

CULTURE OF DOCUMENTATION AND PRESERVATION: ARABIC
AND AJAMI MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS IN NORTHERN HISTORY
RESEARCH SCHEME (NHRS) AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA

BY

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A paper presented at the Ist International Conference on Humanity:
Humanities and the Challenges of Poverty in Africa in The 21st Century.

Organized by Faculty of Arts Kaduna State University, Kaduna,
Nigeria.(February 5th - 8th 2018).

Introduction

This paper is an attempt to reveal, using the theoretical approach of information management and sharing, how the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts became the intellectual heritage resource of the people of Northern Nigeria, and the activities of the Northern History Research Scheme (N.H.R.S.) in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, a centre established with the objective of collection and preservation of relevant records on the history of Northern Nigeria and its peoples, for teaching, learning and research.

Documentation and preservation are two main tools that remain permanent in safeguarding the existence of documentary resources for enduring access and use. Document presents personal and official information, evidence, facts, knowledge, that have technical, social and mental aspects, which have the capability in shaping and re- shaping of our lives and culture. Documentation of whatever is concerned with our personal lives as individuals, organization and government at all levels. However, documentation is the process of identification, collecting, and making it existence available as records, such as correspondences, photographs, manuscripts, files, receipts, tellers' e.t.c that are of enduring historical value (Suter, 2003). The activities of documentation and preservation of intellectual heritage resources is part and parcel of information management that ensures prosperity and integration of knowledge and information for access, retrieval and use for development.

Record in terms of intellectual heritage resource is an important tool and a panacea to the enormous problems affecting our economy, security, socio-political growth, and education, transformation of our character, morale and integrity within the society. Kamatula and Mkeni – Saurombe (2013) submit that, preservation of documentary heritage provides people's enjoyment, inspiration, cultural values, learning potential, economic prosperity and social equity.

Arabic Manuscripts

Arabic manuscripts are regarded as a piece of handwritten information which could be in a form of a book, pamphlet, letter, poem, poetry or otherwise that are not published. The recorded information could be sermons, preaching, judgements proceedings, treatise, transactions, astrology, mathematics, sufism, theology, medicine, talismanology, record of medicinal herbal, spiritual or magical treatise for charms which is known as kundi, a small pocket or bundle of small sheets of papers, among others. That contained information, manual and formulas of talismanic, amulets and charms. Mohammed (2009) notes that manuscripts can be simply described as document written, printed and or /conventionally published information source or sources in bound or unbound format regardless of language of the communication and alphabet of writing. It is also conceived as handwritten, hand – press or printed document, diary of events or information record on variety of events, issues and subjects vital to the writer, composer, compiler or collector.

The Arabic Manuscripts are in two distinct forms: the pure Arabic manuscripts and the Ajami manuscripts. The pure Arabic manuscripts are those manuscripts that are wholly written in Arabic language and with its characters, the Ajami manuscripts are those manuscripts written in any other language but using Arabic characters or inscription to record information. Hashimi (2009) notes that the word “Ajami” which means non Arabic is the utilization of Arabic inscriptions to express thoughts and ideas in other languages that is not Arabic. This is known as the process of linguistic domestication of Arabic letters. The Ajami manuscripts are not Arabic materials but nevertheless the Ajami materials do share a lot in common with the Arabic materials, as Arabic alphabet are used to inscribed such languages and it also contain a substantial amount of loan words from Arabic.

Consequent to the above, there exist today in Nigeria, particularly in the Northern part, a lot of literature written in Hausa, Kanuri, Fulfulde, Nupe, Yoruba, and others, using Arabic inscriptions. These literatures are collectively referred to Ajami manuscripts. Batiste (2007) these manuscripts are the most pure historical content of the indigenous knowledge of the Muslims people of Northern Nigeria, and tools for promoting scholarship within the region, Africa as a whole and the world in general.

