

ALÓRE

VOL.29, 2020



**ILORIN JOURNAL
OF THE
HUMANITIES**

ISSN: 0794-4551

Alóre: *Ilorin Journal of the Humanities* publishes papers of about 6000 words from any relevant discipline in the humanities. The journal is published in English, but contributions may be made in other languages. For details, see Notes for Contributors.



Faculty of Arts, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria,
2020

Published by:

The Faculty of Arts, University of Ilorin, once a year.

Subscription Rates Per Annum:

	USA	CANADA	UK	EUROPE
Individual:	\$27	C\$30	£12	€18
Institutions:	\$37	C\$38	£20	€25

All orders and remittances should be sent to:

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gbengusfakus@yahoo.com
fakuade.ag@unilorin.edu.ng

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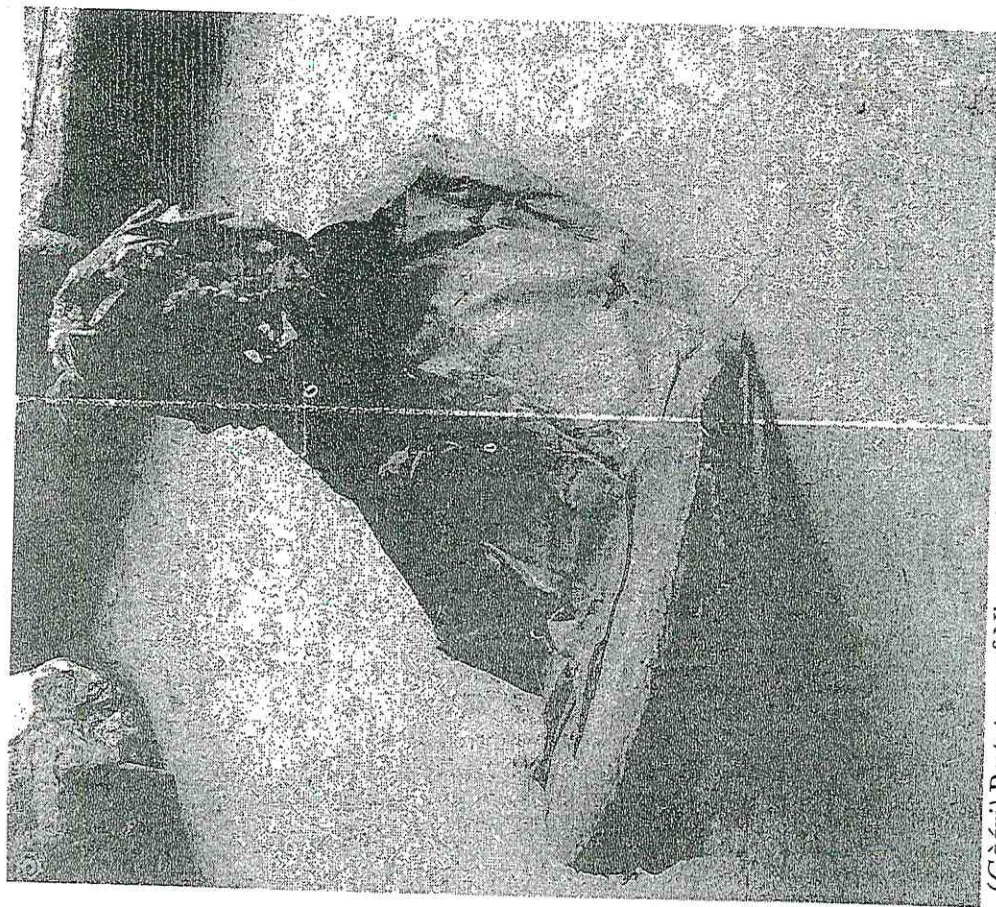
1. Olasupo Thomspon is a lecturer in the Department of Communication and General Studies, Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Nigeria.
2. Dr. Abiodun Afolabi is a senior lecturer in the Department of History and International Studies/Unilorin Archives and Documentation Centre (UADC), University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.
3. Comfort Adenike Onifade is a Professor of Social Studies Education in the Department of Communication and General Studies, Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta, Nigeria.
4. Awotunji Awotayo is a Ph.D. student in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.
5. Dr. Joe Odedina is a lecturer in the Department of Film and Film Production, Kwara State University, Malete, Nigeria.
6. Christopher Olátúbòsún Omóléwu is a lecturer in the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.
7. Dr. Austin Omomia is a senior lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies, McPherson University, Seriki-Sotayo, Ogun State, Nigeria.
8. Gladys Ikhimwin is a lecturer in the Department of Linguistics Studies, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.
9. Edobor-Ezamere is a lecturer in the Department of Linguistics Studies, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.
10. Dr. Onu John Odo is a lecturer in the Department of Linguistics Studies, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.
11. Dr. Amaka Edith Ideh is a lecturer in the Department of Linguistics Studies, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria.

