Introduction: Ali Eisami was seized during the jihad in Borno, was taken through the Hausa country, eventually sold to a master in Katunga, the capital of Oyo, but was then sold to the coast in 1817 because the Oyo aristocracy feared a slave uprising and Eisami was clearly a Muslim.

Text:

Ali Eisami, or William Harding (as he was known in Sierra Leone), was born in Gazir, the metropolitan province of the empire of Bornu, in the later 1780's. His father was a Kanuri mallam, or teacher-scholar, and he in turn received a good education in the Islamic tradition of his country. He was about twenty years old when the Fulbe incursions brought the great religious revolution to his own section of Bornu in 1808.' From 1808 to 1818, Ali Eisami lived in a world of constant change. He was present at the first Fulbe sack of Birnin Gazargamo, the capital of Bornu. Later on, his family lost its home and he himself was enslaved, after which he passed through the great emirates of Kano and Katsina within a few years of the overthrow of the old Hausa dynasties. He witnessed the revolts in Oyo which finally overthrew the Alafin and established the emirate of Ilorin. Finally, in 1818, he was transported to the coast and sold as a slave to European merchants in Porto Novo, shipped for the New World, captured at sea, and landed at Sierra Leone.

Ali Eisami's homeland was the ancient Kanuri empire of Bornu, centered in the flood-plain of the Yo River.' This empire was ruled by the ancient family of the Sefawa, which had already enjoyed nearly a millenium of political power in the lands east and west of the Chad. Settling in the Bornu plain in the fifteenth century, the Sefawa had built up a wide sphere of influence, extending, in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, far into Hausa. Certainly, by the second half of the eighteenth century this once great empire was showing signs of collapse. But the final collapse of the Sefawa and the destruction of Bornu’s influence in the west, which took place in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, were the result of the Fulbe incursions.

From i806 or thereabouts, the Fulbe risings in Hausa were accompanied by revolt among the Fulbe populations living in western and central Bornu. But here the religious setting was different from the Hausa pattern. The Sefawa dynasty was the oldest Muslim dynasty in the whole Sudan, and the Kanuri were well known for their Islamic learning. The Fulbe of Bornu, however, were a discontented minority and claimed that polytheistic practices were widely tolerated in the empire of Bornu. It was also said that the Sefawa were supporting certain of the old Hausa states in opposition to the Fulbe jihad farther west.'

Whatever the facts of the matter, the outcome was momentous: the capital at Birnin Gazargamo was sacked, and the Sefawa government was put to flight. The Fulbe then annexed the old western marches of Bornu and organized them as the new emirates of Hadejia and Katagum, later creating two others, Missau and Jama'are. These new provinces owed allegiance
to Sokoto, and the Bornuan governor of the western frontier, the galadima, was forced to withdraw his headquarters from Nguru to Borsari, far to the east.

These losses in the west were the beginning of the end for the Sefawa dynasty. They were forced to appeal for help from an influential scholar and merchant, Muhammad al-Amin al-Kanemi,' who had built up a large and powerful following among certain minority and fringe elements found among the populations of eastern Bornu, particularly the Kanembu settlers and Shuwa Arabs near Lake Chad. Muhammad al-Amin answered the appeal, temporarily restored the Sefawa government, and suppressed the Fulbe rising in the metropolitan province. The Sefawa, however, became mere puppet rulers, with real political power passed from the Kanuri of central Bornu to the Shuwa advisers of Muhammad al-Amin, his slaves, and the Kanembu military leaders. The old capital at Birnin Gazargamo, was abandoned, and Muhammad al-Amin ordered another one built at Kukawa, in the part of the country where he enjoyed the greatest influence.

Some reflection of these events appears in Ali Eisami's text, but he was already gone from Bornu by 1820, when Muhammad al-Amin had reached supreme power. He had been living in Sierra Leone for many years as William Harding, when, in 1846, 'Umar, the son of Muhammad al-Amin, deposed and executed the last of the Sefawa. Thus he missed the end of this most ancient of Sudanese dynasties and the final political reordering which brought Muhammad al-Amin's descendants, the Shehu of Bornu, into the political eminence they still enjoy in northeastern Nigeria.

