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The Autobiography of
***Alfa* Umar ibn Sayyid 't-Turuudi:**
As Anthropological Evidence of the Rights for Self-
Determination for Enslaved African Muslims

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ وَسَلَّمَ تَسْلِيمًا

For more than 9 centuries, the *Turudbe'* Fulbe' have been the purveyors of social reform and nation formation throughout the entire region of the *bilad's-sudan*. What we mean by the *bilad's-sudan*, are those lands that lie between the Atlantic Ocean and the Red Sea, and what is between the beginnings of the *Sahel* savannah lands below the Sahara until the beginning of the tropical forest. However the origin of this Fulbe' clan have been cast in a veil of mystery mainly due to the diverse opinions among ancient and contemporary scholars concerning them. Furthermore, the various names given to these people do nothing to remove this enigma. For example: *Takruur*, *Tukulor*, *Turunkawa*, and *Turudbe'* (sing. *Turuudi*), are all names referring to one people. The Arab historians referred to them as *Takruri*, in spite of the fact that this cognomen today refers to every Black from West Africa. In Franco-phone West Africa, the Wolof called them *Tukulor*. Among the Hausa speaking people, they are called *Turunkawa*. However, the Fulbe' refer to themselves as *Turudbe'* in their own language or *Turudiyya* in Arabic. The last two cognomens are how they are known among the rest of the Fulani clans as well. What is key here, is that this *Turudbe'* Fulbe' clan played a key role as leaders of religion and purveyors of intellectual reform throughout the regions of Africa known as the *bilad's-sudan*. The comprehension of this function played by the *Turudbe'* is a *sine qua non* to an understanding and apprehension of movements and events in the *bilad's-sudan*, especially during the 19th century.

Having said this, it is fitting here to mention what the *Turudbe'* say about themselves, despite the fact that many of the ethnic groups among the Sudanic peoples customarily give fabricated lineages to establish 'nobility' of origin for its people. The significance of examining the *Turudbe'* Fulbe's view of themselves is to analyze how they construct their identity and how they employ that identity construct for their own survival. Their Self Knowledge helps them to return to the idealization of their cultural values, myths and heroes in order to uphold and reaffirm their collective personality.¹ Waziri Junayd ibn Muhammad al-Bukhari, drawing from earlier sources of the origin of the Fulbe', combines them into a synthesis of opinion. He said regarding their origin:

"It is said that the origin of the *Turudbe'* are from the Jews. It is said that they are from the Christians. It is said that they are from the Bambara from among the Sudanese who came and settled between the Nile and Euphrates rivers. It is said that they are from a band of the Banu Israel who relocated from the region of Sinai to the lands of Tuur. It is for this reason they are called *Turudbe'*. Tuur is a land in the western part of Yemen. The most sound opinion is that they are the descendents of Ruum ibn `Esau ibn Is'haq ibn Ibrahim, (upon them be peace).² They settled near the meeting of the two seas."³

¹ Joseph K. Adjaye, pp. 6-7.

² According to the Bible in Genesis 36: 10 the name of this son was Reu'el who was the son of Bash'emath the daughter of Isma'il. However in Genesis 28: 9 the name of this daughter of Isma'il that `Esau took as his wife was Ma`halath. In 1 Chronicles 1: 35 Reu'el had four sons: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. Allegedly, it is from one of these sons that the *Turudbe'* Fulbe' descended.

Though some contemporary scholars dispute the above account, yet John Willis points out “this need not be taken as a fatal objection to their claims of Arabic ancestry” or even for that matter Hebrew ancestry, as well.⁴ Here in this context, the *Turudbe* traces their lineage and origins back through the two sacred communities the Jews and the Christians and then on to the sacred covenant of Abraham, the father of the People of the Book. This is significant because the narrative of the ‘covenant’, the ‘promise’ and the ‘return’ becomes a motivating factor in the self-image of the *Turudbe*. This identity construct becomes what Ibn Khaldun would call the point of solidarity (*asabiyya*) that binds the *Turudbe* and provides them with a philosophy in their historical consciousness. It gives them their reason for being and what Nietzsche would call ‘the will to power’. Abdullahi Dan Fuduye’ places *Turudbe*’ genesis deep within the ethos of the Bani Israel when he said:

“The origin of the entire *Fullaatiyeen* (Fulbe’) ethnicity comes from the geographical area of Mount Sinai (*Tuur Sina*). They thereafter persisted in migrating from place to place until they reached the lands of the far west (*aqsa’l-maghrib*) and to the lands that Allah ta’ala had willed for them to reach.”⁵

This positing of the *Turudbe*’ in the sacred mount where the Torah was originally revealed to Prophet Musa (Moses) provides them with the mechanism for organizing their collective experience around the Creator and infuses them with divine purpose and destiny. This cohesive self-image will be played out repeatedly throughout the long history of the *Turudbe*’ in every region of Africa where they settled. This concept will reemerge again among the enslaved descendents of the *Turudbe*’ in the Americas as well.

Building on the Abrahamic line signification, Abdullahi Dan Fuduye’ traces the *Turudbe*’ to ar-Ruum who was a descendent of both Is’haq and Isma’il, the two sons of Abraham; thus, assuring for his ethnicity a complete fulfillment of the ‘covenant’ given by the Creator to Abraham. Abdullahi says:

“You also know that this *ar-Ruum* is the son of `Esau ibn Is’haq ibn Ibrahim, upon them be peace. His mother was Nasmāt the daughter of Isma’il ibn Ibrahim, upon him be peace. Dhu’n-Nasibeen said in his *Kitab’t-Tanweer*: “Isma’il fathered twelve boys and one girl and it was from his descendents that all the Arabs descended. When Isma’il approached death he bequeathed to his brother, Is’haq, that his son, `Esau should be married to his daughter, and from their marriage *ar-Ruum* was born. *Ar-Ruum* was yellowish in color for which reason his children were called the Banu al-Asfar.”⁶

It is interesting to note that the *Turudbe*’ trace their lineage to two sons whose birthright has been in question. One being Isma’il, the first born son of Abraham and the African/Nubian woman, Hajar; and the other was `Esau, the grandson of Abraham through his second born son, Is’haq. According to the Bible, `Esau, the first born of Is’haq, first had his birthright taken by his younger brother, Jacob.⁷ Then through the deception their mother, Jacob was able to attain the blessings that was destined for `Esau.⁸ Isma’il was the first born of Ibrahim, yet Is’haq is said by the Jews to have received the ‘covenant of blessing’ from his father. Isma’il, on the other hand was overlooked and treated like an unwanted and rejected son. This is significant, because it lays the foundation for two other identity-constructs: that of the ‘lost tribe’ and ‘the

³ Here reference is made to the southern Arabian peninsular where the Red sea and the Indian Ocean converge. This would place them around the ancient Arab lands of *Tuur*. [See Waziri Junayd ibn Muhammad al-Bukhari, *Dabt’l-Multaqaataat*, f. 3.]

⁴ John Willis, *Studies in West African Islamic History*, p. 23.

⁵ Abdullahi Dan Fuduye’, *Aslu ‘l-Falaatiyeen*, unpublished manuscript in the possession of the author, f. 2. [See Appendix 3 for full translation].

⁶ Abdullahi Dan Fuduye’, *Kitaab an-Nasab*, unpublished manuscript in possession of author, ff. 1-2.

⁷ King James Version Bible, Genesis, 25: 29-34.

⁸ Ibid, Genesis, 27: 30-40.

rejected stone'. The Lost Tribe referent is a key element in the identity construct for the Bani Israel because it opens the hope of future redemption and affirmation after rejection and spiritual fall of the scattered tribes. The referent of the Rejected Stone takes its origin from a people who were despised and discarded due to some outward or inward imperfection, yet the Creator 'chose' them, redeemed them and made them the Corner Stone of a 'New Spiritual World'. This signification will be seen throughout history of the *Turudbe*, especially in the Diaspora of the Americas. This self-image laid the foundation for the individual and collective quest for authenticity among the *Turudbe*, giving them a common historical experience that provided them with a frame of reference that was stable and continuous.⁹

One of my *Turudbe*' teachers in the Republic of the Sudan, Bashir ibn Ahmad ibn Modi Abdu in his *an-Nasab wa 's-Sahar* attempted to clarify this discrepancy in the following story when he related the story of the *Turudbe*' encounter with the armies of the Companions of Muhammad:

"The *Turudbe*' said to them: 'We have recognized the Truth and we will adhere to it.' Then the armies of the Companions waged war against the Sironkulle' and when they intended to depart, the leader of the *Turudbe*' said: 'You came to us with the religion, while we were ignorant. Therefore leave with us someone who can teach us.' They then left behind 'Uqba ibn 'Aamir. Some say it was 'Uqba ibn Nafi', which is the correct view. He settled with them and taught them the religion and the divine law (*shari'a*). Then the leader of the *Turudbe*' married his daughter, Bajjemanga to 'Uqba."¹⁰

Junayd cites that the *Turudbe*' migrated to the west until they reached the lands of Futa Toro. He further explains that when 'Uqba ibn Nafi' led the armies of the Companions of Muhammad across North Africa in 675 C.D. during 'Amr ibn al-'Aas's rule of Egypt.¹¹ He established the great learning center of Qayrawan. He then moved southward to Ghadames, the lands of the Berber, the Suus al-Aqsa, Widaan and from there he led his armies as far as the frontiers of the Sudan, where he encountered the people of Takruur.¹² According to Waziri Junayd:

"The *Amir* (leader) of the *Turudbe*' married his daughter, whose name was Bajjemanga, to 'Uqba ibn Nafi' and she soon gave birth to four sons: Da'atu, Naasa, Waya, and Wa'araba."¹³

Here Waziri Junayd demonstrates that the emergence of the *Turudbe*' was from among the Fulbe' people because of a merger with the Arabs. He implies that their descent from 'Uqba ibn Nafi' gave them their militant Islamic outlook and made them more sedentary than the rest of the Fulbe'. The *Turudbe*' were known for not herding cattle as is the custom of the remainder of the Fulbe' and for taking up the profession of Islam, similar to the Zawaya clerical groups among the Tuareg and Berber. It is not surprising that both the Zawaya and the *Turudbe*' claim descent from 'Uqba ibn Nafi' and that both ethnic groups initially acted as clients to more militant ethnic groups around them.¹⁴

Finally, *Shaykh* Bashir ibn Ahmad gives a summary of the identity construct of the *Turudbe*' Fulbe' people, when he said:

"The *Fulaaniyun* as we said previously are Arabs from the direction of their ancestor, Uqba. The Arabs are originally from Isma'il ibn Ibrahim. From the direction of their paternal uncles, the *Turuuudiya* are from Ruum ibn Esau ibn Is'haq ibn Ibrahim and from the direction of Nasmāt, the mother of Ruum. She

⁹ Joseph K. Adjaye, p. 15.

¹⁰ Bashir ibn Ahmad, ff. 6-7.

¹¹ Ibid. f. 10.

¹² Ibid. f. 13.

¹³ Waziri Junayd, *Dabt'l-Multaqataat*, f. 7.

¹⁴ John Willis, *Studies in West African Islamic History*, pp. 3-13.

too is from Isma`il ibn Ibrahim, upon him and our Prophet be blessings and peace.”¹⁵

The identity construct of the *Turudbe’ Fulbe’*, thus arrives at its origin, where they descend from the sacred line of Abraham, from his two sons, Isma`il and Is’haq. The *Turudbe’* further amalgamated their line back into the line of the source house of Isma`il, to whom the last Messenger and Prophet, would be sent, the House of Quraysh. This assured them the right to self-rule and independence and the right of autonomous leadership among the Muslims. The identity construct of the *Turudbe’* being as it is connected to the Abrahamic line includes the blessings of the covenant, but also comprises the promise of affliction. This is a reflection again on the concept of the ‘tried stone’ and the concept of ‘sacrifice’ that is so essential in the identity construct of the Abrahamic tradition. The idea of rejection and being made a ‘stumbling block’ for the nations comprise the core belief system of the Bani Israel and it is reflected in the supreme sacrifice that Abraham was called upon by Allah to perform. This self-sacrifice becomes the means by which nations will be judged and rewarded. The same stone that was a stumbling block for many and was rejected by oppressive nations would become the ‘corner stone’ of a New World. This identity construct becomes the most powerful element of defense in the face of social and cultural aggression. The oppression itself becomes a form of purification, edification, atonement and preparation for a new just and equitable social order. The Bible narrates this affliction in the Book of Genesis: “And He said to Abram: ‘Know of a surety that your seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them for four hundred years. And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.’”¹⁶ The sojourn of the Bani Isra’il in bondage in Egypt was only one aspect of the fulfillment of Divine prophecy. In order for the prophecy to be truly fulfilled all of the “seed of Abraham” would of necessity have to go through the same purifying fire of exile, bondage and oppression. They would remain in this condition until the return of the Messiah of the house of Abraham who said: “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Isra’il.”¹⁷

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¹⁵ Bashir ibn Ahmad, f. 12.

¹⁶ Bible – Genesis: 15:13-14.

¹⁷ Bible, Mathew – 15:24. King James Version.



Fig. 1: Alfa Umar ibn Sayyid

We come now to the illustrious and benevolent *Turudbe'* Muslim, **Alfa Umar ibn Sayyid**.¹⁸ Perhaps more than anyone else among the enslaved *Turudbe'* *Fulbe'* descendents of the Abrahamic line, Umar constitutes the best example of the persistence of an identity construct because of the extensive Arabic writing he has bequeathed to us. There is much controversy connected with him, because the Anglo-American writers have claimed that he had abandoned Islam and accepted Christianity. However, when careful examination is made of his writings, the evidence proves the contrary. Umar ibn Sayyid was born in 1770 in *Futa Toro*. Futa Toro was the original home of the *Fulbe'* speaking ethnic groups, generally known as *Tukulor* or *Turudbe'*. He was born as he said in his *Autobiography*: "The place of my birth was Futa Toro (which lay) between the two rivers"¹⁹ This region was for many centuries under the sovereignty of the Takruur, Malian and Songhay empires, respectively. With the Moroccan/Portuguese invasion and sacking of the Songhay empire in 1592, many *Turudbe'* speaking scholars took up the banner of *jihād* and attempted to establish Islamic government throughout the regions of the *bilad's-sudan* in general and in Futa in particular. From 1599 until 1670 the Denianke *Fulbe'* ethnicity ruled the area. The spiritual leader at that time was a *Qaadiri Imam* named Malik Sy. The decline of the Denianke was the result of the European slave trade.

