

**MANAGEMENT OF ARABIC MANUSCRIPT RESOURCES FROM
STORAGE, PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION PERSPECTIVES:
THE CASE OF NORTHERN HISTORY RESEARCH SCHEME,
AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA**

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ABSTRACT

Arabic manuscripts are not new phenomena in Nigeria, Africa and the world over. Their importance to the educational development and societal reconstruction along moral, ethics, spiritual, social, economic, political and what have you, is yet to be known, due to the poor understanding of where they can be found and access to them easily obtained, and to know their intellectual content. It is in view of these that this paper set to investigate the management of the Arabic manuscript resources in the Northern History Research Scheme of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, from the perspectives of storage, preservation and conservation. Some of the problems inhibiting the proper storage preservation and conservation of these resources were identified and the way forward towards Arabic and Ajami manuscripts management in Nigeria was highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

The Northern Nigerian area has been one of the earliest regions of West Africa with a literary tradition and heritage, book culture and documentation of events, centuries before the arrival of the Europeans on the African continent. This refers to information or idea related to what data one is concerned with, and it is the knowledge of the natural environment and resources of a people. The development of human intellect has made it possible for the people of Nigeria to participate in promoting world civilization and scholarship. The past Ulama and our leaders sought knowledge and managed it and left behind a great treasure of learning that will continue to be relevant for many generations to come. Knowledge and information are disseminated through various channels, writing has been known for centuries.

The Muslim scholars in Nigeria and the world over are engaged in the dissemination of knowledge and scholarship through teachings, preaching and writing. Ibrahim (1988) notes that it is significant to point out that the Muslim scholars that were involved in the spread of Islam were highly learned. Their knowledge encompassed all types of disciplines and their studies. The early Ulama engaged themselves in the literary works through

the writing of books and recording events which consequently became reference documents and source of inspiration for future generations. As a result of these, there exists a lot of literature that contains a great deal of knowledge that is of great historical, political, social, economic and religious importance. For example Sheikh Uthman Danfodiyo the leading intellectual and guide of the Sokoto Jihad movement, Sheikh Abdullahi Fodiyo and Sultan Muhammadu Bello have produced literatures that are counted in thousands. The literatures produced by these scholars are mostly in Arabic and Ajami which were handwritten and distributed.

NORTHERN HISTORY RESEARCH SCHEME A.B.U, ZARIA

The Northern History Research Scheme (NHRS) is one of the public centres where Arabic and Arabic Ajami manuscripts can be found in the country situated in Ahmadu Bello University. The scheme was one among many local projects designed to study various parts of country in sufficient detail in order to provide basis for the subsequent synthesis of their findings towards the reconstruction of Nigerian history and development of new knowledge. The project was however, designed to collect and preserve primary source materials particularly Arabic and Ajami

manuscripts. According to Bello (2009), the establishment of the project was informed by a number of considerations relating to the state of knowledge and history of the Northern Nigeria, and West Africa in general and as well as that of the states and societies of the Western Sudan in particular.

The scheme's objectives in 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 public; to recruit and train personnel to manage the collections of the scheme effectively; and to meet the needs of the researchers for the development of knowledge and scholarship in the country.

THE CONCEPT OF ARABIC AND AJAMI MANUSCRIPTS RESOURCES

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. This recorded information could be sermons, preaching, judgment proceeding, treatise, transactions, and record of medicinal herbal, spiritual or magical treatise for

charms which is known as kunai or rather something portable like a manual or diary.

The Arabic manuscripts are in two distinct forms which are serving the same purpose. The pure Arabic manuscripts, and the Ajami manuscripts. The pure Arabic manuscripts are those manuscripts that are wholly written in Arabic and with its characters. Umar (2007:6) notes that Arabic manuscripts were written in the standard Arabic language as a result of matured learning style, this is as a result of strict observation to its linguistics rules and convention clearly demonstrated in the texts. On the other hand the Ajami manuscripts are the manuscripts written in any language apart from Arabic, but using the Arabic inscriptions. According to Hashimi (2009:1), the word Ajami is Arabic which means non — Arabic. It is the utilization of Arabic scripts to write non Arabic language, to express thoughts and ideas in other languages. This is known as the process of linguistic domestication of Arabic Letters.

By and large, consequent to the above, there exist today in Nigeria particularly in the northern part and south, a lot of literature written in Hausa, Kanuri, Fulfulde, Nupe and Etsako and

Yoruba languages, using Arabic inscriptions, that referred to Ajami manuscripts.