Ali Eisami's account of his westward travels through Hausa as a slave is disappointingly brief, but his sale to an important figure in Old Oyo, again brought him into contact with the great events of his period. As a Muslim, though a slave, Ali Eisami became one of the potential fifth column in the heart of Oyo, which was used so effectively by Afonja to complete the destruction of that empire. At this point, Ali Eisami's narrative treats the same events described by Samuel Crowther. When Afonja, in 1817, offered freedom to slaves who enlisted in his forces, he was, in fact, recruiting the army that later sacked Crowther's town of Osogun. Ali, however, was sold to the coast by his Yoruba master to prevent his escape. Otherwise, he might well have participated in the enslavement of Crowther, rather than preceding him by four years on a similar path to the coast, capture at sea, and settlement in Sierra Leone.

From another point of view, however, Ali Eisami's arrival on the coast was fortunate since he was ultimately captured at sea. The British had abolished their own slave trade in 1807, and, during the remainder of the Napoleonic wars, they made it a practice to capture slave ships at sea and to land the liberated recaptives at Sierra Leone, their only real territorial holding on the coast of West Africa. At the end of the war, they made a serious effort to obtain international support for the continuation of an anti-slave-trade blockade, but their effort to obtain a multilateral sanction for the capture of slave ships failed. The lack of a legal basis for the blockade brought a British court to hold in 1817 that the Navy could not seize or search foreign slavers on the high seas in peacetime. For a few months, therefore, the Navy had to give up strict enforcement of the antislavery blockade against foreign nations, though it maintained patrols against possible British slavers and against the pirates that infested the West African coast for a few years after the end of the wars.

Ali Eisami was therefore lucky to have been recaptured at all. He sailed from the coast at a peculiarly unpropitious time. Even though Britain rectified the legal problem later in 1817 by forcing Spain and Portugal to sign treaties giving bilateral sanction to the blockade, the slavers captured under these treaties had to be taken before an international Court of Mixed Commission, and the court at Freetown in Sierra Leone was not actually setup until 1819. Meanwhile, the blockading force on the West African coast in the early part of 1818 consisted of only two vessels of the British Navy – the Semiramis, flagship of Commodore Sir James Lucas.
Yeo, and the Cherub. Though the Cherub cruised past Porto Novo near the time of Ali's departure, she apparently missed his ship, which was captured later and far at sea.

Once Ali had been landed in Sierra Leone, his narrative follows a pattern that was to be standard for many thousands of other recaptives, including Samuel Crowther and Joseph Wright. Under the governorship of Sir Charles MacCarthy (1814-24), the reception of recaptives was made more systematic than it had been in the past. They were first kept on board ship until the Court of Mixed Commission or Vice-Admiralty Court had completed the adjudication. If condemned, the ship was confiscated and the recaptives were landed and turned over to the Captured Negro Department (or Liberated African Department after 1822) of the Sierra Leone government, at its establishment called the King's Yard. Some were then apprenticed to the Negro settlers from America, or to recaptives who had arrived earlier and were already established. The rest were assigned to one of a series of villages established for the purpose. Each village, named after an English county or a prominent figure of the day, was under a European manager, who acted as magistrate, schoolmaster, and often as a missionary as well. Many, indeed, were agents of the Church Missionary Society, rather than simply government employees. The recaptives were subsidized at first at government charge, but they were supposed to fend for themselves as soon as they were able. Most took European names in addition to their own African names, often borrowing that of the family to which they were apprenticed or that of the superintendent of their original village.

Ali Eisami was assigned to the village of Bathurst, then under the superintendency of the Reverend Mr. Decker of the Church Missionary Society, the same village to which Crowther was to be assigned four years later. Several recaptives who were later to achieve prominence took Decker's name, but Ali's choice of William Harding probably originated directly or indirectly from John Harding, a Maroon settler of Jamaican origin and clerk in the Captured Negro Department at the time of Ali's arrival!

Little is known of Ali's life in Sierra Leone during the next two decades. Since he was already about thirty years old at the time of his arrival, he was apparently less able or less willing to accept Western culture than younger recaptives like Crowther and Wright. In any event, he became only a nominal Christian, and he remained illiterate in English to the end of his life. During his early years in Sierra Leone, some two hundred other Kanuri were also present, and Ali tended to live among his own countrymen.

The present narrative owes its existence to the arrival in 1847 of S.W. Koelle, the German linguist employed by the Church Missionary Society. Koelle's many-sided linguistic studies included Kanuri grammar and a selection of Kanuri readings with English translation and an extensive vocabulary. Koelle took Ali as a full-time informant during most of 1848 and again for a period of two years during 1849-52, by which time Ali was well into his sixties. Koelle's method of investigation was to write phonetically the examples of the Kanuri language furnished by Ali and other informants. In this way, he accumulated a manuscript literature of some eight hundred pages, including stories, fables, and historical fragments, as well as the personal narrative that is reproduced here.