The region of *Bundu* is the southern most tip of *Futa Toro* which lies on the west bank of the Faleme' River. Islamic learning was originally brought into the region of Bundu as well as Niokholo and Dentilia by the *Jakhanke'* clerical communities coming from Diakha-Bambukha.²⁰ The *Imam* who originally established Islamic learning in this region was none other than the famous *al-Hajj Salim Suware'*. It is from him and his many students that the transmission of the *Muwatta* of *Imam Malik*, *Tafseer 'l-Jalalayn* and the *as-Shifa* of *Qadi Iyad* were transmitted in the entire region of *Futa Toro* and *Futa Jallon*.²¹ In the region of Bundu at the central town of Didecoto, reside two grandsons of *al-Hajj Salim*: Shaykh Abdullah and *Shaykh Ture'* Fode where this learning tradition still persist.²² Later, *Futa Jallon* became a magnet for learned scholars and Arabic literacy where more than 60% of the inhabitants were versed in the Arabic language. Education in this region was propagated by the famous Saalamiyya families who spread the *Qaadiriya Tareeqa* throughout Guinea, Senegal and Gambia and traced their ancestry to Umar ibn 'l-Khataab, may Allah be pleased with

¹⁸ See his picture in figure 1 in the Appendix.

¹⁹ Umar ibn Sayyid, *Autobiography*, digital copy of the original Arabic manuscript in possession of author, folio 6.

²⁰ Nehemia Levtzion, "Islam in the Bilad al-Sudan to 1800", *The History of Islam in Africa*, edit Nehemia Levtzion & Randall L. Pouwels, (Athens, University of Ohio Press, 2000), pp. 79-80.

²¹ Ivor Wilks, "The Juula and the Expansion of Islam in the Forest", *The History of Islam in Africa*, edit Nehemia Levtzion & Randall L. Pouwels, (Athens, University of Ohio Press, 2000), pp. 98-101.

²² Ronald A. T. Judy, *Dis-Forming the American Canon: Affrican-Arabic Slave Naratives and Their Vernacular*, (University of Minnesota Press, London, 1993), pp. 168-170.

him. It was under the shadow of this great reform and intellectual tradition that Umar ibn Sayyid received his 25 years of training and instruction. He began his formal education of memorization of the *Quran* at age 6 in 1776 and by 1801 at age 31; he had completed an exhaustive and thorough Islamic education. There is no doubt, when we compare his education with the curriculum laid out by one of his contemporaries, another enslaved Muslim, Lamin Kebbe', that Umar had reached the level of *Alfa* or *al-faqih* (jurist).²³ At this level Umar ibn Sayyid probably returned to his home to teach children the *Quran*, act as *kaatib* (scribe) for senior jurist, enhance his knowledge with the senior scholars, enter the higher esoteric training in the *Qaadiyya* brotherhood, and assist the *Almami* Abd'l-Qaadir Kan in the administration of the newly formed Muslim confederation. He said in his *Autobiography*:

"I was entrenched in seeking knowledge for twenty-five years. I came back to my region and after six years a large army came to our land. They killed many people and seized me bringing me to the great ocean. There they sold me into the hands of the Christians."²⁴

When Umar ibn Sayyid was captured at the age of 37, and brought to the United States in 1807, it was the same year that the United States abolished the importing of African slaves from Africa.²⁵ It was also the same year that the first Muslim slave revolts issued in Bahia, Brazil from Muslims mostly from the same region as Umar.²⁶ This year also witnessed the major successes of the armies of another *Turudbe*' social reformer and scholar/warrior, *Shehu* Uthman Dan Fuduye' in the central *bilad's-sudan*.²⁷ It is clear that the Anglo-Americans did not want in their borders the emergence of the *jihads* that were engulfing Western *Sudan* and Bahia, Brazil. The reason for this no doubt is the effect that militant Muslims had upon the African freedom fighters in South Carolina. Among those directly influenced by militant Islam in general, and Umar in Sayyid, in particular, was Denmark Vessey. David Robertson said in his biography of Vessey:

"The escaped slave Charles Ball, a native of Maryland who wrote a memoir of his South Carolina slavery in 1806, noted the "great many" Africans he had met during his bondage in South Carolina, and that "I knew several who must have been, from what I have since learned, Mohamedans [sic]." The percentage of slaves at least nominally Muslim imported from Africa to the great trading centers such as Charleston has been estimated at 10 percent of the total number brought in during the years 1711 to 1808. Proportionately, approximately 8,800 of these Muslim individuals must therefore have been sold in South Carolina market in these years. In his decades both as a slave and as a freedman, Denmark Vessey almost certainly knew or observed fellow blacks who continued to practice Islam in their bondage."²⁸

Robertson goes on to suggest that *Alfa* Umar ibn Sayyid, at age 53, was one of the mentors of Denmark Vessey, who perhaps accepted Islam at his or another *Turudbe* Muslim's hand.²⁹ Like the influence that the *Turudbe*' *Amir* Abd'r-Rahman ibn Ibrahim had upon the revolutionary thinking of David Walker, likewise, the *Turudbe*' teacher, *Alfa* Umar ibn Sayyid, had great influence upon the militant revolutionary, Denmark Vessey.³⁰ The sense of historical consciousness engendered through the connection with the

²³ Ibid. pp. 172-173.

²⁴ Umar ibn Sayyid, , folio 6.

²⁵ Keith Irvine, *The Rise of the Colored Races*, (New York, W.W. Norton & Company), 1970, p. 75.

²⁶ Muhammad Shareef, *The Islamic Slave Revolts of Bahia Brazil: A Continuity of the 19th Century Jihad Movements of Western Sudan*, (Houston, Sankore Institute), 1993, pp. 24-26.

²⁷ Mervyn Hiskett, *The Sword of Truth: the Life and Times of the Shehu Usman Dan Fodio*, (New York, Oxford University Press), 1973, pp. 91-96.

²⁸ David Robertson, *Denmark Vessey*, (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1999), pp. 37-40.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid. pp. 137-138.

patriarch Abraham that was transmitted through the *Turudbe*' identity concept transfigured the thoughts of Denmark Vessey and gave him the sense of belonging and self-esteem needed to accomplish his revolution. Herbert Aptheker tells us: "He (Vessey) read to them (his African colleagues) from the bible how the *children of Israel were delivered out of Egypt from bondage*".³¹ Thus, the radical intellectual tradition and the militant arms struggle tradition among Africans in America finds its source from the *Turudbe*' children of Abraham and their entrenched sense of knowledge of self.

The Anglo-American writers, both contemporary with *Alfa Umar*, and thereafter, painted an altogether different picture of the enslaved *Turudbe*'. He was made out to be docile and compliant to his lot as a slave. Further, it was stated repeatedly that he had converted from his native religion of Islam. However, the evidence of his writings prove otherwise. The most astounding evidence for the persistence of *Alfa Umar*'s belief in Islam was a letter written around 1820 at age 50 where the learned *Turudbe*' scholar says at the beginning:

"You show Allah in male or female form? Behold, such is a division! [not clear]
These are nothing but names that you have made up, you and your fathers, which
Allah did not reveal. All good is from Allah and no other."³²

Here is a scathing attack, not unlike the criticisms made by *Amir Abd'r-Rahman ibn Ibrahim*, where Umar assails the Anglo-Americans for their Hellenistic paganism. He calls them to account for associating deities besides the One God Allah ta`ala. In spite of being under the abject subjugation of the white Christians, yet Umar remained firm on the Abrahamic covenant of commanding all that is good and forbidding indecency. Umar remained undeviating from the pure unadulterated monotheism that was bequeathed to Abraham, Isma`il, Is'haq, Ya`qub and all their descendent until Muhammad, may Allah bless all of them and grant them peace. Umar said in his letter citing one of the most fundamental verses that established the tenets (*`aqeeda*) of Islam:

"*The Messenger believes in what was revealed to him from his Lord, as well as the believers. All of them believe in Allah, His Angels, His Books and His Messengers. We make no distinction between any of them.*"³³

This verse revealed at the end of the second chapter called *Al-Baqara* (the Cow) delineates the fundamental creed of Islam. Given Umar's dept of understanding of these verses along with the causative factor behind their revelation, there can be no doubt that he remained consistent with the fundamental beliefs of Islam.

Alfa Umar ibn Sayyid left behind a clear picture of himself, his place of origin, his level of learning and what he thought about those who oppressed him. His Arabic *Autobiography* stands as a living testimony of the persistence of the will to BE and the rights of self-determination for the 'lost children of Abraham'. Umar ibn Sayyid composed his *Autobiography* in 1831 at the age of 61. He began his autobiography by recording from memory the entire *Qur'anic* chapter called *al-Mulk* (the Kingdom) or *at-Tabarrak* (the Blessing).³⁴ It is the sixty-seventh chapter of the *Qur'an* revealed in Mecca during the early days of prophet Muhammad's mission, upon him be peace. It comprises thirty verses. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace used to recite it every night before retiring to bed.

³¹ Herbert Aptheker, p. 41.

³² Allan Austin, p.456. The translation is my own because the translation offered in the text on page 513 is not clear.

³³ Ibid. p. 457. Again the translation is my own.

³⁴ See figure 2 in the Appendix.

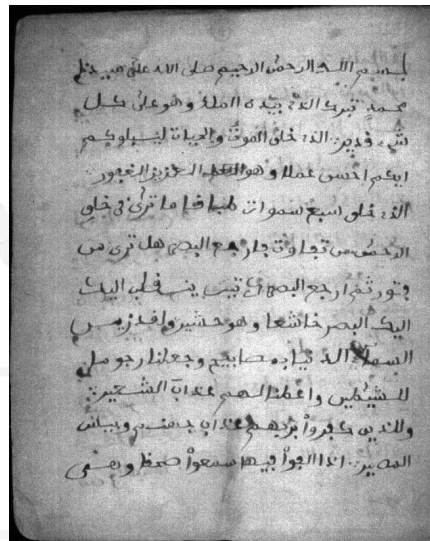


Fig. 2

A copy of *Surat'l-Mulk* written from memory by the *Fulbe'* *Turudbe'* Muslim Umar ibn Sayyid

Modern academicians have pondered the reason why Umar ibn Sayyid, decided to record this early Meccan *Sura*. What was he trying to say to his would be readers? Who was he addressing by quoting these verses? Was it an attempt at proselytizing? Was it a veiled effort to call to account the souls of his captors? The answer to these questions can be found in the religion that he dedicated himself to study for more than 25 years. There has been narrated many traditions concerning the benefits of this tremendous chapter of the *Qur'an*. Among them are the words of the Messenger of Allah, upon him be peace on the authority of Ibn Abass: "*It (al-Mulk) is the preventer. It is the redeemer. By it one is saved from the punishment of the grave.*"³⁵ There are more narrated traditions that demonstrate the importance of this *Qur'anic* chapter and sheds light on the possible reasons that induce *Alfa* Umar ibn Sayyid to begin his *Autobiography* with it. He, may Allah bless him and grant him peace also said on the authority of Abu Hurayra: "*Indeed there is a chapter from the Book of Allah which is only thirty verses, however it will intercede for a man and even bring him out of the Fire on the Day of Judgment and enter him into Paradise. It is the chapter called al-Mulk.*"³⁶ Realizing the level of education that Umar had attained in Bundu, there is no doubt that he had come across these traditions. Thus, his evoking this *Quranic* chapter was a sincere call upon his Lord to redeem him from his captives and to assist him in the grave after death. Here was a *Turudbe'* Muslim who knew he would die and perhaps not be buried in accordance with the rites of Islam, so he did what any Muslim would do in that same situation: *ufawwudu'l-amr ila Allah* ('leave the matter over to Allah!') The fact that Umar ibn Sayyid was able to remember this particular chapter after 26 years of intellectual discontinuance is proof of his faith in Allah and his continuity on the path of Islam, Iman and Ihsan.

Umar ibn Sayyid tells us in the beginning of his *Autobiography* about the extent of the cultural genocide that took place against the *Turudbe'* Muslims. He says: "I have forgotten most of my language as well as the language of Arabic".³⁷ This is significant because reading and learning is an obligation upon every Muslim.³⁸ Education and erudition were the hallmarks of Muslim life in the *bilad's-sudan*. *Alfa* Umar's admission of the lost of his native tongue and the use of the Arabic language could have been the result of the

³⁵ At-Tirmidhi, *Jaam'u at-Tirmidhi*, (Beirut, Dar'l-Kutub'l-'Ilmiya) Chapter Fadaa'il 'l-Quran, No. 3133.

³⁶ Ibid. No 3134.

³⁷ Umar ibn Sayyid, folio 5.

³⁸ Ibn Maja, *as-Sunan*, on the authority of Anas ibn Malik that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace said: "Seeking knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim and placing knowledge with people who are not deserving is like placing diamonds, pearls and gold on the neck of swine."

lack of Muslim co-religionist to communicate with. This is doubtful because David Robertson points out the population of *Turudbe*’ Muslims in South Carolina was great.³⁹ Further, this lack of Muslim company would not have prevented him from writing down the *Qur’an*, and the other fundamental books on Islamic jurisprudence he had memorized in the *bilad’s-sudan*.

There had to be another reason for Umar’s testimony of the lost of his language, in spite of his many years of study and education. The answer can be found in the records of the captors and their laws designed to eradicate any vestige of civilization from the enslaved Africans. In North Carolina as well as South Carolina laws were passed in 1822 which declared it illegal for slaves to be taught to read and write. The penalty for so doing was capital punishment.⁴⁰ It is no wonder that Umar never got around to recording the knowledge, which he had gained for twenty-five years of ‘diligent study’. The admission of Umar also indicates the level of education of its author because he was a polyglot capable of conversing in many language, Arabic, *Fulbe*’, and perhaps Mandinke’ and Wolof, because these were the prominent languages spoken in the regions of Futa Toro, Futa Bundu and Futa Jallon. One can only wonder at the vast number of African Muslims who lost the use of their language and the sacred language of Arabic due to this genocide.

