

OTTOMAN EMPIRE, BORNO AND RABIH: A COMPLICATED RELATION BETWEEN THE 1840S AND 1900S

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Abstract

The history of Borno during the 19th century still lacks a considerable picture regarding the relations between Borno and the Ottoman Empire. This article presents, for the first time, a substantial compilation of Ottoman archival sources from Turkey and Libya, thereby illuminating the previously neglected subject of political and diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and Borno from the 1840s to 1893. Numerous new findings indicate that there was not only a very dense diplomatic relation between two states, but they even created a new political system incorporating Borno into the Ottoman rule, ensuring the further autonomy of the Al-Kanemi dynasty. Furthermore, additional discoveries reveal the intricate diplomatic dynamics between the Ottoman Empire and Rabih from 1893 to 1900, thereby offering a fresh perspective on the historical context of both Rabih and Borno.

Keywords: Borno, Ottoman Empire, Rabih, Al-Kanemi, Sahara.

Introduction

The diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and Borno during the 16th century are well-documented, as evidenced by records found in both Borno and Ottoman archives.¹ However, it has long been presumed that these brief diplomatic interactions constituted the extent of their connection in subsequent centuries. The fact that Shehus of Borno openly rejected the jihad declared by the Ottoman Caliph during the WWI, further let many historians believe that Ottoman-Borno relations in the 19th century was more imaginary than being real.² First in 1987, Sheikh Ali Bani Kyari properly demonstrated that the 19th century marked a significant period of renewed and extensive diplomatic relations between the two

¹ Aziz Samih Ilter first discovered the related documents in the Ottoman archives in the 1930s, See: Aziz Samih Ilter, *Şimali Afrika'da Türkler* (Istanbul: Vakıf Gazete Matbaası, 1937). Thereafter, Cengiz Orhonlu deeply analyzed these documents, see: Cengiz Orhonlu. "Osmanlı-Borno Münâsebetine Âid Belgeler." *İstanbul Edebiyat Fakültesi Matbaası* 23 (1969): 111-130. The chronicle of prominent Borno scholar Ibn Fartuwa (d. 1600?), *Kitab Ghazawat Barnu*, which mentions the direct diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and Borno is also well researched by Borno historians. For a general overview, see: Abdullahi Garba, *A Historiographical Study of Borno: 1583-2007* (Ph.D Thesis, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, 2022).

² For instance, see: Rémi Dewiere, Vincent Hiribarren, "Our delight is for the amir of the English": a Bornoan history of the First World War (North-Eastern Nigeria), in *The First World War from Tripoli to Addis Ababa (1911-1924)* ed, Bekele et al. (Paris: Centre français des études éthiopiennes, 2018).

states.¹ Very recently, more research began to focus on this issue.² Despite these current interests, the Ottoman documentation pertaining to these diplomatic exchanges has yet to be thoroughly analysed. The challenge in this regard is not linguistic, as numerous Turkish historians have been engaged in the study of these Ottoman sources for many years, but rather the fragmented nature of the available documents. During the Italian colonial invasion of Tripoli in 1911, the Ottoman institutions were unable to transfer all state archives to Istanbul, resulting in a substantial portion of official documents remaining in Tripoli. Currently, these documents are housed in the House of Libyan Historical Documents, *Dar al-Mahfuzat al-Tarikhiyya al-Libiyya* (D.M.T.L.), in Tripoli. Unfortunately, a significant portion of this collection is yet to be catalogued. Nevertheless, with diligent research, all documents can be accessed. Additional documents are located in the Central Ottoman Archive, *Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi* (B.O.A.), in Istanbul. Generally, the majority of these documents are written in Turkish using Arabic script, although several Arabic reports and letters are also present. This article aims to compile these documents for the first time in their entirety. To enhance the understanding of the historical context surrounding these documents, the article incorporates two previously unknown Turkish traveller accounts that have not been addressed in Anglophone scholarly literature. Furthermore, it references unexamined letters and reports from the archive of *Kano State History and Culture Bureau* (K.S.C.B.) as well as *Sudan Archive of Durham University* (S.A.D.U.). Consequently, several new findings from these sources present a markedly different perspective on the relationship between the Ottoman Empire and Borno, as well as Rabih, during the 19th century.