Foundation of Arabic and Ajami Manuscripts in Northern Nigeria

The cultural influences from the Middle East and North Africa especially in relation to contact with Islam, and the process of commercial activities by some societies in the Northern Nigeria played a significant role for the development of the literary tradition and book culture in the area centuries ago. This was due to the spread of Islam through North Africa and its subsequent acceptance by a large number of the people in the area. The religion emphasizes teaching and learning as the dominant pillars for the development of the religion and for the followers to have the knowledge with which to worship God (Allah). Worship, Galadanci (1993) it includes utilizing the natural wealth that God has put into the earth, labour of understanding the laws of God which govern creation, knowledge of the properties of matter and the means of utilizing matter in the service of belief and spread of the truth of Islam. Worship in Islam includes realization of what would benefit people, Muslims are given a great deal of flexibility to make good use of their intelligence and discover for themselves what will benefit them, from the matters God has left for man, through learning, researches and as well as deductions from critical thinking to reality of matters.

As the requisite of the religion it is compulsory upon every believer, male or female, young and adult to seek for knowledge in the religion, by this,, there by emerged two schooling systems in the Muslim communities and societies in

Northern Nigeria. These schooling systems are known as *Makarantar allo* (tablet school) and *Makarantar ilmi* (advance school). In these schools a learned, respected person known as Mallam equally a teacher, would be assigned to teach and train the children of both sexes. The children would be taught the art of reading the Qur'an and writing of Arabic alphabets, with the view of developing their mental and intellectual capabilities, that is in *Makarantar allo* level. While in the *Makarantar ilmi*, besides teaching the skills of reading and writing, they were taught the basic principles of Islam, including the pillars of Islam and act of worship(devotion) both theory and practice.

These schools equally produced a lot of scholars who in return produced a lot of scholarly materials in form of Arabic and Ajami manuscripts. This was initiated by the scholars to compliment by producing appropriate religious tracts and pamphlets for guiding the populace as a result of the influx of enthusiastic men and women eager to learn, read and write, and apply the teachings of Islam. The capability of the Islamic teachers and scholars in these schools allowed them to domesticate the Arabic alphabets letters to write in Hausa, Fulfulde, Nupe, Kanuri and Yoruba. This technique which was started in the process of learning by jotting some difficult words and meanings in Arabic by the students of advanced levels as footnoting for better understanding and comprehending of their lessons in the schools.

The Arabic manuscripts in Nigeria could be categorized in terms of authorship, subjects and the language of communication. According to Adamu (2009:5) the first Arabic manuscripts to be circulated in the Nigeria were of the foreign authorship, before the indigenes began to use pen and express their views, ideas, and sentiments and to expand knowledge. More so Adamu (2009) due to the strong patronage and with the influence of Islamic scholarship, one should expect Arabic Manuscripts to have first entered into the Country through Borno before coming in to Hausa land. And most of the Arabic manuscripts were in the form of books for teaching various aspects of Islam.

The earliest composition of in Arabic by an indigenous authors is in Borno region in the 11th century during the reign of Mai of Kanem Borno, Mai Umme Jilmi 1080 AD, by the first known Ajami manuscript appearance, which include government records and historical accounts, the Girgams and Mahrams.

In Hausa land the composition of Arabic and Ajami manuscripts could be regarded as at the time when a visiting scholar from Sankore University of Timbuktu, Sheikh Muhammad b. al – Magilhili d.1504. He was the first in the Northern Nigeria to produce indigenous scholars, like Muhammad b.al- Sabbagh known as Dan Marna (d.1655) and Muhammad b. Nuh known as Dan Masani(d.1667).