Prior to being kidnapped from his native land, *Alfa* Umar ibn Sayyid was linked with the leading personages responsible for consolidating government and Islamic reform in Futas Toro, Bundu and Jallo. During this period *Chirnu* Sulayman Bal, a *Qaadiri* Sufi *Shaykh*, arose leading the Fulani *Turudbe* Muslims against the slavers. This *Chirnu* Sulayman Bal was also known as Sulayman Ka`ba, named after one of the provisional capitals of the Muslim federation that he founded. This was the ‘teacher’ referred to in his *Autobiography*.⁴¹ Later another *Turudbe Imam* emerged as the *Qaadiri* leader, *Chirnu* Abd’l-Qaadir Kan. From 1776 until 1807 Abd ‘l-Qaadir led a successful Islamic state which united the Walo, Jolof and Cayor Muslims under a single banner.⁴² The war that led to the defeat and destruction of this *Fulbe’ Turudbe*’ confederation in 1807, was the causative factor behind the capture and enslavement of Umar ibn Sayyid.⁴³ Thus, Umar ibn Sayyid was a highly educated African Muslim in accordance with the best standards of Islamic education available among the *Fulbe’ Turudbe*’ of Futa Bundu. He tells us in his autobiography that he studied for more than 25 years.⁴⁴

Another feature that the *Autobiography* demonstrates is the religious license of subterfuge and dissimulation (*taqiyya*). Like the *Amir* Abd’r-Rahman ibn Ibrahim, Umar opted to not let the Anglo-Americans know what he was thinking. This was demonstrated in his constant reference to John Owen, his final slave master, and Jim Owen in a laudable manner:

“O people of North Carolina, O people of South Carolina, O people of America all of you: have you among you two good men named Jim Owen with John Owen? These two men are good men. What food they ate, I ate. In what they clothe themselves, they clothe me.”⁴⁵

History bears witness that Umar’s praise for John Owens was an attempt at gaining concessions from a cruel taskmaster. Allen Austin identifies John Owen as the once governor of North Carolina from 1828-1830, who was responsible for passing legislature in North Carolina that ‘seriously limited the rights of Africans in the state’ in the same year in which Umar composed his autobiography. This was done no doubt out of fear that the Anglo-Americans had for the Africans because of the revolution of Denmark Vessey. If, as

³⁹ David Robertson. pp. 38-40.

⁴⁰ Vincent Harding, p. 102.

⁴¹ Umar ibn Sayyid, folio 6.

⁴² David Robinson, “Revolution in the Western Sudan”, *The History of Islam in Africa*, edit. Nehemia Levtzion & Randall L. Pouwels, (Athen, Ohio University Press), 2000, p. 135.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 136.

⁴⁴ Umar ibn Sayyid, folio 6..

⁴⁵ Ibid. folio 10.

David Robertson points out, Umar ibn Sayyid had major influence upon the religious, cultural and political aspirations of Denmark Vessey, then it is clear that Umar could have been much more radical than history has portrayed him.⁴⁶

Jim Owens and others depicted Umar as a gentle and contented slave who had eventually abandoned his *Turudbe*’ Islamic beliefs for the religion of his ‘good master’. There are statements in his manuscript, which when translated improperly and misunderstood may corroborate this erroneous view. For example Umar said:

“Jim along with his brother recite to me the *Injil* of Allah our Lord, Creator, King; who regulates all our circumstances, our health and wealth, and who bestows His bounties willingly, without constraint according to His power. Open my heart to the way of guidance, to the way of Yusu`a, the Messiah, to the tremendous light.”⁴⁷

Many of Umar’s contemporaries and later scholars believe that this statement by Umar is one of the proofs in the manuscript that he became apostate from the religion of Islam over to the religion of his captors. Only someone who is ignorant of the esteem that Muslims hold of the Messiah Isa ibn Maryum would believe that. In fact, what Umar said is nothing but an affirmation of what Muslims have believed from the beginning of the mission of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. Writing in much the same time as Umar ibn Sayyid, the 18th century *Turudbe*’ Muslim reformer *Shehu* Uthman Dan Fuduye’ said this about the belief that Muslims have in Jesus the son of Mary.

“He Prophet, upon him be peace related many traditions notifying Muslims that Isa ibn Maryum is the Messiah and that he would return in the End of Time to renew the religion of Islam and revive his *sunna*. Allah ta`ala says in His *Quran*: “O People of the Book do not go to extremes in your religion and only speak the Truth about Allah. Verily the Messiah Isa the son of Maryum is the Messenger of Allah and His Word that He cast into Maryum and a Spirit from Him. Therefore believe in Allah and His messenger and do not say three gods. If you desist from this it will be best for you. Verily Allah is One, glory be to Him far is He from having a son. To Him belong what is in the heavens and the earth and Allah is sufficient as a Guardian.”⁴⁸ Imam al-Bukhari narrated in his *Saheeh* the tradition: “The son of Mary will truly descend as a just ruler. He will break the cross, kill the swine and set aside the *jizya*.” In the same tradition narrated by at-Tayaalisi it says: “He will break the cross, kill the pig and diffuse wealth until Allah destroys during his time the one-eyed lying forger. Trust and immunity will come to pass in the earth until the lion will graze with the camel, the tiger with the cow and the wolf with the sheep. Even children will play with snakes. And neither of these will harm the other.”⁴⁹

Thus, the *Turudbe*’ erudition in Islam throughout the lands of the *Bilad’s-Sudan* would preclude Umar ibn Sayyid of being ignorant of the nature of Muslim belief in Isa the son of Maryum, upon him be peace. Given Umar’s extensive Islamic education it is difficult to comprehend that he would relinquish this deep grasp of Islamic belief for the paganism or man-worship of Christianity. Along with the fact that the environment from which Umar was captured was inundated with the belief in millenarianism and messianic expectations that would redeem the Muslim world from the European invasion. This was the fundamental

⁴⁶ David Robertson, pp. 37-40.

⁴⁷ Op.Cit, folio 9.

⁴⁸ *Quran* – 5:77.

⁴⁹ Uthman Dan Fuduye’, *Tanbeeh’l-Umma `Ala Qurb Ashrat ‘s-Sa`a*, manusc. In possession of author, folia 39-40.

belief of the leaders and reformers under whom Umar studied and lived, like Karamako Alfa Ibrahim Barri, Sulayman Bal and *Almamy* Abd'l-Qaadir.⁵⁰

Another of the significant proofs of Umar ibn Sayyid's continuous Islamic beliefs is the statement made in his *Autobiography* regarding the primordial status of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. This proclamation is made on a line separate from all the other lines as if Umar intentionally wanted to distinguish this statement from the other sentences. It says in Arabic: "The first is Muhammad."⁵¹ Why would Umar distinguish this statement from the remainder of the lines of the folio? It is clear that after twenty years of intense study in the lands of *Futa Toro* and *Futa Jallon*, Umar no doubt studied the three main text which were transmitted in that region: namely, the *Muwatta* of *Imam* Malik, the *Tafseer* 'l-Jalalayn and the *as-Shifa* of *Qadi* Iyad. The transmission of the *asaaneed* (chains of authority) in these three text is still issued in these regions to this day among African Muslim Fulbe, Soninke, Jakhanke', Tukulor and Mandinke' scholars. It is important to cite here what *Qadi* Iyad said in his *as-Shifa* which will explain exactly what Umar ibn Sayyid was denoting with the above enigmatic statement: "The first is Muhammad".

"Qatada once said that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace said, 'I was the first of the Prophets in existence and the last of them to be sent'." *Shaykh* Ahmad ibn Muhammad said in his commentary upon the *as-Shifa* concerning the above prophetic tradition, "I was the first of the Prophets in existence", means that Allah created his spirit before their spirits; or in the world of atoms; or in the decree by recording him first in the Guarded Tablet; or he was the first to appear to the Angels. 'And the last of them to be sent' means that he is the seal of the Prophets."⁵²

This primordial status of the nature of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace was diffused throughout the *Bilad's-Sudan* by means of the Sufi brotherhoods, particularly the *Qaadiyya*. The *Turudbe*' have left an extensive amount of *Fulbe*' poems that speak to the transcendent nature of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, which would leave no doubt about the belief that the *Turudbe*' Muslims has regarding the Best of Creation, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.

Another momentous proof of Umar's persistence in Islamic belief and practice was his evoking of the first chapter of the *Qur'an* in his *Autobiography*. Again, due to the fact that the transmission of learning in the regions in which Umar lived is well known, we can say with certainty that during his twenty five years of intensified study, he had to have read the *Tafseer* 'l-Jalalayn. This fundamental text of *Qur'anic* exegesis was the first and the most renowned *tafseer* that was transmitted in that region of the *bilad's-sudan*. It is significant to know that the *tafseer* (commentary) upon the last verse of the *al-Faatiha* rendered by the *al-Jalalayn* and all seminal *tafaaseer* is the following: "Not among those who have earned anger", these are the Jews. 'Nor who have gone astray', these are the Christians." Because Umar had to have known the classical commentary upon this important chapter, which is an obligation for every Muslim to know and recite in his prayers - it goes without saying that his reason for citing it was to demonstrate his continued adherence to the faith of Islam. Another *tafseer* that was famous and in widespread use in the lands of the *Turudbe*' was the work of Abdullahi Dan Fuduye' called *Diya* 't-Ta'weel Fi Ma'ana 't-Tanzeel. In this text he adds,

"It is as though Allah is saying 'There is no anger upon them nor are they astray'. Astray here means to deviate from the even path intentionally or by mistake. The word astray is intensified with the negative particle لا (nor) in

⁵⁰ Louis Brenner, "The 'Esoteric Sciences' in West African Islam", in *The Changing Role of the Ulama*, Conference, March 29-31 1984, Northwestern University, Lansing, p. 6.

⁵¹ In the Arabic the text it reads: مُحَمَّدٌ الْأَوَّلُ.

⁵² Shihabudeen Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Khifaji, *Naseemu'r-Riyaad Fee Sharh Shifaa'l-Qaadi 'Iyad*, (Daar'l-Kutub, Beirut), 2001, Vol. 1, p. 67.

order to separate between the two ways in order that everyone can avoid both of them. This is because the path of the people of true faith encompasses both knowledge of the truth and acting in accordance with it. The Jews have lost acting in accordance with the truth and the Christians have lost the knowledge of the truth. It for this reason that the divine anger is against the Jews and being astray is against the Christians. This is due to the fact that whoever knows the truth and neglects acting in accordance with it deserves anger, in contrast to the one who does not know the truth. The bottom line is that both the Jews and the Christians are astray and have earned divine anger. However the Jews have been distinguished with the attributes of divine anger and the Christians have been distinguished with being astray. It has been related on the authority of the prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, “*Those who have earned divine anger are the Jews. Those who are astray are the Christians’.*”⁵³

It is in this light that the above citation of the *al-Faatiha* by Umar ibn Sayyid must be understood. Umar demonstrated clearly his continued adherence to the covenant of Abraham through the Way of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. He did not capitulate over to the corrupt mores and pagan man-worship of the Anglo-American Christians. He held firmly to the rope of Allah ta`ala. The Anglo-Americans attempted to categorize Umar ibn Sayyid within the confines of their own narrow-minded descriptions. The Anglo-American defined the enslaved African as sub-human lacking any ability to know or define himself, not to speak of determining his own course. This psychological warfare was conducted at every level of the Anglo society, even at the constitutional level.⁵⁴

Umar ibn Sayyid had a clear sense of the geopolitical situation that he was in. He knew that the Africans who captured him were non-Muslims and that the enemies that he had been sold to were European Christians. Umar said:

“Truly my residing in my country was by reason of great detriment. The disbelievers seized me unjustly and sold me to the Christians, who purchased me. We sailed a month and a half on the great ocean to the place called Charleston in the language of the Christians. I fell into the hands of a small, weak and wicked man, who did not fear Allah at all. He could neither read nor did he pray. I was afraid to remain with a sinful man who had so many sins. Thus, I fled”⁵⁵

Perhaps when Umar spoke of ‘great detriment’ he was speaking of the many wars that were taking place during the period he was seized. During that time the pagan Africans were successful at raiding many centers of the *Fulbe* Muslims. It was the same year in which he was captured that the pagans sacked the central religious town of *Almamy* Abd’l-Qaadir and had him murdered. The period was a period of insecurity and internecine warfare. Thus, Umar utilized his ability to write as a means of defining his own reality and speaking out against his captors. The ability to evoke and define oneself and the enemy constitutes the most essential element in self-determination. The ability to understand and delineate the inner being and the surrounding universe is what placed mankind over and above the creation. This was the hallmark of Adam and remains the quality of his descendents. This must be understood when examining any referents utilized by enslaved *Turudbe’* Muslims. The *Turudbe’* had a deep sense of which they were, and understood their historical relationship with the Europeans. They were fully aware the role that they and other West African

⁵³ Abdullahi Dan Fuduye’, *Diya at-Ta’weel Fee Ma`ana ‘t-Tanzeel*, (unknown publishers), Vol1, pp. 9-10.

⁵⁴ Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, (London, Harvard University Press), 1981, pp. 2-3..

⁵⁵ Umar ibn Sayyid, folio 13.

Muslims played in the civilizing of Spanish and Portuguese Europe.⁵⁶ The protective historical conscience of *Turudbe*' identity, the inner psychological fortification of Islam, as well as the linguistic security of Arabic, gave the *Turudbe*' the assurance and ability to create their own referents. Thus, the existence of Umar, as he was, defied the Anglo-American's futile attempt to deconstruct him and define him. Umar cannot be understood through the prism of Anglo-American Christian scrutiny, but through his own ethnocentric frame of reference.