12. Dr. Mohammed Oladimeji Alabi is a lecturer in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.
13. S.D. Yusuf is a lecturer in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Ilorin, Nigeria.
14. Kazeem Ibrahim is a lecturer in the Department of Languages, Arabic Unit, Federal University Kashere, Gombe State, Nigeria.
15. Dr. Yaqub Alhaji Abdullahi is a lecturer in the Department of Arabic, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.

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(Gàári) Prototype of Nineteenth Century Saddle locally made by Nupe Smiths in Ilorin.

Source: Picture taken by the Researcher at abode of Nupe Cavalry Accessories' Smiths in Pataki area, Ilorin on the 7th January, 2017.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPREAD OF ISLAM ON THE TREND OF HISTORIOGRAPHY IN NIGERIA

S.D. Yusuf

Department of History and International Studies,
University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

+2348036198432

saliudanyusuff@yahoo.com

Abstract

Historiography in Nigeria is widely believed to have started with the European explorers and missionaries accounts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Nothing could be further from the truth as Arab scholars and traders had been keeping records on Kanem Bornu and Hausa land since around tenth century, when they started coming to the western Sudan. Thus, the aim of this work is to examine how Islam, through the agency of Arabic language, impacted on the contemporary historiography in Nigeria, starting with the nature of historiography itself. This article focuses its attention on the importance of Arabic in the reconstruction of Nigerian history, and how this came about as a result of the adoption of Islamic religion by the people. Thence, the work follows the period when nation-states in the present day northern Nigeria started making use of Arabic as a means of keeping records. This study adopts a historic and structural approach, making extensive use of secondary sources. Findings in this study shows that Arabic was the language employed by the earliest chroniclers of events in black Africa, especially West Africa of which Nigeria is an integral part. Also, to underscore the importance of Arabic as the language of the earliest records in this region, it is proved as one of the findings in this study that scholars of history in Nigeria made efforts to collect Arabic manuscripts in the 1950's and 60's. The manuscripts so collected included Ajami, the system of writing another language in Arabic script. This is very important in the light of Hausa, Fulbe, Yoruba and other indigenous Nigerian languages. Thus, this paper concludes that extant manuscripts in Arabic are an important body of records available for contemporary historians and scholars on Nigerian history. Recommendations are made on the need to employ the services of Arabic scholars whose collaborations are necessary on the construction of Nigerian history and whose expertise are needed in the Departments of History in Nigerian universities as interpreters and translators of historical records that are of Arabic origin.

Keywords: Historiography, Ajani, Islam, Arabic Language, Historical Records

Introduction

It would be puzzling to some people why "Islam" in the title could not be substituted with "Arabic" in this article. This should not be surprising as the spread of Christianity equally had an impact on Nigerian historiography. In this regard, whereas the contributions of Islam are felt in the extant manuscripts and records in Arabic that are scattered in the area that now make up northern Nigeria, Christianity was spread *pari passu* Western education or English language, the language of modern historiography in Nigeria since the 19th Century. It is apposite to state here that the fate of Islam and Arabic are interwoven, in black Africa and the non-Arabic part of Euro-Asia. It is in this context that Raji avers that "the main factor responsible for the spread of Arabic to areas outside Arabian peninsula is Islam. Being the language of the Quran and the Islamic branches of knowledge. . . ." (Raji, 2002: 6). In this context, Oladòsù is also of the opinion that Arabic is the "second language" of every non-Arab Muslim as it is a language a Muslim supposedly acquired next to his mother tongue. He observes that the acquisition of this language is also through other branches of Arabic and Islamic studies, besides Arabic Quran. Thus, he concludes that Islam has stuck religiously to Arabic language, conferring on it the status of the official language of Islam (Oladòsù, 2005: 65).

In the light of the foregoing, it is apposite to make reference to Djait's observation, that black Africa, in relation to other parts of the world made a later appearance, not only in written history, but also as a field for modern research (Djait, 1981: 88). However, in Africa, with the introduction of Islam, came Arabic language and it was used to document events as contained in the writings of people like Al Masudi (C950), al-Bakri (1029-94), al Idrisi [1154], Abu al Fida [1273-1331], Ibn Battuta (1304-69) and Leo Africanus [whose real name is Al Hassan Ibn Muhammad al-Wuzz'an] which are so important for the reconstruction of African history of their periods especially the history of the central as well as that of the western Sudan (Fage, 1981: 26). Meanwhile, in the last two hundred years, Africans themselves started writing in their own languages, beginning with Arabic script in languages as diverse as Kanembu, Malagasy, Kiswahili, Hausa, Fulfulde and Ayula before writing in the Latin alphabet. But of what significance is Arabic and its

conveyor belt, Islam to the early and modern historical writing in Nigeria?

