PROCUREMENT, PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION OF ARABIC /AJAMI MANUSCRIPTS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: SOME CLASSIFICATIONS ON SUFISM IN THE AREWA HOUSE COLLECTIONS.pdf

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The issue of preservation and conservation of Arabic/Ajami manuscripts for the purpose of historical reconstruction has recently re-emerged at the centre stage of Nigeria’s historiography. This seems so especially in the case of Northern Nigeria believed to have thousands of such collections yet to be recovered and rescued from the endangered situation they are in from many private hands. In spite of this however, the Arewa House Centre for Historical Research and Documentation under the Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria has made some important strides in the recovery of some private collections that contain writings by scholars from emirates of the former Sokoto Caliphate on wide ranging issues and subjects. The focus of this paper is an attempt to look at the critical issue of categorization of some of the preserved manuscripts based on their diverse subject matters. The study is particularly interested in the subject of matter of Sufism and Ilm Al Kalam for the contribution this can make as source material for understanding the historical basis of recent developments and innovations in Sufism and the Sufi order in Nigeria. The study intends to access manuscripts recovered and are now preserved in the Arewa House collections along with some manuscripts locally printed and found in the market.
INTRODUCTION

The Procurement of Arabic Manuscripts for use as one of the source materials for the reconstruction of the history of various polities in Nigeria first developed in the University College of Ibadan in the 1950s. This was initiated by and placed under Prof. K. O. Dike, with the support of the Government of Northern Nigeria and assistance of his professional colleagues particularly Professor (HFC) Abdullahi Smith and Dr. S. O. Biobaku (Hamman&Musa 2009)

This persistence by Prof. K. O. Dike on the initiative made the colonial government at that time to establish a Public records Department in 1953 now called National Archives of Nigeria. Similarly, in 1953 W.E.N. Kensdale collected Arabic Manuscripts from various parts of Northern Nigeria and deposited them in the University of Ibadan library, where the head quarters of the National Archives were first located. Since then, a great stride had been made in order to assemble the voluminous but dispersed Arabic/ Ajami MS that had been in the possession of private individuals or families in Northern Nigeria in particular and also in Yoruba Land Nupeland and Northern Edo. These works spanned from the years 1400 AD for the Arabic and 1700 AD for the Ajami MS (Smith, 1962)

AREWA HOUSE

The Arewa House Centre for Historical Documentation and Research, Ahmadu Bello University, was established in 1970, with among other purposes, the function of collecting manuscripts especially in Northern Nigeria. Until April 2009, the Centre had only about 207 Photocopied Manuscripts other than Correspondences and 527 Letters, which are not catalogued. As a matter of fact, Procurement of Arabic Manuscripts by the Center had also stopped since the early 1980s. However, as a result of intensive fieldwork undertaken from 2009 to date in the Northern parts of Nigeria especially, in States like Adamawa, Plateau,
Jigawa, Katsina and Bauchi States, the Center collected more than 2160 Original Manuscripts. Also, the Centre collected about 111 copies of what was popularly known as market copies Manuscripts (note 1). As noted earlier, until April 2009, Arewa House itself had only 3 handwritten Original mss and 34 of the so called “Market Copies” out of 207 Manuscripts other than Correspondences. It is interesting to note that, the situation has now tremendously improved with new acquisitions made particularly from Adamawa (over 985 catalogue originals), Katsina (30 catalogued originals) Plateau (207 originals catalogued) and many more “Market Copies”. At this time the Arewa House has gone far in its negotiation with the management of the National Museum and Monuments for the possibility of rescuing Jos Museum Arabic Manuscripts Collection to Arewa House as permanent loan to the Centre. Also a lot of activities are currently going on in the same direction.

FIELD WORKS ON THE AREWA HOUSE ARABIC/AJAMI MANUSCRIPTS PROJECT

With these improvements, attention was thus focused on fieldwork. This came with the organization of conferences and workshops. The first International Conference on Preserving Nigeria’s Scholarly and Literary Traditions and Arabic Manuscripts was held in March 2007. Its focused was on the Sensitization of Stakeholders, both individuals and institutions on the urgency to address the issue of recovering and preserving Nigeria’s Arabic/Ajami Manuscripts Heritage, which were fast deteriorating because of poor storage and long-standing neglect. These coupled with the Implementation of one of the resolutions of the Conferences which required Arewa House to establish an Umbrella body to be known as Nigeria Arabic Manuscripts Projects (NAMP) with a functional board, started a process of field operation that have yielded positive result in terms of Procurement, Preservation and Conservation of Arabic Manuscripts in some Northern States of Nigeria.
In 2008 there was a workshop on Conservation in Box at the National Archives, Kaduna. The exercise was conducted to include other stakeholders outside the Arewa House, with assistance of the US Embassy, Abuja Nigeria.

In 2009, another International Conference on Nigeria’s Arabic Manuscripts took place at the Arewa House, this time with focus to consolidate on what was achieved since 2007.

In the year 2010 another conference on Arabic Manuscripts was called, and Scholars from Nigeria and beyond met to review and strategize on the way forward, having captured the mind of many stakeholders on the Manuscripts project.

It is indeed interesting to know that since, 2010, there have been series of workshops and training on conservation and preservation conducted especially with Ms. Biddle (who started with the Arewa House in 2008, and is still around). The journey is not ended yet, but there are fresh new challenges, emerging on the collections made so far; those of conservation and cataloguing. Some efforts have been made on conservation which Arewa House, post-2010 workshops seem to be addressing. However, the focus of this presentation is on cataloguing, with the choice of Sufi Manuscripts in Northern Nigeria. But before then, we need to intimate you on the state of preservation and conservation of the manuscript so far collected. It is from the treated copies that we are building the cataloguing issue in this paper.