Allen Austin defined this endeavor on the part of Anglo-Americans to 'redefine' Umar as a 'Christian' as "largely the creation of romantic-white and militant Christian wishful thinking"⁵⁷. The fact that he was 'owned' means that he could not define himself, thus he had to be 'handled' and 'packaged' to suite the Anglo-American image of the good docile slave. An example of this type of historical fallacy is in the following picture painted of Umar:

"The name of the man from whom I obtained this manuscript for you, I believe is Monroe (Umar); ...an Arab by birth, of royal blood ...He fell into the hands of Gen. Owen, of Wilmington, who...proffered him his freedom, and offered to send him back to his native land. But Monroe (Umar) declined the offer, saying that his friends were probably either destroyed or dispersed and that his condition was much better where he was ...He is respected by those who know him, and is a worthy member of the Presbyterian Church."⁵⁸

Not only does the Anglo-American redefine this *Turudbe*' Muslim as Christian, but they went further in claiming that he did not desire his own freedom, that he was content to remain under the yoke, all be it 'benevolent' of the white man. This coincides with their racist views of Africans and other non-white peoples, as Lester Scherer said that white tradition: "affirmed that the heathen could legitimately be treated differently from Christians. They could be enslaved for life; and they could be driven harder and fed less."⁵⁹ The opinion that Africans were resigned to slavery and were naturally disposed to it was pervasive throughout Europe and the United States. Writing in South Carolina, about three decades after Umar ibn Sayyid was captured, William Harper, who spoke of Africans' "indifference to personal liberty". He raised the question: "Let me ask if this people do not furnish the very material out of which slaves ought to be made, and whether it be not an improving of their condition to make them the slaves of civilized masters."⁶⁰ This sentiment is even echoed today by certain Anglo-American 'Muslim' converts who encourage people to study in Mauritania, where the enslavement of African Muslims is seen as benign. The same attitudes prevail where the ability of the African Muslims to endure their lot as slaves is seen as noble and venerable, but to revolt and rebel is seen as unnatural to them.

Umar ibn Sayyid was no exception in this mass self-deception among the Anglo-Americans. Umar's image as a convert to Christianity was utilized to help advance the myth of African innate inferiority. However, when close examination is made of Umar's Autobiography another picture emerges. For example, whenever Umar referred to Jesus in any context, the Anglo-Americans deduced from this acceptance of their view of Jesus as 'lord and savior'. On the other hand, Umar's understanding of Jesus the son Mary, must be comprehended from his own Islamic frame of reference. Umar said in his Autobiography: "And now the

⁵⁶ Dana Reynolds, "The African Heritage & Ethnohistory of the Moors", Golden Age of the Moors, edit. Ivan Van Sertima, (London, Transaction Publishers), 1996, pp. 96-98.

⁵⁷ Allan Austin, p. 445.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 474.

⁵⁹ Lester B. Scherer, Slavery and the Churches in Early America, 1619-1819, (Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 1975, p. 27.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 122.

words of our lord *Yusu`a* the Messiah.”⁶¹ The use of the term ‘our lord’ in referring to *sayyidinaa* Isa ibn Maryum, upon him be peace, is perhaps the strongest evidence of the possibility of Umar ibn Sayyid’s apostasy from the religion of Islam. However, again, when examining Umar’s level of Islamic education, one is forced to reconsider other alternatives other than mere abandonment of his religion. First the term *rabb* (lord, sustainer) when used with the definite article (*alif & laam*) refers suitably to Allah ta`ala that is, as *Shaykh* Muhammad Murtada ‘z-Zaydi said in his *Taaaj*: “The *Rabb* is Allah `azza wa jalla, the sustainer of everything, i.e. its owner. He possesses lordship (*rubuubiyya*) over the entire creation. There is no partner to Him and He is the Lord of all lords, the King of kings.”⁶² Abu Mansuur said in his *Lisaan*, “The *Rabb* unrestrictedly refers linguistic to the owner, the master, the manager and the educator. It is not used unrestrictedly to other than Allah except when the word is brought into relationship with something else. Like when you say: ‘the *rabb* of so-and-such.”⁶³ The *Qur`an* utilizes the term *rabb* in many cases to refer to created beings that are in some way responsible for managing a created thing or person. Allah ta`ala says on the tongue of Prophet, Yusef, when he addresses the inmate who was destined to be freed from prison: “Mention me with your lord.”⁶⁴ Here reference is made to the owner or master of the inmate for whom he will be employed. Thus, Prophet Yusef utilized the term *rabb* as it was known and accepted with those whom he was addressing. Another consideration, and perhaps the most plausible, is that Umar was practicing dissimulation (*taqiyya*) out of fear for his life under the Christians. As previously discussed, this is a legally acceptable option for any Muslim who is under the jurisdiction of the disbelievers and can find no way to establish his religion nor can he find a means with which to make the *hijra* from under their control. This is the legal ruling for a free Muslim who finds himself in circumstances where he fears establishing the religion. Umar was not *hurr* (free). *Taqiyya* was perhaps the only logical option he had. Thus, Umar ibn Sayyid referring to *Isa ibn Maryum*, as ‘lord’ cannot be used as conclusive proof for apostasy because one can construe many implications from the *Quranic* meaning of the word. Further, when this is connected to the right of dissimulation (*taqiyya*), then Umar’s persistent Islamic belief stands out. One must recall that *Amaar ibn Yaasir*, the Afro-Arab Companion of Prophet Muhammad, said far worse than Umar ibn Sayyid, yet Allah ta`ala freed of him apostasy by His words: “Whoever disbelieved after having faith, except those who were coerced while their hearts were tranquil in belief.”⁶⁵ It is well known that Amaar verbally denounced Allah ta`ala and outwardly proclaimed the false deities of the *Quraysh*, yet Allah ta`ala declared him innocent due to the state of his heart. Like `Amaar, the same about Umar ibn Sayyid, who being coerced through slavery, dissimulated to the Anglo-Americans in order not to be killed. We will return to the parallels between *Alfa* Umar and `Amaar, and discuss the possible spiritual influence that the latter had upon the life of the former. Thus, contrary to being proof of his conversion, his dissimulation only proves his utter contempt for his captors and their own innate inferiority as disbelievers.

Today, the *Autobiography* of Umar ibn Sayyid stands as the written anthropological evidence for the rights of self-determination for the descendants of African Muslim in the United States. This lost son of Abraham, the *Turudbe`* Fulbe, *Alfa* Umar ibn Sayyid cried out in his work for justice and liberty, and in speaking out, he indicted the system that oppressed his people. As a *Turudbe`* descendent of Abraham he fulfilled the call to command the good and forbid evil and indecency. He made a lasting impression upon revolutionary leaders in North Carolina, such as Denmark Vessey and the other African Freedom Fighters who took up arms in defense of freedom, liberty and self-determination. To his Anglo-American oppressors in the state of North Carolina as well as the remainder of the country, he demanded his freedom and liberty of

⁶¹ Allan Austin, p. 474

⁶² Muhammad ibn Makaram ibn Mandhur, *Lisaan`l-`Arab*, (Beirut, Dar as-Saadar), 1994, Vol. 1, p. 399.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 400.

⁶⁴ *Quran*: Yusef: 42.

⁶⁵ *Quran*: an-Nahl: 106.

his people. This cry for freedom, which was the hallmark of the Children of Abraham, was echoed in Umar's words:

“O you Americans, you people of North Carolina - Are there among you!? Are there among you!? Are there among you!? - good people who fear Allah much?!”⁶⁶

Alfa Umar ibn Sayyid stands as an excellent example of the resilience of the *Turudbe'* Fulbe Muslims, in the face of the aggression and oppression of Anglo-American slavery. With his quiet, unassuming and humble demeanor, Umar, was not only able to maintain his Islamic customs under the nose of his enemies, but he also had major impact upon one the most vehement, revolutionary, well organized African slave insurrection in the United States, led by Denmark Vessey. It is amazing how Umar ibn Sayyid was able to deceive his slave masters into thinking that he was docile and subservient to their will and had completely acquiesced and succumbed to man-worship. The following anecdote illustrates the subtleness of Umar ibn Sayyid's dissimulation to his enemies:

“When the name and history of the ex-Prince were discussed, Miss Ellen proposed sending for ‘Uncle Moro’. He was received in her splendidly furnished parlor and introduced to each visitor...after which was seated among the guests. He was a fine looking man, copper colored, though an African, well dressed, in a long black coat reaching below the knees, as worn by the nobility of foreign countries of his day, sat very erect on his chair, with both feet flat on the carpet, knees close together, and his hands opened and resting on his legs. He conversed for a short while gracefully, after which, Miss Ellen handed him the family Bible and asked him to read a lesson in his native language. He announced the 23rd Psalm and read it, when I asked if he would kindly write it for me, he did so, and came with it for another interview...the Psalm was written and left for me, which appears as written, with his communication.”⁶⁷

What is astounding is that Umar is now writing in 1855 at the ripe old age of 85, yet he still maintains a steady hand with the *Timbukti* style of calligraphy lucid and striking. He begins the 23rd Psalms with an opening statement that only a dedicated Muslim would make.⁶⁸ He did not say anything about ‘god the father, god the son and god the holy ghost’. He made no appellation to Jesus as being his personal savior, or even ‘in Jesus’ name’. He did not say in the name of Jehovah, or ‘elohim’ or any appellation that would indicate that he had indeed in this late period in his life had become resigned to the Christian faith. Perhaps, when speaking in English, he would refer to these deities; however, his written testimony indicated a spiritual allegiance to something completely different.

⁶⁶ Umar ibn Sayyid, folio 11.

⁶⁷ Allan Austin, p. 478.

⁶⁸ See figure 3 of Appendix for a copy of Umar's rendition of the 23rd Psalms.

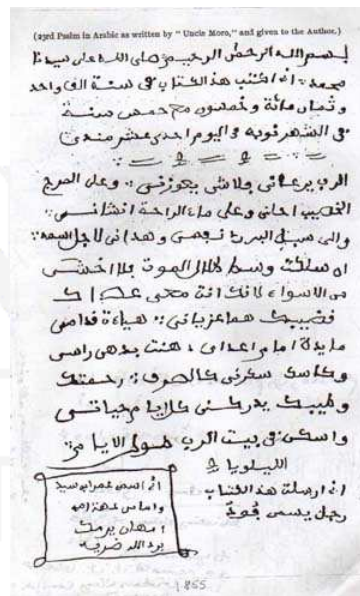


Fig. 3

Copy of the 23rd Psalms written for John Frederick Foard in 1855.

He begins: “*In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful, may Allah send blessings upon our master Muhammad. Verily I am writing this letter in the year 1855, on Monday, the 15th of the month of November.*”⁶⁹ The statement: “*In the name of Allah the Beneficent the Merciful*”, is called in Arabic the *basmalla* and is one of the most important formulas in Islam. Every chapter of the *Quran*, except one, begins with it. It is related on the authority of Abd'l-Qaadir ar-Rahawi in his *al-Arba'een* on the authority of Abu Hurayra, that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace said: “Every matter of importance which is not initiated with: *bismillahi'r-rahmani 'r-raheem* (In the name of Allah the Beneficent the Merciful), will be cut off.”⁷⁰ The importance of this designation in Islam cannot be overstated. During the same period when Umar ibn Sayyid was a student in Futa Bundu, another *Turudbe'* Fulbe scholar, named Muhammad Tukur composed a text comprising the secrets of the Divine Names of Allah ta'ala. The text was called *Qira't'l-Ahibaa* and was composed around 1796, just before Umar completed his 25-year period of deep study in the Islamic sciences. The text is significant because it gives a picture of the level of the mystical education and the esoteric sciences that were being transmitted throughout the *Bilad's-Sudan* by the *Turudbe'* Fulbe Muslims. There is no doubt, given Umar's degree of Islamic education that he too understood some portion of this science. Muhammad Tukur delineates the secrets of the *Bismillahi'r-Rahman'r-Raheem* when he said:

“If you desire the expansion of your breast then say: ‘*Bismillahi*'. If you desire your burden to be removed then say: ‘*Bismillahi*'. If you desire your reward to be magnified then say: ‘*Bismillahi*'. If you desire your name to be extolled then say: ‘*Bismillahi*'. ‘*Bismillahi* is the share of those in need of the Merciful One. It is the portion of those who are reliant upon the Compassionate One. It is the stake of all the believers. The ‘*Bismillahi* protects the ship from inundation. The ‘*Bismillahi* will redeem the *Umma* of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace on the Day of Standing among the masses of the people. It has been narrated that the first person that the ‘*Bismillahi*’ was revealed to was Adam, upon him be peace, who said: ‘I have learned that none of my descendents will be punished in the Fire as long

⁶⁹ Ibid. 477.

⁷⁰ Uthman Dan Fuduye', *'Umdat'l-'Ulama*, trans. Muhammad Shareef (Fairfiled, Sankore' Institute), 2003, p. 8.

as they persists in reciting it.’ Then it was raised up after him until the time of *al-Khalil*, upon him be peace. It was then revealed to him when he was in the catapult and then Allah redeemed him from the fire. Then it was raised up after him until the time of Musa, upon him be peace. It was revealed to him and by means of it; he overcame Pharaoh and his forces. It was then revealed to Sulayman, upon him be peace and then to Isa ibn Maryum, upon him be peace and then to Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. He was then commanded to write it at the head of every chapter, at the beginning of books, at the head of letters, and in the beginning of every action. When the tumult of mountains descends with glorification when thirst becomes severe on the Day of Standing and the sweat is flows; then they will say with one voice: ‘*Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*.’ It is then that the decree of Allah will be rendered. It has been related in a prophetic tradition: ‘Whoever says it one time every day and night with sincerity in his heart there will remain not even an atoms weight of his sins left. Therefore it is incumbent upon you to recite it and thereby protect its sanctity.’ It has also been related in a prophetic tradition: ‘Whoever recites it Allah will record on his behalf for every letter four thousand good deeds raise him up four thousand spiritual ranks and wipe away from him four thousand sins’.”⁷¹

Thus, when Umar ibn Sayyid begins his 23rd Psalm with the *basmalla*, he was fully aware of the import of the statement. It was not some passing reference used by habit because in all of his writings, he begins with this same designation. If *Alfa* Umar knew the esoteric sciences, narrated by the *Turudbe* Fulbe Muhammad Tukur, regarding the secrets of the *basmalla*, it is then inconceivable to conclude that he had abandoned the religion of Islam. In fact, the usage of the *basmalla* demonstrates a profound and mysterious aspect to Umar’s nature that none of the Anglo-American narrators of his life are willing to admit. What we are looking at is an extremely sophisticated *Turudbe*’ Muslims scholar who had mastered the science of *taqiyya* (dissimulation), with all of its subtleties. He had resigned himself to a prolonged lifetime of concealment of his true faith and belief; only manifesting it through his written testimony.

