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# This Filthy Plant: The Inspiration of a Central Sudanic Scholar in the Debate on Tobacco

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## ABSTRACT

*In the seventeenth century, tobacco was fiercely debated from England to Istanbul. Muslim scholars from Bornu and Baghirmi participated in this debate and maintained that smoking was forbidden by divine law, long after their counterparts in the heartlands of Islam allowed it. The question addressed here is why and how the adamant rejection of tobacco in central sudanic Africa was formulated. The study is based on a number of Arabic manuscripts from the region and focuses on a treatise, written around 1700, by Muhammad al-Wālī b. Sulaymān. It is argued that he was as much inspired by the popular opinion about tobacco in his home-environment as by the writings of scholars from the Middle East. In folktales, tobacco was literally demonised, and the rejection of “pagan” smokers helped to mark new social boundaries. The dominant position regarding smoking was the result of an exchange between islamic learning and popular culture in the region.*

The adamant rejection of tobacco “made” the Muslim man in the central Sudanic regions of Bornu and Baghirmi, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> The idea that tobacco, smoked or

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<sup>1</sup> Tobacco was also smoked by women in central Sudanic Africa, but little is known about the circumstances. However, since this article is about opinions regarding smoking in general and not about practices, gender aspects are not taken into consideration.

chewed,<sup>2</sup> did not fit in Islam, was so deeply rooted in the local culture that it inspired at least two scholars<sup>3</sup> from the region to take a position in the debate on tobacco which deviated from that of their peers in the Middle Eastern centers of Islamic learning. In the following pages I will concentrate on the opinion of one of these two scholars and his environment. The texts about tobacco offer a rare opportunity to explore how books, ideas, and narratives from the “global library of Islam,” to use a notion of Knut Vikør, were read and adapted, against what background and to what end.

Tobacco crossed the Atlantic Ocean from the Americas to the Old World sometime in the last decade of the sixteenth century. Although initially hailed as a medicine, it aroused deep aversion among many in Europe and in the Levant, an aversion which often took the form of a conviction that smoking or chewing tobacco was against religion. The main objection of opponents in the Muslim countries of the Ottoman Empire was that tobacco “obscured” the mind, like wine does, and was therefore forbidden (*ḥarām*) by divine law. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, after a few decades of heated discussion, most Muslim jurists in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Maghreb had come to the conclusion that obscuring the mind only happened to some smokers, when they imbibed great quantities of tobacco, and that no legal principle applied to proclaim tobacco forbidden.

In what follows, I will first give short descriptions of the debate about tobacco as it was carried on in the Middle East and of the treatise by Muḥammad al-Wālī, a central Sudanic scholar in the seventeenth century. I will then show that he was inspired by the popular opinion about tobacco of the people in his home environment. In this opinion tobacco was more than filthy, it was literally demonized, because society felt deeply threatened by the drug and the habit of smoking. It will be argued that during the period in question, the Muslim communities of Bornu and Baghirmi were “under construction.” Their Muslim identity was not yet firmly established, although new converts had an interest in showing a clear Muslim

<sup>2</sup> The central Sudanic texts against tobacco speak of *shurb al-dukhān*, *akl* (chewing) and *istiʿamāl* (using) of *tinbak*, *ṭibgh*, *ṭabaʿ*, and other synonyms.

<sup>3</sup> The second scholar, who is not studied here, is Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Raḥman al-Hajj (d. 1746). He mentioned smoking in a text about shariʿah (*ʿshurb al-zulāl*) and those remarks were taken up by a nineteenth-century author in Cairo. John O. Hunwick and R. S. OʻFahey, *Arabic Literature in Africa (ALA)*, vol. II, *The Arabic Writings of Central Sudanic Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 40, 41.

image of their community as a whole. What they feared was the weakness of their community. The rejection of tobacco and of “pagan” smokers helped to mark new social boundaries. The folktale relating the demonic origins of tobacco emphasized the need to choose between loyalty to the Muslims or to others.

The study is based on a number of manuscripts from present-day northern Nigeria, which are now kept in the Kano collection in the Melville Herskovits Library of Northwestern University in Evanston in the United States, and on manuscripts from the Middle East in the Library of Leiden University in the Netherlands.

### *The Debate in the Middle East*

Because neither the Qur’an nor the traditions (*ahādīth*, singular *hadīth*) of the Prophet Muḥammad and his companions mention tobacco, Muslim jurists had to find the answer to the question whether this novelty was allowed or not elsewhere. Generally, they applied the method of analogy (*qiyās*), to extend the validity of a verdict in one of the authoritative sources to tobacco. One of the sources available to them were the principles that the thirteenth-century scholar al-Qarāfī<sup>4</sup> had established about intoxicants, corruptives, and soporifics.

Dozens of jurists gave their opinion in fatwas, and the production of these texts continued for decades. According to Aziz Batran, over seventy fatwas on smoking were produced in the seventeenth century in North Africa alone.<sup>5</sup> One of the best-known texts against tobacco was written in 1616 by a renowned Mālikī professor at the al-Azhar in Cairo, Ibrāhīm al-Laḡānī (d. 1631).<sup>6</sup> It is a short but fiery treatise which, through the propaganda of al-Laḡānī’s sons, inspired slightly later opponents like al-Wālī in Bornu and al-Aḡḡisārī in Anatolia,<sup>7</sup> and is even quoted in

<sup>4</sup> Shihāb al-Dīn Aḡmad b. Idrīs al-Qarāfī al-Ṣanhājī (d. 1285, see Brockelmann, *Geschichte der Arabischen Literatur [GAL]* I, 385 and S I 665), Mālikī jurist, established the *Qā’ida al-qarāfīyya* about wine and other intoxicants.

