Welcome to Online Office Hours!

We’ll get started at 2PM ET
Library of Congress
Online Office Hours

Welcome! We’re glad you’re here! Use the chat box to introduce yourselves. Let us know:

- Your first name
- Where you’re joining us from
- Grade level(s) and subject(s) you teach
The Omar Ibn Said Collection at the Library of Congress

Laverne Page  
Area Specialist, African Section  
African & Middle Eastern Division
African and Middle Eastern Division

https://www.loc.gov/rr/amed/
You can also access the collection from the Library of Congress’ main page (www.loc.gov), by searching “Omar Ibn Said”
Omar Ibn Said Collection

Summary: The collection, assembled by Theodore Dwight (1796-1866) includes the autobiographical manuscript written in 1831 by Omar ibn Said (1770-1863 or 1864), in Arabic. This is the only known American slave memoir, written in Arabic, while still in slavery. Includes texts and letters, some written in Arabic, some in English (and translations into English of some texts).


Date: 1741

Collection Items: View 46 Items
The life of Omar ben Saeed, called Morro, a Fullah Slave in ...

Translation of the life of Omar ibn Said.

Fاشل fi ṣuṣul khalq ʿibraʾ Adam ...
Who was Omar Ibn Said?
• Born in 1770 in Futa Toro (present-day Senegal)
• Islamic scholar
• Captured at 37 years old and sold into slavery
• Brought to Charleston, South Carolina
• Autobiography written in 1831

"Africa : to the committee and members of the British association discovering the interior parts of Africa this map is with their permission most respectfully inscribed" (1802): https://www.loc.gov/resource/g8200.ct003484

Half length formal portrait of "Uncle Moreau" [Omar ibn Said]: elderly man seated wearing headwrap, suit; left elbow rests on newel, cane in right hand. From: Randolph Linsly Simpson African-American collection 📖
The Life of Omar ben Saed, called Morocco, a Fullah Slave, in Fayetteville, N.C.

Owned by Governor Owen.

Written by himself, it seems, to Eld. Paul, or Solomon Holby, in 1840, or 1836.

Presented to Freeman Dwight by Paul in 1836.

Transliterated by Alex. Critical in 1848.

(To begining at the other end.)
What is the Omar Ibn Said Collection?
About this Collection

The Omar Ibn Said Collection consists of 42 digitized documents in both English and Arabic, including an 1831 manuscript in Arabic on “The Life of Omar Ibn Said,” a West African slave in America, which is the centerpiece of this unique collection of texts. Some of the manuscripts in this collection include texts in Arabic by another West African slave in Panama, and others from individuals located in West Africa.

Who was Omar Ibn Said? According to his autobiography, and to articles written about him in the American press while he was still alive, he was a member of the Fulani ethnic group of West Africa who today number over 40 million people in the region extending from Senegal to Nigeria. In the interviews he gave during his lifetime he stated that he was born in a place called Futa Toro “between the two rivers” referring to the Senegal and the Gambia rivers that separate those two countries. His father, who was a wealthy man, was killed in an inter-tribal war when he was five, and Omar and his family had to move away to another town. In his autobiography, Omar Ibn Said writes that as he grew older he sought knowledge in Bundu, an area in Senegal today that had historically been controlled by another ethnic group, the Mandé people, until the Muslim Fulas conquered the region in the second half of the 17th century. Omar Ibn Said writes that in Bundu he studied under his own brother Sheikh Muhammad Said, as well as two other religious leaders and “continued seeking knowledge for twenty years.”

Omar Ibn Said collection: https://www.loc.gov/collections/omar-ibn-said-collection/about-this-collection
“The Omar Ibn Said Collection consists of 42 digitized documents in both English and Arabic, including an 1831 manuscript in Arabic on "The Life of Omar Ibn Said," a West African slave in America, which is the centerpiece of this unique collection of texts. Some of the manuscripts in this collection include texts in Arabic by another West African slave in Panama, and others from individuals located in West Africa.” - https://www.loc.gov/collections/omar-ibn-said-collection/about-this-collection/
What are some frequently asked questions inspired by the collection?

• What was the slave trade? In Africa, where were slaves transported from?

• Do you have maps to show where the slaves came from?

• Why did Omar ibn Said write in Arabic? What other languages did he speak?

• Were there other Muslims who were slaves?

• What are some resources for the study of enslavement in America?

• Did other slaves write down their stories? Did their writings survive?
What topics might students explore using this collection?

• Historical research on the enslavement of peoples from Africa

• History of Africa and cultures

• Heritage tracing, genealogy

• Pre-colonization of Africa
Why is this a significant collection for the Library of Congress?

• It is a unique collection of research value and adds substantive content to the story of slavery and the slave trade.

• It is the only known autobiography of an enslaved person written in Arabic.
How can you learn more about Omar Ibn Said and the Collection?

Explore “Expert Resources” on the collection page, including:

- Symposium: Omar Ibn Said at the Library of Congress
- Podcast: "The Long Journey of Omar Ibn Said"
- Blogpost: "New Online: Rare 19th Century Autobiography in Arabic by an Enslaved West African Scholar" by Mary-Jane Deeb
- Blogpost: "Omar Ibn Said: Conserving a One-of-a-Kind Manuscript" by Sylvia Albro
- Story Map: "Educated and Enslaved: The Journey of Omar Ibn Said"

Related Resources: https://www.loc.gov/collections/omar-ibn-said-collection/about-this-collection/related-resources/

"Online Illustrated Guides": https://www.loc.gov/rr/amed/guide/
Africana Collections:  https://www.loc.gov/rr/amed/guide/afrillguide.html
African Peoples' Encounters With Others

Throughout the centuries, peoples born in the area known as sub-Saharan Africa have interacted on many levels with peoples from elsewhere. The Library of Congress Africana collections are rich in primary documents, facsimiles, and secondary sources in a variety of languages and formats that describe these experiences. Texts, maps, visual images, artifacts, and recordings document the observations of non-Africans as they traveled to parts of the continent and of Africans who encountered them willingly or under coercion. These materials also describe the resistance and adaptation of Africans to the cultural and political onslaught of non-Africans. Diverse resources are available to study the development of commercial and diplomatic relations; the creation and dissolution of colonial governments; and the reestablishment of sovereign nations.

Dating from the 16th to the 18th centuries, the manuscripts presented in this exhibition cover every aspect of human endeavor and are indicative of the high level of civilization attained by West Africans during the Middle Ages.

http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/mali/
Islamic Manuscripts from Mali features 32 manuscripts from the Mamma Haidara Commemorative Library and the Library of Cheick Zayni Baye of Boujbeha, both in Timbuktu, Mali. The manuscripts presented online are displayed in their entirety and are an exemplary grouping that showcases the wide variety of subjects covered by the written traditions of Timbuktu, Mali, and West Africa.

http://memory.loc.gov/intldl/malihtml/malihome.html

Thank you!

Questions? Post them in the chat box!