The importance of this account is not that it contains much political history that cannot be read elsewhere, though the events described accord with what we know from other sources. Neither is it a work of historical interpretation: it is, indeed, doubtful that either Ali Eisami or Koelle appreciated the significance of the events they discussed. As a document of social history, however, it shows the impact of revolutionary changes on the life of an ordinary man. Such documents are rare for Ali's time and place, and it may serve to remind us that the study of the past is of little use unless it concerns itself with the fortunes of the talaga as well as the rise and fall of governments.
NARRATIVE OF THE TRAVELS OF ALI EISAMI

The narrative that follows was dictated by Ali Eisami to S. W. Koelle in Sierra Leone in about 1850. It was published in Koelle's African Native Literature (London, 1854), in Kanuri, pp. 115-21, and in English translation, pp. 248-56. The present version follows Koelle's translation, with some modernization of Koelle's English style and with a few corrections, including modern spellings for all the clearly identifiable place names. Minor obscurities in Koelle's translation have been disregarded, and some of Koelle's footnotes have been omitted; those that have been retained are marked with an asterisk.

In the town of Magriari Tapsoua, there was a man, named Mamade Atshi, son of Kodo,* and he was my father." He was already a mallam" when he went and sought to marry my mother: so when their elders had consulted together, and come to a mutual understanding, my father prepared himself, sought a house, and the time for the wedding was fixed, which having arrived, my mother was married, and brought into my father's house. After they had been living in their house one year, my elder sister, Sarah, was born, next my elder brother Mamade,* and after him myself; next to me, my younger sister Pesam, and then my younger sister Kadei were born; on their being born, our mother did not bear any more. As to myself, I was put to school when I was seven years of age. Then my younger sister Kadei and my elder brother Mamade died, so that only three of us remained, of whom two were females and I alone a male. When I had been reading at school till I was nine years of age, they took me from school, and put me into the house of circumcision; and after passing through the rite of circumcision, I returned to school, and having remained there two years longer, I left off reading the Koran." When I left off reading the Koran, I was eleven years old.

Two years later, there was an eclipse of the sun, on a Saturday' in the cold season." One year after this, when, in the weeding time, in the rainy season, about two o'clock in the afternoon, we looked to the west, the Kaman-locusts" were coming from the west, forming a straight line across the sky, as if one of God's thunderstorms were coming, so that day was turned into night. When the time of the locusts was past, the famine Ngeseneski" took place, but did not last long, only three months. After it, the pestilence came, and made much havoc in Bornu, completely destroying all the elderly.'

Next the wars of the Fulbe" came up. In the rainy season the Fulbe put to flight the king of Daya with his family," and, as they were coming to our town, my father said to me, "My son, times will be hard for you: this year you are nineteen years of age, and though I said that, when you are twenty, I will seek a girl for you, and let you marry, yet now the Fulbe have unsettled the land, and we do not know what to do: but what God has ordained for us, that shall we experience." When the guinea-corn which we were weeding had become ripe, and the harvest was past, the Fulbe roused both us and the Dayans, so we went, and remained near the capital,'O till the Fulbe arose and came to the capital, on a Sunday, about two o'clock in the afternoon. When they were coming, the kaigamma" went out to encounter them; but, after they had met and been engaged in a battle till four o'clock, the kaigamma's power was at an end. The mai arose, passed out through the east gate, and started for Kurnawa." Then the kat gamma left the Fulbe, and followed the king; on seeing which, all the Fulbe came and entered the capital. After they had entered, the tidings reached us about seven o'clock in the evening. When the tidings came, none knew where to lay his head. On the following morning, a great Pulo mallam" said to us, "Let every one go and remain in his own village, the war" is over: let all the common people go, and each cultivate his land!" Then my father called his younger brother, and we arose and went to our town; but when we came, there was nothing at all to eat. So my father called my mother at night, when all the people were gone, and said to her, "Our town is ruined; if we remain, the Fulbe will make an end of us: arise, and load our things upon our children!" Now there was a town, Magerari" by name, which is subject to the Shuwa; and the Fulbe never meddle with any place that is subject
to the Shuwa." So we arose, and went to that town; but when we had lived there one year, the
mal went, turned the Fulbe out of the capital, and went in himself and abode there. 28
About one year after this event, when my father had died, as it were today, at two o'clock in the
afternoon, and we had not yet buried him, intending to do so next day, then we slept, and on the
following morning, my mother called me, and my elder and my younger sister, and said to us,
"Live well together, you three; behold, your father lies here a corpse, and I am following your
father." Now there was just then a mallam with us who said to my mother, "Why do you say
such things to your children?" but my mother replied to the mallam, "I say these things to my
children in truth." Then she called me, and I rose up, went, and sat down before her. When I had
sat down, she said to me, "Stretch out your legs, that I may lay my head in your lap." So I
stretched out my legs, and she took her head, and laid it on my lap; but when the mallam who
was staying with us saw that my mother was laying her head on my lap he rose, came, sat down
by me, stretched out his legs, and took my mother's head from my lap, and laid it upon his own.
Then that moment our Lord took away my mother. After this tears came from my eyes, and
when the mallam saw it, he said to me, "Let me not see tears in your eyes! will your father and
your mother arise again, and sit down, that you may see them, if you weep?" I attended to what
the mallam said, and did not weep any more. With the corpse of our father before us, and with
the corpse of our mother before us, we did not know what to do, till the people of the town went
and dug graves for both of them, side by side, in one place, and came back again, when we took
the corpses, carried and buried them, and then returned.

