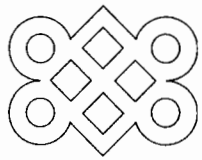
A HISTORY OF
ISLAMIC SOCIETIES

SECOND EDITION



IRA M. LAPIDUS

Emeritus, University of California, Berkeley

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ʿUthman Don Fodio and the central Sudan

The central Sudan was another locus of jihad. Here, too, Muslim clerics and reformers dreamed of establishing an Islamic society on the model of the life of the Prophet and the early Caliphs. Such teachers as Jibril b. ʿUmar had traveled to Mecca and Medina, where they were influenced by reformist Sufi views. They returned to preach the principles of the Quran and the tradition of the Prophet, uphold the rule of Shariʿa, and encouraged individuals to seek personal sanctity. They also taught the doctrine of the double jihad: the inner jihad, the struggle against the corruption of the body, must precede the outer jihad, the war against pagan rulers and corrupt Muslim governments and their hired ʿulamaʾ. Hijra, migration to a true Muslim community, and jihad, a war in the name of the faith, were the overriding obligations. Thus they introduced a universalistic and theocratic concept of Islam as the supreme arbiter of social life and as the transforming force in the lives of individuals. For them Islam was an exclusive religion incompatible with African cults. This new message was preached with messianic fervor. Throughout West and Central Africa the thirteenth Muslim century (corresponding to the nineteenth century) was expected to mark the victory of Islam over the infidel world. This was to be the age of the mujaddid, or renewer of Islam, who comes once every century, and of the Caliph of Takrur, the twelfth Caliph, whose rule would be followed by the coming of the messiah.

'Uthman Don Fodio (1754–1817) was the greatest of these new leaders. 'Uthman was a descendant of a torodbe family, well established in Hausaland, a student of Jibril b. 'Umar, an uncompromising opponent of corrupt practices, and a proponent of jihad. He began his African preaching in 1774–75, wandering from place to place as an itinerant *mallam* (religious scholar). For a time he accepted the patronage of the Hausa state of Gobir. His position was like that of the Muslim scholars who for centuries had found in the Hausa courts attractive opportunities to establish their influence, but who chafed against the restrictions placed upon them. Publicly expressing his frustration with the failure of the rulers to put Islam into practice, 'Uthman broke with the royal court. Disillusioned, he returned to Degel to preach to his followers.