The development of Historiography in Nigeria

Historiography in Nigeria cannot be divorced from the rest of West Africa or Western Sudan as it is an ongoing process that pre-dated the coming of the European to this part of Africa. Thus, when we talk of African historiography, we are talking of the major development of historical tradition in Africa for ages. In this respect, African historiography concerns African history as recorded by Africans and non-Africans especially from Europe, America and elsewhere, in the context of the African perspective (Oshadare, 2007: 55).

There is no doubt that the earlier phase of historiography in Africa, especially West Africa was almost an exclusive preserve of Arab Muslim merchants/ travelers to the western Sudan. This is why the writings of men like al-mas'udi (c.950), al Bakri (1029-94) al Idrisi (1154), Abdu al fida (1273-1331), Ibn Battuta (1304-69) and al Hassan Ibn Muhammad al Wuzzan also known as Leo Africanus (c1494-1552) are very important for the reconstruction of the history of western and central Sudan between the ninth and fifteen centuries (Fage, 1981: 26).

The writings of African history by Europeans was pioneered by explorers, Christian missionaries, travelers, anthropologists and ethnographers, their writings were in most cases coloured by the European perspective (Oshadare, 2007: 55). But the Arabic authors appear to be better informed as the adoption of the camel facilitated regular trading activity by the Saharan people with West Africa long before the advent of the European explorers and missionaries. Their commercial activities were aided by the settlement of Western Sudan (Fage, 1981: 26). This is not however, to say that the natives of the area now known as Nigeria do not partake in documenting events. For instance, in the present day northern Nigeria, chronicles and other materials in Arabic emerged at a somewhat comparatively early date. In the late sixteenth century, the Imam Ibn Fartuwa left a comprehensive account of the life and times of Mai Idris and also of his wars (Hrbeek, 1981: 130). Although not much of the pre-jihad historical material is now available in the Hausa, the state of learning among the religious leaders, mainly among

the Fulanis, was high. Be that as it may, some poems are still in existence in Hausa language that contain comments on contemporary events (Hrbeke, 1981:131). There was a considerable development of correspondence in Arabic language throughout Africa, including Nigeria, in the nineteenth century. There was increasing administrative and diplomatic activities due to the existence of centralized states during this period. Thus, there are abundant materials principally from the Sokoto caliphate and its emirates like Gwandu and Adamawa, and also from the Bornu Empire and the Masina state (Hrbeke, 1981:135).

Elsewhere in Nigeria area, there were many Africans or Afro-Americans who also took part in exploratory travels or published thoughts on African ways during the nineteenth century. However, the revolutionary steps that brought about a watershed in the development of modern historiography were taken by two eminent Nigerian scholars i.e. late Professor Kenneth Onwuka Dike whose thesis titled *Trade and Politics in Niger Delta* earned him his doctorate degree at Kings College in 1950 and also Late Professor Saburi Biobaku whose doctoral thesis, *The Egba and Their Neighbours* was completed in 1951. The works, were revolutionary and first of their kind as they delved into analytical use of oral sources to complement written and archival documents to bring the two works to light (Oshadare, 2007: 60).

And above all, to emphasise the head start the Muslims in Nigeria and West Africa had in terms of writing culture over non-Muslims in the area, it is apt to cite Hunwick who observes that:

the Muslims of West Africa represented in general, the educated elite... Muslim societies possessed and had possessed for centuries a technological instrument which gave them an advantage over other neighbouring societies and which these non-Muslims societies were often anxious to share - the technology of writing (Hunwick, 1974:9).

Islam in Nigeria

Islam, which means total submission to the will of Allah to its practitioners, was preached and spread by Muhammed the prophet of Islam in Arabia in the seventh century. During the caliphate of Umar b Alkhatib (634-644) prophet Muhammed's second successor as the head of Muslim community, Islam spread to the continent of Africa through North Africa (Balogun, 1980:210). In this regard, the followers of Muhammad had won control of most of North Africa by AD 700. They founded new states in this region and some of the states became active in the trade across the Sahara with the states of the Sudan. Thus, Islam reached old Sudanese towns and West Africa by way of Mauritania and Senegal before AD 1000. Some of the rulers of the western Sudan were converted to Islam after AD 1000 and the new religion spread gradually among West Africans (Davidson, 1985:136). Even though it is difficult to date precisely, the advent of Islam in areas that constitute present-day Nigeria, some scholars have researched extensively on this topic. For instance, Lavers (1980:21) is of the opinion that, in the 1080s, the ruler of Kanem was converted to Islam. Davidson is also in agreement with this date as he is of the opinion that Hume, the Sefawa king of Kanem accepted Islam, not only as his own religion, but also that of his court in 1086. This scholar is of the opinion that from that time, the Sefawa kings and emperors who continued to rule Kanem-Bornu for another eight hundred years were always Muslims (Davidson, 1985:99).

