

Center for African Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (ISITA) and the Program of African Studies,
Northwestern University

Call for Papers

The “Caliphate of Hamdallahi”: A History from Within



Sponsored by the Center for African Studies (CAS), University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought in Africa (ISITA), and the Program of African Studies (PAS) at Northwestern University, this international conference will take place at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign from April 6-7, 2018.

The conference is part of a series of collaborative programs on Islam in Africa organized under the auspices of the Illinois-Northwestern Consortium for African Studies (funded by a U.S. Department of Education Title VI National Resource Center grant).

Explicit of the Letter on the Appearance of the Twelfth Caliph by Nuh b. al-Tahir al-Fulani (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Ms. Arabe 6756).

Problematique

The 19th century saw the emergence in West Africa of a wave of Islamic reform movements that led to the establishment of a number of Islamic states. Historians had overlooked these movements until the very the end of colonialism when an article by Abdullahi Smith drew attention to this “neglected theme” of African history (in the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1961). Since then, much research has been devoted to these states and extensive literature exists on the topic. The lion’s share of this literature is devoted to the so-called Sokoto state, established in the first years of the 19th century in northern Nigeria (see, for example, Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate* [1967]); and to the Tukulor Empire, originating in Senegal

and Guinea-Conakry, but extending its influence deep into central Mali (see, among others, David Robinson, *The Holy War of 'Umar Tall* [1985]).

By the time of the emergence of the Tukulor Empire, Mali had also been the theater of an earlier Islamic state: the Caliphate of Hamdallahi. This state was founded by the Muslim reformer Ahmad Lobbo (d. 1845) and extended between Jenne and Timbuktu along the River Niger. The caliphate was ruled by three Ahmads, the founding leader, his son (d. 1853), and his grandson (d. 1862), before being annexed by the Tukulor Empire. As the Malian scholar Bintou Sanankoua underlines, the Caliphate of Hamdallahi has left a deep imprint on the history of Mali, but has suffered “the destiny of the defeated” (Sanankoua, *Un empire peul* [1990]) and disappeared from history. Very few studies exist on this Islamic state, mainly PhD dissertations or published works in French (apart from the above mentioned Sanakoua *Un empire peul*, see, Amadou H. Ba and Jacques Daget, *L’empire peul du Macina* [1956]). Literature in English is virtually non-existent, with the exception of an unpublished dissertation (William A. Brown, *The Caliphate of Hamdullahi* [1969]), a journal article (Marion Johnson, “The Economic Foundations of an Islamic Theocracy: The Case of Masina,” *Journal of African History* 17/4 [1976]: 481-495), and overviews in general histories of the continent.

“The ‘Caliphate of Hamdallahi’: A History from Within” aims at filling this gap and aspires to take the caliphate out of what Sanankoua has defined as the “oblivion of history” (Sanankoua, *Un empire peul*), on the occasion of the bicentennial of the foundation of the caliphate. The conference is organized by Mauro Nobili (Assistant Professor in African History, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), Mohamed Diagayete (Senior Researcher at the Institut des Hautes Etudes et de Recherches Islamiques Ahmed Baba de Tombouctou), and Ali Diakite (Post-Doctoral Fellow at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign). We seek papers that reflect new research to improve our knowledge of Hamdallāhi from within. We encourage established as well as emerging scholars to interrogate unexplored sources, be they oral or written, published or unpublished, which will shed light on different aspects of the history of the caliphate: political, intellectual, and economic. As an outcome, we aim at producing a collective volume that will stand as a reference work for scholars.

Please send paper proposals to: nobili@illinois.edu by **August 5, 2017**. Proposals should include an abstract of no more than 300 words and a title, as well as the author’s name, email address, institutional affiliation. Please also attach an updated Curriculum Vitae. Graduate student proposals are especially welcomed, and should be accompanied by a thesis abstract. Some financial support may be available to cover travel costs for invited participants, particularly from overseas.