

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Documentation, Preservation and Dissemination of Arabic and Islamic Heritage: The Basis of Scholarship in Northern Nigeria**

**Ibrahim Dogara**

#### **Introduction**

This paper is an attempt to understand, using the theoretical paradigm of information management and sharing, how Arabic and Islam became the heritage of the people of Northern Nigeria (Central Sudan), and as well as how the documentation, preservation and dissemination of Arabic and Islamic literacy became the basis of scholarship among the people of Northern Nigeria. In fact in any society that cannot document, preserve, and disseminate its ideas and historical antecedence for its future generations is automatically dead.

#### **Arrival of Islam in Nigeria**

The introduction of Arabic language to what is referred to as Northern Nigeria dates back to the arrival of Islam to West Africa in general. In his assertion Bravmann (1974) indicated that Islam was first introduced into the Western and Central Sudan (probably as early as the eighth and the ninth centuries AD), then spread into the Southern Savannah and Guinea Coast forest, and diffused throughout Northern and Central Nigeria. In the same vein, Bugaje (1991) however, strongly asserts that the period that Islam arrived in the country was around 8th century AD. On the other hand, Smith (1960), Doi (1980) and Galadanci (1993), suggested that Islam arrived Nigeria as early as the 7th century of the Christian era. That was the first century of the Hijra of

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) from Makkah to Madinah. Furthermore Doi, stated that Islam was in Africa as early as when it was introduced in Saudi Arabia, in the year 610AD. In support of the above statement, Mohyidin (1981) asserts that during the early days of the Prophet's mission in Makka, the Muslims were persecuted and the prophet arranged for them to leave for Abyssinia (Ethiopia) as immigrants. Whichever way, Islam had arrived in Nigeria and spread through the various activities of the Islamic scholars and traders from the North East. On the expansion of the religion, Bravmann (1974) revealed that there were a number of basic factors that aided the expansion of Islam in West Africa. The main factor was the continual operation of Muslim traders over the vast area of West Africa. He further, indicated that the religion was expanded through the agency of individual merchants, small mercantile family groups and highly dispersed trading corporations into Western Sudan.

Jay (1973) revealed that North Africa was Islamized during the seventh century AD., because of the zeal to spread the message of Islam to millions that lived across the Sahara, which was increased through the number of caravan traders travelling from the north to south. The reason for this zeal was because Islam emphasized Da'awah (propagation or calling into Islam). More so, the continual advance of Islam was encouraged by its literate character for as a religion with a book, it demanded some basic levels of literacy from its adherents.

It is in support of the above statement that Hunwick (1964) argued that, wherever Islam was spread, encouragement was given to the learning of Arabic and to the foundation of both small schools for teaching and reading of the Qur'an and higher schools for deeper study of the Arabic language and the literature of Muslim peoples –more especially the theological and the legal literature which

formed the basis of both the spiritual and temporal life of the adherents. That is why, wherever Arabic is spread in an area as the language of religion (Islam), it was soon put to other worldly ends, for the purposes of trade, politics, administration, diplomatic correspondences with the Arabs communities, and for family records.

#### **Trends in Documentation, Dissemination and Preservation of Literature in Northern Nigeria**

The earliest written literature in Northern Nigeria and Nigeria in general were the copies of the Holy Qur'an and the records of the Hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). These are the most authentic sources of Islam. The issue of documentation and dissemination of knowledge and information among the Muslims dates back to the period of the prophet. This can be traced from the activities of the various scribes of the prophet that recorded every bit of the revelation sent to him, on the pamphlet, papyrus, skin etc, with the aim of preserving the message of Allah in a written form for future generations. It was the same process done in the recording of the prophetic tradition (The Hadiths) as an explanation and model for mankind. These efforts were as a result of the emphasis of the religion, on seeking, acquiring and dissemination of knowledge among the Muslims and the rest of mankind. This was the first step taken to record or document knowledge for the purpose of dissemination, and it set a precedent for the documentation of ideas and information in the Muslim world.

With the zeal to spread the word of Allah, and subsequent to the above, Galadanci (2007), reported that the earliest manuscripts in circulation in Muslim countries were the copies of the Glorious Qur'an and the recording of al-Hadith. As a result of the encouragement given by Islam and the effort made for seeking and acquiring knowledge and

disseminating it, the early Muslim leaders and Ulama' endeavored to collect and preserve those documents for the benefit of students and the public at large. Apart from the Glorious Qur'an and Hadith, the first Arabic literature which came in a form of manuscript into the northern part of Nigeria by Muslim merchants and preachers from North Africa included the *Muwatta Malik (book of fiqh) Kitab alShifa* of Qadi Iyad and some standard primary books dealing with Ibadat (act of worship), devotion and religious observances, they including, the *Ashmawiyyah, Al-Akhdhari, Al-Risala of Ibn Zayd, Muqadimatu al-Hariri*.

