

TRANSLATION

[62r] In the name of God, the Compassionate and the Merciful.

May God bestow his blessing upon our master Muḥammad who unveiled what was locked and the seal of the past, the protector of truth by truthfulness and the guide to your straight path, and upon his family, the truth of his power and his great status.

Verily the breeze will cure me when it blows, diffusing fragrance from your regions.

Who will inform my friends in the clan that I remain faithful to the bonds of love?

Protector of the truth when protectors are rare, benefit of eras and ages.

The conqueror of lands and cities, the example of those possessed of hands and eyes.

They are given victory through following the Umarian *sunna*⁵ to victory, under him [ʿUmar] who is not affected by shortcoming or inadequacy in seeking God's pleasure nor, by God's power, are his miracles in any way restrained or withheld. No, he comes and shines forth in proof from his Lord and of his rationality, he is the pillar of the aspirants and teacher of those following the mystical way, the place where those seeking benefit and blessing dismount, the reviver of the path of men, the horseman who leads in every field, the overflowing ocean of mystical and cognitive knowledge whom glory and pride no one today can comprehend, Abū Ḥafṣ⁶ al-Ḥājj ʿUmar al-Fūti,⁷ may God glorify your name and raise your status as high as the heavens. May the peace

⁴ Including a poem celebrating military victories in BNP, MO, FA 5573, ff. 64-65, and a poem praising the Prophet and establishing a Sharifian genealogy in 5582, ff. 53-4.

⁵ *Al-sunna al-ʿumariyya*. The phrasing suggests that the Umarian *jihād* against paganism was highly regarded and closely watched by the larger Muslim community.

⁶ "Father of Ḥafṣa." Ḥafṣa was the daughter of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and wife of the Prophet. The author wishes to evoke the analogy between ʿUmar ibn Saʿīd and his illustrious namesake.

⁷ The author actually writes *al-Futawwī*, a variant of al-Fūti.

of God, the Righteous and Merciful, be upon your exalted status. We praise God other than Whom there is no god, we ask Him for us and for you pardon and well-being. Thanks be for well-being and the continuation of well-being. And now:

God has a glory beyond the reach of the stars
 Which occupies in you the highest peak and summit.
 Hopes were stirred through you after having been lost,
 Your son proudly guards them.

[62v] Our ears have been delighted by this good news⁸ about you and your majesty -- good news which when heard makes people happy, and whenever a Muslim hears it he is cured of his envy and raises his voice and is filled with joy and praise. It is news of victory and conquest, the news of clear glory, a great victory, a source of much joy. In truth this is a glory for the Muslim nation, a victory through a road that had previously been blocked, it is a joy for the saints of God who repeat it standing and sitting. I pray that the swords of truth will strike the foreheads and cheeks of the evil people.

When the news became public knowledge and we got the details from all sources,⁹ it became necessary for us to come to your doorway with this congratulation.

Therefore we thank God who, through you, has removed obstacles, and helped to spread your message,¹⁰ and through your happy rule set in order what was confused and destroyed the evil people. Be happy, O master in the bounty of God. May your days be happy with God's happiness -- your today, yesterday and your tomorrow surrounded by God and His power.

The writer wishes to introduce himself briefly, about his poor, humble and insignificant self. Though he is not one of those who are famous, yet he begs

⁸ The news traveled very quickly, for al-Kansūī wrote barely six weeks after the Woitala victory.

⁹ Another indication of the close communications between the Umarian camp and Morocco.

¹⁰ *Da'watakum*, which implies a sense of a strong mission which will change the lives of those who hear it.

to receive from your greatness and the greatness of your shaykhs a rescue from all dangers. The good and the benefit of this introduction is that it may lead to a meeting face to face in order to talk about specific matters such as the hidden prayers which we are seeking. But for the present, I am Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Yūnus ibn Mas'ūd, al-Kansūsī by lineage, affiliated to the Tijaniyya order and related to our ancestor 'Abd Allāh and Ja'far ibn Abū Ṭālib (only God knows if this is correct),¹¹ and also to the great shaykh, [63r] the seal of God's saints, the owner of exalted status, Abu'l-'Abbās Sidi Aḥmad al-Tijāni (may God have mercy on him). Associated in this intercession is the *sharīf* full of grace, Sidi Muḥammad al-Ghālī Abū Ṭālib al-Fāsi¹² (may God have mercy on him). Even if I had reached or equalled the shaykh (may God have mercy on him in the righteousness in which he died), yet I did not receive [my affiliation] from him because at that time I was a youth and all my energies were employed in the acquisition of knowledge, but I nevertheless received the initiation after the death of the shaykh (may God have mercy on him). Still, thanks to God, I did see him, I think on a Friday, and I visited him in his noble home, and he prayed for my welfare. I have also heard from him what I hope God will make useful for me in the two worlds. I was present at the time of his death and I prayed for him (thanks to God the ruler of the worlds). I lived in Fez for a while, then I moved on to Marrakesh at the command of my lord Sultan 'Abd al-Raḥmān (may God have mercy on him).