After waiting two months at home, I took my younger sister, and gave her to a friend of my
father's in marriage, my elder sister being already provided with a husband. On one occasion I
got up after night had set in, without saying anything to my sister, took my father's spear, his
charms, and one book which he had, set out on a journey, and walked in the night, so that it was
not yet day when I reached the town of Shagou," where there was a friend of my father's, a
Shuwa; and, when I came to the dwelling place of this friend of my father's, they were just in the
open space in front of the house. When I came to him, and he saw me, he knew me, and I knew
him. I having saluted him, he asked me, "Where is your father?" I replied to him, saying, "My
father is no more, and my mother is no more, so I left both my elder and my younger sister, and
came to you." Whereupon he said to me, "Come, my son, we will stay together; your father did
good to me, and now since he is no more, and you did like me and come to me, I also like you: I
will do In vnu what I do to my own son."

After I had been there about three years, I called a companion, saying, "Come and accompany
me!" for I had a friend in the town of the name of Gubber." The youth arose, and we started
together, but as we were going towards the town of Gubber, seven Fulbe waylaid us, seized us,
tied our hands upon our backs, fettered us, put us in the way, and then we went till it became
day." When it was day, both they and we became hungry in a hostile place, the land being the
land of Ngizim." In this place we sat down, and ate the fruit of a certain tree called ganga, till it
became dark, when they took us again, and carried us to the town of Ngololo" to market. On that
day some Hausa bought us, took us into a house, and put iron fetters on our feet; then, after five
days, we set out, and were twenty-two days, till we arrived in Hausa. When we arrived, we went
to a town called Tsangayya where there are a great many dates." In this town we remained during
the months of Asham, Soual, and Kide," but when only three days of the [month of] Atshi were
passed, they roused me up, and in a week we came to Birnin Katsina, where they slew the
Easter-lamb," and after five days they rose again, and we started for Yauri. After marching a
fortnight, we arrived at Birnin Yauri. Here the Hausa sold us, and took their goods, whilst
Borgawa" bought us. The Borgawa roused us up, and when we came to their town, the man who
had bought me, did not leave me alone at all: I had iron fetters round my feet, both by night and
by day. After I had stayed with him seven days, he took me, and brought me to the town of Sai,"
where a Yoruba bought me.
The Yoruba who bought me was a son of the Katunga king; he liked me, and called me to sit down before him, and, on seeing my tattoo-marks, he said to me, "Were you the son of a king in your country?" To this I replied, "My father, as for me, I will not tell lies, because times are evil, and our Lord has given me into slavery: my father was a scholar." Then he said, "As for this youth and his father, his father must have been a fine man; I will not treat him ill," and so he kept me in his house. In this place I remained a long time, so that I understood their language. After I had been there four years, a war arose: Now, all the slaves who went to the Lar ec4me free; so when the they all ran -the e, anU_t1_e_Yo-ruba saw it. The friend of the man who had bought me, sLi-d to him, "if you do not sell this slave of yours, he will run away, and go to the war, so that your cowries will be lost, for this fellow has sound eyes." Then the man took hold of me, and bound me, and his three sons took me to the town of Ajashe, Where whitemen had landed; then they took off the fetters from my feet, and carried me before them to the white people who bought me, and an iron round my neck. After having bought all the people, they took us, brought us to the seashore, brought a very small canoe, and transferred us one by one to the large vessel.

