

Arabic Literature of Africa

A Contribution to the Intellectual History of Islam

John Hunwick and R.S. O'Fahey have embarked upon a joint project in collaboration with a number of other scholars, for the publication of a seven-volume work under the general title 'Arabic Literature of Africa'. The work is being published by E.J. Brill of Leiden and the first two volumes of the series have already appeared (1994 and 1995). The series is under the joint general editorship of Hunwick and O'Fahey.

The editors take it as axiomatic that we cannot understand the trends and currents of Muslim discourse in Africa, its relationship to wider Islamic discourses and its local shaping by historical and cultural factors unless we consider the broader picture of Islamic scholarship in the region. For this we need to know not only who the scholars were and what they wrote, but also how they are related to one another intellectually, and how learning was nurtured, transmitted, explicated, revived, revised, contested.

It is the task, then, of the several volumes of the series 'Arabic Literature of Africa' to explore this intellectual heritage. The aim of the series is to produce for sub-Saharan Africa a guide to its Islamic literature and scholarly production in Arabic and in certain African languages that goes beyond a mere enumeration of scholars and their writings. Rather it aims to open up the intellectual history of the region's Muslims and to relate it to the intellectual history of the larger world of Islam.

Volume I, compiled by R.S. O'Fahey is sub-titled 'The Writings of Eastern Sudanic Africa to c. 1900', and it was prepared with the collaboration of Muhammad Ibrahim Abu Salim, Albrecht Hofheinz, Yahya Muhammad Ibrahim, Berndt Radtke and Knut Vikør. It deals with authors living in the area of the

present Republic of the Sudan and their writings, as well as the writings of the Idrisiyya tradition both within the Sudan and outside it, and the Sanusiyya tradition. Volume II is sub-titled 'The Writings of Central Sudanic Africa' (i.e. Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Cameroun). It was compiled by John Hunwick with the collaboration of Razaq D. Abubakre, Hamidu Bobboyi, Roman Loimeier, Stefan Reichmuth and Muhammad Sani Umar. Within each chapter writers are grouped according to their family, tariqa, or teaching affiliation and also (so far as is possible) chronologically. Information on works in Fulfulde and Hausa (and some Yoruba) by the authors who wrote in Arabic is also given. Currently in preparation are volumes on Ethiopia, Sudan and Eastern Africa, which includes Islamic literature in Swahili and volumes on the Arabic writings of scholars in Ghana, Mali, Senegal and Niger. Yet another will deal with Mauritania. A supplementary volume will treat the writings of Central Sudanic Africa and will be prepared in collaboration with Nigerian scholars. ◆

*John Hunwick, Department of History,
Northwestern University, Evanston, USA.*

*R.S. O'Fahey, Department of History,
University of Bergen, Norway.*