Establishment of the New Ottoman Rule in Tripoli between 1835 and 1842

The Ottoman Empire established control over Algeria, Tunisia, and Tripoli already in the 16th century, driven by its expansionist ambitions to end the Spanish occupation in northern Africa.³ These re-captured regions were registered by the Ottoman administration as *Garb Ocakları* (Tr. Western janissary camps), as the Ottoman sultan designed the new rules in the region as temporary military supply camps for further expansion.⁴ The secondary role of these military camps was to be a response to the corsairs of Malta who were attacking the Muslim merchants. In other words, Algeria, Tunisia, and Tripolitania were not initially considered as a governing body in the region. However, Ottoman army generals had the right to collect tribute from local communities to fund their *jihad* against Spain, Venice, and Malta, without providing any governmental functions. From the Ottoman perspective, this new ruling structure in the region was regarded as an overseas dominion, since the generals of the camp (Tr. *ocak ağaları*) were responsible before the chief admiral of marine (Tr. *kapudan paşa*), rather than before an administrative body such as vizier (Tr. *vezir*).⁵

The Ottoman sultans reorganized the structures in the region when, in the early 17th century, the militant marine activities of *Garb Ocakları* – by capturing mainly the merchant ships from Venice – began to create wealth for the generals of the camp. Thus, Algeria, Tunisia, and Tripoli were incorporated into the *saliyane* system, which entailed the payment of annual

¹ Sheikh Ali Bani Kyari, “Borno-Ottoman Relations in the Nineteenth Century” (Borno History Conference, Maiduguri, 1987).

² For instance, see: İsa Gökgedik, *Afrika'nın Sultanları: Bilâdüssûdan'da Çad Havzası Sultanlıkları ve Osmanlı ile Münasebetleri* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2024); Remi Dewiere, “Borno in the Ottoman Archives (1574–1903).” *Eurasian Studies* 21 (2023): 151-185.

³ Saydi V. Toprak, “Osmanlı Yönetiminde Kuzey Afrika: Garp Ocakları.” *İstanbul Üniversitesi Türkiyat Mecmuası* 22 (2012): 225–26.

⁴ Mehmet Zeki Pakalın, *Osmanlı Tarih Deyimleri ve Terimler Sözlüğü*, vol. 2 (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1993), 711.

⁵ Ibn Abi 'l Diyaf, *It'haf Ahl al-Zaman Bi-Akhbar Muluk Tunis Wa 'Ahd al-Aman*, vol. III (Tunis: Publications du Ministère de la Culture, 1963), 28–29.

tribute to Istanbul, whereas the Sultan permitted them to maintain their autonomy in managing their internal affairs. However, the generals of the camps were now tasked with providing the governmental functions for the people. The Ottoman Empire underwent another significant administrative restructuring in the 1650s, adopting a more decentralized governance structure.¹ This shift had a profound impact on *Garb Ocakları*, conferring upon them a considerable degree of autonomy while still maintaining their juridical submission to the sultan. In the wake of the 1710s, the control of the nascent governing bodies in Tunisia and Tripoli shifted from the generals of the camps to the local communities, paving the way for the advent of new dynasties (Husseyini in Tunisia, and Karamanlı (aka Qaramanlı) in Tripolitania), while Algeria remained under the control of janissary army commanders.²

In Tripolitania, the rule of Karamanlı dynasty under the Ottoman control continued from 1711 to 1835. During this era, Karamanlı dynasty had close connections with Borno, while their control over Sahara was very weak.³ Especially Yusuf Pasha of Karamanlı, who ruled from 1795 to 1830s, greatly transformed the whole Tripolitanita and its relations with the south.⁴ However, following severe dynastic conflict between two sons of Yusuf Pasha, after 1830, the Ottoman Empire decided to abolish the rule of Karamanlı dynasty and take the control of Tripolitania under direct authority of Istanbul.⁵ As a result, after 1835, Tripolitania is ruled by an Ottoman *vali* (Tr. *l. rank governor*) appointed from Istanbul. Nevertheless, this new rule was not easily accepted by some powerful local communities such as Awlad Sulaiman, who were controlling Fezzan since the beginning of dynastic war in 1830 and prominent sheikh Ghuma.⁶ It took the Ottomans 7 years to finally take control of Fezzan, defeating Awlad Sulaiman. Thus, around 1842, the Ottoman Empire established its complete control in Tripolitania, scratching from Tripoli, Ghadames, and Fezzan to Benghazi and Jalo/Awjila.

¹ Orhan Kılıç, "Ocaklık Sancakların Osmanlı Hukukunda ve İdari Tatbikattaki Yeri." *Fırat Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 11(1) (2001): 257-274.

² Abdullah Erdem Taş, "Garp Ocaklarında Birliğin Bozulması: 18. Yüzyılda Cezayir-Tunus-Trablusgarp İlişkileri." *İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Araştırma Dergisi* 9 (2) (2020): 1065-1091, 1087.