<sup>5</sup> Aziz Batran, *Tobacco Smoking Under Islamic Law: Controversy over Its Introduction* (Beltsville: Amana, 2003), 46.

<sup>6</sup> Abū-’l-Imdād Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm b. Ibrāhīm b. Ḥasan b. ‘Alī al-Laḡānī al-Mālikī. *GAL* II, 316–17. His ‘*Naṣīhat al-ikhwān bi-jtināb al-dukhān*’ was written in 1616.

<sup>7</sup> See Aḡmad al-Aḡḡisārī, *Against Smoking: An Ottoman Manifesto*, introduction, first edition, and translation by Y. Michot (Leicestershire: Kube, 2010).

a twentieth-century pamphlet from Indonesia.<sup>8</sup> But even contemporaries of al-Laḳānī like Mari'ī al-Karmī (d. 1623)<sup>9</sup> argued that although tobacco could be disapproved of in certain circumstances, nothing indicated that it was principally forbidden. Later, famous scholars such as Katib Celebi (1609–1657) in Istanbul and 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulī (1641–1731) in Damascus wrote about smoking and found no legal objections.

J. Grehan wrote a study of the reactions to tobacco by rulers and clerics in the Ottoman Empire<sup>10</sup> in which he argues that the aversion and initially very forceful and cruel repression of smoking by a number of Ottoman sultans was caused by the consternation over social and cultural transformations that it accelerated. “In the long term, smoking would help to redefine patterns of social interaction, promoting more relaxed attitudes about pleasure and opening up new avenues for leisure and escapism.”<sup>11</sup> Smoking was enjoyed in the also recent invention of coffeehouses. Clerics feared the breakdown of moral restrictions there, and rulers feared that besides coffee and smoke, rebellious ideas were brewed there. Both had an interest in depicting smoking as a habit of the lowest classes, of riffraff.<sup>12</sup>

To emphasize their point about the despicability of tobacco, opponents recounted how it was imported by Christians, and that it was often covered, kneaded, or sprinkled with wine or pig fat, either because Christians liked the taste, or because they intended to harm Muslims. Other stories relate how tobacco was polluted by human or dog's urine, and mixed with or substituted by dung.<sup>13</sup> One of the issues for jurists was whether the impurity of wine disappeared when tobacco was washed, and whether the

<sup>8</sup> I thank Dr. Nico Kapteijn for showing me the pamphlet *'Irshād al-ikhwān li-bayān shurb al-qahwa wa 'l-dukhān*, by Ihsān Muḥammad Dahlān al-Jampasī al-Kadīrī. It bears no place or date of publication, but the author lived in east Java from 1901 to 1952. Al-Laḳānī's popularity among the anti-smoking lobby is somewhat surprising, because ultimately he argued that the legal category applying to smoking was only that of “doubtful” (shubha) matters, not disapproved (makrūh) or forbidden (ḥarām).

<sup>9</sup> Mari'ī b. Yūsuf al-Karmī, d. 1623, was a Hanbalite and wrote *'Tahqīq al-burhān fī shurb al-dukhān*. *GAL* II 369.

<sup>10</sup> James Grehan, “Smoking and ‘Early Modern’ Sociability: The Great Tobacco Debate in the Ottoman Middle East (Seventeenth to Eighteenth Centuries),” *American Historical Review* 3 (December 2006): 1352–77.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1353.

<sup>12</sup> See also Rudi Matthee, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Drugs and Stimulants in Iranian History, 1500–1900* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 137, 138.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Laḳānī, Leiden University Library, Or 8288, f 124b.

smoke of something impure is also impure.<sup>14</sup> But all these only constituted extrinsic reasons for a possible prohibition, whereas the most important question in the legal discussions was whether there were intrinsic reasons to forbid tobacco, for example, because it “obscured” the mind. And that was hard to maintain.

Meanwhile, the popularity of tobacco was unstoppable. Before the second half of the seventeenth century most jurists in the great centers of the Ottoman Empire had come to the conclusion that smoking was allowed (*mubāḥ*). Intellectuals should instead turn their attention to real problems like bribery and corruption, said al-Nābulṣī.<sup>15</sup> To the west, the famous Aḥmad Bābā al-Tinbukṭī had already set the tune for the scholars of Timbuktu, in favor of tobacco, before 1607. Their colleagues in the Maghreb were divided.<sup>16</sup>

### *Al-Walī's Deviant Position*

The dominant opinion in Bornu and Baghirmi was different. We know this from the author of *Shurb al-Zulāl* (note 3) who condemned smoking in one sentence. But there is another source. Muḥammad al-Wālī, who was one of the leading scholars of his day in central Sudanic Africa during the second half of the seventeenth century, was the author of a whole pamphlet against smoking tobacco.<sup>17</sup> In twenty-three folios his text, entitled *Valid Reasons for the Prohibition of Smoking (Al-adilla al-ḥisān fī tahrīm shurb al-dukhān)*, presents ten arguments against the habit and the product, followed by a refutation of a treatise by al-Ajhūrī (d. 1656). Al-Ajhūrī, sheikh al-Azhar and one of the highest authorities of the Mālikī school of law in Cairo, had argued before that smoking was not against the law of God.<sup>18</sup> We don't know when the original of *Valid Reasons* was written,

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., al-Ajhūrī in Batran's translation.

<sup>15</sup> Grehan, “Smoking,” 1365 and 1369.

<sup>16</sup> Al-Tinbukṭī's treatise is entitled ‘*Al-lam' fī 'l- ishāra ilā-hukm tibgh.*’ See Batran, *Tobacco Smoking*, 169–90.