Also know, O master, that we care for your news and for all that comes from you. Some four or five years ago a man named 'Uthmān came to us and he mentioned that he was part of your circle. He stayed here for some time, whereupon we sent him with some servants so that he could go on the pilgrimage and return. They left him in the blessed city of Medina. Then, just last year, another man, whose name is Aḥmad ibn 'Abd Allāh from the people

¹¹ Al-Kansūsī's claim to a Sharifian genealogy. The author appears to be introducing himself to 'Umar for the first time, or to be indulging in false modesty. He was certainly known to 'Umar as one of the leading Tijaniyya of Morocco.

¹² At the time of 'Umar's pilgrimage, al-Ghālī was the Moroccan Tijaniyya representative in Medina, and it was he who appointed 'Umar as the *khalīfa* for the spread of the Tijaniyya order in the Western Sudan. Robinson, *Holy War*, pp. 96-8.

of Gundam,¹³ came and told us of your news and happy situation. This gave us and those who love you much pleasure. He told us about the news of God's saint,¹⁴ Sidi al-Mukhtār ibn Wadi'at Allāh, and his two brothers, Abū Bakr and Mālik.¹⁵ We sent him to visit the shaykh in Fez and from there he went on the pilgrimage with other companions (may he have reached there safely).

Be it known to you (may God make you happy and give you His grace for ever) that our requests for you are many, both spiritual and temporal. We mention the most important of these and we leave it to your generosity and noble disposition to supply us with what God has given you that will guarantee our well being in this world and the next. [63v] We are sick and poor. I wish to ask you to pardon us the way brothers pardon one another and that you write that to us with your own personal hand. This we shall treasure as a personal fortune. We also ask you to give us your blessings without which we cannot live and continue the good relations between us.

I wish also to tell you that the bearer of this letter is the merchant prince, the son of Sidi al-Ḥājj Muḥammad al-Qabbāji al-Fāsī who had a relative trading in that country who died there and left much property there. He [the prince] wanted to go there because he was the custodian.¹⁶ If he reaches you please be generous to him, give him protection until he settles all the affairs of the estate of his cousin. He is the head of his people and the guardian of his kind. Truly remember what the blessed Prophet said: "If a noble man comes to you, honor him, if he sends his representative, do the same. Take his hand gently and tenderly. Do not put any other person in charge of him until he has achieved his purpose." We know and all people know how just you are and

¹³ An important town close to the Niger north of Masina and west of Timbuktu.

¹⁴ Literally "the *wali* (friend) of the Most High God."

¹⁵ Al-Mukhtār is better known as Yirkoy Talfi, the Songhay translation of Wadi'at Allāh, "entrusted to God." He was the leading figure of the Tijaniyya of Masina, which fell on hard times during the 1840s and 1850s and became the target of a campaign led by Aḥmad al-Bakkāy. It is obvious that the Tijaniyya lodges of Morocco followed not only the fortunes of the order in the Umarian campaign but also, and from an earlier time, the situation in the middle Niger region. See Robinson, *Holy War*, pp. 284-91, and "Yirkoy Talfi et le Masina au 19e siècle," *Islam et Sociétés au Sud du Sahara* 4 (1990).

¹⁶ Or executor of his estate. The person may well be the Ṭālib Muḥammad cited in the Introduction to Section I, note 9.

how you care for strangers. We need no reassurance of this. We need to say nothing more. He is one of those whom we love, and all his children are of our people.

Finally, we know that it is your habit in your correspondence that you preach and pray. So we ask you to preach to us and pray for us. We are the most in need of this. This is the purpose of this letter. Our prayer for you is that each day God gives you what He wills for you. Let death be the best preacher. 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz said: "I saw al-Khiḍr in Medina and I said to him, 'Preach to me,' and he said, 'O 'Umar, beware of being outwardly an ally of God and inwardly His enemy."¹⁷

We have written this on the fifth of Rabi' II in the year 1277 AH.¹⁸

¹⁷ Al-Khiḍr is a holy man who figures prominently in Islamic traditions. See H. T. Norris, *Saharan Myth and Saga* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 14ff.

¹⁸ 21 October 1860.