Arabic and Ajami manuscripts are vast treasures of invaluable source materials that contained the heritage of northern Nigeria and beyond, which documented materials on the period of Islamic Jihad in the West African sub-region. It also shows the contribution of African scholars to Islamic heritage and to the world civilization. These manuscripts have provided the written testimony to the skills of African scientists in the field of mathematics, medicine, climatology, archaeology and general scholarship in the middle ages.

Mohammed (2009) notes that manuscripts can be simply described as document written, printed and or/unconventionally published information source or sources in bounded or unbounded format regardless of the language of 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.

Furthermore, Umar (1995) is saying that there are two distinctive locations where to find the Arabic and Ajami

manuscripts in the country, the private and public collections. Private collectors are those in the libraries of individuals and families. The public collections; include those Arabic and Ajami manuscripts at the Universities, National Archives and some States Historical Bureaus.

MANAGEMENT OF ARABIC MANUSCRIPTS IN NIGERIA

The management of Arabic manuscript in Nigeria was however, started since 1914, when the country became a single political unit under the colonial rule. This was with the initial objective among others to preserve books of account and treasury. As reported, Alegbeleye (1988), in 1948 a circular was dispatched by the colonial office prior to the establishment of National Archives, on the need for preserving Nigeria's records is significant. According to National Archives of Nigeria (1989), the National Archives Kaduna houses the oldest records dating back to the 12th century; these records deal with the activities of Muslim traders, Muslim missionaries and adventures. Ibrahim (1988) reported that in 1950 the British Administrators in Nigeria from the seat of Northern region government in Kaduna gave order to collect all Arabic manuscripts from all corners of the country. The exercise was successful by collecting thousands of manuscripts in the

custody of the National Archives Kaduna. The list of these manuscripts was compiled by their titles only and other bibliographical details were left out.

Management of Arabic manuscripts from this perspective entails the activities and efforts for proper processing, preservation, conservation, organisation and dissemination of the resources, through organized structures, systems and relevant manpower for its coordination and facilitation. Through which access, retrieval and use of the resources will be much easier. More often than not, management here is for the total satisfaction and harmony, for both the organization and the users, for the organization, towards attainment of its goals, mission and vision and for the users in getting what they want without tears. Drucker (1990), management is the specific organ of the business enterprise and organs can be described and defined only through their functions. Subsequently, management could be seen in two distinctive ways; from the perspective of the people and from the working environment and equipment or tools to do the activities.

GENERAL STATEMENT

The learning processes of any society are the nerve centres of its adaptive capability which allow it to learn much from the past, engage the present and imagine what the future may likely be. In the Northern Nigeria, the Arabic manuscripts constitute important and valuable resources for understanding the people's religious, culture, societal natural sciences and traditions. It is these resources that preserved records about the region, Nigeria and Africa in general.

These resources are found in most of the Nigerian University's libraries, Historical Research and Documentation Centres, States Cultural and historical Bureaus, museums and archives and private own libraries. Unfortunately, these resources despite their presence in these collections centres, have problems of identification, classification and in all likelihood were not catalogued. These make their accessibility, retrieval; dissemination and use become very difficult. There are no suitable protective measures for their safekeeping, preservation and conservation that would ensure their availability accessibility and use for future generations to come. The storage conditions in almost all the repositories in the country are less than the optimal, the

manuscripts are suffering against decompose through chemical reactions and are ruined by fungi and bacteria

The buildings housing these resources in the country, furnishings and equipment are old and some equipment are obsolete and incompatible to the needs of the resources management.

Batiste (2007), generally speaking I found the Arabic manuscripts in the Northern Nigeria covered with thick harmattan dust, mold and moisture damaged by insects very badly frayed or ragged pages, water and coffee stained pages and damaged binding were also observed.

It is as a result of these that Smith (1958) was saying, that there are two problems involved toward failing to exploit the wealth of documentary historical material in the form of works written in Arabic language in the Western Sudan, particularly in the last two hundred years. These problems are: the problem of the study to the documents and, but the most immediate than this is the problem of preservation and their availability to scholars, due to the fact that paper ink are perishable.

It is in view of these that this paper set to investigate the management of Arabic and Ajami manuscript resources from

storage, preservation and conservation perspectives, in Northern History Research Scheme of A.B.U, Zaria.

STORAGE PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION OF ARABIC MANUSCRIPT RESOURCES IN NHRS/ABU ZARIA

It is clear that the effectiveness of any organization rests upon its ability to maximize its efforts in providing good services, towards achieving its aims and objectives. In this regard organization of information resources is ultimate and also central to the effective function of any information services.

There are two methods of information organization; (the traditional and conventional methods). However, the study revealed that Northern History Research Scheme is using the conventional method in organizing their collection. The manuscripts are arranged individually in envelopes bearing the following bibliographical information written by hand: title, author, page number, date, and reference or accession number, in English language. While in some envelopes it indicate the places from where the manuscripts come.