<sup>17</sup> Leiden University Library, Or 8362. The Leiden University Library bought it in 1949 from an auction of manuscripts collected by the orientalist P. Herzsohn. The author envisages publishing an edition and translation of the text shortly. Al-Wālī's full name was Muḥammad al-Wālī b. Sulaymān b. Abī Muḥammad al-Wālī al-Fulānī al-Baghirmāwī al-Barnāwī al-Ash'arī al-Mālikī.

<sup>18</sup> Nūr al-Dīn ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Rahmān b. ‘Alī al-Ajhūrī al-Mālikī (1559–1656. *GAL* II 317, *S* II 437), who wrote ‘*Ghāyat al-bayān liḥill shurb mā lā yughaiyib al-*

nor when al-Wālī was born or died, but one of his fourteen other works is dated in 1688, so the anti-tobacco essay may have been composed in the last decades of the seventeenth century as well. The copy in the University of Leiden, upon which this article is based, was made in 1755, most probably in the Middle East, judging from the handwriting.<sup>19</sup> It is the only copy that is known of this text; no other versions have turned up in African collections.

Muḥammad al-Wālī lived in Baghirmi, southeast of Lake Chad.<sup>20</sup> In the seventeenth century Baghirmi was a marginal kingdom, tributary to the most powerful state of the region in that era, Bornu. But it was far enough away from Bornu to be a safe haven for people who were persecuted by that state's king.<sup>21</sup> The ruling family of Baghirmi, and nominally therefore the whole Barma population,<sup>22</sup> had been Islamized only in the sixteenth century, by missionary Fulani. Al-Wālī himself also belonged to this ethnic group which played such a significant role in the spread of Islam in the whole region. As one of his *nisbas* (names referring to origin) indicates, he also spent some of his time in Bornu, presumably pursuing his studies in the capital Gazargamo, one of the most important centers of learning in West Africa of the time.

A comparison of the authors mentioned by al-Wālī with, on the one hand, the books that according to Hall and Stewart made up the “core-curriculum” of Islamic learning in West Africa,<sup>23</sup> and on the other hand with the West African Arabic Manuscripts Database,<sup>24</sup> shows that al-Wālī read (or listened to the reading of) many more books than most students did, and that

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*‘aql min al-dukhān,*’ started this treatise by saying that tobacco was not an intoxicant, and that if it were established that it was also not a soporific or a corruptive, then it would be considered “an absolutely legal substance, the smoke of which is clean and lawful” (translation Batran, *Tobacco Smoking*, 149).

<sup>19</sup> The handwriting is a type of naskh that was written in the Mashriq, in the view of Jan Just Witkam.

<sup>20</sup> Baghirmi is now the name of a prefecture in the same region, in present-day Chad.

<sup>21</sup> Muḥammad Bello in *‘Infāq al-Maysur,’* 1812. Edited by Charles. E. J., *Infaku’l Maisuri* (London: Luzac, 1951).

<sup>22</sup> A folk etymology of the name Baghirmi is that this was the land of baggar mia, a hundred cows in Arabic. However, as Kodi Mahamat points out (1992), an important autochthonous (non-Arabic speaking) population group is called Barma. It seems likely that Baghirmi is derived from Barma.

<sup>23</sup> Bruce S. Hall and Charles C. Stewart, “The Historic ‘Core Curriculum’ and Book Market in West Africa,” in *The Transsaharan Book Trade: Manuscript Culture, Arabic Literacy and Intellectual History in Muslim Africa*, ed. G. Krätli and G. Lydon (Brill, 2010), 109–74.

<sup>24</sup> WAAMD, see <http://westafricanmanuscripts.org>.

he could have found some of these only in Timbuktu or Cairo. It is known that al-Wālī twice made the journey to Mecca, and on his way there spent some time in Cairo. Undoubtedly, he attended lectures in both cities.

Travel is what Muslim scholars did to gain knowledge and prestige, and al-Wālī acquired both. In central Sudanic Africa he enjoyed a great reputation.<sup>25</sup> Some of his works, especially on theology, were copied many times. He wrote an explanation of a theological work which was at the time gaining great influence all over West Africa, al-Sanūsī's *Al-'Aqīda al-ṣughra* (*The Minor Creed*), also known as *Umm al-barāhīn* (*Mother of Proof*).<sup>26</sup> Al-Wālī's explanation, *Al-Manhaj al-farīd fi ma'rīfat 'ilm al-tawhīd* (*The Peerless Method for Knowledge of Theology*),<sup>27</sup> bears witness to his originality, his affinity with Sufism, and, most of all, his passion for education. A difficult, philosophical work is here "translated" into simple rules and supplemented with basic information about terms and titles in Islam. In fact, the total of al-Wālī's works, including a work on Arabic grammar, advice to young people, and a versification of al-Sanūsī's *Ṣughra* is like a starter kit for Muslims, beginning and advanced—very suitable for the small but growing Muslim population in rural Baghirmi. Some of his theological work has been called cerebral,<sup>28</sup> but texts like *Al-manhaj al-farīd* or *Awṣikum yā ma'shar al-ikhwān* (being advice to use one's time of life well) were clearly adapted to an illiterate public with an enchanted worldview, knowing little Arabic and still learning the basic tenets of Islam. They show the authors' dedication to his "flock." Thus, al-Wālī takes his position in between the cosmopolitan centers of the Islamic world and the African hinterland, or rather perhaps between Muslim learning and the culture of illiterate new converts.

Al-Wālī's treatise against smoking clearly reflects his "double vision." It consists of two parts.<sup>29</sup> The first lists ten reasons why smoking is *ḥarām*.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Wālī and his father are the very first scholars mentioned in Muḥammad Bello's *Infāq al-Maysūr*.

<sup>26</sup> *GAL* II 250, S II 352.