The people of the great vessel were wicked: when we had been shipped, they took away all the small pieces of cloth which were on our bodies, and threw them into the water, then they took chains, and fettered two together. We in the vessel, young and old, were seven hundred, whom the white men" had bought. We were all fettered round our feet, and all the oldest died of thirst, for there was no water. Every morning they had to take many, and throw them into the water: so we entreated God by day and by night, and, after three months, when it pleased God to send breezes, we arose in the morning, and the doors were opened. When we had all come on deck, one slave was standing by us, and we beheld the sky in the midst of the water.

When I looked at the horizon, my eye saw something far away, like trees. On seeing this, I called the slave, and said to him, "I see a forest yonder, far away." Whereupon he said to me, "Show it to me with your finger!" When I had shown it to him, and he had seen the place at which my finger pointed, he ran to one of the white men who liked me, and would give me his shirts to mend, and then gave me food, he being a benefactor; now, when the slave told it him, the white man who was holding a roasted fowl in his hand, came to me, together with the slave. This slave who understood their language, and also the Hausa," came and asked me, saying, "Show me with your finger what you see, that the white man also may see it!" I showed it, and when the white man brought his eye, and laid it upon my finger, he also saw what I pointed at. He left the roasted fowls which he held in his hand and wanted to eat, before me, and ran to their Captain. Then I took the fowl, and put it into my bag. All of them ran, and loaded the big big guns with powder and their very large iron. We, not knowing what it was, called the Hausa who understood it, and said to him, "Why do the white men prepare their guns?" and he said to us, "What you saw were not trees, but a vessel of war is coming towards us." We did not believe it, and said "We have never seen any one make war in the midst of water," and, after waiting a little, it came, and when it was near us, our own white men fired a gun at them; but it still went on. When the white men with us had fired a gun nine times, the white man-of-war was vexed and fired one gun at our vessel, the ball of which hit the middle mast with those very large sails, cut it off, and threw it into the water. Then the white men with us ran to the bottom of the vessel, and hid themselves. The war-chief, a short man, of the name of Captain Hick, 45* brought his vessel side by side with ours, whereupon all the war-men came into our vessel, sword in hand, took all our own white men, and carried them to their vessel." Then they called all of us, and when we formed a line, and stood up in one place, they counted us, and said, "Sit down!" So we sat down, and they took off all the fetters from our feet, and threw them into the water, and they gave us clothes that we might cover our nakedness, they opened the watercasks, that we might drink water to the full, and we also ate food, till we had enough. In the evening they brought drums, and gave them to us, so that we played till it was morning. We said, "Now our Lord has taken us out of our slavery," and thanked him. Then came a white man, stood before me, and after looking
at me, slapped both my cheeks, took me to the place where they cooked food, and said to me, "You must cook, so that your people may eat." So I cooked food, and distributed the water with my own hand, till they brought us and landed us in this town [Freetown], where we were a week in the king's house [King's Yard], and then they came and distributed us among the different towns.

We went and settled in the forest" at Bathurst." We met a white man in this town whose name was Mr. Decker, and who had a wife, and was a reverend priest. On the following morning we all went, and stood up in his house, and having seen all of us, he came, took hold of my hand, and drew me into his house, and I did not fear him; but I heard inside the house that my people without were talking, and saying, "The white man has taken Ali, and put him into the house, in order to slaughter him." So I looked at the white people, and they looked at me. When the white man arose and went to the top of the house, I prepared myself, and thought, "If this white man takes a knife, and I see it in his hand, I will hold it," but the white man was gone up to fetch shirts, and trousers, and caps down. On coming down, he said to me, "Stand up!" So when I stood up, he put me into a shirt, put trousers over my legs, gave me a jacket, and put a cap upon my head. Then he opened the door, and when we came out, all our people were glad. He called a man who understood the white man's language, and said to him, "Say that this one is the chief of all his people." Then the man told me so. When they carried us to the forest the day before, my wife followed after me; and on the day after our arrival the white man married us, and gave me my wife, so we went and remained in the house of our people.

