
Ajami Writing in the Propagation of Islam in Nupeland

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Abstract

This paper seeks to provide a conceptual overview of the ‘‘Ajami writing in propagation of Islam in Nupeland’’ An historical background is provided regarding the position of Arabic writing and its uses, in Nupeland. However the work makes a case study of existence of classical Ajami writing and how it was used in propagation of Islam in Nupeland and its impact on people and society. The research adopted historical research methods were literatures were used and content analysed.

Introduction

Arabic is a common language that Islam with its literary potentiality had occasioned the outpouring of literature in many non-Arabic-Ajami Languages of the world/adapting the Arabic manuscript for their writing system.¹ Most of the Muslims in Nigeria, especially those of the Northern part, were already literate in Arabic by the time the British colonialists penetrated into Nigeria.¹ This is because Islam has since existed in Nigeria in the 7th century-about twelve (12) centuries in KanemBorno Empire, before the coming of the British colonialists and the western system of education in 19th centuries. Much importance was attached to Islamic education as well as Arabic language which was regarded as the lingua franca and was used as means of communication among the learners and scholars.²

However, the Muslims were also stimulated at the initial stage to write and correspond in their local languages such as Hausa, Fulfulde, Kanuri, Yoruba and Nupe among others with the Arabic alphabets known as ‘Ajami ‘or a’jamiyya’. They composed poems and wrote artistic prose in this form. Though the Europeans came with the Roman or Latin script, which gradually eroded the use of Ajami writing, however, it was used in some Nigerian currency demonical notes (paper notes) which have their values written in Hausa using Ajami.³ This also of recent has been replaced due to criticism from some gooks.

This not understanding, of recent there is the resurgence of the Arabic literature Arabic, especially in tertiary institutions of learning, were there is the use of Ajami system at least

in writing local names and places which might not be necessarily translated into Arabic. This means they would remain in their original local languages but with Ajami Arabic letters writing.⁴ More so, Ajami writing was used to document historical developments of society, and propagation of Islam and its culture in Nupe land.

The Islamic manuscript in Nupe Land Ajami as an area of research comes up as a result of discovery of some Nupe (Ajami) manuscripts kept in the Northern History Researches Scheme (N.H.R.S) of the History Department, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria by Aboki who undertook a preliminary study to ascertain the possibility of research on the terms of their size, nature source, scope, and further discoveries. He later did a detail research on them leading to the award of master degree-⁵

As the English writing is use to justify the past event of the people, its uses was mostly limited to places of English literacy either in Europe or the invaded areas. This no doubt happened in Africa and Nigeria in particular. However, in writing history of some part of Africa, it is also essential to study Arabic writing as they are part of pre – historic items found in Africa.⁶ This was due to the traditional center of Islamic learning in African, such as the Morocco and Egypt who have contact with the people of Sudan and Sahel in Africa. In Hausa land important centers of Islamic learning and scholarship also emerged. These learning centers not only serve to facilitate scholarly exchanges between travelling scholars but also to enhance the activities of indigenous scholars, who composed manuscripts work written in

Arabic and in the traditional Arabic scripts known as Ajami in their languages.⁷

Arabic, the language of the Qur'an and indeed the language of Islam has been spoken and written by millions of Muslims (Arabs and non-Arabs) all over the world for the past fourteen centuries, Arabic had lived wherever Islam lived. Islam is indeed second to none when it comes to the promotion of literacy. Literacy is imperative to being a Muslim at least to read the Qur'an. Thus literary culture had developed wherever Islam spread. Bearable⁸ noted that with the advent of Islam, Hausa land began to witness a wave of literary activity. Hackett observed that the first, and until the beginning of the twentieth century, the only literacy in Hausa land was through Arabic.⁹ This started as early as the fifteenth century and by the seventeenth century, according to Hunwick,¹⁰ the vernacular language of the Hausa land were being written in the Arabic script. Of the impact of the Sokoto Jihad, in the assessment of Clarke is that literacy in Arabic spread much more widely throughout the society and led to the emergence, of literacy in the vernacular language.¹¹

Ajami Writing in Nupeland

Arabic, the language of the Arabs who are the inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula now living in the Middle East and North Africa, became the language of Islam with the Quran being revealed in it. It has thus been spoken and written by millions of Muslims (Arabs and non-Arabs) all over the world.¹² The backbone of the civilization that evolved was Islam; the totality of the relationship of man and his Creator on the one hand, and on the other hand, between man and his environment (fellow man inclusive). Islamic studies in this context therefore, is not limited to Qur'an (Tafsir), Hadith, Tauhid, Fiqh, (pillars of Islam and legal matters), Sirah, among others; but all sciences – natural, physical, social etc. The literature that developed over the ages around the aforementioned phenomenon especially in Nupeland have remained in Manuscripts. They are still hand written, not typed, printed or published. Some are in oral form. We therefore, refer to them as our literacy heritage.¹³

However, Arabic and Islamic studies manuscripts are much available in Nupeland. The knowledge that was hitherto associated with them has been adequately filled. A great

concern is the state of manuscripts. Thus, the quality of beliefs and customs being passed down from earlier generations of Nupe Muslims can be traced from the Arabic and Islamic literary traditions. This necessitates studying the manuscripts.¹⁴

The important aspect of the heritage is the NupeAjami manuscripts. This means Nupelanguage written in Arabic letters. Historically, the writing of Nupe language with Arabic symbols started before its transcription with Latin letters because Nupe language had contacts with Islam and Arabic language before it had any with missionaries or English language. This call for a research, not only for the NupeAjami, but all Islamic and Arabic manuscripts in Nupeland after which there should be a descriptive catalogue and authentication of the manuscripts. They would need to be edited based on standardization, transliteration, translation and analysis for possible adoption.¹⁵