<sup>27</sup> See *ALA*, Vol. II, 34–37 for a list of al-Wālī's works. Of '*Al-Manhaj al-farīd*' 32 copies still exist in different West African collections.

<sup>28</sup> Mervyn Hiskett about *Urjūza fī ḥudūth al-'ālam*, in *A History of Islamic Verse* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 1975), 15–16. And Muḥammad Bello writes that al-Wālī's work shows the abundance of his knowledge and intelligence and his skill in science. *Infaku'l Maisuri*, ed. Charles E. J. Whitting (London: Luzac, 1951), 5.

<sup>29</sup> In *Arabic Literature of Africa* the two parts are mentioned as different texts, one of which was supposed to be lost. But the second text should be considered as part of one discourse.



It does so in simple wordings, supported by a host of references to well-known prophetic traditions. One could almost imagine this part being read out by a public crier in a market. The second part then continues with a polemical discussion, paragraph by paragraph, of a treatise on the acceptability of tobacco by the renowned al-Azhar scholar al-Ajhūrī, in a much more scholarly style, in which the syntax is often as complex as the legal argumentation. The general public in Baghirmi would have had no idea what it was about, and the authors referred to would have been unknown to them.

This division in the text seems puzzling, as if it were addressed to two different audiences. But that is not the case. The second part starts with the words “I have just presented ten good reasons,” a direct and unambiguous reference to the first part of the work. Because of the style of the second part, and because no copies of the text were found in West African libraries, it seems likely that the treatise as a whole was addressed to an audience of learned jurists in the Middle East, and was produced there. But the first part bears clear traces of an argument that was developed in al-Wālī’s home environment.<sup>30</sup>

In spite of the adaptation of the second part to a more intellectual audience, it is remarkable that al-Wālī does not use two arguments that would be most decisive in Islamic law as it was taught in the older centers of learning, namely that smoking would “cloud the mind” and tobacco was impure. But he knew of course that both arguments had been dealt with in the past three quarters of a century, and did not stand their ground. Even his example, al-Laḡānī, had admitted that tobacco did not obscure the mind and was therefore not an intoxicant. So al-Wālī writes: “Surely, the things that necessitate its prohibition are other than absence of the mind from smoking it.”<sup>31</sup> A bit later he says, in answer to al-Ajhūrī’s statement that tobacco is not impure, because the mind is not obscured by it, “there is no connection between a substance obscuring the mind and its being impure.”<sup>32</sup> But he is careful enough to refrain from saying that tobacco is impure. Instead, his ten objections were that smoking was *bid’a* (an unlaw-

<sup>30</sup> It resembles, e.g., manuscript Falke 1850, Melville Herskovits Library, Northwestern University (NU). This manuscript comes from the same region, and probably from the same time. It also mentions al-Ajhūrī and al-Laḡānī, and many other earlier authors, but no later ones. It lists many of the same arguments against smoking, and opens with al-Wālī’s poem *Awṣikum ya ma’shar al-ikhwān*. It will be interesting to find out if this text could in fact be by the hand of al-Wālī himself.

<sup>31</sup> Or 8362, f 9b.

<sup>32</sup> Or 8362, f 12b.

ful innovation), it distracts the attention from religion, it stinks and harms the body, it is copying a habit of heathens (who introduced tobacco), it is filthy, it makes one drowsy (although it cannot be characterized as an intoxicant, it is still a soporific), it involves a waste of money, smoke is one of God's punishment on the Day of Judgment (and who would want to associate with that), and smoking is "unmanly."

All these arguments had been mentioned by others, although few listed so many in one text. But compared to others al-Wālī puts a lot of emphasis on his opinion that tobacco is filthy or disgusting, *khabīth*. The words *khabīth* and its synonyms *shanī'* and *qabīḥ* occur fifteen times within the first sixteen folios. Now *khabīth* is a word that plays a role in the Qur'an. In sura 7:157, for example, God forbids people to consume what is *khabīth*. A few others had called tobacco *khabīth* too: al-Laḡānī and another very early writer on the topic, a Ḥanafī scholar in Medina named al-Nāfi<sup>33</sup> and perhaps some others, since al-Karmī reacted to it. But in neither of the four law schools is *khabīth* a legal category. It does not imply any sanction, as al-Karmī had already pointed out before the first quarter of the seventeenth century was over. He and others did consider tobacco *karīh*, disliked or repugnant, and deducted from that the legal verdict of smoking as *makrūh*, disapproved. But that would not have helped al-Wālī, who aimed for more, and wanted its total condemnation as *ḥarām*. Consequently, he does not even use the word *karīh*.

Al-Wālī also stresses the incompatibility of smoking with "manliness" or decency, that is, *murū'a*. *Murū'a* is a complex term that is associated with the honor of an individual or a tribe, with the observance of duties connected to family ties, and—notably in West Africa—with self-restraint and the control of emotions.<sup>34</sup> Thus, when the term *murū'a* occurs in later<sup>35</sup> manuscripts about smoking (Falke 1040, f 15; Falke 1101, f 19), it is in contrast with such antisocial behavior observed among smokers as fooling around and dancing, lowering oneself, being inferior for having sub-

<sup>33</sup> See Felix Klein-Franke, "No Smoking Paradise: The Habit of Tobacco Smoking Judged by Muslim Law," *Le Muséon* 106 (1993): 155–92.

<sup>34</sup> See the chapter on *murū'a* and *dīn* in Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967), 22. See for an example of *murū'a* in West Africa at the beginning of the nineteenth century: 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad dan Fodio who writes that after a certain military victory only shari'a and "the chain of *murū'a* kept men from fighting over the booty." *Tazyīn al-waraqāt*, ed. and trans. M. Hiskett (Ibadan University Press, 1963), 116.