These literature written in Arabic language were for long to have influence over the social and cultural norms of the people of the area. These have been recognized as the success of the efforts made by the Muslim merchants and preachers who left a great legacy of learning and scholarship with Arabic language as the medium of communication.

This however, led to the training of scholars in Islamic religion, jurisprudence and the natural sciences. This confirmed the assertion of Tirmingham (1968) and Balogun (1977) that Arabic language stimulated Africans to write their own languages in Arabic characters.

The spread of Islam and the development of Arabic in Northern Nigeria was given more respect and admiration by some leaders in the area at its inception. Abdul (1973) and Mahmud (1982) stated that as a result of the influence of Islam and Arabic language, Mai of Kanem Bornu, Mai Umme Jilmi (1080 AD) embraced Islam while Mai Dunama (1097-1150) performed the Hajj (Pilgrimage) to Makka twice and died during the third trip. Subsequent to this, as reported by Kani (1983/1405A.H) in Kano during the reign of Muhammadu Rumfa (1493 -1499), Islam became the state religion. Rumfa showed a great interest in the spread of Islam in collaboration with the Ulama'. He introduced Islamic

reforms into Kano political administration and substituted the pagan practices with Islamic institutions. It was in his period that many great scholars from Magrib and Western Sudan visited Kano and taught in its schools. He further reported that similar reforms took place in Zazzau during the reign of Muhammadu Barau and in Katsina during Sarkin Katsina Muhammadu Korau. Thus, the acceptance of the religion by leaders contributed immensely to the development of Arabic and Islamic traditions as well as scholarship among the people of northern Nigeria, which served as their heritage.

On the development of Arabic literacy and Islamic culture in Nigeria, a great deal of it occurred in the nineteenth century, during the Jihad of Shehu Usman Danfodio. A man, who was described as a young man, an earnest student with a gift of Arabic language and thorough knowledge in Islamic sciences, was reported by Kensdale (1964) that, Shehu Usman Danfodio read over a hundred works in Arabic language, and his brother Abdullahi and his son Mohammed Bello were almost equally prolific. These personalities were responsible for the resurgence of Islam and Arabic language in the nineteenth century. They established the Sokoto Caliphate in which Arabic language became the language of state and its literature. It is in the light of the above, that a lot of literature as produced in the area and in various fields of knowledge. As Oloyede (2012) reported that Arabic became the official language in Sokoto and Bornu and a language of correspondence between the existing communities as at then. He further reported that in 1997 Ogunbiyi and Reichmut documented such correspondences between the Olubadan, Emir of Katsina and the Sultan of Sokoto and the Iwo community (in the present Osun State). More so, there were some of these official correspondences in Arabic between the Bornu Court and the British government; the

Sokoto jihadists and the Bornu scholars and between the Sultan of Sokoto and the Iwo community.

There is no doubt whatsoever, to the claim that the academic ideals, the tradition of learning which the leaders of the Sokoto Jihad sought to follow and develop, was influential and excelled as a result of the wisdom behind documentation, preservation and dissemination of information and knowledge. It is with this that Shehu Usman Danfodiyo in his book *Najm al Ikwan* is saying:

“All other works are explanation of what had been generally treated in the works of previous scholars. The works of previous scholars are explanation of what was generally treated in the Book (Qur’an) and Sunnah”.

The Arabic and Islamic heritage among the people of northern Nigeria and Nigeria in general, form the basis of scholarship the Arabic and Islamic culture were introduced to the people of the area. It is along this that Bunza (2007) asserts that, the writings of the leaders of the Sokoto caliphate were intended to mainly address the need of their contemporary situation. He further stressed that, it was the belief of the Shehu that the works of the contemporary scholars at any given moment were relevant to their people as they addressed the specific needs of the situation. Along this line Bello and Augi (1993) stress that the jihad literature was significant for its deep commitment to the needs of the society of that period. The various works written in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were explicitly directed at informing the citizens of the areas affected by the jihad movement of the obligations placed on them by the Islamic religion and the need for them to adhere to them. While the subsequent works, on the other hand, were mainly directed at guiding the rulers and the general populace on the proper rules of conduct as laid down by Islam. However, Umar (2007) notes that, the writings of these Ulama were not

limited to religious ritual practices; they treated natural and human sciences, agriculture, astronomy, algebra, alchemy, physics, pharmacy, medicine and engineering.