Subsequently, upon this cursory indication the development of both Ajami and Arabic literature in Northern from both Kanem –Borno and Hausa by the last

quarter of 15th to 16th century by the indigenous authors, Kani (1978) and Adamu (2009) listed some of these authors and some of their works:

1. Ahmad Ibn Furtuwa, Chief Imam of Mai Idris Alawma (1570 -1602).Some of his works are: Shajan Sultan Alawma and Mai Idris Alawma wa ghazawatuhi.
2. Muhammad al –Kashnawi Ibn Sabbagh popularly known as Waliyi DanMarina. He wrote some books and commentaries, but only three of his works are said to have survived.
3. Muhammad DanMasani. Some of his writings are: Fath al – Shukur, Al – Nafhat al –Anbariyya, which is a commentary on Ishiriniyat al –Fazazi and Shifa al – Ruba fi Thaharir Fuqaha Yuruba land.

In his own contribution Bobboyi (1997) reported that the three books of Dan Marina that have survived are:

1. Kitab ila ma'rifat umara Kashina (knowing the Kings of Katsina).
2. Tazyin al'asa bi darb hamat man asa (Adornment of the staff concerning the execution of him who rebels.
3. Kitab Tartib al- Umara a Kashina (Chronological list of the kings of Katsina).

He went further mentioning that these books could be found in National Archive Kaduna and National Museums Jos.

The development of book culture was further developed and excelled in the second half of the 18th century; the gate for the production of both Ajami and Arabic

manuscripts in Hausa land was opened. The areas experienced avalanche of Arabic manuscripts produced by numerous scholars whose number are yet to be determined. This was influenced as a result of the Sokoto Jihad led by Shaikh Uthman Danfodiyo in 1804. Considering the intellectual process involved in the production of Arabic and Ajami manuscripts, their subjects content were not limited only to religion or ritual practices. In support of this statement Hunwick (1997) posited that the leaders of the Sokoto Jihad almost wrote on all the subjects within the Islamic disciplines and what affects most human endeavor. Such as: fiqh (jurisprudence) Tawhid (theology), tasawwuf (sufism), tafsir (qur'anic exegesis), hadith (prophetic traditions), lughah (Arabic grammar), adab (manners), wa'z (paraensis), tibb (medicine), tarikh (history), politics, trade, and administration.

The writings of these scholars today are readily much available in the country's archives, museums, centres, Bureaus for History and Culture in some states in Northern Nigeria,, and institutes of higher learning such as; Arewa House Kaduna Centre for Historical Research and Documentation, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Northern History Research Scheme Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Centre for Trans – Saharan Studies University, of Maiduguri, Centre for Islamic Studies, Usmanu Danfodio University, Sokoto, Centre for Arabic Documentation, Institute of African Studies University of Ibadan and the Kenneth Dike Library, in the University of Ibadan. These Centres share one

common goal and objective, which is “to recover the past of peoples, cultures, and civilization, to establish and maintain a comprehensive depository for the preservation of manuscripts in all fields of learning relating to the area as ‘Trans-Sahara’”.

Collection and Organization of Arabic and Ajami Manuscripts in Northern History Research Scheme (NHRS) Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

Documentation and preservation of literary heritage, historical antecedence and ideas is not by accident. This was possible as a result of matured learning process and wisdom by the students and teachers in the Islamic learning process. They uphold and stand with the epithet that says “what you comprehend diminishes while that what is written remains permanent”. The challenge of history is so great to humanity, a community, society, or nation that does not know the history of itself is bound to perish. Bello (2010) argue that the natural environment and human creations or artifacts, constitute important source material on the human beings themselves, in relation to their natural environment, as well as contributing important sources of information on the very history of nature of itself. Basic sources of historical information, it oral or written and archaeological evidence, are therefore significant areas of research and investigation in order to find out about the development of both natural and social phenomena.

The systematic neglect, or destruction and exxp0loitation of many of our oral evidence relating to African History by colonial administration in Africa most especially in Nigeria, was for long having very persistent and negative influence on the preservation and production of knowledge in Africa.

It is worth noting that despite the colonial administration order on need to preserve books of account and other treasury documents of both the South and Northern protectorate in 1914, which led to the establishment of National Archives in 1954 was not for educational purposes rather for administrative purposes. But, however, from general perspective all the documentation centres founded and established in Nigeria were under taken as a result of concerted efforts made by a number of patriotic intellectuals in the country and many public personalities with foresight and critical thinking over the future of their generations.

