

# Increasing the Accessibility of the Autobiography of Omar ibn Said through Translation Alignment

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## Introduction

In 1807, Omar ibn Said, a West African man educated in the Islamic tradition, was captured, enslaved, and brought to the Carolinas. Roughly two decades later, he produced a first-hand account of his life written in Arabic. The original manuscript forms the centerpiece of a collection of now digitized documents held by the Library of Congress. This work is notable because unlike other contemporaneous slave accounts written in English, it was not subject to editing by the slave-holder ibn Said lived with and can be viewed as a more faithful version of his experience. In addition, it demonstrates the strong traditions of writing and education that existed in the parts of Africa that were raided during the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

In order to make this important document more accessible, particularly in a secondary classroom setting where many students may not have the requisite language skills to read the original Arabic, we have produced a lightly annotated digital edition of the text aligned to both an original translation and a transliterated version of the Arabic. The goal of this work is to give readers with limited Arabic the confidence to engage with a primary source and to elevate the interesting components of the manuscript that disappear when it is only read in translation.