It is noteworthy, however that documentation, preservation and dissemination of knowledge through whatsoever means and process, is significant to the development of learning and scholarship in any community or society. That is why the people of northern Nigeria, Nigeria and beyond are adherents of Arabic and Islamic cultures as their heritage and identity. However, these attributed immensely for the people of Nigeria to participate in the production of ideas and promoting of world civilization.

### **Collection and Preservation of Arabic and Islamic Literature in Northern Nigeria**

The need for the collection of Arabic and Islamic literature in Nigeria particularly in the north arose due to some of the following reasons:

Firstly, as it is contained in Nigeria's National Anthem, *"The labour of our heroes past shall never be in vain"*. It is in pursuant of such goals that the idea to acquire and collect the works of Nigeria's past intellectuals was started.

Secondly, the interest colonial officers had in collecting, collating and managing historical records including manuscripts also necessitated the collection of Arabic Manuscripts in Nigeria by Nigerians since independence.

Thirdly, the need to reconstruct the history of the peoples, cultures and civilization of northern Nigeria and Nigeria at large and to cause publicity to such recoveries and findings for the advancement of learning.

According to a report by Alegbeleye (1998), the consideration of archives administration and records management in Nigeria started from 1914 when the country became a single political unit. Initially the objective was only

on the value of account books and treasury. In 1948 a circular was dispatched by the Colonial Office prior to the establishment of the National Archives, on the need for preserving Nigeria's historical records is significant in yet another way.

Furthermore, it was as a result of these, that Dr. Kenneth Dike, a historian put forward a proposal to the then government on how to "save what can be saved" of the historical records in the country before it was too late, due to their terrible condition.

As a result of his proposal he was appointed as a supervisor of public records to undertake part time duties, in connection with the preservation of "ancient documents" of public interest in Nigeria and concluded his assignment in 1953.

However, according to Alegbeleye (1998), the subsequent acceptance of Dike's report by the government led to the establishment of Nigeria's Record Office on April 1, 1954. More so, Dike's report remains today the foundation on which the National Archive of Nigeria is built.

Apart from these efforts made by the colonial administrators in the 60's to date, various Centres and Bureaus were established by some academic Institutions and State Governments in Nigeria. This includes the establishment of History Bureaus of Kano, Katsina and Sokoto. It also includes the establishment of Africana and Documentation Unit of Kashim Ibrahim Library of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; Documentation Section in the Library of Bayero University Kano, Centre for Islamic Studies Usman Danfodio University, Sokoto; Centre for Trans-Saharan Studies, University of Maiduguri; National Museum, Jos; National Archives in Kaduna and Ibadan; Arewa House, Kaduna; and Northern History Research Scheme, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.



However these Centres share one common goal and objective, which according to Centre for Trans-Saharan Studies 1987, 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".

On the development of Arabic and Islamic literacy in the country Fafunwa (1974) noted that, in 1934, when the Emir of Kano, Alhaji Abdullahi Bayero returned from pilgrimage from Makka, he brought with him new ideas based on what he had seen in the Middle East and Saudi Arabia. With respect to their system of Islamic and Arabic education, where he set up a school at Kano which was maintained jointly by all the native authorities in Northern Nigeria for training of Alkalis (Al-Qadis). The school was named as the Northern Provinces Law School and in 1947 was changed to School for Arabic Studies and came under government control. The main task of the school was to train teachers in Arabic and Islamic subjects, as well as in English and Arithmetic.

The development of Arabic literacy in Nigeria came a long way through these processes as a result of our leaders' concerted efforts through which it brought the establishment of Higher Islamic and Arabic institutions in the country. It subsequently, led to the introduction of Arabic and Islamic studies courses in most of the Universities in Nigeria. All these came about as a result of the influence of Islam and the recognition given to the Arabic language.

The development of Arabic and Islamic literary culture of Muslims of Nigeria, the contribution of various philanthropic organizations in the country can never be over emphasized. Muhammad (1983) stressed the contribution of such organizations as the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), the Islamic Trust of Nigeria (ITN) and the Islamic Education Trust (IET)

among others, that they have given high priority to education particularly Islamic and moral education. They established Islamiyya schools (equivalent to the secular primary schools). They sourced and provided scholarships for both the Islamic and Arabic studies and Western education, to Europe and to Arab countries, such as, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Sudan.

### **Conclusion**

The paper has been able to reveal how documentation, preservation and dissemination of the Arabic and Islamic literary heritage established the tradition of scholarship among the people of North Nigeria. The effort made by the people Northern Nigeria in documentation, preservation and dissemination of ideas, events and knowledge as a result of upholding the Arabic and Islamic heritage allowed them to participate in the production of new ideas of knowledge and participate in promoting world civilization and scholarship. The government and the stake holders in education are advised to devise some more means for the promotion of our literary heritage for development of new knowledge and scholarship.

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