The manuscripts are arranged into individual folders as they were received or purchased. The arrangement is by ascending order with a given number, which served as the call number or accession

number to the document. The catalogue to these documents is done in Arabic language capturing the following bibliographical information: author's name, title of the manuscript, number of pages, and date of composition and where possible the place of composition is indicated.

Records management involves different disciplines which may draw on variety forms of expertise. Storage is a major responsibility in any information centre to ensure that adequate storage facilities are provided for the information resources. These facilities are having much influence to preservation, conservation, access and other functions of the centre. This may include classifying, storing, securing, preservation and destruction of records where necessary.

After processing of the manuscripts are then later stored inside a separate room with appropriate provision of conducive atmosphere for the proper preservation of the resources.

Conservation is the care given to the manuscript resources in order to protect them against three major effects of alteration.

1. The environment, this constitute the environmental temperature, humidity atmospheric condition, pollution and lightening.

2. The internal factors, such as biological, physical, chemical or mechanical action within the manuscript itself.
3. The human factor, such as handling and transportation in the process of use by the staff and the users.

These three factors are to some extent being managed by the scheme through the provision of appropriate conducive atmosphere for the resources. A close supervision to users is made by the staff in the process of using the resources. More so, special services are offered to users by guiding them on how to handle the resources and avoid their mutilation.

USERS OF THE MANUSCRIPT RESOURCES IN THE NORTHERN HISTORY RESEARCH SCHEME A.B.U ZARIA ARE GETTING ACCESS TO THE RESOURCES THROUGH CONVENTIONAL METHOD, WHICH IS THROUGH THE CATALOGUE. MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, SPECIAL SERVICES ARE RENDERED BY THE LIBRARIANS TO THE USERS THROUGH THE PROVISION OF REFERENCE INTERVIEW.

The major problem with management of these resources with scheme is that problem which is general with all other repository Centres in the country, which is poor funding, because all

problems associating with the inhibition of smooth management of these resources fold within a good, poor or no funding.

SPROBLEMS OF ARABIC MANUSCRIPT RESOURCES STORAGE PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION IN NIGERIA

As these manuscript resources are still scattered all over the country with many still in the hand of individuals and few in libraries, archives, museums, and research centers. There are still a lot of problems to be addressed towards their proper management to make them stable enough to allow safe handling and ensure their utmost usability. As various authorities and professionals posited the problems associated with manuscripts management from the perspectives of storage, preservation and conservation to mention few are:

- Poor understanding of what the contents of Arabic manuscripts are.
- Control of Relative Humidity
- Atmospheric pollution.
- Structural factors
- Poor planning
- Poor funding
- Lack trained personnel

- Biological factors
- Chemical factors
- Human failing
- Nature and type of users.

THE WAY FORWARD

The Problems associated with the storage, preservation and conservation of Arabic Manuscripts resources in Nigeria are so great that may subsequently that led to the permanent destruction of the records. With these serious majors should be taken to ensure prevention and as well restoration of the resources to their former original or normal conditions. The major steps to take and consider in the management of Arabic manuscript resources in Nigeria should include:

- General awareness campaign about the existence of the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts and what their content is, among the general public and institutions of learning.
- Determination of what type of structures and infrastructure to put in place in planning the buildings where to keep the resources.
- Setting policies and standards in Arabic and Ajami manuscript resources management.

- Determination of the basic training/knowledge and skills required for the personnel to manage the Arabic and Ajami manuscript resources.
- Provision of adequate and dynamic funding of the Arabic and Ajami manuscript resources repository centers.
- Ethics of accountability and transparency
- Introduction of course of study on Arabic and Ajami manuscript resources by schools of library and Information Science in the Nigerian Universities(most especially in the northern Universities).
- There is the need by the Arabic and Ajami repository centres to exploit the benefits of information communication technology alternative in their services.
- The repository centers in the country should engage in cooperation and collaboration with other similar bodies both locally and international in order to develop and enhance their services.

CONCLUSION

This paper has highlighted the importance of Arabic manuscripts in preserving the literary tradition and heritage, events and ideas of the people of Nigeria, West Africa and Africa in general. The

knowledge contained in the manuscripts will continue to be relevant for many generations to come. The Arabic manuscripts in Nigeria are still inaccessible as a result of the majority of these manuscripts are scattered in the hands of individuals and few available copies with some libraries, archives and documentation centres are not easy to be accessed as a result of their poor condition as related to storage, preservation and conservation. By and large what is required at present is not more than a collective effort among the various stakeholders to collaborate and cooperate to ensure proper management strategies that would facilitate easy access to the resources.

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