The establishment of Northern History Research Scheme (N.H.R.S) A.B.U., Zaria, according to its first interim report (1966), the scheme was conceived in 1960 by the Vice Chancellor of University College Ibadan, K. O. Dike, as an inter-disciplinary research project combining the resources of both the then University College, Ibadan, and the then Government of Northern Nigeria, By 1961 and 1962 the preliminary work necessary for the launching of the scheme was completed, and it emerged as a project for the initiation of the large-scale research into the history of the Northern Nigeria.

The responsibilities of the Northern Government in connection with the project was transferred to Ahmadu Bello University in 1962 when the University was founded and the first phase of the scheme was finally launched in 1964 as a joint-project of the University of Ibadan and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

The scheme started its activities with selection of topics of study which was extremely difficult as to meet with the objectives of the scheme. Finally some topics of study were identified to start with, which include the following:

- (I) The 'Recovery' of the Arabic Scripts literature of the north.
- (II) Publication of Arabic Literatures, biographies of reputable leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate and translation of Works from Arabic to English.

The scheme's objectives in a nutshell are; to promote the growth of material on the history of Northern Nigeria and its peoples; to acquire relevant records for preservation, dissemination and computerization for easy access by the public; to recruit and train personnel to manage the collections of the scheme effectively; and to meet the needs of researchers. The functions of Arabic and Ajami manuscripts in the scheme are to provide material that will help in correcting the biased historical data and interpretations by colonial administrators. To provide materials for teaching, learning and research for development of knowledge and educating the people of Nigeria.

At present, the scheme has thousands copies of various Arabic and Ajami Manuscript collections on Northern Nigeria, and so many books, journals and magazines; on the history of Northern Nigeria, Nigeria and Africa in general.

Subject Coverage of Arabic and Ajami Manuscripts in NHRS/Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

There is no doubt that the Arabic and Ajami Manuscripts were emerged to served as mechanism for passing religious message to the indigenous people within the Muslim community and a vehicle of scholarship among the people of Northern and Nigeria in general. By their content analysis Arabic and Ajami Manuscripts are *generally grouped into three major subject areas, these include; religious, language and other sciences.* In Arabic and Islamic literature, by their subject coverage are encyclopedic in nature, for instance, a theme, subject or topic could be discussing more than subjects or more at once as because subjects and issues in Islam are *interrelated to each other as it affect man in the society.*

Understanding the subject coverage of Arabic and Ajami Manuscripts in NHRS is great in facilitating access and use of the resources for teaching, learning, research and as well for development of new knowledge. Dogara (2011) conducted the content analysis of the Arabic and

Ajami manuscript collection in NHRS where he analyzed seven hundred and fifty copies of Arabic and Ajami Manuscripts of the scheme. The analysis is presented as follows:

**Subject Analysis of Arabic And Ajani Manuscripts in NHRS Ahmadu Bello
University, Zaria**

Table 1: Classification of Manuscripts by Subject Areas

S/N	Subject	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Administration/Politics	26	3.4
2.	Sermon/Admonition	27	3.6
3.	Astrology/Geography	12	1.6
4.	Biography/History	88	11.7
5.	Diplomacy	56	7.4
6.	Education	12	1.6
7.	Ethic	13	1.7
8.	Jihad	7	0.9
9.	Jurisprudence	172	22.8
10.	Language	21	2.8
11.	Sociology		

		4	0.5
12.	Medicine	12	1.6
13.	Praise/Tribute	136	18
14.	Poetry	19	2.5
15.	Supplication	25	3.3
16.	Sufism	34	4.5
17.	Theology	90	11.9
	Total	754	100