<sup>35</sup> These manuscripts mention names referring to members of the Tijāniyya movement, and therefore must be of the nineteenth century or later.

stituted one's brains with smoke, eating in public (all mentioned in Falke 1101 and 1040), and indulging in calumny and wild hilarious conduct (al-Fakkoun)<sup>36</sup>—in short, the behavior of rifferaff (*al-ra'āf*).

In another work<sup>37</sup> al-Wālī himself even mentioned smoking tobacco as one of the capital sins, together with adultery, stealing, slander, and defamation. That was a far cry, which he did not repeat in the legal discourse of *Valid Reasons*. But in Islamic law, none of al-Wālī's other ten arguments and concerns suffice to proclaim something forbidden. He knew it, and all the hadiths (about fire, for example) he drags in do not really make up for the weakness of his plea. The question is, why he was so eager to make an impossible point?

Obviously, al-Wālī had a personal aversion to smoking. But so did others, who saw no legal indication for a prohibition.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, the motives of other opponents to smoking seem different from al-Wālī's. Someone like al-Aqḥiṣārī, for example, was inspired by puritanical ideas about the reform of Islam as propagated by Ibn Taymiyya. Such puritanism, however, was not what inspired al-Wālī, who tended much more toward Sufism.<sup>39</sup> What inspired him to compose a text in which the word *khabīth* is central did not come from scholars in the older centers of Islamic learning, but from common people in his own homeland.

### *A Folktale about the Devil's Urine*

Near the end of his essay, al-Wālī mentions a strange story about tobacco, which was presented as a hadith. This story was first noted—as we know from the Algerian Mālikī jurist al-Fakkūn (d. 1663)—in Algeria, around 1600.<sup>40</sup> Al-Fakkūn described it in 1616, and mentions four elements:

<sup>36</sup> In Batran, *Tobacco Smoking*, see below, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Al-manhaj al-farīd*. Hunwick collection manuscript 178, p. 11.

<sup>38</sup> For example, al-Karmī and, initially, al-Nābulī (who turned into a smoker later). The latter wrote *Al-Ṣulḥ bayna al-ikhwān fī ḥukm ibāhāt al-dukhān* in 1682. *GAL* II 345, S II 473.

<sup>39</sup> See also both Hiskett and Levtzion, who write that the jihad of Uthman dan Fodio was not inspired by Wahhabism, as some authors have suggested, but rather by local history. Mervyn Hiskett, "An Islamic Tradition of Reform in the western Sudan," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies (BSOAS)* vol. 25 (1962); Nehemia Levtzion, "Islam in African and Global Contexts: Adventures in Comparative Studies of Islam," in *Islam in Africa and the Middle East: Studies on Conversion and Renewal*, by N. Levtzion (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2006).

<sup>40</sup> By a certain al-Susi, probably Abu 'Abd Allah al-Susi, who died in 1614. It seems plausible that al-Fakkūn means him, although he also describes him as someone "who did not rise to the level of an author . . . because his reasoning was defective." Batran, *Tobacco Smoking*, 216.

Tobacco was created from the urine of Iblīs.<sup>41</sup>

The Prophet has said that smokers do not belong to his *ummah*.

The Prophet predicted smoking to Abū Hurayra.

It was when God told Iblīs that he would have no authority over His people (Q. 15:42) that he urinated, from shock.

The first two elements form the core of the narrative, and in other versions these are combined: there it is the prophet himself who says that tobacco grows from the devil's urine. The last statement, a *vaticidium ex eventu*, "is simply arbitrary and nonsensical," says al-Fakkūn.<sup>42</sup>

As far as I know, this story has not survived in the Maghreb or the Middle East. But there are a number of versions of it in the Kano collection of Arabic manuscripts from the region of present-day northern Nigeria and west Chad, where it still survives today. With their repetition, irregular handwriting, and spelling mistakes, they are clearly the deposit of stories that were passed on orally, among people who were not very skilled in Arabic, presumably rural. The shortest compilation runs as follows:

Bismillah and greetings to our lord Muḥammad, his family, companions, wives and slave-girls. This "book" is communicated by the noble [Prophet], [when] consulted by 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. On account of the prophet, God bless him and grant him salvation: all inanimate nature is pure, except this one plant that grows in the urine of Iblīs and is from the bottom of the hell. It is more reprehensible than wine. He who eats of this plant, the prophet says that he rejects him from him and that he is not of his umma. For he who chews it is an unbeliever. There is no peace for him, nor religion, nor jihad and he is damned in the Torah as well as in the Gospel, in the Book of Psalms and in the Furqān.<sup>43</sup>

God, the benevolent, the exalted, said that vicious things are forbidden to them: wine, gambling, calumny and pigs and adultery and slander. These are the first things that are evil to him. On account of Abū Hurayra<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Iblīs is an alternative name for the Devil, especially associated with the story of the creation of the world. See the *Encyclopaedia of Islam, second edition*, "Iblīs."

<sup>42</sup> Batran, *Tobacco Smoking*, 253.

<sup>43</sup> Synonym of Qur'an, see below.

<sup>44</sup> A companion of the Prophet. In canonical hadith collections, he is one of the transmitters of the Prophet's words "he who eats of this plant (garlic) should not approach our mosque and should not harm us with the odor of it," which was used as an argument against smoking.

may God be pleased with him, from the prophet who said: “Beware of this plant.” He said it is [like] wine, more than wine.

It is told on account of Abū Ḥudhayfa, may God be pleased with him, that Abū Ḥudhayfa said that he went out with a party of the Messenger of God and [said] “I saw this plant and [the prophet] said: “This is from Iblīs’ urine.” He also said: “A time will come after me, when they will drink this plant and be drunk from it and will err from the path of God. For them will be punishment according to the verse from the Book of God. And he who says to them ‘leave this plant!’ he will be an enemy to them.<sup>45</sup> But they are the worst people and I am far from them.”

‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib said: “The messenger from God, peace be upon him, said: ‘he who eats from this plant belongs to the depths of hell. May God, the Exalted, curse him – He does not care.’”<sup>46</sup>

‘Alī said: “There is no peace for them, do not befriend them, do not sit down with them, do not greet them, do not help them, do not laugh with them.”<sup>47</sup>

The rest of this manuscript is lost, but other versions continue with a list of forms of social interaction that should not take place with smokers. The element of the original version, where the prophet said that smokers do not belong to his *umma*, is here converted into an order to his *umma* to actively exclude users of tobacco.

Al-Wālī says he believes that al-Ajhūrī refers to this story when he writes that “the oft-repeated traditions [to refute tobacco] are fabrications . . . concocted in contemporary times”<sup>48</sup> and admits that al-Ajhūrī would be right. But at the same time he repeats the information with the unquestioned context of the Quranic verse.

Among [the *aḥādīth* that are fabricated] we must mention the derogation of tobacco as coming from the urine of Iblīs, may God curse him. When he was terrified after hearing the words of the Highest, “as for My servants, you have no power over them,”<sup>49</sup> he was shocked and he uri-

<sup>45</sup> Compare the words of the Algerian al-Fakkūn who wrote in 1616 that when he admonished people not to smoke, he was mocked and scandalized. See Batran, *Tobacco Smoking*, 209.

<sup>46</sup> Compare the *ḥadīth qudsī*, “These to hell and I do not care, and those to paradise, and I do not care.”

<sup>47</sup> Manuscript Falke 2017, Melville Herskovits Library, NU.

<sup>48</sup> Batran, *Tobacco Smoking*, 157.

<sup>49</sup> Sura 15:42.

nated and this plant sprang up from his urine. And the *ḥadīth* related by Ḥudhayfa ibn al-Yamān [must be mentioned], and he said: “I went out with the prophet, God bless him, and he saw a plant and shook his head. I asked, O messenger of God, why do you shake your head? He told me: “A time will come to the people when they will drink<sup>50</sup> from the leaves of this plant.” And there are other *aḥādīth* that they relate like these, of which we don’t know the source.”<sup>51</sup>

This is not a sharp denunciation, but rather shows that al-Wālī is taking the feelings seriously of those around him who did believe the story of tobacco’s origin in the devil’s urine. In another, contemporary anti-tobacco manuscript from the region, Falke 1850,<sup>52</sup> this demonic origin was presented as a fact. In *Valid Reasons* al-Wālī shows that, although he knows that tobacco was not introduced into the Islamic world before the tenth century after the hegira, he is still deeply imbued with the idea that the herb is intrinsically disgusting. The question now is what the essence of this idea was.

Other versions of the *ḥadīth* even equate tobacco with idolatry, the worst of sins. And in later anti-tobacco texts there are comparisons of smokers with dung beetles, allusions to the stench of an anus, riffraff, uncivilized behavior, and not heeding the law. Altogether, it seems that in the course of time, no means were spared to literally demonize tobacco and depict it as not merely besmeared with urine, but intrinsically soiled by it. Significantly, the sanction on smoking was not punishment in the hereafter, but being ostracized here and now. All this effort suggests that these central Sudanese societies felt deeply threatened by smoking tobacco.<sup>53</sup> The next step then, is to find out what this threat was.

### *The Threat of Tobacco*

Grehan as well as Matthee pointed out that in the Middle East, tobacco caused fears of social disruption when it was first introduced. In the

<sup>50</sup> In Arabic the term for smoking is “to drink smoke,” *shurb al-dukhān*.

<sup>51</sup> 8362, folio 19a.

<sup>52</sup> See note 30.

<sup>53</sup> In neighboring Sokoto the attitude of the Qadiriyya leaders toward tobacco was completely different. ‘Abdallah dan Fodio wrote a chapter (called “Teasing,” *tankīt*) on tobacco in which he listed its benefits. I thank Prof. Murray Last for drawing my attention to this chapter in *Ḍiyā’ al-siyāsāt wa-fatāwī ‘l-nawāzil mim mā huwa fī furū’ al-dīn min al-masā’il*.

nineteenth-century travelogues of European travelers in central Sudanic Africa there is nothing to be found of coffeehouses or smoking-holes like they existed in Ottoman centers or the Maghreb, where vagabonds were wasting away and an urban underclass could concoct schemes against its masters. But some of the same worries seem to have troubled people here too. In the manuscript Falke 1850, for example, it says: “[smoking tobacco] keeps the mind from caring about matters. If a person is learned, it keeps him away from learning and work and from seeking refuge [with God]. If he is a worshiper, it keeps him from worship. If he is a slave, it keeps him from serving his master. If he is a merchant, it diminishes what is his and keeps him from his occupations. For the smoker drowns his heart with love for it and drowns his time night and day with smoking and with craving for it. . . . Is there worse *fitna* than this?”<sup>54</sup> Smoking perturbs the social order, it leads to *jahiliyya* (lit: ignorance, ff 2a and 4b), to chaos.