³ For debates about the contested control of the Ottoman Empire through Karamanlı dynasty in the Sahara, see: Kerem Duymus, "Politico-Theological Debates in Ghadames between the 1770s and the 1850s from a Global Perspective." *Afriques : Débats, Méthodes Et Terrains D'histoire* 15 (2024): 1-17.

⁴ See: Kola Folayan, *Tripoli During the Reign of Yusuf Pasha Qaramanlı* (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1979); Kerem Duymus, "Tadbir as Marine Diplomacy: Ottoman Foreign Jurisdiction in Practice and the Debate of Piracy in Case of Tripoli between 1790s-1835." *Sebha University Journal of Human Sciences* 23(2) (2024): 84-90.

⁵ Kerem Duymus, *Afroglobal History of Siyasa in the Central Sudan during the 19th Century* (PhD Thesis, Universität Leipzig, 2025), 77-95.

⁶ For more details, see: Cemal Atabaş, *Trablusgarp Eyaleti'nde Merkezi İdarenin Tesisi ve Şeyh Guma İsyanı (1835-1858)* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2021).

Ottoman-Borno Relations between 1844 and 1893

When Fezzan (with its capital in Murzuq) came under the direct Ottoman rule in 1842, the Ottoman *vali* of Tripoli began to argue that Borno might not be too distant and could potentially be receptive to Ottoman authority. Consequently, in 1844, the *vali* of Tripoli instructed the Ottoman *kaymakam* (2. rank governor) of Fezzan to dispatch an envoy to Borno to assess the ruler's willingness to voluntarily accept Ottoman rule.¹ The *kaymakam*, in turn, selected a merchant named Husseyin al-Titiwi from Hun (present-day Libya) for this unofficial mission, directing him to convey a narrative suggesting that the ruler of Borno would receive protection from the Ottoman army if he accepted Ottoman rule. After one year, Al-Titiwi returned back and submitted a detailed report to the *vali*. However, interestingly, Al-Titiwi's report does not reference Omar Al-Kanemi, who wielded actual power in Borno, but rather *Mai* of Borno, Ibrahim IV, who held a largely symbolic position at this point. After propagating the benefits of potential Ottoman rule, he was summoned by Ibrahim IV for discussion. During this meeting, Ibrahim IV explicitly expressed his reluctance to cede his sultanate to the Ottomans for military protection, emphasizing his interest solely in procuring weapons from them.² Concurrently, in 1845, Omar Al-Kanemi also approached the *kaymakam* of Fezzan to inquire about purchasing weapons from the Ottomans. However, the manner in which Al-Kanemi initiated contact with the *kaymakam*, by dispatching his letter through a British agent, provoked the Ottoman authorities.³ Faced with urgent requests for weapons from both parties, the *vali* suspected preparations for a civil war and opted not to intervene.⁴ In light of the clear lack of interest from both sides, the Ottoman authorities concluded that they had reached their maximum influence in the region and deemed further political engagement beyond the Sahara unnecessary. In this regard, the Tripolitan *vali* continued only a symbolic friendly diplomacy with Borno between 1845 and 1850, while the Ottoman Empire greatly expanded in this period, taking Ghat, Kawar, and Tibesti under their control.⁵

However, soon, the *vali* became aware that especially since 1850 two European agents, James Richardson and Heinrich Barth, who were introducing themselves in the southern Central Sudan as travellers, had been instructed by the British consul in Tripoli to act as British spies in the region. In accordance with this secret spy mission, they were disseminating conspiracy theories in Kano and Borno, alleging that the "despotic Turks" were enemies of African people and were preparing to invade and enslave them.⁶ Additionally, reports indicated that Omar Al-Kanemi was preparing a military mission against Kano in the 1850s, but due to the influence of the conspiracy theories propagated by Richardson and Barth, he feared that the Ottomans would soon appear in Borno with an army, causing him to delay his plans.⁷ The situation even worsened when Sheikh Abdurrahman seized power in Borno through a military coup in 1854. Due to the current fragile situation, both parties, Abdurrahman and Omar Al-Kanemi, suspected that now Ottomans will take the advantage to invade them. In actuality, the *vali* prepared a letter for Abdurrahman proposing friendly relations and collaboration. However, while the letter was en route to Murzuq, the *kaymakam* of Fezzan learned that Omar Al-Kanemi had regained power through a counter military coup. Consequently, he sought guidance from the *vali* on how to

¹ D.M.T.L., unclassified, dated as 1844.

² D.M.T.L., unclassified, dated as 1846.

³ D.M.T.L., unclassified, dated as 1845.