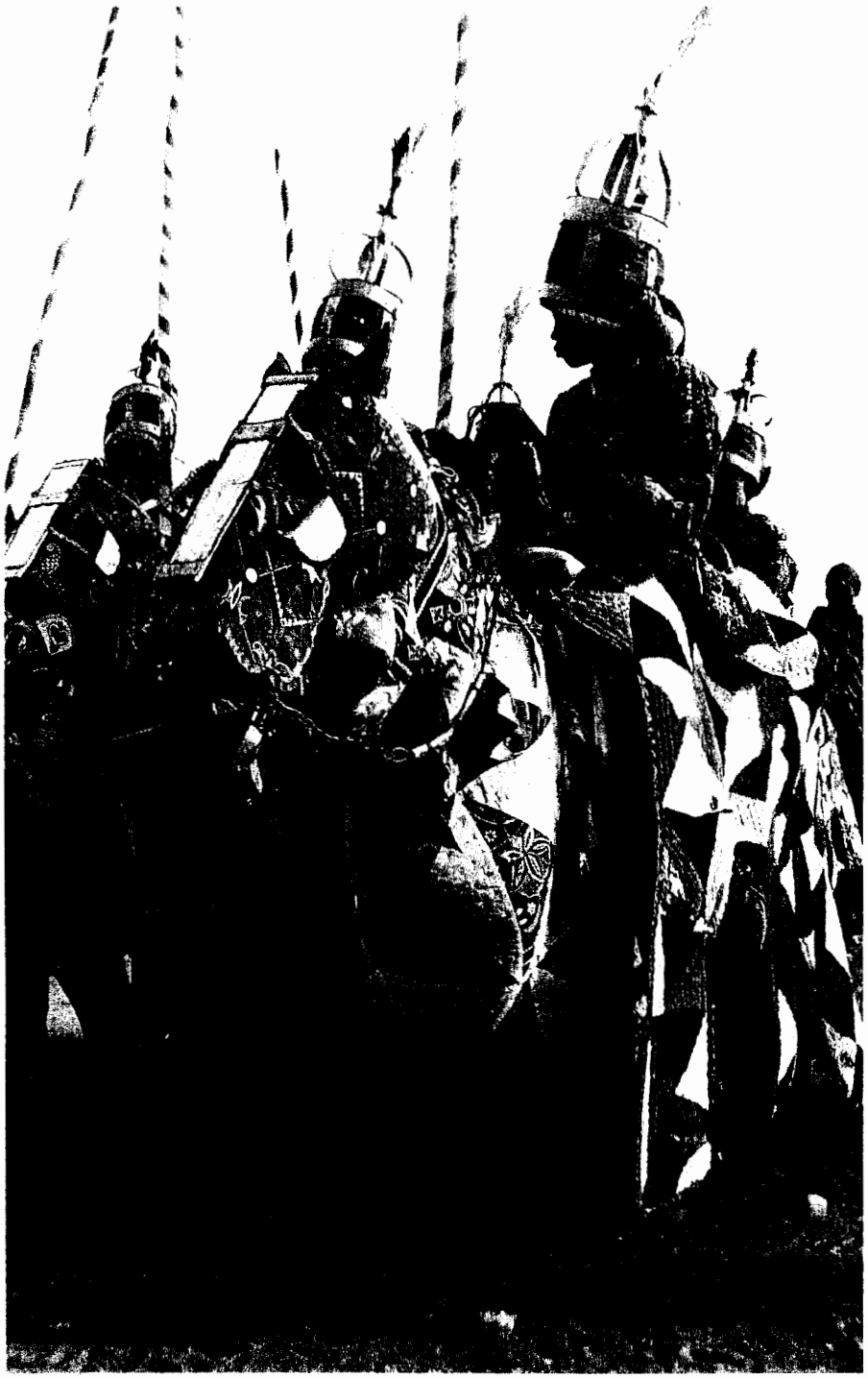
The tradition of reform in which 'Uthman preached also had African origins. In the fifteenth century al-Maghili had denounced the corrupt and un-Islamic practices of West African Muslim states. He condemned illegal taxation and the seizure of private property, and denounced pagan ceremonial practices and "venal" mallams who served rulers without adequate knowledge of Arabic or Islam. Al-Maghili called for the implementation of Muslim law by a strong and committed Muslim ruler, and introduced into West Africa the concept of the mujaddid. In this vein, 'Uthman criticized the Hausa rulers for unjust and illegal taxes, for confiscations of property, compulsory military service, bribery, gift taking, and the enslavement of Muslims. He also criticized them for condoning polytheism, worshiping fetishes, and believing in the power of talismans, divination, and conjuring. Another strand in his preaching derived from the tradition of Maliki law, communicated through Timbuktu and Bornu and reinforced by reformist religious currents emanating from Mecca and Medina. 'Uthman denounced pagan customs, the free socializing of men and women, dancing at bridal feasts, and inheritance practices that were contrary to Muslim law. As in other Islamic societies, the autonomy of Muslim communities under 'ulama' leadership made it possible to resist the state and the state version of Islam in the name of the Shari'a and the ideal Caliphate.

'Uthman's influence was based on deep knowledge of Muslim law and his mystical visions. A vision in 1789 led him to believe he had the power to work miracles, and to teach his own mystical wird, or litany. He later had visions of 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, the founder of the Qadiriya, and an experience of ascension to heaven where he was initiated into the silsila of the Qadiriya and the Prophet. Here he was named the imam of the walis (saints), and presented with the sword of truth. His theological writings were concerned with the concepts of the mujaddid, the hijra, the role of 'ulama' in teaching the true faith, and the role of reason and consensus in the derivation of Muslim law. All of these concerns bear on the problem of the authority of an individual scholar to challenge the established political and religious elites. Out of these concerns, 'Uthman produced numerous tracts on political theory, biographies, histories, and other works in Arabic and Fulbe. Many people regarded him as the mahdi come in fulfillment of popular prophecies. 'Uthman's appeal to justice and morality rallied the outcasts of Hausa society. He found his principal constituency among the Fulani. Primarily cattle pastoralists, they were dependent upon peasants for access to river beds and grazing lands, and were taxed accordingly. Hausa peasants, runaway slaves, itinerant preachers, and others also responded to 'Uthman's preaching.

In 1804, the conflict between 'Uthman and the rulers of Gobir came into the open. The rulers forbade Muslims to wear turbans and veils, prohibited conversions, and ordered converts to return to their old religion. 'Uthman declared the hijra and moved from Degel to Gudu where he was elected imam, amir al-mu'minin, and *sarkin muslim* – head of the Muslim community. There he declared the jihad. In the wars that followed, the Muslims rallied Fulani support, and by 1808 had defeated the rulers of Gobir, Kano, Katsina, and other Hausa states. They expanded into the territory south of Lake Chad and into Nupe and Yorubaland as far as the forest zone. By 1830 the jihad had engulfed most of what is now northern Nigeria and the northern Cameroons. The regime founded by 'Uthman is known as the Caliphate of Sokoto. 'Uthman was Caliph; his brother 'Abdallah, based in Gwandu, and his son Muhammad Bello, based in Sokoto, were his viceroys. 'Uthman retired to teaching and writing, and in 1817 Muhammad Bello succeeded him.