Meanwhile, the penetration of Islam into Hausaland is popularly attributed to the coming of a group of Mande Dyula Muslim merchants and clerics from Mali known as Wangarawa. According to the Kano Chronicle, the coming of the Wangarawa and the introduction of Islam to Kano was during the reign of Sarkin Kano Yaji (1349-1385). In this regard, the Muslim immigrants preached Islam to the Sarki who not only accepted Islam but also built a mosque besides appointing many Muslim immigrants to offices solely identified with the religion of Islam. The offices included those of *Imam*, *Muezzin* and others. Again, it should be noted here that this *sarki* also directed that all in his state should accept Islam. Another important personality associated with the introduction of Islam to Hausaland is the celebrated North African Muslim scholar, Muhammad b. Abd al Karim b. Muhammad al-Maghili.

His visit to Kano about 1492 coincided with the arrival of the Wangarawa in the city (Balogun, 1980:213-214). Elsewhere in Hausaland, Sarki Muhammad Korau is recorded to have been the first Muslim ruler of Katsina. He was a contemporary of Rumfa of Kano. His immediate successors, Ibrahim Sura (1493-8) and Ali Murabus (1498-1524) were very active Muslims who were known far and wide. Ali was such a devoted Muslim reformer that he was given the title of *Murabit* which is why he was known, and is still remembered, as *al-Murabus* (Balogun, 1980:215).

However, in Nupe land, Islam appeared to have been introduced around the fifteenth century A.D. by the Muslim Wangarawa traders (Muhammed 2011:54). Although according to Balogun, it is not easy to date the advent of Islam in Nupe land. He however agrees that by the middle of the seventeenth century there is some indication of some Islamic influence (Balogun, 1980:217). As the Muslim Wangarawa traders were active participants in trading activities in various central Sudan territories, spreading Islam to Nupe land was made easier with the existence of River Niger. In this regard, as Muhammed opines, the great river was one of the routes used by the traders that introduced Islam into Nupe land. Apart from the River Niger route, there was also the Gonga-Kano trade route via a vis the introduction of Islam into Nupe land. In this vein, this route linked Nupe land with both Kano and Borno where Islam had been in existence since the fourteenth and eleventh centuries respectively (Muhammed, 2011:54-55). Nupe towns like Nku, Nupeko, Gbara, Jima, Mokwa, Labozhi, Dabboa, Eggan and Raba felt the influence of Islam early due to their status as political and commercial centres in Nupe land then. This is understandable as the introduction of Islam to the land was done by Muslim traders. As Muhammed observes, all the Etsu *Nupezhi* were Muslims from the reign of Mamman Wari (1670-1679) (Muhammed, 2011: 55-56). Etsu Jibril who ruled between 1746 and 1759 has been described as the first Muslim ruler by some sources (Balogun, 1980: 217; Muhammed, 2011: 57).

However, it is the opinion of some scholars that Islam penetrated Yoruba land in the seventeenth century. In this vein, Abubakre states that Yorubaland had been known to the Arabic scholars by the beginning of the seventeenth century. He cited Abu Abdullah Muhammed bn

Masaniti's book, *Shifa uruba fi tarikh fuqaha Yuruba* which is about Yoruba people. The book was attributed to Ahmiad Baba of Timbuktu who died in 1627 (Abubakre, 2004:18-19). Abubakre also cited the case of a manuscript believed to have been copied in Rajab 1070 AH (1659 AD) that contains an undated note, though of apparently early period, of a sale to one Imam Habib b. al Hasan al-Malawi al-Yurubawi, to show that Islam had been in Yorubaland since the seventeenth century. According to this scholar, it is clear from the name of the buyer that he was a Yoruba (Abubakre, 2004:21). As regards the advent of Islam in Yorubaland, Balogun also avers that "by the middle of the seventeenth century, it seems that a Muslim community existed in the old Oyo". Thus, it is believed that Islam had spread along the trade routes, not only to Oyo but also to Igboho, Kisi, Saki, Iseyin, Ikoyi, Ogbomoso, Owu, Ijana, Ketu and Badagri. By the eighteenth century, the Yoruba land were not only receivers of Islamic faith but also propagators. Thus, at this period, the Yoruba were involved in preaching and spreading Islam to such place as distant as Dahomey (Balogun, 1980:219).