From my experience, the Nupe scholarly pursuits include the notes they wrote in Ajami while trying to understand the conventional Islamic textbooks they were reading. For instance Daliyyah of IbnNasir. Is an example of Nupe written language work gain. The work explainthe power of their mind with desire to acquire knowledge that led them to writing such notes. More so, they also included the oral scholarly traditions.¹⁶

In addition to the above, the manuscripts could contain medicinal treasures. Expositions about rich ethno medicinal cultural values of specific plants and leaves that are found in Nupeland. In fact, the imperatives for the collection, preservation, and study of the Arabic and NupeAjami manuscripts of Nupeland are in their intellectual and scientific values.¹⁷ The late EtsuNupe, AlhajiUmaruSandaNdayako (1975 – 2003) rightly opined, in his foreword to the Book: Medicinal and economic plants of Nupeland, that the evolution of indigenous technologies can be traced back to the period before the advent of the “white man”. We have such practices likes using verses of the Qur'an to be recited and spit on the body, or written and washed and drank. Similarly, we read such statements as in the medication. For instance, the use of stem bark of Neem tree through steam bath and taken orally for Anti-malaria. All these can be found written in Arabic or Ajami.¹⁸

Ajami Writing and Propagation of Islam in Nupeland

By talking about literary traditions, scholarly and intellectual materials in Nupeland are expressed in Ajami hence literacy and that literacy culture developed wherever Islam spread. Thus, until the beginning of the twentieth century, the only literacy (means of written communication) in Nupeland was through Arabic and Ajami.¹⁹ Dupigy Acknowledged this fact when he states that “Features of Nupe culture...religious ideas are characteristic for the whole culture of the western Sudan” He alluded that genealogies of the Nupe Kings were preserved in the Books of the first Muslim historians of Nupe. It is not surprising, therefore, that when Christianity came to Nupeland, a century after Islam reached Nupeland, Arabic had impacted upon the spoken language of Nupe Christians as it is evident, in the Nupe translation of the Bible which contain as many as 58 borrowed words that are of Arabic origin mostly used in Arabic – Islamic context.²⁰

The knowledge of Ajami was facilitated by the process of copying, reading and studying the conventional Islamic studies textbooks of the time. They include for instance, on Fiqh: Qawaa'id, Akhdari, Ashmaawiyy, Qurtabi, Ibn Rush, Ibn Ashir, Izziyah, Risalah, Askar, Mukhtasar and Mudawwanah. On hadith, there are Arbaun Nawaawiyy, Mukhtaarul Ahadith, Buluugul-Maraam, Riyadus Saalihin, and Muwatta of Imam Maalik. On Arabic grammar and lexicology, there are books like Ajurumiyyah, Matnil Qatri, Mulha, Ibn Duraid, Lamiyya, and Alfiyya. There were also poetic works like Al-Burdah, Hamziyyah, and Al-Suyuti (d. 1505). All these books, the Nupe scholars painstakingly copied and studied. In the process, they sometimes recorded the name of the copyist and the dates or period or reign of the Etsu. Other valuable information were recorded on these books that studying them could be very important and treasures for posterity.²¹ This group of source materials has been the most neglected of all the written sources. Its presence in Nigeria pre-dates the European literacy or historical work. In Nupe land, such work might have come with the advent of saad of blairi and Quranic education that can be traced to about 16th and 17th centuries. But great deal of this source material came with the spread of religious reformation

that began in the last quarter of 17th and 18th century and got momentum with Sokoto jihad that swept across Hausa land and got to Nupeland and beyond.²²

Arabic manuscripts and Ajami works (Hausa, Nupe and Kanuri) written in Arabic letter and the likes could be inform of poems, correspondence, historical accounts of political developments and dynastic history, Islam and its teaching. The historical accounts of this nature were politically and religiously influenced.²³

It is important to point out that, whatever knowledge or learning experience an individual meant to establish has for long been posited. But the most interesting thing about it perhaps, could be the wisdom and different pattern such a person implores to achieve adequate grasp of his intent by its immediate recipients. This was the case of Shaykh Muhammad Saba in his “Adult Chap”.²⁴

The manuscript commences with the name of Allah the Beneficent, the Merciful. After this, the Shaykh went straight to the message he had for the Muslim brethren as here tinder discussed.

يَسْمَعُ نَبِيُّهُ سَوَافٍ
يَسْمَعُ نَبِيُّهُ تَمَنَّى سَوَافٍ رَنْدُو شَيْبَانِي أَبْعُو شَيْبَانِي كَوَقَبِي قَبِي
وَعَبِي أَدِي شَيْبَانِي تَبِي

Meaning: We want to talk about Allah's (injunctions), but some people became angry! You should not be angry, let us rather practice the religion (as appropriate)

The author x-rays our society even then that the community was not as degenerated as it is today. There are some categories of people who are very resentful to the words of Allah, even though they profess faith in Islam. Preaching the words of Allah infuriated them. Allah instructed the believers to listen to the recitation of the Qur'an for which they will certainly receive mercy. How much shall we except when we listen and obey the message of Allah, manifesting in preaching and discussions about Allah's commandments.

Conclusion

Ajami writing have played a vital role in the propagation of Islam in Nupeland Ajami writing was used in propagation of

Islam. However the papers also examine historical development of Ajami writing in Nupeland and its use in propagation of Islam. The paper thus was able to establish that Ajami writing is as old as Islam in Nupeland. The writing system became a means of documentation of historical development of the period. Apart from its use as scholarly activities, it was used in correspondence between societies and states.

Endnote

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