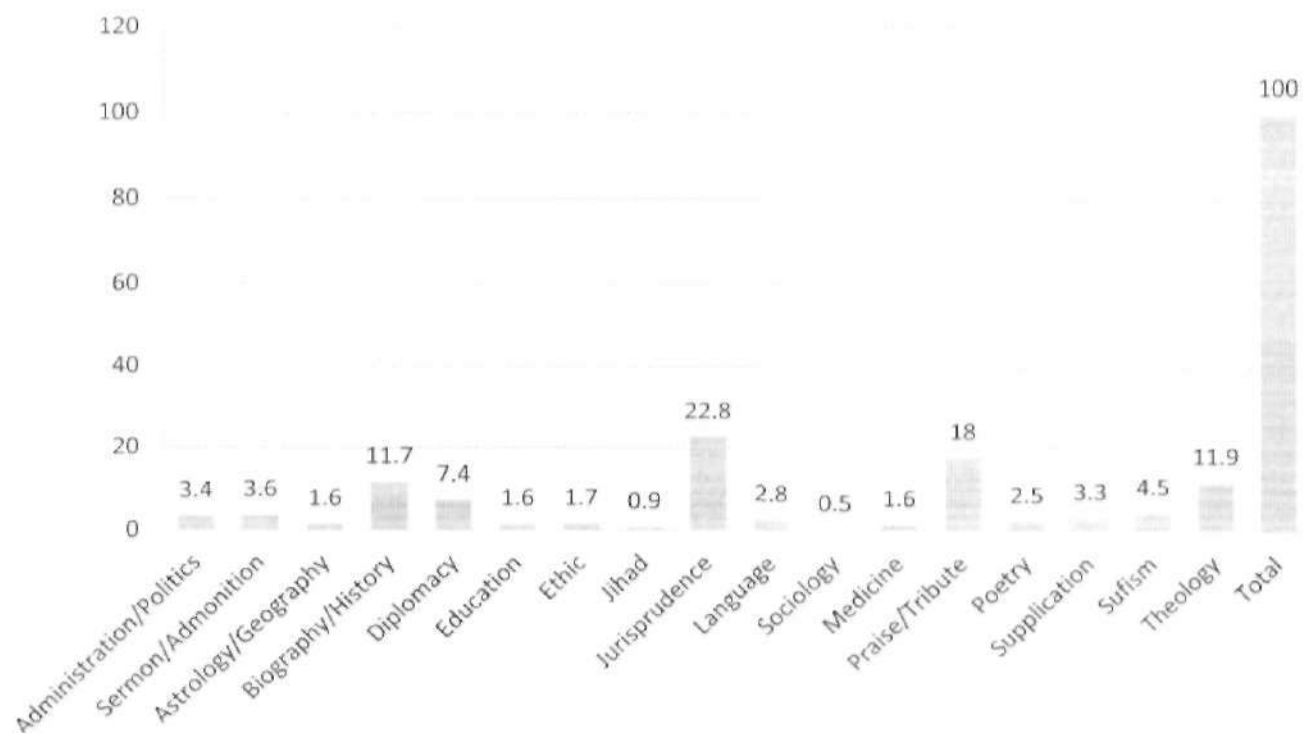


Fig 1: Percentage Distribution of the Subjects of Arabic and Ajami Manuscripts by Subject.

The study reveals from the table 1 and figure 1 above that, from the total of seven hundred and fifty four manuscripts, one hundred and seventy two 172 (28.8%) are in Jurisprudence in Islam. This is not surprising, as jurisprudence is the source of all pragmatic aspects of worship in Islam. Any other knowledge in Islam is built upon the understanding of the laws of God. More so, jurisprudence naturally dominated all other aspects as Islam was just taking root in Nigeria.

Next is praise and tribute with one hundred and thirty six 136 (18%) manuscripts. This is not surprising because praise and tribute usually are conveying works and achievements of those praised in the media, during their lifetimes or after their

death. This is as a result of their contributions in their various endeavors to benefit their immediate society and beyond. Then theology which is a strong basis in Islam recorded ninety 90 (11.9%) manuscripts while history and biography have eighty eight 88 (11.7%) manuscripts.