According to Gbadamosi and Ajayi (1980), there is evidence of Islamic presence as shown by the existence of a few Muslims and some Islamic activities in Yorubaland before the nineteenth century. According to these scholars, the Muslims were scattered in Yorubaland during this period and their political and social status were generally low. But we have to note here that the number of Muslims along the coast increased as liberated slaves came back to their land of birth around the second decade of the nineteenth century. Even though most of these liberated slaves were Christians, some of them were Muslims. Whereas some of those belonging to the latter category had been Muslims before they were taken captive, others became Muslims in Cuba or Brazil, due largely to the influence of Hausa or Fulani slaves. These returning Muslims settled in Lagos, Badagry, Otta, Ibadan and other places on their arrival. The itinerant priests from Kano and Borno supplied these Muslims with the needed spiritual diet and the bulk of the teachers and preachers were from Ilorin. Of course, this town "for much of the second half of the nineteenth century became the southern Islamic lighthouse for Yoruba Muslims" (Gbadamosi and Ajayi, 1980: 347-348)

However, Ilorin's case is a totally different kettle of fish. Though a part of Yoruba land -even if only linguistically-considering the non-Yoruba ethnic stocks of the town, Ilorin has its own unique history of Islam. In this regard, it is important to note here that Islam in Ilorin predated the establishment of an emirate, the ultimate fall out of the 1804 Jihad. Thus, before the establishment of emirate in Ilorin, Sheikh al-tahir Solagberu had established a *ribat* (religious monastery) at Oke Sunah, where Islamic activities were not only carried out, but Islamic principles were also strictly adhered to. The monastery was a place for erudite scholars from different backgrounds. Learners flooded to this place for Islamic learning, guidance and ascetism. More importantly, however, is the establishment of an emirate over Ilorin and its environs. This was of course, the consequence of the military victory of Muslim Jama'a over Afonja, the Aare Ona Kakanfo, and his followers considered as pagans. The military action was itself a consequence of this coming of sheikh Alimi, a Fulani man into Ilorin from Yoruba land. Thus, the emirate established after the victory of Jama'a over Afonja and his supporters was guided by Quranic injunctions in particular and Islamic principles in general (Jawondo, 2011:176). At this juncture, we have to note that historical facts abound to show that many Yoruba were Muslims before Afonja revolted at Ilorin in 1807. Afonja's association with Mallam Salih Ibn Janta, popularly known as Alim was purely political as observed by Abubakre (Abubakre, 2004:47).

The Importance Of Arabic Manuscripts In The Reconstruction Of Nigerian History

According to Encyclopedia of Islam (Vol. 1, 1960) as cited by Raji (2002: 3), "Arabic is a member of the Semitic family of languages. It belongs to the south-west Semitic branch which embraces south Arabian and European languages". In taxonomy, the science of linguistic classification, according to Abubakre, Arabic is a member of the family of Semitic languages (Abubakre, 2002:1). In Africa, Arabic is the native tongue of such countries as Morocco, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Mauritania, Sudan and the Western Sahara. Also, in Asia, it is the language for countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Yemen, Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine (Raji, 2002:4).

However, with specific reference to Nigeria, Arabic language and Islam reached the savannah area of West Africa in the 8th century. From there, it spread to the part of present day Northern Nigeria known as Kanem-Borno Empire in 1085CE. Arabic and Islam later reached Hausa-land and in the late 18th century spread to Yoruba-land. An important fact to note here is that Arabic language entered Nigeria through two major directions - Egypt and Maghrib as observed by Raji (2002: 1). As a matter of fact, Arabic pre-dated any other foreign languages, not only in Nigeria but in West Africa in general (Raji, 2002: 10). It is however in the context of the expansion of Islamic empires that the spread of Islam and Arabic language could best be appreciated. As observed by Abubakre (Abubakre, 2002:2) such expanding empires carried Arabic along as, not only the language of religion but also of business and administration. Thus, Arabic later became a familiar language to the people of Turkey which is in Europe and also to the people of India, Indonesia, Malaysia and China in the Far East (Abubakre, 2002:2). Abubakre also observes Shuwa Arabic is the language of the Semites living in towns and villages of Dikwa, Gwanboru Ngala, Ran and Gajibo of Borno State. All these groups of peoples mentioned are natives to Nigeria and the language is close to the standard Arabic (Abubakre, 2002:3).