Then after the *basmalla*, Umar sends the blessings and peace upon the Seal of the Prophets and the Master of the Messengers, Muhammad, upon him be blessings and peace. Did Umar renounce his religion of Islam? Louis Moore, writing in 1927 would have us believe so by his saying: “Under the ‘careful’ tutelage of Governor Owen, his brother, Gen. Jas Owen, and the Presbyterian clergy, Moreau (Umar) entered upon a ‘careful’ and ‘exhaustive’ study of the principles and ideals of the Christian religion. The Arabian prince soon professed Christianity.”⁷² If this is so, then why would he open all of his letters and correspondences with sending blessings upon the one whom he called: “our master Muhammad”? Would not “a careful and exhaustive study of the principles of Christianity” followed by conversion, have wiped out any and all spiritual allegiance to Allah and His Final Messenger Muhammad? It is related that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace said: “Whoever sends blessings upon me in a letter or book, there will remain an Angel seeking forgiveness for him as long as my name is in that book or letter.”⁷³ It is clear from this that the profound transmission of knowledge established by the *Turudbe*’ connected with a persistence sense of historical consciousness helped to defend Umar ibn Sayyid from the cultural aggression of his Anglo-American captors. As the above prophetic tradition demonstrates, Umar’s desire to attain forgiveness from Allah ta’ala, the God of his fathers, Abraham, Isma’il, Is’haq, and the Tribes was so entrenched, that no amount of indoctrination would dissuade him.

⁷¹ Muhammad Tukur, *Qirat ‘l-Ahibaa*, manuscript in the hands of the author, folios 8-9.

⁷² Allan Austin, 497.

⁷³ Uthman Dan Fuduye’, *‘Umdat’l-‘Ulama*, p. 8.

Even when we look close at the text of the Bible that he decided to recite for Miss Ellen and her ‘distinguished guests’, the 23rd Psalms, there is nothing in it that is diametrically opposed to the teachings of Islam and the lucid monotheism and well structured concept of the Divine Unity (*tawheed*) upon which the religion of Islam is built. In fact, when one examines the choice of biblical verses that Umar decided to recite for his Anglo-American audience, one is witnessing with clarity a form of disdain and defiance on the part of a descendent of Abraham towards oppressors. The 23rd Psalms says:

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil and my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the House of the Lord for ever.”⁷⁴

What, in Umar’s eyes is ‘the valley of the shadow of death’ if it is not the ability to endure 49 years of servitude under unjust Anglo-American slavery? One can only imagine what Umar was thinking when he recited this verse to his credulous audience: “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” The quiet resignation for which *Alfa* Umar was known, could it be that he saw the affliction and hardship of slavery as part of Divine Providence? When one recognizes his close attachment with African freedom fighters such as Denmark Vessey and the slave revolts that were being planned daily in the vicinity of the venerable *Shaykh*, one cannot help but imagine that behind the exterior of humility was the quiet assurance of eventual victory and justice.⁷⁵

The last known writing of Umar ibn Sayyid that decisively testifies to his persistent Islamic beliefs, but also his understanding of the eventual triumph of Divine Justice, was a hand written manuscript composed during the period of his ‘alleged conversion’.⁷⁶ General Owen gave this text to Mary Jones, the wife of Rev. Charles Colcock Jones of Rockland County, Virginia on July 27, 1857.⁷⁷ The manuscript written by Umar ibn Sayyid was supposed to be another copy of ‘the Lord’s Prayer’, but proves to be altogether different.⁷⁸ One has to wonder why is it that *Alfa* Umar’s Anglo-American captors continued to demand written proof of his conversion. Were they in doubt of his conversion? Did they recognize the persistence of *Turudbe*’ Islamic traditions in this venerable sage? One cannot help but reflect upon what the above mentioned Rev. Charles C. Jones said about the mass dissimilation of African slaves in 1834: “It is true they (the Africans) have access to the house of God on the Sabbath; but it is also true that even where privilege is within their reach, a minority, and frequently a very small one, embraces it.”⁷⁹ Thus, there is no wonder that *Alfa* Umar’s so-called conversion was not really believed. The final written testament of *Alfa* Umar ibn Sayyid demonstrates this clearly.

⁷⁴ My own translation of Umar’s text. Its source is from The Holy Bible: King James Version, Psalms 23:1-6.

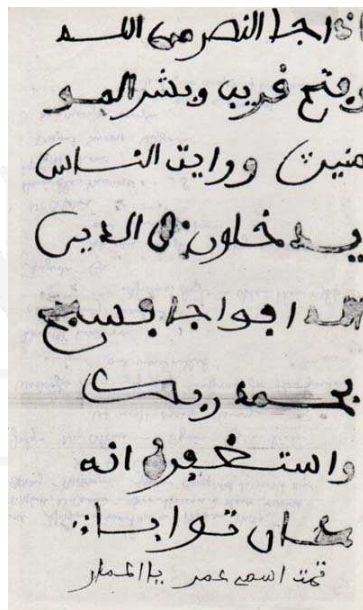
⁷⁵ According to Herbert Aptheker from 1807 to 1864, the period from Umar ibn Sayyid’s capture until his death, there were 18 major slave insurrections and more than 20 minor infractions by slaves throughout the immediate vicinity of Chaleston, Fayetteville and Wilmington

⁷⁶ Allan Austin, p. 451.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 519.

⁷⁸ See figure 4 in Appendix for Umar’s rendition of ‘the Lord’s Prayer.

⁷⁹ Sterling Stuckey, Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory & the Foundations of Black America, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1987, p. 37.



The copy of "the Lord's Prayer"; the last written testament of Alfa Umar ibn Sayyid around 1856-57

What made General Owen determine that this was the Lord's Prayer is hard to ascertain. We know that as early as 1819 a copy of the Bible in Arabic was given to Umar ibn Sayyid. In a letter from John Louis Taylor to Francis Key, written on the 10th of October, 1819, it states: "I should be much gratified Sir, if you could indicate to me in what manner I could procure an Arabic bible for his use, as I think it possible that a person of his enlargement of merit could not but peruse it without perceiving its authenticity and divine origin."⁸⁰ So Umar had access to an Arabic Bible that he could refer to in order to copy the Lord's Prayer verbatim. We know this because in the previous year he did exactly that when John Foard requested him to write the 23rd Psalms. In fact, rather than write the Psalms in front of Mr. Foard, Umar, went to his private quarters, no doubt, to copy it from his own Arabic Bible.⁸¹ In fact, Foard states this explicitly when he said: "When I asked if he would kindly write it for me? He did so, and came with it for another interview. I was out visiting friends and failed to see more of him, but the Psalm was written and left for me."⁸²

So why did Umar not simply make a copy the Lord's Prayer verbatim from his Arabic bible for General Owen? In 1856 Umar was 86 years of age, being able to use his memory fairly well. The so-called Lord's Prayer that Umar recorded for General Owen was the chapter called *an-Nasr* (the Help) and was revealed about two years before the death of Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.⁸³ Umar wrote it from memory, some fifty years after he was captured and enslaved, so lapses of memory had to occur for him. His manuscript reads:

"When the help from Allah comes and the victory (is near, so give good news to the believers). And you see mankind entering into the religion in mass, then glorify with the praises of your Lord and seek forgiveness of Him. Verily He is Oft Relenting." It is complete. My name is Umar – Yaa `Amaar!"

What was Umar saying to those who would come across this manuscript and what was he saying to Owen, his slave master by citing this particular verse? In order to understand Umar's motives, we have to look at the context of the *Quranic* verse and then at the events that were occurring at the time he wrote it.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 455.

⁸¹ Ibid. p. 478.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Abd'r-Rahman as-Suyuti, *Asbaab 'n-Nuzuul*, (Beirut, Dar'l-Fikr), 1994, p. 258.

Umar ibn Sayyid's education in Futa Bundu included a deep and exhaustive study of *Qur'anic* exegesis (*tafseer*), which would also include the sciences of the causative factors of the descent of revelation called *asbaab 'n-nuzuul*. Thus, Umar knew the context in which this verse was revealed, its history, and the applications to which this verse could be applied. Writing about two years after Umar was captured, in 1809, another *Turudbe'* scholar, Abdullahi Dan Fuduye' gave the exegesis of this chapter using the same sources that Umar ibn Sayyid studied in Futa Bundu. He said:

"When the help from Allah comes', this means to His Prophet against his enemies; 'and the victory', this means the victory over Mecca, or it is the help of Allah for the believers and the victory He gives them over all the lands. 'And you see mankind entering into the religion in mass,' this means in large groups after they use to enter into the religion one by one. This occurred after the conquering of Mecca. There came to him, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, delegations from many of the Arab tribes from the distant regions of the earth, showing their obedience to him after they saw that he had conquered Mecca and there did not occur to him what happened to the Companions of the Elephants. '...then glorify with the praises of your Lord', that is, adhere to praising Him. '...and seek forgiveness of Him', as a form of subjugation of your soul and realizing that the help and victory is not from you. 'Verily He is Oft Relenting', for the things you seek forgiveness for. After the revelation of this chapter, the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, used to say often: **Subhaana Allah wa biHamdihi wa Astaghfir Allah wa Atuubu ilayhi** (Glory be to Allah and with Him is the praise. I seek forgiveness of Allah and repent to Him.). It was understood from this that his appointed time was near. Umar ibn al-Khataab said: 'This chapter was revealed at Mina in the middle of the day of sacrifice during the Farewell Pilgrimage'.⁸⁴

Thus, Umar ibn Sayyid citing of this final chapter of the *Quran* is significant for many reasons. First Umar recognized the circumstances that he was in as an enslaved Muslim in the hands of pagan Anglo-Americans. This verse was consolation to his heart and a reminder of the eventual triumph of Truth over falsehood and Justice over tyranny. The help and victory of Allah ta'ala is the triumph of the worship of the One Creator, who has no partner, helper, or offspring. It is the widespread acceptance of the message of Divine Unity that all the Prophets taught to mankind.

In Umar's manuscript there is incorporated an error in the original *Qur'anic* chapter, which can be said to be a lapse of his memory. He said: "*The victory is near, so give good news to the believers.*" This verse that Alfa Umar was made to place in the beginning of *an-Nasr* is from the chapter called *as-Saff* (the Ranks).⁸⁵ Although it does not belong in the chapter he cited in his manuscript, its inclusion is quite revealing. One has to remember, he was not allowed to write for 48 years. Much of the *Quran* and the other fundamental books of *tawheed* (theology), *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *tasawwuf* (spiritual purification) that he had memorized in his native land had been lost or dangerously altered. Therefore, lapses in memory are understandable. However, when it comes to the *Qur'anic* text, lapses of memory do not apply, because it has been related by al-Bukhari on the authority of Abdullah ibn Mas'ud that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace said: "Most evil it is when one of you say: 'I have forgotten *Qur'anic* verse such and such'. On the contrary, he was made to forget." So when looked at from the esoteric perspective, Alfa Umar's introduction of the new verse into Chapter *an-Nasr* was not intentional. It was apart of the action of Allah ta'ala as He says: "*It was not you who threw when you threw, however it was Allah who threw.*"⁸⁶ So from

⁸⁴ Abdullahi Dan Fuduye', *Diya at-Ta'weel*, Vol. 4, p. 299.

⁸⁵ *Qur'an: as-Saff*: 14.

⁸⁶ *Qur'an: al-Anfaal*: 18.

the perspective of predetermination the verse that *Alfa Umar* inadvertently introduced into *an-Nasr*, by the decree of Allah ta'ala, emerged because of the circumstance that the *shaykh* found himself in actually demanded it. Thus, *Alfa Umar* through his acknowledgment of his complete servitude and surrender to the power and decree of Allah ta'ala, then attributes his actions to the One who created him in the first place. Said another way, the venerable *shaykh* willfully disobeyed his earthly slave master by writing the chapter called *an-Nasr* (The Help) rather than 'the Lord's Prayer', as a result, his Real Master and Creator, Allah ta'ala subjugated him and drowned him in the station of servitude and induced him to insert a verse that was utterly relevant to the condition and circumstance he found himself in. Thus, *Alfa Umar ibn Sayyid* became the means of Allah ta'ala speaking out to the circumstances of oppression, tyranny and injustice. Let us now examine closely the 'inserted verse', in order to comprehend what Allah ta'ala emphasizes through *Alfa Umar's* "lapse". Allah ta'ala says:

نَصْرٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَفَتْحٌ قَرِيبٌ وَبَشِّرِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

"The help is from Allah and the victory is near, so give good news to the believers."⁸⁷ The *Turudbe'* exegesis, Abdullahi Dan Fuduye', said:

"The meaning of His words: 'The help is from Allah and the victory is near', the victory over Mecca or it means the impending victory over the Persians and the eventual victory over the European Romans. The meaning of His words: 'so give good news to the believers', is 'O Muhammad, give them the good news regarding what Allah ta'ala has promised them about the commerce they have made with Allah, now and in the future for Divine assistance, victory and Paradise.'"⁸⁸

This *Qur'anic* verse was revealed to Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, in Medina at a time when the Muslim *Umma* had consolidated its military and political strength.⁸⁹ This verse is an announcement of the good news of the ultimate spread of Islam in every land and the opening of the societies traditionally connected to the Roman Empire, which includes eastern and western Europe as well as the Americas. The *Turudbe'* Fulbe had always defined the Europeans and Americans as the *Ahl-Ruum* (The Romans). In a judicial ruling produced in 1901 by the *Turudbe'* Chief Justice of Adamawa, Mudi Abdu Bellel, he says:

"Realize! And may Allah make you and I successful at arriving at that which is correct; with regard to what has transpired between the adherents among the People of Islam and the Europeans (*ar-Ruum*) accompanied by the remainder of the disbelievers, comes down to one of three matters. The first is to fight (*al-qitaal*). The second is the making of truce (*as-sulhi*). The third is emigration (*al-hijra*). And for each one there is a specific stipulation (*mahalun*) and definite legal ruling (*hukmun*)."⁹⁰

It is clear from this that *Alfa Umar ibn Sayyid*, understood the nature of his captors. He knew that the people who enslaved him and his Muslim and non-Muslim Africans were destined to be conquered through the Call of Islam. This would explain his 'resignation' and outward compliance with his Anglo-American captors. During the same fateful year of 1856, when *Alfa Umar ibn Sayyid* composed this far-reaching and millenarian manuscript, North Carolina witnessed astonishing slave insurrections. Aptheker tells us that during that year Africans who had freed themselves and escaped into the forest in the surrounding counties of Robeson and Bladen.⁹¹ These *maroons* waged incessant guerrilla warfare against Anglo-American

⁸⁷ *Qur'an: as-Saff*: 13.