The white man was a benefactor, and he liked me. But, after a few days, his wife became ill, so we took her, and carried her to the town of Hog-brook [later Regent]; and then the illness exceeded her strength, and our Lord sought her. After this he arose in our town, and we took his things, and carried them to Freetown, where he said to us, "Go, and remain quiet; I go to our own country, not knowing whether I shall come back again, or not." Then be shook hands with us, bade us farewell, and went to their own country. We returned and settled down until the Lord brought the minister, Mr. Renner, to our town.

Until now our Lord has preserved me, but "God knows what is to come," say the Bornuans. I also heard the great men say, "What is to come even a bird with a long neck cannot see, but our Lord only." This is an account of what I experienced from my childhood till today, and what I have been telling you is now finished.

NOTES

1. Errors of a chronological nature are to be expected in an oral account of this kind, remembered over several decades. Ali, however, appears to be substantially correct for most dates, except the ordering of events in the years 1808-9. Minor discrepancies, however, occur here and there in his account of time elapsed between events. His birth date, for example, can be calculated as 1794 from an eclipse of the sun he observed in 1807. On his own report of his father's words, however, he must have been born in 1786 or 1787. We have accepted the latter estimate as the more likely.

2. For the history of Bornu generally see Y. Urvoy, Histoire de l'empire A Bornou (Paris, 1949), and works there cited.


4. Material now available on Muhammad al-Amin is comparatively scarce. D. Denham and H. Clapperton met him in the early 1820's and published their impressions in Narrative of Travels and Discoveries in Northern Central Africa (London, 1826). Copies of a few of his letters, a tract
which he wrote (on the shari'a pertaining to marriage), and an elegy to him, by one of his friends, are among Ibadan Arabic MSS. His correspondence with the Sokoto reformers is copied in lnf.,-q al-Maysfir. But there is, as yet, little else; and, though important, he therefore remains an obscure figure. His obscurity is increased by his misleading surname. His connections were not with Kanem, but with the Fezzan and the Arab world. To him Bornu was in many ways a foreign country, and this has to be taken into account in any appreciation of his work.


7. Fyfe, Sierra Leone, p. 167.


9. She was his mother.

10. "Magriari Tapsoua- is possibly Magirari Tamsuguwa. Both parts of this name are common as place-names in Bornu (Magirari means under the Queen Mother; Tamsyguwa means tamarind trees). There is a place of this name at a day's journey from Birnin Gazargamo. "Mamade Atshi" is Muhammad al.HRjj. "Eisami" means "son of Aisha." The use of the matronymic is still a common feature of Kanuri society.

11. A teacher-scholar. Ali later refers to his father also as fugara, or scholar-student, a less respected title.

12. Muhammad.

13. This could be translated: "completed reading the Koran"; that is, finished the standard primary education for Muslims.

14. An eclipse of the sun should have been visible in Bornu on Sunday, 29 November 1807, according to the path calculated in T. R. von Oppolzer, Canon der Finsternisse (Vienna, 1887; trans. Gingerich, New York, 1962), Chart 144. The confirmation of oral accounts by astronomical data is rare as yet for African history. The best known case is the eclipse recorded by E. Torday in the history of the Bushong (see B. Davidson, Old Africa Rediscovered [London, 1959], p. 26).

15. The species in question is likely to have been the desert locust, which is liable to do considerable damage during the months of September through November. In this case, the locusts appear to have come in July.

16. Ngaseneski means "I forgot."

17. The nature of this pestilence (bamba) is not known. The intensely hot, dusty months before the rains are the season for epidemics.

18. Ali Eisami used the Kanuri term, Fulata, but Koelle's translation used the form, Phula, more common in Sierra Leone. (The present text has been corrected to Fulbe, throughout.) The Fulbe had lived for a long time in western and southern Bornu. Here, as in Hausa, they preserved a tradition of Islamic learning, as is attested by the writings of the eighteenth-century scholar, Muhammad al-Tahir b. Ibrdhim al-Fuldni, of which examples are to be found among the Ibadan Library Arabic MSS collection.