⁴ Indeed, the *vali*'s suspicions were validated when a civil war erupted in Borno in 1846 between Omar Al-Kanemi and Ibrahim IV, resulting in the latter's demise. Consequently, the Sayfawa dynasty ceased to exist, and the Al-Kanemi family assumed complete control in Borno.

⁵ For more details, see: Kerem Duymus, "1850-1910 Arası Osmanlı'nın Sahra Politikaları." *Tarih Araştırmaları Dergisi* 43(77) (2024): 363–390.

⁶ D.M.T.L., unclassified, dated as 1853.

⁷ D.M.T.L., unclassified, dated as 1853.

proceed.¹ Initially, the *vali* decided to await further details from the region. After a few months, he became convinced that Omar Al-Kanemi would retain power, prompting him to write a letter to him. In this correspondence, the *vali* explicitly stated that the Ottomans were not involved in Abdurrahman's military coup and had always maintained a positive relationship with Omar Al-Kanemi.² To underscore their amicability, the *vali* declared that the Ottomans would not levy any taxes on caravans operating under Omar Al-Kanemi's personal account.³ Nevertheless, Omar Al-Kanemi was still influenced by British conspiracy theories and, upon regaining power, wrote to London seeking their support against the Ottomans and even proposed the opening of a British consulate in Kuka.⁴

Despite the favourable conditions, Britain gradually lost interest in Central Sudan, and in 1860, they even stopped their all diplomatic and spy activities in Borno as well as Kano, Kavar, and Murzuq. This marked a turning point in the relationship between Borno and the Ottomans, as British conspiracy theories no longer held sway in the region. Consequently, in 1861, the *kaymakam* of Fezzan received a direct order from Istanbul to initiate new diplomatic efforts to improve relations with Borno.⁵ In 1862, following a direct order from Istanbul, the *kaymakam* once again dispatched a member of the Al-Titiwi family from Hun, Muhammad Al-Titiwi, to Borno. His objective was to establish an unofficial diplomatic channel between Omar Al-Kanemi and the *kaymakam* of Fezzan in order to enhance their diplomatic ties.⁶ Following a significant improvement in diplomatic relations with Borno after 1862, the *vali* of Tripoli appointed an individual named Muhammad Başala (who was a prominent merchant in Sokna) to undertake a crucial mission. His task was to engage in lobbying efforts to persuade Omar Al-Kanemi to accept Ottoman rule.⁷ In the same year, Başala delegated this duty to a merchant named Abdurrahman Burkan (who was a prominent merchant in Murzuq), rather than undertaking it himself. Burkan travelled to Borno around 1864, and lived in the palace of Omar Al-Kanemi as an Ottoman representative. He lobbied for the Ottoman rule in Borno between 1865 and 1875. After 3 years of his arrival, in 1868, Burkan informed Başala that Omar Al-Kanemi was willing to accept Ottoman rule on the condition that he would retain power.⁸ Central Ottoman government in Istanbul accepted the condition and began to prepare a proper assignment. Yet, before this official protocol, Omar Al-Kanemi wrote a letter to Tripoli to thank for recognition and signed his letter as *mutasarrıf of Borno*.⁹ However, the title of *mutasarrıf* was used for the administrators appointed from Istanbul, and the plans of the Ottomans was different for Borno. As the Ottomans were not interested in creating a direct rule in Borno and appoint a *mutasarrıf* from Istanbul, they created a particular governmental system for Borno. They declared the land of Borno as *waqf* (Ar. foundation) registered in the Ottoman Empire, and Omar Al-Kanemi is assigned as the *mutawalli* (Ar. trustee) of this *waqf* on the name of the Ottoman caliph. In this regard, Omar Al-Kanemi could not give the land to another ruler, but could rule there freely by remaining in the limits of sharia. Yet, in the foreign affairs, he had to ask confirmation of Istanbul. In this respect, Borno gained a special status for the Ottoman Empire. It was practically not the part of the Empire (as Borno did not receive any Ottoman

¹ D.M.T.L., unclassified, dated as 1855.

² D.M.T.L., unclassified, dated as 1855.

³ B.O.A., Cevdet Maliye, 3230.

⁴ Sheikh Ali Bani Kyari, „Borno-Ottoman Relations in the Nineteenth Century“ (Borno History Conference, Maiduguri, 1987).

⁵ B.O.A., Meclis-i Vükela Mazbataları, 20493.

⁶ D.M.T.L., unclassified, dated as 1862.

⁷ D.M.T.L., unclassified, dated as 1865.

⁸ D.M.T.L., unclassified, dated as 1868.