⁸⁸ Abdullahi Dan Fuduye', *Diya't-Ta'weel*, Vol. 4, p. 197.

⁸⁹ Abd'r-Rahman as-Suyuti, *al-Itqaan Fee `Uluum'd-Deen*, (Beirut, Dar'l-Kutub'l-Ilmiya), 2004, Vol. 1, pp. 22-23.

⁹⁰ *Al-Qadi* Modibo Abdullahi Bellel, *Risaalat wa'n-Naseeha Ila al-Mu'asireen*, (manuscript in possession of author), folio 1.

⁹¹ Herbert Aptheker, p. 55.

slaveholders. These brave freedom fighters were freeing many Africans, many of them who were *Turudbe'* Fulbe Muslim. The struggle for freedom and victory over slavery had been raging all around the United States.

The chapter *an-Nasr* (the Help) was the last of the *Qur'anic* chapters revealed to Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace. Perhaps this fact alone is what prompted *Alfa* Umar, to disobey General Owens request for the Lord's Prayer in Arabic. The revered *Turudbe'* in his later years produced this explosive *Qur'anic* chapter, not only as an act of defiance, but also as a supplication for his descendents and all the oppressed peoples in America. In addition to this, *Alfa* Umar ibn Sayyid, demonstrates in his last writing his mystical creed with regard to the controversy of taking the protected friend's of Allah as intermediates to Allah (*tawassul bi awliyya Allah*). He says in the last part of the manuscript: "Yaa `Amaar!" This is extremely significant and controversial because of the nature of *tawassul* in Islam. Many of the scholars differ about the validity or permissibility of this act in Islam. Some of the more conservative scholars declare this as an act of disbelief, while others consider it permissible. The permissibility of *tawassul* or lack thereof is not in question here. The fact is that *Alfa* Umar believed it to be permissible. This is true because he was a member of the *Qaadiiriya* Sufi Order, who believed that *tawassul* with the Protected Friends of Allah ta'ala was permissible. And since he considered it permissible, let us examine the legal rulings that lay at the foundation of this controversial issue. The author of the *Lisaan'l-Arab*, Ibn Mundhuur said: "The concept of 'means' or 'intermediate agent' (*al-waseela*) means a place of importance with the ruler. It has the meaning of rank (*daraja*) or nearness (*qurba*). Thus so-and so is taken as a means to Allah, when he does an act that draws him near to Him by means of that person."⁹²

The concept of intermediate agent also finds its root in the pure *Sunna* where it is utilized with a specific meaning referring to a station in Paradise. It has been related by *Imam* Muslim on the authority of Abdullah ibn Umar who said that the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace said: "When you hear the caller to prayer, then say what you hear him say. Then send blessings upon me, for whoever sends blessings upon me once Allah will send blessings upon him ten times. He should then ask Allah to give me the *Waseela*. It is a station in Paradise that is only for a particular servant from among the servants of Allah. I hope that I will be that one. For whoever ask Allah to give me the *Waseela*, then my intercession will be made permissible to him."⁹³ This gives the etymological root of the concept of intermediate agent, however its usage as a technical term where a created being is taken as an intermediate between Allah ta'ala finds its origin when Umar ibn al-Khataab, may Allah be pleased with him, relinquished taking the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace as an intermediate agent, and took al-Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him as an intermediate agent. It has been related by al-Bukhari on the authority⁹⁴ of Anas ibn Malik, may Allah be pleased with him, that whenever the rain were withheld Umar ibn al-Khataab, may Allah be pleased with him use to ask for rain by means of al-Abbas ibn Abd'l-Muttalib by saying:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنَّا كُنَّا نَتَوَسَّلُ إِلَيْكَ بِنَبِيِّكَ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَتَسْقِينَا وَإِنَّا نَتَوَسَّلُ إِلَيْكَ بِعَمِّ نَبِيِّنَا فَاسْقِنَا

"O Allah, verily we use to take Your Prophet as a intermediate agent to You, and You would give us rain. Now we take the uncle of our Prophet as an intermediate agent to You, so give us rain." Clearly this is a proof for the permissibility of a Muslim taking a created being as an intermediate between himself and Allah ta'ala. However, the above evidences do not in anyway justify using the vocative phrase in Arabic: 'Yaa!' which is used when addressing someone directly. Many of the more conservative scholars in Islam say that this type of address is exclusively for Allah ta'ala when making a request and is never to be used to someone who is deceased or who is not within hearing range of the one making the request. They declare this to be a form of

⁹² Ibn Mundhuur, *Lisan'l-Arab*, (Daar Saadir, Beirut), vol. 13, p. 724.

⁹³ Muslim an-Naysaburi, *as-Shaheeh Muslim*, (at-Tibaa't al-Misriya, al-Azhar, 1929), vol. 4, p. 85.

⁹⁴ Muhammad al-Bukhari, *al-Jaami' as-Saheeh*, (Idaarat at-Tibaa'at al-Minbaryiya, 1986), vol. 2, p. 75.

idolatry. However, it has been related by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, al-Haakim, Ibn Maja, at-Tirmidhi, and others on the authority of Uthman ibn Hunayf, may Allah be pleased with him that a blind man came to the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace and said: ‘O Prophet of Allah, supplicate Allah that He will give me well being.’ He said: “If you like I can postpone that for you and it will be a virtue for you in the Hereafter. But if you like I can supplicate for you.” The man said: ‘No, rather supplicate for me now.’ Then the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace ordered him to go and make ablution and pray two *raka`ats* and to supplicate with the following supplication:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ وَأَتَوَجَّهُ إِلَيْكَ بِنَبِيِّكَ مُحَمَّدٍ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ نَبِيِّ الرَّحْمَةِ، يَا مُحَمَّدُ إِنِّي أَتَوَجَّهُ بِكَ إِلَى رَبِّي فِي حَاجَتِي هَذِهِ فَتَقْضِي وَتُشَفِّعَنِي فِيهِ وَتُشَفِّعَهُ فِيَّ

“O Allah verily I ask You and direct myself to You by means of Your Prophet Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, the Prophet of Mercy. O Muhammad! Verily I direct myself by means of you to my Lord regarding this need of mine, therefore fulfill it for me, intercede for me in it and intercede for me.” The man made the supplication and he was cured of his blindness.⁹⁵ Further, *Shaykh* as-Shawkani said about the above prophetic tradition:

“In this prophetic tradition is proof of the permissibility of taking the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, as an intermediate agent to Allah `azza wa jalla, but with the belief that the Doer is Allah sub’hanna wa ta’ala, and that He alone is the Bestower and the Preventer, what He wills will be and what He does not will, will never be.”⁹⁶

Thus, the use of the vocative particle: ‘yaa’ by *Alfa* Umar ibn Sayyid, had its foundation deep within the Islamic ethos. But why did *Alfa* Umar ibn Sayyid take Amaar as an intermediate agent between him Allah ta’ala? Who was this Amaar? And why was he so important in the psychic of Umar to warrant him being taken as a means? The answers to these questions opens a door to the profound level of learning of this enslaved *Turudbe’* Muslim and demonstrates his acute historical consciousness and the genius of his spiritual autonomy despite being enslaved.

There is no doubt that the `Amaar that *Alfa* Umar took as an intermediate agent for the help and assistance of Allah ta’ala was none other than the famous Companion of Prophet Muhammad, `Amaar ibn Yaasir ibn `Amaar ibn Malik ibn Kinana ibn Qays, whose mother Sumaya was an African freed woman to the Banu Makhzum. Thus, `Amaar was of African origin on his mother side.⁹⁷ Ibn Sa’d described `Amaar as being very tall and dark and counted him among the oppressed people of Mecca who were punished and tortured in order to renounce the religion of Islam.⁹⁸ It has been related on the authority of `Amr ibn Maymun who said: “The idolaters burned `Amaar ibn Yaasir with fire. Then the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace passed by him and wiped his hands over his head and said:

يَا نَارُ كُونِي بَرْدًا وَسَلَامًا عَلَى عَمَارٍ كَمَا كُنْتَ عَلَى إِبْرَاهِيمَ، تَقْتُلُكَ الْفِتْنَةُ الْبَاغِيَّةُ

O fire! Be cool and at peace for `Amaar in the same way that you were for Ibrahim! (O `Amaar) you will be killed by an unjust group.”⁹⁹ The punishments and tortures that `Amaar, his father and mother endured were

⁹⁵ Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *al-Musnad*, (Daar Saadir, Beirut, 1969) vol. 3, p. 138; al-Haakim, *al-Mustadraak*, (Maktaba al-Matbuu`aat al-Islamiyya, Halabi, 1335 h), vol. 1, p. 19; Ibn Maja, *as-Sunan*, (Daar Ihya at-Turaath al-`Arabi, 1975), vol. 1, p. 441; at-Tirmidhi, *Sunan*, (Daar Ihya at-Turaath al-`Arabi), vol. 5, p. 569.

⁹⁶ As-Shawkani, *Tuhfat ad-Dhaakireen*, (Mustafa al-Babali, 1393-4 h), p. 175.

⁹⁷ Ahmad ibn Ali ibn Hajr al-`Asqalani, *al-Asaaba Fi Tamyeez as-Sahaaba*, (Daar al-Kutub al-`Ilmiyya, Beirut, 1995), vol. 4, p. 473.

⁹⁸ Ibn Sa’d, *at-Tabaqaat al-Kubra*, (Daar Saadir, Beirut, 1998), vol. 3, p. 248.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

extremely brutal and psychologically damaging. This violence induced `Amaar to openly renounce the religion of Islam and proclaim the idols of Mecca. It was about him that the *Quranic* verse was revealed:

مَنْ كَفَرَ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ إِيمَانِهِ إِلَّا مَنْ أُكْرِهَ وَقَلْبُهُ مُطْمَئِنٌّ بِالْإِيمَانِ

“Those who deny Allah after having faith except those who are coerced while their hearts are tranquil with faith.”¹⁰⁰ It has been related on the authority of Waki`a ibn al-Jaraah that this verse was revealed about `Amaar ibn Yaasir.¹⁰¹ This is the legal foundation of dissimulation (*taqiyya*), which is permissible for a Muslim when his life is in danger. Thus, we can understand why Alfa Umar ibn Sayyid chose `Amaar as an intermediate agent to Allah. He was in a similar situation as `Amaar, being oppressed without any helpers in a strange land that was not his own. He no doubt witnessed his African comrades tortured in cruel and brutal means in the same way that `Amaar witnessed his mother and father tortured to death. Alfa Umar saw in the personage of `Amaar, a protected friend of Allah, whose station with his Lord was firm and well established for him to take as means to Him. There is no doubt that `Amaar was among the leading of the Companions of Muhammad, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, which had attained the status of protected friend (*waliy*). Ibn Hajr said about him: “He was among the first of the foremost. He, his mother and father were among those who were tortured for the sake of Allah...He made the immigration to Medina, witnessed all of the military campaigns with the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace...Then Umar appointed him as the *Amir* of Kufa. Umar wrote to them saying:

أَنَّهُ مِنَ النَّجَبَاءِ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ مُحَمَّدٍ

“Verily he is among the *nujaba* of the Companions of Muhammad.” This term *nujaba* (notable) has a specific meaning among the protected friends of Allah. The great *Turudbe*’ Muslim reformer and statesman, Shehu Uthman Dan Fuduye’, in his famous *Munaajaat*, counted the *nujaba* among the People of the Circle of the Government of the Spiritual Pole (*Ahl Daa’irat Imaarat al-Qutb*).¹⁰² The *nujaba* are eight spiritually super empowered individuals who have been established by Allah ta`ala in order to correct the affairs of humanity. Their sole responsibility is to take on the burden of the difficulties of other people, and they never expend their spiritual force to save themselves, only for others. The *nujaba* are among the people of excellent noble character (*makaaram al-akhlaaq*) and direct knowledge of Allah ta`ala (*irfaan*). Ibn al-`Arabi said about them: “They are the people who comprehend the Eight Eternal Attributes: Existence, Power, Will, Knowledge, Life, Seeing, Hearing, and Speech.” Alfa Umar evoked the name of `Amaar ibn Yaasir as a sign that Allah ta`ala had granted him the secrets of the above eight Eternal Attributes of Allah. These eight secrets were manifested in eight correlations between him and `Amaar: [1] he was a descendent of Africa; [2] he was oppressed in the earth; [3] he had mastered the science of dissimulation (*taqiyya*) in the face of enemies; [4] he had taken the burden of suffering on behalf of his people; he kept the covenant of victory and Divine assistance, which are: [5] glorifying Allah; [6] praising Allah; [7] seeking forgiveness of Allah; and [8] turning to Allah in repentance. This is the reason that Alfa Umar ibn Sayyid evoked the name of `Amaar ibn Yaasir, because like him, he had attained a station with Allah ta`ala where he was responsible for carrying the burden of an entire people. The suffering of Alfa Umar through slavery became the key for the future salvation of his people. It became a means through which the nation of the Anglo-Americans would be judged and measured. “When the help from Allah comes and the victory (is near, so give good news to the believers)”. In Alfa Umar, the prophecies regarding the seed of Abraham was being fulfilled, and like a true patriarch of his people, he foretold the coming of Divine help and victory from Allah ta`ala. For today, his descendents in America, and all the oppressed in this country of the Romans, are the fastest growing Muslim population in the entire world. “And you see mankind entering into the religion in mass”. Thus, the last