Meanwhile, as pointed out earlier in this paper, as the language of the Quran and the other Islamic branches of knowledge, Arabic language was spread to areas outside Arabian peninsula by Islam. Thus, Arabic had reached its maturity in the early days of Islam as a writing system and there is no doubt that the language was aided by Islam. This is because Arabic writing provided the medium for documenting the history of Islam from its early days through its later development as noted by Raji (Raji: 5-6). In this regard, Arabic language and Islam, its carrier, came to West Africa with the learned Muslim merchants using the trans-saharan trade routes from Fez to Sijilmasah in modern Morocco to Mauritania and the Senegal basin. Other routes in existence then were from Sijilmasa to Taghaza, Tunis to Tripoli and Air to Katsina, down to Kano. In the Eastern sector were also such routes as Fezzan through Kanem Bornu and also Egypt through Darfur into Kanem Bornu (Raji, 2002:5-6). In fact, as early as 1067 CE, a scholar from Fez,

Muhammed Ibn Mani was reported to be teaching Arabic texts to several Borno Muslims and their rulers before the reign of Ummu Jilmi (1085-97CE) (Raji,2002:6)

However, we have to point out here that just like some other continents, Africa is generally indebted to Arabic for serving as the earliest vehicle of a vast literature and for keeping African historical records. In this vein, Arabic had brought its educational achievement as well as its rich literature to the West African environment many centuries before the coming of the Europeans to West Africa, according to Malik, as cited by Raji. Compared to their influences on some other parts of the world, Islam and Arabic came to West Africa at a later date (Raji, 2002:10). For instance, as observed by La Fay, Cordoba in present day Spain boasted a population of 500, 000, miles of paved streets and a library of 400,000 books in the years AD 900, thanks to the Arab overlords. This was the year when Madrid was a Moorish fortress, Paris a bastioned island and London was fighting for its life against Viking raiders (La Fay, 1975:835). As a matter of fact, Cordoba's glory came and departed with the Arabs, even though the city has existed since Phoenician times (La Fay, 1975). But when did the Arabs come to Cordoba? In 711 Moslem armies smashed across the strait of Gibraltar, seized control of most of the Iberian peninsula and established their capital at Cordoba. Thus, they declared their independence of Damascus, the then Muslim capital in the aftermath of the Abbasid revolt that swept the Arab world in 757. Consequently, Cordoba, the then "Athens of the West" exercised a cultural domination over Europe. In the wake of this cultural domination, arts and sciences flourished, more than 500 Mosques raised their minarets in the city (La Fay,1975:835). Substantiating this, Roberts opines that "the Islamic world was probably highly literate by comparison for example, with medieval Europe. Higher learning, more closely religious in so far as it was institutionalized in the mosques or special schools of religious teachers, is more difficult to assess" (Roberts, 1995:327).

At this juncture, we have to note that for about three hundred years from 17th to 19th centuries as historical records available confirm, Arabic documents were the only source of information for European writers on the Western and central Sudan as observed by Raji. He

observes further that much of the scholarly works were written by native West African authors in Arabic or in their native tongues, but making use of Arabic scripts (Raji,2002: 10). As regards the use of Arabic scripts to write in native language, the practice was not restricted to Nigeria or West Africa. For instance, Arabic has exercised a considerable influence on not only the languages, but also literature and orthography of many countries. In this regard, Persian and Urdu are written in Arabic characters while Turkish language used to be represented with Arabic script. In the same vein, languages of Afghanistan, India, Indonesia, Indochina and Burma reflect characteristic features of Arabic (Raji,2002:4).

With the foregoing however, there is no doubt that Arabic language plays a very important role in the literature and writing culture of not only the northern part of present day Nigeria but also in places that Islam had had contact with. Thus, it follows that wherever there is the culture of writing, historical records would be kept in one way or another. As a matter of fact, the credit for the emphasis on Arabic manuscripts from the northern part of Nigeria as a principal source of early Nigerian history goes to the Late Professor Dike. So, commenting on the writing of scholars, clerics and the administrators in the northern Nigeria before the coming of Europeans, Dike stated as cited by Raji from Hunwick's work that:

it is through their work on the enormous amount of Arabic material in Archives and Libraries, both public and private, that we shall be able to put together a coherent picture of Northern Nigeria based on our own indigenous source material and not, as in the past, chiefly on report of colonial administrator and foreign travelers, valuable though much of these material is. . . the Arabic scholars of the present, drawing upon the writings of the Arabic scholars of the past, will be able to bring before us the events and happenings of the past ages of Nigeria, and also help us to write a history we may rightly call our own(Raji,2002:4).

It should however be noted here that the Late professor was not just postulating and pontificating on the importance of Arabic manuscripts to Nigerian historiography, he made personal efforts and pressurized the then colonial government to come to the aid of scholars of Nigerian history in this regard. Thus, as a result of Professor Dike's pressure, in 1953, the colonial Government established a Public Records Department under the supervision of the Professor himself. The Professor's efforts began yielding fruits when, in 1954, W.E.N Kensdale collected Arabic manuscripts from various parts of Northern Nigeria and deposited them into the library of the University of Ibadan where the Headquarters of the National Archives was then located (Bala, 2011:111). The repositories of the ancient Arabic manuscripts of Northern Nigeria, as observed by Bala dealt with varying fields of human endeavours. According to him, these fields included psychology, history, astronomy, human medicine etc. He states further that the advent of Islam in Kanem Borno in the 11th century and that of Hausa land in the 13th century laid the foundation for the use of Arabic scripts in Nigeria (Bala, 2011:110).