Sokoto was a combination of an Islamic state and a modified Hausa monarchy. Bello introduced an Islamic administration. Muslim judges, market inspectors, and prayer leaders were appointed, and an Islamic tax and land system was instituted, with revenues on the land considered kharaj and the fees levied on individual subjects called jizya, as in classical Islamic times. The Fulani cattle-herding nomads were sedentarized and converted to sheep and goat raising as part of an effort to urbanize them and bring them under the rule of Muslim law. Mosques and schools were built to teach the populace Islam. The state patronized a large community of religious scholars (mallams), some of whom were tied to the government as administrators and advisors, while others rejected worldly power and lived among the common people. The jihad movement helped to fortify the practice of Islamic law in Hausaland and also generated a theological, legal, astrological, and vernacular poetic literature in the Hausa language. Sufism became widespread and Hausa society became fully part of the Muslim world. Kano became famous for law, Zaria for Arabic grammar, and Sokoto for mysticism. The Sokoto scholars were mainly affiliated with the Qadiriya, but the Tijani order was introduced by al-Hajj 'Umar during the 1830s.

Under the authority of the Caliphate, the territories were divided into emirates appointed by and responsible to the Caliphs. Many emirates corresponded to the former Hausa states, and accepted Hausa methods of administration and palace organization. The power of the Amirs was based on military force, but they governed with the aid of the Fulani lineages and the advice of the mallams. For rural administration the emirates were divided into fiefs, some of which were controlled



20 Nigerian men and horses in quilted cloth armour

by the rulers and some by local Fulani chiefs. Village chiefs administered their subjects through appointed ward-heads and through the chiefs of organized craftsmen. The crafts were also the fiefs of officials who were responsible for the collection of taxes, observance of Muslim law, and maintenance of public property such as mosques, roads, and walls. The fact that the greater part of the territory nominally ruled by Sokoto remained in the hands of local fief-holders and chieftains meant that Islamic ideas were only occasionally applied in the provinces. Government by secular-minded Fulani chieftains led quickly away from Muslim norms, and many of the practices that had been criticized by the Muslims flourished again. Despite the claims of reform, it is arguable that the emirates were only a modified version of the older Hausa states.

The economy of the Sokoto Caliphate was based upon slave villages or plantations. First developed in the Sokoto region after 1760 (and again after the jihad of 1804–08), the plantations produced cotton, indigo, grain, rice, tobacco, kola nuts, and other crops. The state also promoted indigo and textile industries. The plantation economy flourished until the late nineteenth century, when colonial rule and the suppression of slavery allowed for a revitalization of the peasant economy.

The jihad of ʿUthman spilled out from its homeland in northern Nigeria to Bornu, the Lake Chad region, and to southern Nigeria, and inspired other jihads in the western Sudan and Senegambia. In the seventeenth century Bornu was already a center of Muslim learning, but it also had a substantial Fulani population aggrieved by landlord domination. Inspired by ʿUthman, the Fulani rose up to attack the rulers of Bornu. Bornu, however, successfully resisted the jihad by revitalizing its own Muslim credentials. Al-Kanemi, a mallam living in Ngala, helped the rulers to defeat the Fulani, and became the most powerful chieftain in Bornu. In 1814 he built his own town, Kukawa, expanded the area of his hegemony, appointed his own officials, and essentially displaced the rulers. Speaking for Bornu, he denied that jihad was legitimate when waged against Muslim peoples, regardless of whether they were good or bad Muslims.

Thus a new dynasty and a new Muslim state was, ironically, founded as a reaction against the jihad. The new regime was built upon an aristocracy consisting of the royal family, courtiers, and nobles called *kogonas*. The regime appointed qadis and imams, and professed to be as genuinely Muslim as the rival Sokoto Caliphate. It had a double structure of administration. One system was applied to the control of territories and all the resident populations; the other was directed to clans and ethnic and craft associations. The existence of both territorial and group administrations indicates a society in transition from clan lineage to territorial forms of organization.

The jihad inspired by ʿUthman also helped spread Islam into southern Nigeria. Muslim traders from Bornu, Songhay, and Hausaland came to Yorubaland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and converted the first Yorubas to Islam. With the help of the Sokoto Caliphate Muslims won control of Ilorin, and Muslim quarters

were formed in Abeokuta, Lagos, and other towns. Their communities were organized under the leadership of imams, who led the prayers and festivals and mediated disputes.

Still other jihads led to the formation of Muslim states south of Lake Chad in Air, north of Sokoto among the Tuaregs, and in Masina. The Masina state, led by Ahmad Lobbo, had its capital at Hamdallahi and lasted from 1816 to 1861. It was based on a highly organized army supported by a system of granaries created to provision the soldiers and spare the local population from abuse. A council of state was made up of religious teachers; the local administrative apparatus was filled with relatives and clients of the learning counselors. New legislation was introduced, including controls over women, and the suppression of fortune telling, tobacco smoking, and prostitution.