CHAPTER 3

The ‘Ulamā’ of the Second Generation, Heirs of the Hijra and Teachers in the First Islamic Institutes in Saudi Arabia

Ḥammād al-Anṣārī (1344–1418/1925–97)

Ḥammād al-Anṣārī was a Tuareg from the Kel es Suq group, like his teacher al-Madanī (Ag Maḥmūd Abdullahi). He was among those who followed the advice of al-Madanī and emigrated to Arabia; he arrived in Mecca in 1367/1947. In his autobiography1 he wrote about his shaykh, Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Abdallāh b. Maḥmūd al-Madanī, whom he describes as an uncompromising person. He notes that he saw him in 1366/1946 spreading the Salafī teaching in Kano (northern Nigeria) and in Ghana: “If it were not for his intransigence, which he himself recognized as an obstacle, many would have benefited from his teaching.”2 Ḥammād al-Anṣārī was a muḥaddith (an expert in the science of ḥadīth); he first taught in the Madrasat al-ʿUlūm al-Sharʿiyya in Medina, then at the Madrasat al-Ṣawlatiyya in Mecca, then at the Maḥad al-Riyāḍ al-ʿIlmī in

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1 al-Anṣārī, Daʿwat al-Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh al-Madanī.
2 Ibid., p. 12.
Riyadh, and later at the Islamic University of Medina. At this university, he was also in charge of Arabic manuscripts, which he acquired by traveling throughout the world on behalf of the university. Today, his personal library, which is accessible to the public, is one of the best private libraries of the Islamic sciences in Medina. Shaykh Ḥammād al-Anṣārī died in Medina in 1418/1997.

“Riḥlat min Ifrīqyā īlā bilād al-ḥaramayn” [Traveling from Africa to the two holy cities]

In a series of long interviews entitled “Riḥlat min Ifrīqyā īlā bilād al-ḥaramayn” [Traveling from Africa to the two holy cities] he gave to a journalist, Shaykh Ḥammād al-Anṣārī related his hijra from Africa to Mecca and Medina via Sudan. He recounted his origins; his hijra in all its aspects; the Islamic knowledge he received in Africa (Mali), in comparison to what he observed in Asia (the Arabian Peninsula, the Middle East, and the Indian subcontinent); and finally, he offered advice to young students of the Islamic sciences.

Shaykh Ḥammād’s mode of exposition includes many digressions, yet, whatever their length, he does not lose the thread of his speech. His memory for the precise dates of events that occurred during his travels is also remarkable. He had a keen sense of history (real or mythical). We see this especially when he talks about the emigration of Arabs from the Arabian Peninsula to North Africa and Andalusia at the time of Islamic conquest, a history that he intimately binds with that of the Tuaregs of Tadmakka, with his own history (his autobiography), and with that of his family. By telling these histories, he highlights his own life story. The travel accounts and other texts in which Shaykh Ḥammād speaks for himself strike one as somewhat grandiloquent; perhaps this is a result of his very talkative character. We can also see Shaykh

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3 Also known as Ma‘had al-‘Ilmi bi-l-Riyāḍ (The Institute of Sciences at Riyadh). The sciences in question here are the sciences of the sharī‘a (al-ʿulūm al-shar‘iyya), these include commentary on the Qurān (tafsīr) and the teaching of ḥadīths. For the history of this institute, see e.g., Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh al-Rashīd (ed.), al-Shaykh ʿAllāma Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Āl al-Shaykh Muftī al-Diyār al-Suʿūdiyya (1311–1389/1893–1969) (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī, 1416/1996); Ḥamad al-Jāsir, “Fī ma‘hād al-Riyāḍ al-ʿilmī,” al-Majallat al-ʿArabī 204, no. 18 (Muharram 1415/June–July 1994).

4 See the two-volume collection of his interviews and the comments that his colleagues and students have written about him. The collection was compiled by his son ʿAbd al-Awwal b. Ḥammād al-Anṣārī, under the title al-Majmūʿ fī tarjamat al-ʿallāma al-muḥaddith al-Shaykh Ḥammād b. Muḥammad al-Anṣārī, wa-sīratihi wa-aqwālihi wa-riḥlātihi (Medina, 1422/2002), see especially “al-Riḥlat min Ifrīqyā īlā bilād al-ḥaramayn,” vol. 2, pp. 781–851.