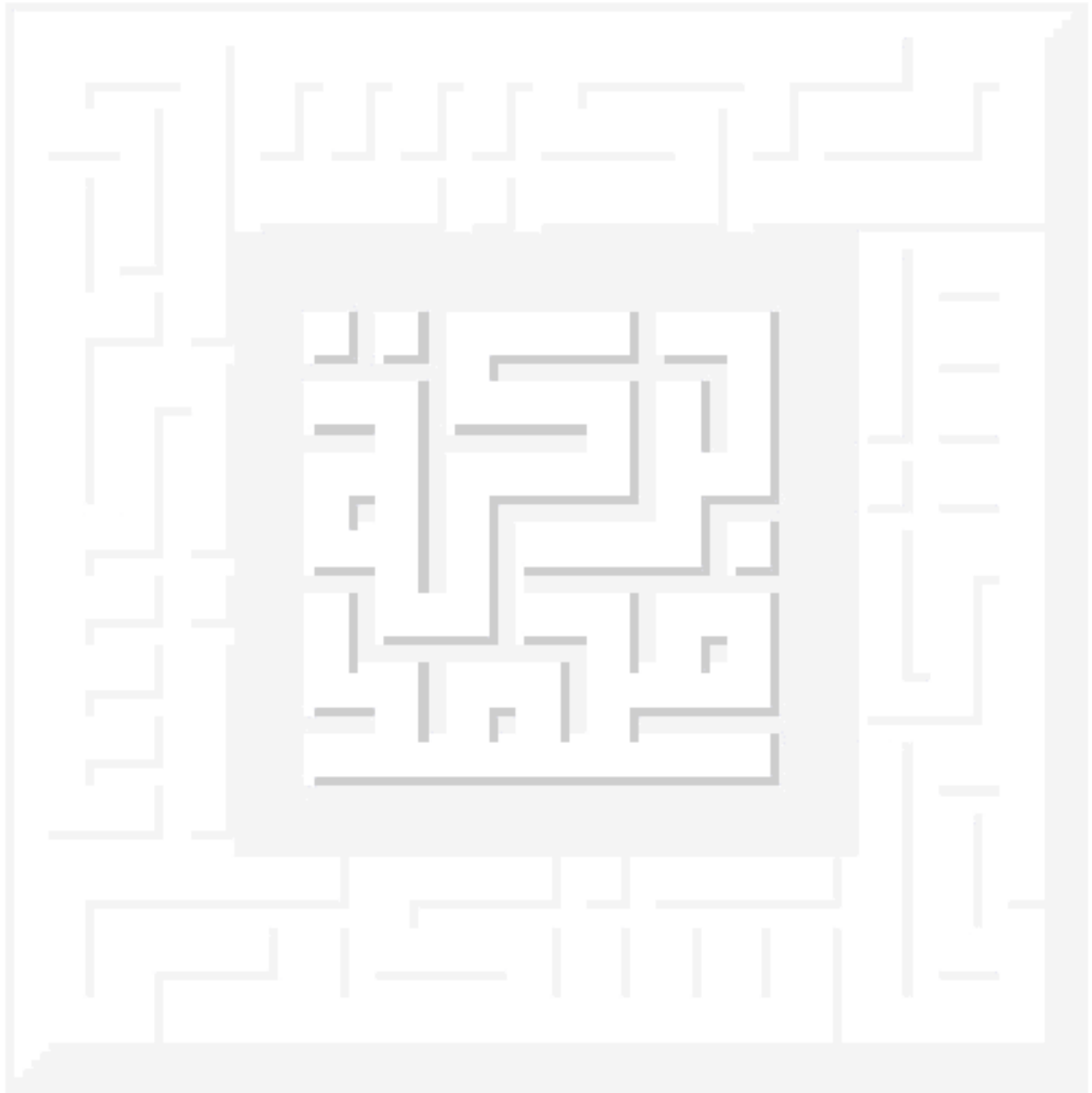
¹⁰⁰ *Quran* – 16: 106.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 251.

¹⁰² Shehu Uthman Dan Fuduye’, *Munaajaat*, (Sankore’ Institute, 2003), p. 11.

testament of *Alfa Umar*, not only announced the impending victory of Islam in the lands of the Anglo-Americans, but it also gave clear instructions on the means to that victory. “*Then glorify with the praises of your Lord and seek forgiveness of Him. Verily He is Oft Relenting.*”

In 1864 *Alfa Umar ibn Sayyid* returned to Allah ta`ala at the venerable age of 94. That same year, on the other said of the Atlantic, two other *Turudbe*’ Fulbe ‘friends of Allah’, passed on to their Lord, and was able to welcome *Alfa Umar* back into the fold of those martyrs and saints of this ‘sacred people’ – they were *Nana Asma’u bint Shehu Uthman Dan Fuduye*’, and her nephew, the mystic *Shaykh Abd’l-Qadir Dan Tafa*, may Allah be merciful to all of them.



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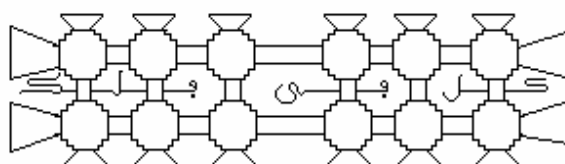


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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَى سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ وَسَلَّمَ تَسْلِيمًا

Following is a translation of the famous letter or autobiography of the enslaved Muslim Umar ibn Said.¹⁰³



In the name of Allah the Beneficent the Merciful, may Allah bless our master Muhammad.

Blessed is He in Whose hands is the kingdom, and He has power over all things.¹⁰⁴ Who created death and life is order to try you - which of you is best in deeds. And He is the Mighty the Forgiving. Who created seven heavens one above another. You do not see any inconsistency¹⁰⁵ in the creation of the *Rahmaan*. Return the sight, do you see any rupture. Then return the sight again and again, your sight will return back to you afraid¹⁰⁶ (rejected) and it is assembled (exhausted). And definitely We have beautified the lower heavens with lamps and made them missiles against the devils. And We have given¹⁰⁷ (prepared for) them the punishment of roasting. And for those who disbelieve in their Lord the punishment of Hell and an ill-fated destiny. When they will be folded¹⁰⁸ (thrown) therein, they will hear the grumbling of it¹⁰⁹ as it boils.¹¹⁰

¹⁰³ I received a color copy of this rare manuscript from Yushua Rabah, who purchased it in 1996 for \$22,000.00 at a public auction. According to Allen Austin the manuscript had been lost since 1924. It was last known to be in the hands of Howland Wood the curator of the American Numismatic Society in New York. The first translation of Umar ibn Sa'id's autobiography was done in 1848 by Alexander I. Cotheal, the treasurer of the American Ethnological Society. J. Franklin Jameson, editor of the *American Historical Review*, later annotated it. It was published in the same journal in July 1925, Vol. XXX, no. 4, pp. 787-795. Allen Austin in his *African Muslims in Antebellum America*, published a translation, which had been accomplished by Rev. Isaac Bird. Dr. F.M. Moussa later revised this translation.

¹⁰⁴ Umar ibn Sa'id began his autobiography by recording from memory the entire *Qur'anic* chapter called *al-Mulk* (the Kingdom) or *at-Tabarrak* (the Blessing). It is the sixty-seventh chapter of the *Qur'an* revealed in Mecca during the early days of prophet Muhammad's mission, upon him be peace. It comprises thirty verses. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace used to recite it every night before retiring to bed. He has narrated many traditions concerning the benefits of the tremendous chapter. The fact that Umar ibn Sa'id was able to remember this particular chapter after twenty-four years of intellectual discontinuance is proof of his faith in Allah and his continuity on the path of Islam, Iman and Ihsan.

¹⁰⁵ In Umar's manuscript he uses the word تَفَاوُت as in the recitation of *Imam Warsh* as opposed to the recitation of *Imam Hamza* and *Imam al-Kasa'i* who recite it تَفَاوُت. The recitation of *Imam Warsh* is the common recitation used throughout the *bilad 's-sudan* from which Umar took knowledge of *Qur'an*.

¹⁰⁶ Umar uses the word خَاسِبًا (afraid) rather than the correct reading خَاسِبًا (rejected).

¹⁰⁷ Umar uses the word اعْطَيْنَا (we have given) rather than the correct reading أُعْتِدْنَا (prepared).

¹⁰⁸ Umar uses the word الْفُؤَا (folded) rather than the correct reading أُلْفُؤَا (thrown).

¹⁰⁹ It is at this point that folio one ends after twelve lines of graphology..

Almost bursting from the fury. Each time a group is thrown therein, its custodian¹¹¹ says to them, 'Did not a warner come to you?'. They will say: 'Of course! A warner came to us and we rejected him (and)¹¹² said: 'Allah has not revealed anything. You are merely in enormous error'. They will say: 'If we had only listened or used our reason we would not be among the punishment (companions) of the burning fire.¹¹³ Then they will acknowledge their sins, but remote will be the companions of the burning fire.¹¹⁴ Verily those who fear¹¹⁵ their Lord in the unseen¹¹⁶, for them will be forgiveness and a tremendous rebuke (reward).¹¹⁷ And conceal your words or say them out loud¹¹⁸, truly He knows the contents of the breast. Does He who creates not know?! He is the Subtle¹¹⁹ the Aware. He it is who made (the earth)¹²⁰ smooth for you, so go through¹²¹ its spacious sides therein and consume from His sustenance. To Him is the final return.¹²² Are you so safe from He in the heaven that He should not make the earth swallow you up? Suddenly it is¹²³ in confusion. Are you so safe from He in¹²⁴ the heaven that He should not send down upon you stones. Then you will know how My warning was. Those before them denied, then how was My disapproval. Have they not seen the birds above them expanding and advancing (contracting)¹²⁵. Nothing upholds them except the *Rahman*. Truly He sees everything. (Who is it that will be supports for you who will assist you except the *Rahman*. Truly the disbelievers are only in deception).¹²⁶ Who is it that¹²⁷ will provide for you if He were to withhold your sustenance. Rather! They continue¹²⁸ in their ridicule and distaste. Is he who goes prone upon his face better guided or he who¹²⁹ walks upright upon a straight path? Say: He is the One who originated you¹³⁰ and made for you hearing, sight and perception. Little thanks do you give. Say: He it is who scattered you (multiplied you)¹³¹ in the earth and to Him you will be gathered. And they say: When will this¹³² threat come, if you are truthful? Say: The¹³³ knowledge of this is only with Allah and¹³⁴ I am only a plain warner. But when they

¹¹⁰ Here Umar omits the genitive particle and the object pronoun governed by the particle: لهم and he rendered the correct reading صحفاً as شهيئاً.

¹¹¹ Umar uses the word خذنتها (its confidant) rather than the correct reading خزنئتها (its guardian).

¹¹² Umar omits the conjunctive particle الواو.

¹¹³ Umar uses the words عذاب الشعير rather than the correct reading أصحاب السعير (the companions of the burning fire).

¹¹⁴ Umar uses the words لاصحاب الشعير rather than the correct reading لاصحاب السعير (the companions of the burning fire).

¹¹⁵ Umar uses the words يخسون rather than the correct reading يخشون (who fear).

¹¹⁶ Umar uses the words بالغيب rather than the correct reading بالغييب (in the unseen) omitting the definite particle ال.

¹¹⁷ Umar uses the words عز rather than the correct reading أجر (reward).

¹¹⁸ Umar omits the genitive particle with its genitive objective pronoun به.

¹¹⁹ Umar uses the words لطيف rather than the correct reading اللطيف (the Subtle) omitting the definite particle ال.

¹²⁰ Umar omits the accusative case noun الأرض.

¹²¹ Umar uses the words فامشوا rather than the correct reading فامشوا (so go through).

¹²² Umar omits the conjunctive particle الواو and uses the word نسور rather than the correct reading النشور (the gathering).

¹²³ **It is at this point that folio two ends after twelve lines of graphology.**

¹²⁴ Umar omits the genitive particle في (in).

¹²⁵ Umar uses the words يقبلن rather than the correct reading يقبضن (contracting).

¹²⁶ Umar omits the above two verses.

¹²⁷ Umar omits the relative pronoun الذي.

¹²⁸ Umar uses the words لزوا rather than the correct reading لجوا (continue).

¹²⁹ Umar adds the relative pronoun من.

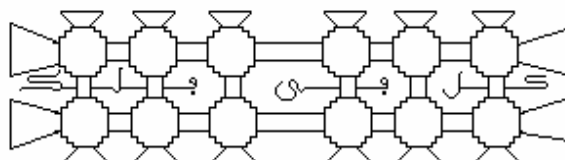
¹³⁰ Umar makes a calligraphic error by rendering انشأكم as انشاكم.

¹³¹ Umar uses the words زرعكم rather than the correct reading ذرأكم (multiplied you).

¹³² **It is at this point that folio three ends after twelve lines of graphology.**

¹³³ Umar makes a calligraphic error by rendering انما as انما.

will see it approaching, the faces of those who disbelieve will be in sorrow¹³⁵. It will be said: This is what you used to call for. (Say: do you see if your water were to dwindle, who is it then that will)¹³⁶ Say: Have you considered if Allah were to destroy me and those with me, or if He were to show us mercy - yet who will back up (protect)¹³⁷ the disbelievers from a severe punishment? (Say: He is the *Rahman*. We believe in Him and upon Him do we rely. You will soon know who is truly in clear error.)¹³⁸. Say: do you see if your water were to dwindle, who are it then that will bring you flowing water?¹³⁹



O *shaykh* Hunter, I am unable to write (about) my life. I have forgotten most of my language as well as the language of Arabic.¹⁴⁰ O my brothers, do not blame me.¹⁴¹ All praises are due to Allah with much praises. He provides from blessings to those who increase in good.¹⁴²

In the name of Allah, the Beneficent the Merciful. All praises are due to Allah the Possessor of good, generosity, bounty, adoration and munificence from before endless time. All praises are due to Allah who created creation for His worship, even the provision of their actions and words.

It is from Umar to *shaykh* Hunter. You asked me to write down my life. Truly I am unable to write (about) my life. For I have forgotten much of my language as well as the language of Arabic. I have studied only a little grammar as well as a little linguistics. Therefore O brothers, I ask you by Allah, do not blame me. My eyes are weak as well as my body.