Admittedly, this concern is not explicitly expressed in other texts from the region. Very frequent, however, are the associations of smoking with riffraff (*al-ra‘ā’*), as they were also made in texts from the Maghreb, North Africa, and the Middle East. In all these regions, riffraff or people of the lowest standing were African slaves. A certain al-Ishāqī, for example, said that smoking was the habit of contemptible Sudanese and people of low standing.<sup>55</sup> Sudan, literally meaning “black,” had been a vague geographical designation referring to sub-Sahara Africa ever since the first Arabic writings on the area. But it also had a negative connotation. Hunwick explained that there existed in the Arab-Muslim culture (in Africa) a very old “simplistic equation of *black* equals *slave* equals *inferior*.”<sup>56</sup> African Muslims themselves often used the words for “black” and “unbeliever” as synonyms. The famous Muḥammad Bello, one of the leaders of the Sokoto jihad of the beginning of the nineteenth century, wrote about the lands south of Sokoto that “the inhabitants there are Sudanese, Islam has not spread there” and that in Mali lived “Christians, Jews and Sudanese.”<sup>57</sup> Black did (and does) not in the first place refer to the color of skin. On the

<sup>54</sup> Falke 1850, f 6b.

<sup>55</sup> Muḥammad b. ‘Abdal Mu’tī al-Ishāqī. Batran, *Tobacco Smoking*, 58.

<sup>56</sup> John O. Hunwick, *West Africa and the Arab World* (J. B. Danquah Memorial Lectures, series 21, Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1991).

<sup>57</sup> In the translation by E. J. Arnett, *The Rise of the Sokoto Fulani. Being a Paraphrase and in Some Parts Translation of the Infaku’l Maisuri of Sultan Mohammed Bello* (Kano, 1922?), 12 and 137.

other hand, people with a black skin were easily tainted by the designation “sudani” in the sense of pagan. That was dangerous, because it made them eligible for slavery.

Slavery was extensive in this part of Africa. Before merchants from North Africa and later Europe bought them, slaves seem to have been used by rulers in the region to colonize land that was hard to cultivate without them. Then, starting in the seventh century, they became the most important “commodity” in the trade of the eastern parts of central Sudanic Africa with Libya and Morocco. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries European travelers learned that they constituted the main and indispensable labor force for agriculture in the region, as well as valuta in some cases. Leo Africanus (sixteenth century) noticed that the king of Bornu had no other income than the slaves he procured from neighboring countries.<sup>58</sup> And Bornu in turn was raided by others.<sup>59</sup> Numerous sources reveal how tribes throughout the region carried out yearly raids on their neighbors, to supplement poor harvests or even just to celebrate someone’s homecoming. Slave raids were a constant danger for populations living on the margins of Bornu, Wadai, and other Islamic states. According to Islamic law, Muslims could not be made into slaves, and sometimes that could be a reason for conversion.<sup>60</sup>

In central Sudanic Africa conversion was not an individual matter. “Muslim” was a collective label: a population was Muslim when its rulers were Muslim, and an individual was considered Muslim if his whole community had a firm Muslim identity.<sup>61</sup> The seventeenth century saw the start of a movement of Islam from towns to rural areas. For centuries Islam had

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<sup>58</sup> Nehemia Levtzion, “Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Early States of Bilād as-Sūdān,” in *Islam in Africa and the Middle East: Studies on Conversion and Renewal*, by Levtzion (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2006).

<sup>59</sup> Victor N. Low, *Three Nigerian Emirates* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 124.

<sup>60</sup> Conversion to Islam as a strategy to escape slavery is explicit, for example, in Dixon Denham, *Travels and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa in 1822, 1823 and 1824* (London: Clapperton and Oudney, vol. 2 (London, 1831), 40, 41.

<sup>61</sup> A very precise discussion about the legality and illegality of slavery is a famous text by Aḥmad Bābā al-Tinbuktī, *Miʿrāj al-ṣuʿūd ilā naʿyl ḥukm majlūb al-sūd*. For a translation, see B. Barbour and M. Jacobs, “The Miʿrāj: A Legal Treatise on Slavery by Ahmad Baba,” in John R. Willis, *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. 1 (London: Frank Cass, 1985). Because it was legal to obtain slaves from “lands of unbelief” (in principle when they were captured during a “jihād” and refused Islam, but this principle was flexible) Aḥmad Bābā and others gave lists of countries of unbelievers, from where it was legal to obtain slaves.



been a matter of the elites only, of rulers who attached ulama to their courts in order to strengthen their authority. Then Islam started to spread outside the towns and from families of rulers and merchants to farmers, in all of west Africa.<sup>62</sup> Although conversion started with the mere utterance of the Muslim creed and in some cases outward signs like a head cover, a Muslim identity did not come to communities as easily as it might seem. One reason was that all those whose economy was based on slaves had an interest in defining neighboring communities as unbelievers.<sup>63</sup>

Also, converted people often did “lapse back” to their traditional religion, or they did not really give up all the rituals of veneration of the spirits and gods who had always decided about the fertility of their land and rivers and animals, and about the health or punishment of people. One of the processes that marks the social history of central Sudanic Africa, especially in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, is the competition between Islam and traditional religions or animism, and between different types of political authority based on either one.<sup>64</sup> Not every inhabitant of villages that converted followed the leader who turned to Islam. Even at the end of the nineteenth century important parts of the population of “Muslim” villages in Bornu were non-Muslim.<sup>65</sup> The non-Muslims lived in their own quarter of a village, but otherwise there were no significant differences in lifestyle between Muslims and non-Muslims. All this meant that the unity and force of Muslim society was unstable, even in the Sokoto caliphate<sup>66</sup> and a fortiori in Bornu, Baghirmi, and other regions in present-day Chad.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Nehemia Levtzion 2006, VII.

<sup>63</sup> See Denham, *Travels and Discoveries*, 2:40, 41.

<sup>64</sup> Finn Fuglestad, “A Reconsideration of Hausa History Before the *Jihād*,” *Journal of African History* 19, no. 3 (1978): 319–39. See also the article about the integration of Islamic elements into African societies by Nehemia Levtzion, “Sociopolitical Roles of Muslim Clerics and Scholars in West Africa,” in *Comparative Social Dynamics*, ed. Erik Cohen et al. (Boulder: Worldview, 1985).