The Fulbe revolt in western Bornu actually began more than a year before these events, under the leadership of Ardo Lerlima and his associate Biyi Abdur. It had already brought about the death of Galadima Dunama, governor of the western frontier districts of Bornu. Eisami's account begins with a second revolt, that of the southern Fulbe under Shaykh al-Bukhari and Gwoni (the learned) Mukhtar, in 1808.
19. Daya, some twenty-six miles south of Damaturu and west of Guiba, is now deserted, but was then the main town of a district of that name. The "family" of the king of Daya probably means his people. Elsewhere (Koele, African Native Literature, Pp. 212 ff.) Ali Eisami says that Daya had been a center of disaffection for some time. Five years previously the Mai Daya, a supporter of the Fulbe, had apparently defied the government. He had been deposed for this, and replaced by his younger brother. The new governor of Daya subsequently fell into a dispute with the Fulbe, who are said to have migrated to Gujba whence they mounted the attack mentioned here.

20. Birnin Gazargamo, the deserted ruins of which lie some twenty-five miles east of modern Geidam in north-central Bornu. It had been the seat of government of the Sefawa since the late fifteenth century.

21. The slave commander-in-chief of the Bornu army. Ali Eisami claims (Koele, African Native Literature, Pp. 212 ff.) that three kaigamma had already been demoted for failing to deal with the trouble in Daya. "About two o'clock" is Koelle's translation of zubr, the time of mid-day prayer; "four o'clock" is 'asr, the afternoon prayer.

22. Mai is the traditional title of the Sefawa rulers of Bornu. The mai at this time was Ahmad, son of Ali, who is said to have become blind. He abdicated after his arrival at Kurnawa in favor of his son, Dunama. It was also apparently at this time and from Kumawa that the appeal for help was first made to Muhammad al-Amin al-Kanemi. This particular Kurnawa, however, cannot be positively identified. It is a common place name, and at least two towns called Kurnawa are located to the east and southeast of Birnin Gazargamo. Ali Eisami deals with these events in greater detail in Koele, African Native Literature, pp. 221 ff.

23. March-April 1808 (Muharram-Safar, A.H. 1223) is the most likely date for the first Fulbe occupation of Birnin Gazargamo (Ibadan Arabic MSS, Borma 52; H. R. Palmer, Gazetteer of Bornu Province [Lagos, 19291, p. 18). Muhammad al-Amin's first letter to the Fulbe leaders about the troubles in Bornu is dated May 1808 (Rab'1, A.H. 1223), though it does not actually mention the sack of the capital. Ali Eisami's account (reckoning from the eclipse in November 1807) would put the event after the rains in 1808. This is certainly too late.

24. Possibly Gwoni Mukhtar, the leader of the Daya Fulbe in this attack.

25. It is indicative that Ali Eisami used the ordinary Kariuri word for war, krige, and not the term iihad, which would have implied a recognition of the Fulbe religious goals.

26. Mongono Magirari (as this town is called below) is not precisely identified. There is a famous Mongono near the western shore of Lake Chad in what is now Shuwa country. Similarly, there is a Mongono in central Bornu, in the area allotted to the Shuwa by Mohammad al-Amin after his reconquest.

27. The Shuwa Arabs were, like the Fulbe, a non-Kanuri minority, long domiciled in Bornu. The Fulbe did not, in truth, meddle with them, probably because of their respect for Arabic-speaking peoples and because the Shuwa way of life and their position in Kanuri society were similar in so many ways to their own.

28. This passage refers to the reoccupation of Birnin Gazargamo by the young Mai, Dunama, with the help of Muhammad al-Amin al-Kanemi, most probably before the rains in early 1809. Gwoni Mukhtar, whose forces were largely dispersed with their cattle during the dry season, was killed (see Ali Eisami's more detailed account in Koele, African Native Literature, pp. 222-23).

29. Probably the village of that name in south-central Bornu.

30. A village some fifteen miles west of Shagou.

31. It is not surprising that Ali Eisami and his friend were captured, given the circumstances of the period. By this time, Birnin Gazargamo had again fallen to the Fulbe under Ibrahim Zaki, the emir of Katagum. Mai Dunama was then deposed by his uncle, Muhammad Ngeleruma. Muhammad succeeded in recapturing the capital, but he later surrendered the office of mai to Ibrahim, Dunama's younger brother (Ali Eisami, in Koele, African Native Literature, pp. 224-26). Muhammad al-Amin's role in this episode is not clear. Mai Muhammad Ngeleruma
probably tried to operate independently of him. Mai Ibrahim, however, was certainly under his domination. The Fulbe, meanwhile, mounted two further attacks on Birnin Gazargamo before it was finally abandoned by the Kanuri in favor of the new capital at Kukawa.