⁹ D.M.T.L., unclassified, dated as 1869.

army or did not pay tax to Istanbul), but registered as being under the Ottoman jurisdiction and rule (since shehu obtained an official appointment and an Ottoman flag).

In 1870, Omar Al-Kanemi received official declaration from Istanbul about the transformation of Borno into *waqf* and his appointment as Ottoman *mutawalli*. He also received several copy of Quran with myriad personal presents and an Ottoman flag for his palace. In the same year, Omar Al-Kanemi personally responded to the Ottoman sultan expressing thanks for his appointment, and titled his letter “from the *mutawali* of Borno to his great sultan” (*min al-mutawalli Barnu ila sultani al-'azimi*).¹ In the same year, the *vali* wrote to Omar Al-Kanemi, offering to fulfil any of his needs and inquiring about the possibility of capturing giraffes in Borno and sending them to Istanbul for the sultan’s palace.² The archival documents, however, do not provide any reason why Omar Al-Kanemi decided to accept the Ottoman rule. One can only speculate that with the rising power of Tinimun in Zinder around 1860, and losing Muniyo, Kutus, and Ngroubaya to Damagaram sultanate around 1868, Omar Al-Kanemi might have considered the actual power situation in the region fragile for him, and sought a possible protection against the expansion of Damagaram.³ Furthermore, as shehus have deliberately never used the title of mai or sultan to emphasize their religious authority over brute force, having the title of *mutawalli*, which also has a strong religious meaning, was also firmly suitable for their positions. In this respect, with such appointment, they were not only ensuring a military assistance from the Ottoman Empire, but also maintaining their religious authority as well as political autonomy. Consequently, this new formation was firmly profitable for Borno, which might have been convinced Omar Al-Kanemi.

As a result, shehus of Borno after 1870, officially recognized by Istanbul as *mutawalli* of Borno on the name of the Ottoman Empire. All following shehus, Bukar Kura bin Omar al-Kanemi (ruled between 1881 and 1884), Ibrahim bin Omar al-Kanemi (ruled between 1884 and 1885), and Hashim bin Omar al-Kanemi (ruled between 1885 and 1893) sent letters to Tripoli after the coronation for their official appointment.⁴ In 1881, 1884, and 1885 the Ottoman sultan sent their official appointment with some gifts and new Ottoman flags. Also, an Ottoman representative in the palace of shehus became a norm. Following the demise of Burkan in 1875, Muhammad Bařala took the office and settled in Kuka. Nevertheless, between 1881 and 1884, Bukar Kura and Ibrahim barely engaged with the Ottomans except their appointment. This radically changed with the coronation of Hashim. With his particular religious character, he had a great sympathy for the “Islamic Union” politics of the Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II. From 1884 to 1893, Hashim was in regular contact with Tripoli and Istanbul, even trying to convince the Caliph in Sokoto to accept the Ottoman rule.⁵ In this regard, when Rabih appeared before Borno in 1893, for Istanbul, Borno was already an Ottoman *waqf* under the trustee of Al-Kanemi family for 23 years.

¹ D.M.T.L., unclassified, dated as 1870.

² D.M.T.L. Tijarat, dated as 1870.

³ Maïkorema Zakari, *Contribution a l'histoire Des Population Du Sud-Est Nigerien: Le Cas Du Mangari (XVIIe - XIXe Siècle)* (Ph.D. Thesis, Université de Paris VII, 1983), 342–44.

⁴ In various cases, there were misunderstanding regarding the title and hierarchy regarding the shehus of Borno. In such cases, the Ottoman *valis* wrote the personal letters to Borno to explain the Ottomans administrative titles and hierarchies. See: D.M.T.L., uncategorized, dated as 1885.

⁵ For more details, see the forthcoming article in the Sokoto Journal of History by Kerem Duymus under the title “Ottoman – Sokoto Relations during the 19th Century: An untold History”.

Ottoman-Rabih Relations between 1893 and 1900

Regarding Rabih, the Ottomans first knew him through Al-Zubayr Rahma Mansur (aka Zubayr Pasha). The central Ottoman government in Istanbul was in direct contact with Al-Zubayr Rahma Mansur from 1872 until his death in 1913, where he commenced his career as a *bazınqır* in the 1860s,¹ a term derived from the Turkish word *baskıncı* (Tr. raider). This term is utilized within Ottoman military terminology to describe small armed groups that engage in guerrilla warfare. For instance, during the 1920s, when a resistance movement arose in Bukhara against the Soviet Union, the participants in this movement also identified themselves as *basmacı*, a term that is another derivative of *baskıncı*.² Yet, following Al-Zubayr's expulsion from Sudan in 1878, the Ottomans lost their connection to the region. Consequently, from 1878 to 1893, the Ottomans were uninformed about Rabih's activities. His sudden emergence in Borno was, in this regard, a significant shock to the Ottoman *vali* in Tripoli.

