the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, which are now on deposit at Northwestern University. There are also new initiatives to catalogue and make available previously unknown collections, such as Moussa Konate's recent project of identifying and cataloguing privately held Arabic manuscripts from Ivory Coast, including Bonduku.<sup>130</sup> Thus an engagement

<sup>129</sup> Ivor Wilks, "Conversations," 31 July 1965, FN/179: Interview with al-Hajj Muhammad Marhaba Saghanughu.

<sup>130</sup> Moussa Konate, "Pilot project for endangered Arabic manuscripts in Ivory Coast (EAP915)," British Library, Endangered Archives Programme, <https://doi.org/10.15130/EAP915>, (accessed March 22, 2023).

with Wilks' field notes, and pushing his insights in different directions with additional contextual information and details acquired from new research has the potential to make tremendous contributions to the study of Islam in Africa.

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