32. The country lying to the north of modern Potiskum in western Borno.

33. A village some fifty-five miles west of Shagou.

34. Tsangaya is southwest of Ngololo and southeast of Kano. Clapperton passed through early in 1824 and described it as it then was, somewhat decayed as a result of the wars, but still with the date trees Ali noticed (Denham and Clapperton, Travels in Africa, P. 36).

35. That is, the Arabic months of Ramadan, Shawwal, and Dhu-l-qa'ida, or September to November, 1812.

36. The "Easter" feast, 'Id al-kabir, was celebrated in Katsina in December. It is curious that Ali Eisami went from Tsangaya to Katsina without passing through Kano, or, if he did, that he does not mention it.

37. The people of Borgu, the country lying west and southwest of Birnin Yauri. 111(, Borgawa are not linguistically akin to the Hausa, and they were well known for their resistance to the Fulbe jihad.

38. Sai (or Saitu, as it appears in the Kanuri text) is not identified. It possibly lay in the now-deserted area between Old Oyo and Kaimai.

39. Katunga, meaning "the wall," is the Hausa name for Old Oyo. Hence, the Katungang king should be the Alafin; but it is probable that the office of Alafin was vacant until about 1817. However, the period was extremely confused in Old Oyo, and Ali's owner could equally well have been the son of a former Alafin, or else the son of a claimant to the title.

40. Here he uses the term fugara, a scholar-student.

41. There is little doubt that this war was Afonja's revolt. Specialists on Yoruba history incline to date this revolt in 1817, which is confirmed here by Ali Eisami and is congruent with the dates supplied by Crowther, who lived nearby (see below, Chap 9). Afonja's revolt is also associated with a flight of slaves from Old Oyo, such as is mentioned here (Samuel Johnson, The History of the Yorubas [Lagos, 1921], PP. 193ff; see also H. Clapperton, Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa [London, 1829], p.39).

42. The region of modern Porto Novo. The trade route between Old Oyo and Ajashe had long been a main artery of trade between the interior and the coastlands, passing as it did through the open country to the west of the Egba forest; and the Alafin had established his influence along this route as far back as the end of the seventeenth century (Johnson, Yorubas, pp. 74 ff., 183; A. Dalzel, The History of Dahomey [London, 1793], pp. 179ff; J. Adams, Sketches Taken during Ten Voyages to Africa, 1786-1800 [London, 1822], p. 80). With the decline and abandonment of Old Oyo as a commercial center, this route was diverted to the west through Borgu and to the east through Ilorin and eastern Yoruba.

43. The term used here for white men is wasili, the normal Kanuri word for the Tuareg and the North Africans. The white men in this case are said to have been Spaniards.

44. Which Ali likewise speaks a little.

45. I wrote this name from Ali's pronunciation, and so I am not quite sure whether it is correct: it might also be Heck, or Hicks, or Egg. [The commanders of the two ships then on West African Station for the Royal Navy were Yeo of the Semiramis and Willes of the Cherub. The individual in question, however, might possibly be Samuel Tuck, Master of the Cherub.] 3

46. The slave ship and its capture are hard to identify in British naval records of the period. Ali's description of his journey at sea, however, suggests that the ship dropped south of the equator in order to catch the southeast trades, and that it then was becalmed in the doldrums somewhere in mid-Atlantic. A foreign ship captured in this situation might well have been taken to Sierra Leone for condemnation. One captured in West Indian waters would more likely have been turned in to a vice-admiralty court there. Two pirates with slaves on board were captured late in
1817 or early in 1818 on the African coast itself (both by H.M.S. Cherub), but both were captured within sight of lard, neither had a large number of slaves, and the descriptions of the engagements in the Cherub's log do not fit that given by Ali Eisami.
47. As the neighborhood of Bathurst was in those days.
48. One of the villages for the reception of recaptives, Bathurst had only recently been founded, in 1817, within a year of Ali's arrival there in April 1818.
49. Many Negroes believed, on being shipped in slave vessels, that the white men were cannibals who had almost eaten up their own countrymen, and now came to fetch black men to gratify their appetite for human flesh.
50. From that time Ali was for many years a constable.
51. Rev. Melchior Renner, a German Lutheran who served the Church Missionary Society in Sierra Leone and Rio Pongas from 1804 until his death in 1812 (Fyfe, Sierra Leone, pp. 94-95, 130, 153).