In fact, Since the 1890s, Hashim consistently requested military support from Istanbul due to his concerns regarding the escalating activities of the British agents. In 1892, when an agent from the Royal Niger Company approached Hashim in Borno to negotiate a treaty, he asserted that he is under Ottoman jurisdiction and could not enter into any agreement with the British without the explicit approval of the Ottoman Sultan. Subsequently, Hashim communicated this encounter to Tripoli, stating "... I explained the *Nasara* (Christian) my duty as Ottoman *mutawalli*, yet he did not believe me and implied that if I do not sign the treaty, next time they will come with army... I forced him for immediate leave and hanged the Ottoman flag in the highest place in my palace to show him... Now, I'm asking from my great sultan for assistance..."³ While awaiting a response from Istanbul, Hashim faced a more immediate threat from Rabih, prompting him to dispatch a special envoy directly to Istanbul to solicit support from the Ottomans.⁴ Upon receiving Hashim's envoy, the Ottoman government in Istanbul began to prepare a military plan to safeguard Borno. However, in 1893, Rabih launched an invasion of Kuka.⁵ In the aftermath, the Ottoman *kaymakam* of Fezzan began receiving correspondence from Borno regarding the invasion. To thoroughly investigate the situation, he appointed a merchant from Murzuq, Muhammad bin Al-Zahuni, to undertake a special mission to ascertain the developments in Borno.⁶ By 1894, the Ottoman government in Istanbul was inundated with reports concerning Borno, compiled by special agents from Murzuq, Wadai, Darfur, and Khartoum. While the *kaymakam* of Fezzan awaited the findings of his special agent, Istanbul had already received an initial report from Wadai, which relayed rumours of an individual named Rabih, formerly a soldier in Zubayr's army, invaded Borno.⁷ Shortly thereafter, another report from Khartoum corroborated these rumours, indicating that Rabih had not only invaded Borno but also Baghirmi.⁸ In the same year, Istanbul finally received reports

¹ For a comprehensive history of Rabih, see; W.K.R. Hallam, *The Life and Times of Rabih Fadl Allah* (Devon: Arthur H. Stockwell, 1977); Mohammed Kyari, *Bornu in the Rabih Years, 1893-1901: The Rise and Crash of a Predatory State* (Maiduguri: University of Maiduguri Press, 2006); A.M. Asfaha, "Afro-European Imperialism and the Making of a New Bornu", in *Kanem-Bornu: A Thousand Years of Heritage*, Vol. I, ed., T. El-Miskin, Y. Mukhtar, K. Mohammed, A.G. Shettima (Ibadan: Krafts Book Limited, 2013).

² Salâhi R. Sonyel. "Enver Paşa ve Orta Asya'da Başgösteren "Basmacı" Akımı", *Belleten*, 54(211), 1990: 1179-1208

³ D.M.T.L., unclassified, dated as 1892.

⁴ Sami Çölgeçen, *Sahra-yı Kebiri Nasıl Geçtim*, ed. Ömer Hakan Özalp (İstanbul: Özgü Yayınları, 2014), 242.

⁵ For the detailed account of the Rabih's rule in Borno, see: Muhammad Kyari, *Bornu in the Rabih Years, 1893-1901: The Rise and Crash of a Predatory State*.

⁶ D.M.T.L., unclassified, dated as 1893.

⁷ B.O.A., Yıldız Sadaret Hususi Maruzat Evrakı, 328/39

⁸ B.O.A., Hariciye Nezâreti Siyasî Kısım Evrakı, 1002/56

from Fezzan detailing that Rabih had captured Kuka and perpetrated a massacre, leading the Al-Kanemi family to appoint Shehu Kiyari as the new ruler.¹ In fact, this appointment was not due to the death of Hashim, as he had successfully escaped from Kuka in the right time, but due to the lack of the hope that the Ottomans will come for the help as Hahim assumed. Thus, the members of Al-Kanemi dynasty preferred to choose a new shehu who would personally lead the fight against Rabih, such as Shehu Abba Kiyari.²