It is in the light of the foregoing that Murray opines that the fullest history of the first fifty years of the nineteenth century are those written in Arabic. According to him, they provide the data for the Sokoto administration and its crises during the last two decades of the nineteenth century (Raji:12). Referring to the materials available in Arabic on the Collapse of the old Oyo Empire, Smith opines that:

they neglect the written Nigerian material in Arabic. This is a serious neglect as this material includes a dated contemporary document (written in 1829) of great importance in a field where contemporary documents are very scarce indeed. This document is a letter written by the Emir of the West (Gwandu) Muhammad b. Abdullahi to the Emir of Yoruba (Ilorin) Abdulsalam b al Salih, a copy of which is preserved in Gwandu (Smith, 1983:42).

We have to note here that Smith is only lamenting the inability of "contemporary scholars" to avail themselves of the opportunity

offered by the existing materials in Arabic on the collapse of the Old Oyo when he says "... in a field where contemporary documents are very scarce indeed". He believed that making use of the document and its like would more than fill the existing gaps on the topic since there is no any work in English or even French for that matter that makes any reference to those materials. Smith continues:

Another neglected Arabic source is a history of Ilorin entitled *Ta'lif akhbar alqurun min Umara balad Ilorin* written in 1912 by Ahmad b. Abi Bakr Kokoro which, though not contemporary with the collapse of the Alafinate, contains extremely important material relating to it, and is of considerable value in this connection because its author belonged to the community of descendants of the Muslims of Yoruba who played an active part in destroying the power of the Alafin (Smith, 1983:42-43).

In fact, since the translation of Ahmad Kokoro's *Ta'lif* by B.G. Martin in 1965, the book published as *New Arabic History of Ilorin* has been widely used by various scholars in their studies of the histories of not only that of Ilorin but of the Yoruba in general. Such scholars included Balogun, R.C.C. Law, G.O. Gbadamosi and H.O. Danmole (Danmole, 1984:57-67). This author/scholar, popularly known as Ikokoro, wrote many other works which included *Risala ila Wazir Bida* which he wrote in praise of al-Baonawi the then Waziri of Bida in the early twentieth century (Danmole). However, a work of this nature can not be a wholesome one without discussing about Ajami system of writing. According to Khalil, Ajami is basically "any form of writing using Arabic inscription into any other language" (Khalil, 2009:1). On their own part Muhammad and Usman are in agreement with Ajami's definition as "a system of writing any language which is not Arabic by the use of Arabic letters" (Muhammad and Usman, 2002:158). As observed by Khalil, Ajami was the pre-colonial pattern of writing in, not only Hausa land and its environs like the Borno Empire, but also old Ghana Empire and so on. He avers that the wordings in Ajami are localized and not words of Arabic. He however admits that there may be

some domesticated Arabic words used as indigenous words of Hausa, Fulfulde or any other language for that matter (Khalil, 2009: 1).

Even though Ajami script have various usages in different communities, in Hausa land, Ajami script is used mainly for official communication, documentation of records, historical events, dissemination of knowledge, court proceedings, poetry and even facilitation of business transaction (Khalil, 2009:1-2). The first form of writing in Hausa land, we have to note, is Ajami, that is during the reign of Muhammad Rumfa, the Emir of Kano between 1463 and 1499, when Islam was established in Kano as the official religion (Khalil, 2009:1-4). Thus, with the religion of Islam in existence in Hausa land, Islamic scholars started teaching the reading and writing of Arabic for no other reason than reading the Holy Quran, Sunnah and other books of jurisprudence. As a matter of fact, this is exactly what led to the invention of Arabic Hausa Ajami as observes by Khalil. Ajami was later used in official correspondences and exchange of letters by the traditional authorities in Hausa land. Thus, the use of Ajami improved tremendously after the Uthman Danfodio Jihad of 1804 (Khalil, 2009:1-4).

At this juncture, we have to note that the use of Ajami script before the colonial era was not restricted to Hausa land and Borno. As we have noted elsewhere, Islam and knowledge are inseparable and Ajami is a literary skill that also developed among some earliest Muslim elites in Ilorin. Thus, in the case of Ilorin, as was the case in Hausa land, Ajami script is a product of the introduction of Islam and its scholarship into the town (Jawondo, 2011:176). A careful examination of some early manuscripts reveal that at the beginning of the development of Ajami scripts in Ilorin, many users had no skills in the reading and writing of Arabic as a language. Be that as it may, some users of Ajami scripts started to include Arabic words in their writings. The Ilorin scholars who were prolific writers in Arabic also got involved in the use of Ajami scripts in their bid to document what were in their physical and socio-political environment (Jawondo, 2011:179). Thus, with the establishment of the Public Records Department referred to earlier in this work, great studies had been made in efforts to gather voluminous and dispersed Arabic/Ajami manuscripts that had been in the possession of private individuals or families not only in Northern Nigeria, but also in Yoruba

land and Northern Edo since around 1400AD for Arabic manuscript and 1700AD for the Ajami manuscripts (Bala, 2011:111).