My name is Umar ibn Said.¹⁴³ The place of my birth was Futa Toro¹⁴⁴ (which lay) between the two rivers¹⁴⁵. I sought knowledge in Bundu¹⁴⁶ and Futa¹⁴⁷ with my *shaykh*, whose name was Muhammad Said, my

¹³⁴ Umar makes the same calligraphic error in the above footnote # 29.

¹³⁵ Umar adds the definite article ال to the correcting reading السبئت rendering it السبئت.

¹³⁶ Umar adds this verse here, although it is the last of the *surat*. He indicates it is a mistake, which he himself recognized because he circled this statement with dots. This is a normative practice in correcting calligraphic errors in hand written manuscripts throughout the *Bilad 's-Sudan*.

¹³⁷ Umar uses the words يجر rather than the correct reading يجر (protect).

¹³⁸ Umar omits these two verses and instead renders: قل اه ام العلم عند الله. Here again Umar indicates that he realizes that he has not rendered the correct reading because he circles this statement with lines in order to separate it from the remainder of the text.

¹³⁹ **With the ending of this *surat* is also the ending of the forth folio after nine lines of graphology .**

¹⁴⁰ This is significant because reading and learning is an obligation upon every Muslim. Education and erudition were the hallmarks of Muslim life in the *bilad's-sudan*.

¹⁴¹ Here there every reason to believe that Umar is addressing his fellow Muslims who one day may come across this letter and find in it many grammatical and linguistic errors. It also indicates for whom was he writing this autobiography.

¹⁴² **It is here that the fifth folio ends after eight lines of graphology.** On the left edge of the folio is a slight English type written in cursive: "For translation only."

¹⁴³ In other manuscripts Umar mentioned that the name of his mother was Umm Hani Yarmake'.

¹⁴⁴ *Futa Toro* is the traditional homeland of the Fulfulbe speaking ethnic groups known as *Tukulur* or *Turudbe*'. This region was for many centuries under the sovereignty of the Takruur, Malian and Songhay empires, respectively.

¹⁴⁵ The two rivers here either refers to the region between the Senegalese River and the Gambian River; or the region between the Senegalese River and the Faleme' River. The entire region is considered the lands of *Futa Toro*.

¹⁴⁶ The region of *Bundu* is the southern most tip of *Futa Toro* which lies on the west bank of the Faleme' River.

brother, *shaykh* Sulayman Kabah¹⁴⁸, and *shaykh* Jibril Abdaal. I was entrenched in seeking knowledge for twenty-five years.¹⁴⁹ I came back to my region and after six years a large army came to our land.¹⁵⁰ They killed many people and seized me bringing me to the great ocean.¹⁵¹ There they sold me and I was sold into the hands of the Christians. They brought me in the enormous ship on the great ocean.¹⁵² We sailed on the great ocean for a month and a half. We came to a place named Charleston in the language of the Christians.¹⁵³ There I was sold and bought by a diminutive, weak and wicked man, named Johnson, a serious disbeliever who had no fear of Allah.

I am a small man and unable to do strenuous work, so I fled from the hands of Johnson. Until (when) the month (arrived) I came to a place called Fayadil.¹⁵⁴ There I saw houses.¹⁵⁵ During the month I entered into one of the houses in order to make the *salaat*. A young boy riding a horse saw me and he went to his father's place and informed him, saying: 'I saw a Black man in the house'. A man by the name of Hunda¹⁵⁶ and another man riding a horse came with many hounds. They seized me and brought me with them for twelve miles to a place called Fayadil. They placed me in a large building which they called *jail*, in the language of the Christians. They kept me there for sixteen days and nights.¹⁵⁷ On Friday they opened the cells of the huge building and brought me to a place where I saw many men, all whom were Christians. Some of them called out to me, 'What is your name? Is it Umar or Sa'id?' I did not understand their Christian language. I saw a man called Bob Mumford who spoke to me and led me out of the jail.¹⁵⁸ I was extremely pleased to go with them to their place. I was situated in the place of Mumford for four nights and days. And then a man named Jim Owen, son-n-law of Mumford, having married his daughter Bansah (Betsey?) Mumford.¹⁵⁹ He asked me if I was willing to go to a place called Balden. I said, "Yes." I was pleased to go with them. I have been situated in the place of Jim Owen until now.

¹⁴⁷ Here I believe Umar is referring to *Futa Jallon* because the level of Islamic learning in the region during the period in question superseded that of the *Futa Toro*. *Futa Jallon* became a magnate for learned scholars and Arabic literacy where more than 60% of the inhabitants were versed in the Arabic language. Education in this region was propagated by the famous Saalamiyya families who spread the *Qaadiiriyya Tareeqa* throughout Guinea, Senegal and Gambia and traced their ancestry to Umar ibn 'l-Khataab.

¹⁴⁸ This, no doubt refers to *Chirnu* Sulayman Bal, who initiated Islamic reform and education in the regions of *Futa Toro* and *Futa Jallon*. The surname *Kambah*, I believe, is a derivative of the name Kabba meaning that *Shaykh* Sulayman was a member of the Jakhanke clerical communities.

¹⁴⁹ It was 1776 when Umar began his education at the age of six. This was the traditional age in which the Muslim child began his *Qur'anic* studies with a teacher throughout the *bilad's-sudan*. This period was the same time in which *Shaykh* Sulayman Bal and *Almamy* Abd'l-Qaadir initiated their reform movements in the regions of *Futa Toro* and *Futa Jallon*.

¹⁵⁰ It was in 1801 when Umar returned to his region after twenty-five years of study. He was thirty-one years old.

¹⁵¹ The forts of Umar's possible sale could have been the English fortress called Fort James at the mouth of the Gambian River or one of the Portuguese forts called Goree Island and Cape Verde.

¹⁵² The Atlantic Ocean. **Here ends the sixth folio after fourteen lines of graphology.** This folio is numbered fourteen. This makes me wonder if there were not some folios between this one and the previous folio five.

¹⁵³ Charleston, South Carolina, which was the chief port of disembarkment of African slaves. Umar arrived in Charleston in the same year that the United States abolished the importing of African slaves from Africa. It was also the same year that the first Muslim slave revolts issued in Bahia, Brazil from Muslims mostly from the same region as Umar. This year also witnessed the major successes of the armies of *Shehu* Uthman Dan Fuduye' in the central *bilad's-sudan*.

¹⁵⁴ Fayetteville, North Carolina.

¹⁵⁵ It is not certain what type of houses Umar is referring to here. However, according to the translation of Rev. Isaac Bird, Umar was referring to churches. There is no indication in the Arabic text that these 'houses' were indeed churches.

¹⁵⁶ The translation of Rev. Isaac Bird renders this name as Hunter, however it is written different from the spelling in the beginning of the autobiography.

¹⁵⁷ **It is at this point that folio seven ends after fourteen lines of graphology. Again this folio is numbered fifteen.**

¹⁵⁸ According to Allen Austin Bob Mumford was the sheriff of Fayetteville's Cumberland County.

¹⁵⁹ In Rev. Isaac Bird translation he rendered the name of the women as Betsy.

Before I came into the hand of General Owen a man by the name of Mitchell came to buy me. He asked me if I were willing to go to the place of Charleston. I said, 'No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, I am not going to the place of Charleston. I will stay in the hand of Jim Owen.'¹⁶⁰

O people of North Carolina, O people of South Carolina, O people of America all of you: have you among you two good men named Jim Owen with John Owen? These two men are good men. What food they ate, I ate. In what they clothe themselves, they clothe me. Jim along with (my brothers?)¹⁶¹ recite to me the *Injil* of Allah, our Lord, Creator, King; who regulates all our circumstances, our health and wealth, and who bestows His bounties willingly, without constraint according to His power. Open my heart to the way of guidance, to the way of Yusu`a the Messiah, to the tremendous light.

Before I came to the lands of the Christians, my religion was the religion of Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah may Allah bless him and grant him peace. I used to walk to the mosque before the appearance of dawn. I used to wash my face, (wipe) my head and (wash) my hands and feet. I prayed at the time of *dhuhr*. I prayed the time of *asr*. I prayed the time of *maghrib*. I prayed the time of *`isha*.¹⁶² I gave the *zakat* every year: gold; silver; seeds; cattle; sheep; goats; rice; wheat and barley. I gave the *zakat* on all that. I went to the *jihad* every year against the disbelievers. I went to Mecca and Medina, as all did who were able. My father had six sons and five daughters. Three of these sons and one of the daughters were from my mother. When I left my country I was thirty-seven years old. I have stayed in the country of the Christians for twenty-four years¹⁶³.

In the year 1831 of Yusu`a the Messiah.¹⁶⁴

O people of North Carolina, O people of South Carolina, O all you people of America. The first son of Jim Owen is called Thomas, and his sister is called Masa Jayne (Martha Jane?).¹⁶⁵ These are people are very good people. Tom Owen and Neil Owen have two sons and one daughter. The name of the first son is Jim and the second is John. The daughters' name is Mulcy (Mercy?).¹⁶⁶ Mister Jim Owen (and his wife)¹⁶⁷ had two sons and five daughters. The first was Tom, then John, Maasa (Martha?),¹⁶⁸ Miriam, Sophia, Maakit (Margaret)¹⁶⁹ and Eliza. These people are very good people.

The wife of John Owen is called Lucy. She is an upright wife. She had three and two children. Three of them died and two are still living.

O you Americans, you people of North Carolina - Are there among you!? Are there among you!? Are there among you!? Are there among you!? - good people who fear Allah much?!

Verily I, Umar, love to read the book of the Mighty *Qur'an*.

General Jim Owen and his wife used to read the *Injil*. They read it to me very much. Allah, our Lord, Creator, King; who regulates all our circumstances, our health and wealth, and who bestows His bounties willingly, without constraint according to His power. Open my heart to the way of guidance. All praises are

¹⁶⁰ **It is at this point that folio eight ends after fifteen lines of graphology.** This folio is numbered sixteen.

¹⁶¹ I believe Umar intends to say, 'his brother'.

¹⁶² **It is at this point that folio nine ends after thirteen lines of graphology.** This folio is numbered seventeen.

¹⁶³ This means that Umar was first captured in 1807, the same year in which *Shaykh Abd'l-Qadir* was captured and killed. This resulted in increased instability for the Muslim Fulbe in the *Futa Jallon* and *Futa Toro* regions.

¹⁶⁴ This means when Umar recorder his autobiography he was sixty-one years old.

¹⁶⁵ **It is at this point that folio ten ends after fourteen lines of graphology.** This folio is numbered eighteen.

¹⁶⁶ Allen Austin renders the correct spelling as Mercy.

¹⁶⁷ This phrase is written on the borders of the folio near 'Mr. Jim's' name. I took the liberty to insert at this point because it seems the only logical place for it.

¹⁶⁸ This is the name rendered by Allen Austin.

¹⁶⁹ Again Allen Austin is credited with this spelling.

¹⁷⁰ **It is at this point that folio eleven ends after twelve lines of graphology.** This folio is numbered nineteen.

due to Allah the Lord of the worlds, with abundant praises. He is plenteous in blessings and abundant in goodness.¹⁷¹

For reason that the law by Musa one must act. Further, the blessing and the truth were by *Yusu`a* the Messiah.

The first (foremost?) is Muhammad:

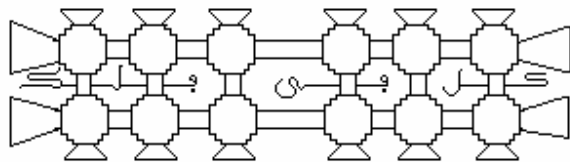
that he prayed saying “*All praises are due to Allah the Lord of the worlds. The Beneficent the Merciful. King of the Day of Judgment. It is You that we worship and You alone that we seek for assistance. Guide us to the straight path. The path of those upon whom You have blessed. Not among those who have earned anger nor who have gone astray. Amen.*”

And now the words of our lord¹⁷² *Yusu`a* the Messiah¹⁷³:

“Our father who are in heaven Holy be Your name. Your kingdom come. You will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us our daily bread. Forgive us as we have forgiven those who have done us harm. Do not enter us into temptations. But redeem us from evils. To You belong the Kingdom and the power, the majesty forever. Amen.”

Truly my residing in my country was by reason of great detriment.¹⁷⁴ The disbelievers seized me unjustly and sold me to the Christians, who purchased me. We sailed a month and a half on the great ocean to the place called Charleston in the language of the Christians. I fell into the hands of a small, weak and wicked man, who did not fear Allah at all. He could neither read nor did he pray. I was afraid to remain with a sinful man who had so many sins. Thus, I fled for a month, when Allah, our Lord, lead me into the hands of a good man, who feared Allah and who loved to do good. His name was General Jim Owen along with his brother whose name was Colonel John Owen. These were two good men. I am presently residing in Bladen County.¹⁷⁵

I am established in the hands of Jim Owen. He does not beat nor scold. I neither go hungry nor naked, and I have no hard work to do. I am not able to do hard work for I am a small man and feeble. During the last twenty years I have not seen any harm at the hands of Jim Owen.¹⁷⁶



Translated by:

Abu Alfa MUHAMMAD SHAREEF bin Farid

¹⁷¹ **It is at this point that folio twelve ends after nine lines of graphology.** This folio is numbered twenty.

¹⁷² The use of the term ‘our lord’ in referring to *sayyidinaa* Isa ibn Maryum, upon him be peace, is perhaps the strongest evidence of the possibility of Umar ibn Sa`id’s apostasy from the religion of Islam. However, again, when examining Umar’s level of Islamic education, one is forced to consider other alternatives other than mere abandonment of his religion.

¹⁷³ Just above these words is written the word *يُصَلِّي* (he prays) as though he wanted to add this to the sentence.

¹⁷⁴ It is not clear what Umar meant here by these words. Perhaps he was speaking of the many wars that were taking place during the period he was seized. During that time the pagan Africans were successful at raiding many centers of the Fulbe Muslims. It was the same year in which he was captured that the pagans sacked the central religious town of *Almamy* Abd’l-Qaadir and had him murdered. The period was a period of insecurity and internecine warfare.

¹⁷⁵ **It is at this point that folio fourteen ends after thirteen lines of graphology.** This folio is numbered twenty-two.

¹⁷⁶ This no doubt was from the *baraka* of *al-Mulk*. The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace said, “Whoever recites it once every night will never be harmed by tribulation.”