Following the aforementioned reports, the Ottomans became convinced of the Al-Kanemi dynasty's defeat. Rather than engaging in discussions regarding the potential re-establishment of the Al-Kanemi dynasty in Borno, their primary concern shifted to assessing the losses incurred by Tripolitan merchants. They sought to ascertain the fate of these merchants, as none had returned to Tripoli since two years. An Ottoman envoy from Istanbul, Sadık El-Müeyyed, met five of the merchants who were finally returning from Borno. They were Muhammad bin Rihal, Muhammad Huriya, Muhammad Zaklam, Muhammad bin Salim al-Filali, and Al-Hajj Abdullah. They told Sadık El-Müeyyed that “when Rabih came to Kuka, half of the Tripolitan merchants joined Hashimi (almost 25 people), while the rest preferred to not involve in war. After his victory, Rabih asked Tripolitan merchants why they joined war against him. They said that they were forced to do so. So he forgave them. But confiscated their goods and forced them to stay there till the end of the war.”³ Conversely, those merchants who abstained from the conflict also faced delays in returning, primarily due to a shortage of camels, necessitating nearly a year of waiting.⁴ Once they secured sufficient camels, their initial destination was Wadai. However, the Sultan of Wadai regarded them as potential spies of Rabih and detained them until he was assured of their lack of affiliation with him.⁵ The merchants further recounted that some of them visited Dikwa around 1894, where they conversed with Seyyif Ebubekir, an official in Rabih’s court. Seyyif Ebubekir expressed his aspirations to enhance trade with the Sahara and indicated plans to invade Sokoto and Kanem by eliminating the Awlad Sulaiman, thereby establishing a substantial trade relation with Tripoli.⁶ Thereafter, some Tripolitan merchants, such as Sharif Hassan confirmed the aim of Rabih to expand towards Sokoto.⁷

In this respect, in 1895, the Ottoman Empire remained uncertain regarding its approach to Rabih and his overarching objectives. The situation was further complicated by reports indicating that Rabih's forces had approached Kawar, a territory under Ottoman control since 1849.⁸ It is noteworthy that despite the prolonged resistance against Rabih in Borno, the Ottomans did not contemplate providing support to either the resisting factions or the remaining members of the Al-Kanemi family. Amidst this influx of information, an unexpected incident occurred in Jalo (present-day Libya). In 1895, The Ottoman *kaymakam* of Jalo became aware that a Majabran merchant named Yunus Badis and his father possessed correspondence from Zubayr intended for Rabih. Hence, the *kaymakam* confiscated these letters and dispatched them, along with Badis's father, to Benghazi.⁹ Following a swift investigation, the Ottoman *kaymakam* of Benghazi discovered two letters and several weapons that Zubayr had sent to Rabih.¹⁰ In the

¹ B.O.A., Yıldız Sadaret Hususi Maruzat Evrakı, 326/110

² N.N.A., Maiproof, 4/23.

³ Sadık El-Müeyyed, *Afrika Sahra-yı Kebiri'nde Seyahat*, ed. İ.Ö. Bostan (İstanbul: Çamlıca Yayınları, 2018), 167.

⁴ S.A.D.U., 258/1/904-905

⁵ Sadık El-Müeyyed, *Afrika Sahra-yı Kebiri'nde Seyahat*, 169.

⁶ Sadık El-Müeyyed, 170.

⁷ B.P.R.O, Foreign Office, 403/233.

⁸ B.O.A., Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Dahiliye, 10/46

⁹ Interview with Yunus Badis [Al-Fashir] by W.E.J. Bramley in 1940.

¹⁰ B.O.A., Yıldız Mütenevvi Maruzat Evrakı, 143/95

first letter, Zubayr states: "... to Rabih, the leader and emir of the land of war in the Africa (*rais wa-l-amr fi harbiyyat bilad afrikiyya*)... Abd al-Rahman ibn al-Sheikh Idrisi al-Arbab is residing with me in Cairo. He is the most prominent scholar in our age... If you need consultation or fatwa for any issue about the governance of your land, you can ask us... But we did not receive any letter from you since years... We just hear your victories, which makes me proud of you as you are following my path... we send you some medicine and weapons, if you need more, just send us ostrich feather and ivory, thus we can supply you anything you need..."¹ In the second letters, Zubayr tells: "... I order you not to take more than half of share of import from merchants and not to take more than half of the tithe from farmers. You do not need to take so much from them. The justice that you provide them is far better all these incomes, as at the end, that will bring more to you."² In fact, Zubayr had dispatched two other individuals from Egypt, Sharif Muhammad Jali and Al Hajj Muhammad Limam, who took an alternative route and reached Borno in 1895. Although it remains unclear whether they carried any letters, Rabih claimed that they brought him 200,000 thalers.³

