

A NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY AND TRANSLATION

Any historian trying to write a book on Muslims in West Africa is faced with a common problem, namely the transcription of Arabic and vernacular names. First, one has to deal with Arabic names from classical sources alongside West African names of Arabic origin that have been naturalized in West African languages, as Mervyn Hiskett already pointed out. Second, sources in European languages, in my case English, French and German, further add to the variation in the spelling of names and places. For example, one of the key Muslim ethnic groups in West Africa is known in French as Dyula but in English as Juula. One of the most prominent local Muslim scholars of his time was ‘Umar ibn Abu Bakr ibn ‘Uthman ibn ‘Ali al-Kabbawi al-Kanawi (ca. 1858–1934). For the Germans – and in German texts – he was known as Imam Imoru but contemporary Muslim Ghanaians refer to him as Alhaji Umar of Kete-Krachi. From a strict, historical point of view, he was Imam ‘Umar before he made his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1913 and only when he returned was he Alhaji ‘Umar (but he still continued as Imam of Kete). Furthermore, names and spelling in most, especially early, colonial sources are heavily influenced by Hausa as many colonial officers either themselves were fluent in Hausa or used Hausa *malams* (Hausa: literate Muslim, equivalent of the Arabic term *mu'allim*) as their intermediaries.

For the sake of accessibility of the text for those who are not specialists, either in African linguistics or in Islamic studies, I made the following compromises when referring to African and Arabic names of persons, people and places. In the first part of the study, which concentrates on the precolonial period, I followed the recommendations of the authors in the *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources of West African History* (2000 [1981]) and the *Arabic Literature of Africa, Vol IV (ALA)* and use, as far as possible, an Arabic spelling for Muslim scholars. However, persons known by their African names are referred to by them, although I have tried to standardize them using English forms. If both spellings are known, then the English-Africanized form is used and the Arabic is put in bracelets. Arabic terms are transliterated using a simplified standard transliteration system. However, Arabic words and terms which have been adapted into English, such as *amir*, will be used. Others will be written in a simplified transliteration, i.e., omitting long vowels, etc., for example, *Quran* instead of *Qur'ān*. This also applies to place names; thus, for example, I will use *Mecca* instead of *Makkah*. African political entities, such as the ‘kingdoms’ in Northern Ghana, are referred to by their local names, i.e., *Dagbon* (instead of the Anglicized form of *Dagomba*), *Mampurugu*, *Nanun* and *Wa*. However, the state of the Gbanya is referred to as *Gonja*. The spelling of local titles,

too, varies greatly. I have, as far as possible, tried to use a spelling which is based on an Anglicized vernacular form.

In parts two and three, i.e., the parts which deal with the colonial and the postcolonial period, names of local persons are usually written as they are known today. Thus, persons referred to in texts produced in the colonial period are, if possible, identified and their name standardized. The names of political entities follow colonial and contemporary praxis, i.e., Dagomba, etc., refers to the administrative unit.