<sup>65</sup> Victor N. Low, *Three Nigerian Emirates*, 1972.

<sup>66</sup> A sense of the proximity of paganism as the alternative option pervades Muḥammad Bello’s *Infāq al-maysūr*. “I live on the margin of emptiness, in the Sudan, where paganism and dark ignorance prevail,” he writes. One of the main issues of the writers of the Sokoto caliphate was differentiating between true and false Muslims. See Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate* (Longmans, London, 1967); and Humphrey Fisher, “The Fulani ‘Jihād,’” review of *Tazyīn al-Waraqāt*, by Abdallah ibn Muhammad, ed. and trans. Mervyn Hiskett, *Journal of African History* 7, no. 2 (1966): 344–47.

<sup>67</sup> For examples in Bornu in the nineteenth century, see Gustav Nachtigal, *Sahara and Sudan* (C. Hurst & Company, London, 1980) vols. 2 and 3. For Baghirmi, see Kodi Maha-

### *Choosing an Identity*

And yet these populations needed the image of Muslim communities, if they wanted to be left alone by slave-raiding neighbors. They had to make a choice between a culture of Islam and their old customs and be clear about it, in a society where being Muslim had such serious implications. It is not suggested that not smoking was enough to present a community as Muslim. But in this context, the struggle against tobacco may be seen as a struggle against the temptation for Muslims to fall back to non-Islamic loyalties.

The “hadith” about tobacco helped to create an identity for the *umma*. It did so not only in religious terms, but also in terms of actual customs. Other options to do the same were limited. Muslims were allowed and sometimes ordered to wear a turban, but otherwise the clothing of (rural) Muslims and non-Muslims was the same. Women had the same tasks, and remaining in their house or courtyard was something rural women could not afford. Changing burial rites was psychologically and socially difficult,<sup>68</sup> and even praying five times a day, one of the pillars of Islam and a religious obligation, was and is not easy in a farming life, to name a few other options. Smoking, however, was something one could choose not to do. Indulging in it—which must have happened, or we would not have so many texts on the topic—could be seen as a penchant for a novelty which came literally and figuratively speaking from the other direction, from the Christians and Jews in the West. Using tobacco therefore could serve as a sign of failing in loyalty to a community under construction.

The threat of tobacco was the threat of the attraction of an alternative identity. The rejection of smoking offered an opportunity to mark the boundary between Muslims and others. The sanction of ostracizing smokers gave an opportunity to strengthen the unity of the Muslim community.

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mat, *Dignitaires et titulaires: Quelques aspects des institutions Baghirmiennes au dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris: Conférences et Documents Aresae, 1992). For the Zaghawa of northern Chad, see Marie-Josée Tubiana, *Survivances pré-islamiques en pays Zaghawa* (Paris: Institut d’Ethnologie, Musée de l’Homme, 1964).

<sup>68</sup> Murray Last explains why it was easier for people in densely populated areas than for farmers to convert to Islam. Murray Last, “Economic Aspects of Conversion in Hausaland, Nigeria,” in *Conversion to Islam*, by N. Levtzion (New York: Holmes and Meyer, 1979). From a text about *bid’a* by Uthmān dan Fodio (Manuscript Hunwick 151, Melville Herskovits Library, NU) it appears that even in Sokoto people were not very willing to give up their traditional ways of burying.

And the description of tobacco as filthy and stinking was an opportunity to defend the choice for Islam.

Making that choice is what the story about the devil's piss is all about. The theme of choosing, or more precisely of the distinction between good and bad, is amply represented in all the versions that we have. The person who relates to Abū Hurayra or Abū Ḥudhayfa that the prophet said that tobacco grows in the devil's urine and that smokers should be excluded from the community is 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. He was not only a close relative to the Prophet Muḥammad, he is also known and usually depicted as the man with the double-edged sword, which separates Muslims from unbelievers, as Dhū al-Faqār, the Purifier. In one manuscript with "tobacco *aḥadith*" 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is given the name al-Karār, the Assaulter, "because he slew heathens with a sword in jihad."<sup>69</sup> Second, in all versions of the narrative, the word Furqān is used instead of Qur'an. Furqān is a synonym for Qur'an, but is used to evoke the meaning of the Book that distinguishes good from evil.

### *Conclusion*

In Bornu and Baghirmi of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the spread of Islam played a role in creating new partitions between populations. At the same time it provided the narratives that helped to define new loyalties. Confronted with the arrival of the new foreign commodity of tobacco on the one hand, that coincided with a period of redefinition of allegiances, rural people in central Sudanic Africa used these narratives to fabricate a hadith about tobacco, to help them construct their identity as Muslims. In doing so they chose a point of view regarding tobacco that was different from that of mainstream Muslim jurists of that time.

By the end of the seventeenth century, the meaning that tobacco had acquired there was so deeply rooted in the local culture that it convinced a scholar like Muḥammad al-Wālī of the necessity to point out to his colleagues in the Middle Eastern centers of Islamic learning that they were straying from God's path. His remarkable and rather headstrong position in the "international" debate on tobacco was determined by the lens through which he read their legal works: the lens of his local culture.

Al-Wālī's own text shows that he was well aware of the arguments and conventions of the debate in circles of the most respected jurists. Muslims

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<sup>69</sup> Paden 76, ff 4 and 6. Herskovits Library.

from the geographical margins of the Islamic world who traveled to the Middle East have often been understood to find there “what seemed to them true Islam, but which often contrasted with the Islam in their homeland, which now appeared to them utterly polluted by influences of popular customs and pre-Islamic practices.”<sup>70</sup> But the example that was briefly presented here shows that Muslims living on the periphery did not always consider the Islam of the center to be more true.

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<sup>70</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975).

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