This analysis, from jurisprudence, praise/tribute, theology and biography/history, indicates that the NHRS possesses relevant manuscripts that are tied to the Scheme's aims and objectives. Such as the 'recovery' of the Arabic Script literature of the north Nigeria and the publication of Arabic Literature, biographies of reputable leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate and translations of their works from Arabic to English.

Furthermore the table shows that there is wide range of essential Ibrahim, D. subjects in Islam. Diplomacy as a subject has fifty six 56 (7.4%) manuscripts. Diplomacy here involves • internal and external relationships through exchanges of letters which may take different forms by the ruling class and the *Ulamas*. The relationship could be on seeking for guidance on religious issues, fatwa clarifications on issues or events, requests, conveyance of appointments, instructions and notices or invitations. Sufism as a subject has thirty four 34 (4.5%) manuscripts. Sufism to go with this number the researcher is of the view that at a period of time most of the jihad leaders and *Ulamas* were busy on the issues of settling the society and issues such as mysticism were not the bone of contention in

the caliphate. Sermon and Admonition each have twenty seven 27 (3.6%) manuscripts. Administration and politics have twenty six 26 (3.4%) manuscripts. Supplication has twenty five 25 (3.3%) manuscripts. Language, which is wholly Arabic, had twenty one (21) manuscripts 21 (2.8%). Poetry nineteen 19 (2.5%), and ethics thirteen 13 (1.7%) manuscripts Astronomy, Geography, Education and Medicine each has twelve 12 1.6%. manuscripts. Sociology has four 4(0.5%) manuscripts. This might be because at that time the scholars in Sokoto Caliphate were busy with the issues of the reconstruction of the society on religious, economic and political bases.

Beside the other subject disciplines indicated in table 1 and figure 1 respectively, as discovered Jihad recorded 7 (0.9%) manuscripts which is very low .In this regard the researcher is of the view that this may be due to the fact that, most of Arabic and Islamic literatures are encyclopedic in nature. For instance, as it is the nature of the Holy Qur'an a verse that is talking about marriage or charity, fasting, supplication, politics or administration, may suddenly switch to other issues such as justice, piety, humility, education, and many others as they relate to subjects or the theme on discussion. Essentially this is done by the Qur'an in order to draw the attention of its readers on the imperatives and importance of the message being communicated. In most cases this is the nature and tradition of Islamic literatures which model the prophetic sayings of the prophet in their contents and subjects.

The representation of this wide range of subjects by the Arabic manuscripts shows that Muslim Scholars in Nigeria -are highly learned and their knowledge encompasses most disciplines of knowledge. It also confirms the assertion made by Umar (2007) that Arabic manuscripts were never limited to religious ritual practices. They treat natural and social sciences, agriculture, astronomy, algebra alchemy, physics, pharmacy, medicine and engineering.

The Scope and Significance of the Arabic and Ajami Manuscripts

The Arabic and Ajami manuscripts to their subjects' coverage are multi – dimensional knowledge base that covered and dealt with almost all aspect of human endeavor which include religious, politics, economics among others. Hashimi (2010) in real sense Arabic and Ajami manuscripts promotes scholarship in the communities; the significance of these resources can be seen clearly from the capability of the Ulamas in the Northern Nigeria who used the resources as their information sources for discharging their religious and civic engagement in their communities. In a nutshell the significance of the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts are:

- It makes Islamic Sciences to remain pure to its scholastic roots. Thus the translation and transcribing of the holy Qur'an, Hadith and other Arabic literature in Ajami for use.

- The short footnotes, stories, praise, tribute and poems written in Ajami accelerated understanding of the learners.
- The integration of Ajami script integrated the community into literacy as people can read and write with the Arabic alphabets.
- Ajami as process of linguistic domestication, helped in learning the holy Qur'an and Islamic traditional sciences better than other means.
- Ajami provide the primary contact of the learners with formalized or conventional means of communication and a major means of communication among Islamic scholars and rulers in the Hausa land.