At long last, efforts of scholars like professor Dike started paying off as in the period between 1957 to 1967, more than 5000 Arabic manuscripts from 14 provinces of the North were collected by the National Archives, Kaduna. In the same vein, Professor Abdullah Smith, M. Hiskett, M.A. Alhaji and M.D. Last covered various provinces in the North between 1959, up to the mid 1960s collecting manuscripts. The manuscripts so collected were filmed in Ibadan and many of these, 528 to be precise, were microfilmed and taken to the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, where the Northern History Research Scheme (NHRS) was instituted in 1964. Interestingly, the successes recorded in the collection of Arabic/Ajami manuscripts in the North up to 1967 was a product of a joint effort between the Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria and the University of Ibadan (Bala, 2011:112).

However, together with historical works of contemporary Islamic scholars like Sheikh Adam al Ilori, both Arabic and Ajami manuscripts form veritable sources of historical material on Nigerian and even West African history. Referring to al Ilori's work on Islamic scholars of Ilorin, Ajetumobi states that "Shaykh Adam Abdullah al Ilori sometimes called the Ibn Khaldun or Imam Ghazali of Nigeria devoted one of his books to Islamic scholars of Ilorin of the period 1800 – 1980. He classified them according to their place of settlement in the town and treated them in groups based on age or period (Ajetumobi, 2006:14-15). Let it be noted here that al Ilori authored well over seventy seven books in literary activities that spanned over five decades (1938 – 92) as attested to by Abubakre who opines: "Judging by sheer literary productivity, . . . Adam Abdullah al-Ilori (1917 – 92) clearly stands out as probably the greatest worker for the survival of Arabic learning in West Africa since the death of the three outstanding men of letters in the family of Fodiyo" (Abubakre, 2002:14-15). Two of al Ilori's historical works are *al-Islam fi najiriya wash Shaykh Uthman Ibn Fudi* published in 1971 and *al-Islam l yawm waghada finajiriya* published in 1985.

Before concluding, it is clear from the foregoing that the view of some scholars that there is nothing we can call African history before the coming of the Europeans is not only prejudicial and racist, but also

misleading. For instance, the then Regius Professor of History at Oxford, Hugh Trevor-Roper asserted with authority in 1963 that "perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none: there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness.....and darkness is not a subject of history" (Fage, 1981: 31). If our eminent professor had tried to find out what had actually happened in various parts of Africa without concentrating his efforts on those areas only that arrested his intellectual curiosity, he would have discovered that record keeping had been taking place in black Africa centuries before his forefathers came to the continent. Instead, he rushed himself into making conclusion, with magisterial confidence, that there was no any African history to teach, and in 1963 for that matter (History Today, 1984).

Conclusion

Records on the pre-colonial history of Nigeria abound all over Nigeria, especially in the northern and north-central parts of the country. These records are available forms ranging from correspondences between kings, emirs and chiefs on one hand and outright record of events on the other. Whereas some of these records were kept in Arabic, some were preserved in *Ajami*, Nigerian indigenous languages, using Arabic script. Much of these records are currently available due to the efforts of such scholars as the late Professor Kenneth Onwuka Dike, the first indigenous professor of history in Nigeria.

Due to the importance of Arabic language in the construction of Nigerian history, it would be necessary to always have experts of Arabic language as archivists in the Departments of History in Nigerian Universities as well as Federal and State owned archives. Their usefulness in archives can not be overemphasized as they would be readily at hand to interpret archival records and materials for scholars working on a particular field. It is only important that such experts in Arabic language would not only be proficient in Arabic language, but also possess strong facility in English language.

It is equally important that specialists in the pre-colonial history of present day Northern Nigeria, middle belt, Yoruba land and even Edo area should form a productive bond between them and Arabic scholars.

This is because some Arabic scholars are in possession of extant remains of epistolary records and correspondences between rulers of Islamic states and also of scholars from various Islamic community. Among such were epistolary exchanges amongst Muslim rulers and between them and non-Muslim rulers (Oseni, 2002:8) and also between Muslim scholars in the 19th century. Collecting these materials as well as those referred to by Smith in this work would greatly assist in the reconstruction of Nigerian history.

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