The letters obtained in Jalo significantly influenced the Ottoman perspective on Rabih, leading them to believe that Rabih's ambitions extended beyond mere invasion and plunder of Borno; they perceived him as seeking to establish governance in accordance with sharia. In 1896, some Tripolitan merchants, such as Haji Khalifa al-Ginnad, also began to visit Borno again, yet under strict control and monitor of Rabih.⁴ Consequently, the Ottomans dismissed any possibility of assisting the Al-Kanemi family in reclaiming power. Instead, they formulated a strategy to collaborate with Rabih and potentially incorporate him into the Ottoman Empire. This opportunity materialized in 1897 when Rabih communicated with the Ottoman *vali* of Tripoli, asserting that he had secured stability in Borno following his defeat of Hashim, stating "... the land is secure, and merchants can come to Borno without problem... from his servant to the great sultan..."⁵ Rabih justified his invasion of Borno by arguing that Hashim was too feeble to withstand the colonial ambitions of the British and French; he contended that failure to act would result in the rapid subjugation of the region by French colonial forces.⁶ Despite receiving multiple reports regarding Rabih's atrocities, the Ottomans chose to overlook these details. Following 1897, the *vali* assured merchants of their safety in travelling to Borno; however, many remained hesitant due to their lack of trust in Rabih.⁷ After extensive internal discussions, the central Ottoman government in Istanbul resolved in 1899 to appoint Rabih as the Ottoman pasha of Borno and dispatched an Ottoman flag to him.⁸ Subsequently, Rabih began to display the Ottoman flag within his military ranks.⁹ Nevertheless, when French colonial invasion forces began to threaten Rabih later that year, he quickly realized that the French disregarded the Ottoman flag and continued their assaults. In response, he sent a letter to Istanbul requesting the sultan's intervention. In the same year, the Ottoman foreign office formally cautioned France that Rabih fell under Ottoman jurisdiction.¹⁰ However, these efforts proved ineffective, as Rabih was killed by French colonial invasion forces later that year. Despite this, the Ottoman Empire maintained its stance, refusing to acknowledge the French

¹ B.O.A., Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Tahrirat-ı Ecnebiye ve Mabeyn Mütercimliği, 37/36

² B.O.A., Yıldız Perakende Evrakı Tahrirat-ı Ecnebiye ve Mabeyn Mütercimliği, 37/37

³ K.S.C.B., 863/13, f.1/2.

⁴ S.A.D.U., 263/1/248-250.

⁵ B.O.A., Yıldız Mütenevvi Maruzat Evrakı, 172/36

⁶ Sami Çölgeçen, *Sahra-yı Kebiri Nasıl Geçtim*, 240-41.

⁷ D.M.T.L., Internal Affairs, dated as 1900

⁸ B.O.A., Yıldız Perakende Umum Vilayetler, 47/41

⁹ B.O.A., Sadaret Mektubî Kalemi Umum Vilayetler Evrakı, 47/41

¹⁰ B.O.A., Bâbîali Evrak Odası Evrakı, 1486

colonial invasion of Borno until the Empire's dissolution in 1923, asserting that the region remained an Ottoman land under the Ottoman jurisdiction.

Conclusion

The relation of the Ottoman Empire with Borno during the second half of the 19th century had several different phases. From 1844 to 1860, the relations were quite cold, as neither Sayfawa nor Al-Kanemi dynasty was interested in engaging with the Ottomans, especially with the great influence of anti-Ottoman conspiracies disseminated by British and German travellers. However, following the decline of British interests in the region, the situation radically changed. From 1860 to 1870, Ottomans and Borno gradually improved their relations. In 1870, Omar Al-Kanemi even accepted to the Ottoman rule, receiving the title of Ottoman *mutawalli* of Borno. After this year, Ottoman representatives had their place in the palace of shehus in Kuka. Following the demise of Omar in 1881, the relations began to decline, as the new shehus were preoccupied with dynastic problems. However, after 1884, with the coronation of Hashim, the relations underwent another zenith. This period of very positive and dense relations drastically ceased with the invasion of Borno by Rabih in 1893. Thereafter, the Ottomans tried to re-orient their strategy in Borno, oscillating between helping Al-Kanemi dynasty to regain power and recognizing Rabih as the ruler of Borno. Finally in 1897, the Ottomans decided for the side of Rabih, appointing him as the Ottoman pasha of Borno. In this regard, it is not surprising that the later members of the Al-Kanemi dynasty openly rejected the jihad declaration of the Ottoman caliph in 1914, as they were greatly disappointed by the fact that the Ottomans did not help them against Rabih, and even appointed Rabih as the new ruler of Borno, instead of helping Al-Kanemi dynasty.

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