Results of field works
PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION

The collections of Arewa House Manuscripts have undergone preliminary preservation stabilization with each folio being brush cleaned on both side, while individual manuscripts were housed in acid –free folders and boxed. These boxes have been made from acid –free cardboard found in local markets.

CONSERVATION

Arabic Manuscripts in Northern Nigeria are generally loose and unbound, which would likely be mixed up, with loss of some pages and usually in poor condition due to rough storage, heavy use harsh climate and voracious insets. In Northern Nigeria, Arabic/Ajami Manuscripts Collections are widely dispersed in which there is a need for well-trained preservation and conservation officer for each collection. In this regard, the Arewa House established a paper conservation laboratory, and invited Ms Michelle Biddle from Wesleyan University, Middletown Connecticut US as its Consultant since 2008. We are still working under this term of agreement with Ms Biddle.

CATALOGUING

The issue of Cataloguing/ Classification came on the Collection and Conservation of the Arewa House, Arabic Manuscripts that was, soon after collection of the Manuscripts. From there we embarked on Indexes and Conservation of these Collections which are as follows:

(1) Modibbo Ahmadu Fufore, (2) Sheikh Ahmad Arabic Jos, (3) Mall Musa Gana Daji Jos, (4) M. Ahmadu Gwaraje, (5) Iliyasu Katsina (6) and Market Copied

These Arewa House Manuscripts Collections were approximately 2,266; by 2013 I was given grant by the Islamic Manuscripts Association UK (TIMA) to examine the collection and to
catalogue them for preservation and easy access. At the stage, the Manuscripts were in bad condition, but we were able to sort, collate, dust, and arrange them based on various subjects.

Then we initiated the new Code for each Collection such as AH/MAF: which indicates Arewa House Manuscripts of Modibbo Ahmadu Future Collection, AH/AA/ indicates the Sheikh Ahmad Arabi Jos Collection, while AH/MDG/ Arewa House Arabic Manuscripts stands for Musa Gana Daji, AH/IKT for Iliyasu Katsina, and AH/GJ/ for Ahmadu Gwaraje Collection. It all followed the numbers in the manner we have all our collected Manuscripts Catalogued in a simple as acrimony of Arewa House, and the Collection name; which makes it easy for the Researchers. In addition we have collected more Manuscripts locally printed and Tagged as “market copies” with most of the subjects on Sufism.

A Brief statement on the contents of Arewa House Arabic Manuscripts Collections:

The Arewa House Arabic Manuscripts cover a number of languages and subjects, and they are as follows: -

- Varieties of Languages in the Arewa House Arabic/Ajami Manuscripts Collections

The Languages, Such as Arabic (2169) Hausa (44), Fulfulde 52, and Nupe(1) as follow:
b- Varieties of contents

1- Arabic literature, Arabic Grammar, Rhetoric, Prosody, Prose and poetry: these categories contain about 165 such as pre Islamic literature Manuscripts

2- Islamic Monotheism (Theology) or Tawheed/ Ilm al Kalam, Sufism under whose heading there are 200 Manuscripts

3- Holy Qur’an includes, commentaries of the Holy Qura’an: what we have here are copies of the hand written Qur’an with different writings styles and decoration such, as Zayyana decorated in the first, ½, ¼, and ¾ of the Holy Qur’an 65 Manuscripts

4- Islamic Jurisprudence (Fiqh) and all aspect of judicial cases: under this heading we have 236 Manuscripts

5- Some aspect of history: under this heading we have 105 Manuscripts

6- Mysticism/ astrology: under this heading we have 33 Manuscripts

7- Ethics/ Islamic Commandments: under this heading we have 83 Manuscripts

8- Hadith (saying of the Holy Prophet: under this heading we have 22 Manuscripts

9- Correspondences/ Mahadism: under this heading we have 38 Manuscripts

10- Mathematics: under this heading we have 12 Manuscripts
11- Logic/Astronomy: under this heading we have 30 Manuscripts

12- Medicine/Pharmacology: under this heading we have 9 Manuscripts

13- Azkar/Supplications/ Incantations: under this heading we have 982 Manuscripts

14- Cosmology /Ijaza/Sociology/Politics and Governance: under these heading we have 47 Manuscripts

Table 1 describes the topics of Arewa House Arabic/Ajami Manuscripts

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Poem on Tawhid: جواهر من الكلام by Muḥammaḍ al Saliḥ b Abd al raḥman b Abdallāḥ al awjili (note 2)
SUFI MANUSCRIPTS

The Sufi was one of the major groups responsible for the spread of Islam in the Bilad as Sudan; Particular to this was QADIRIYYA and TIJANIYYA sects. Their political and social activities have always been recognized in academic circles written as their literary achievements, an area where they were considered to have made concrete and valuable contributions. In addition, there are a number of SUFI Scholars known to be authors of highly reputable works (A.R.M. Balogun2012). Putting this into consideration, we tend to believe that the QURAN can be regarded, as the earlier work of reference on whatever SUFI literature build upon. SUFI Scholars also wrote on different aspects of Sufi themes, which are yet to be published or printed.

SOME THEMES OF SUFI MANUSCRIPTS

The general classifications of the Sufi manuscripts are to be understood from the teachings and doctrines of Sufism itself. The major themes of the Sufi literature include the following:

- Divine Love (الحب الاهى) 74 =5%
- Prophetic Eulogies (المدائح النبوية) 39=3%
- The Doctrine of Muhammadan Reality (الحقيقة المحمدية) 86=6%
- Love of Family Members of the Prophets (الحب أهل البيت) 80= 5%
- Love of Sufi Leaders and Scholars generally (الحب أهل البيت) 45=3%
- The Doctrine of Unity of Being (وحدة الوجود) 55=4%
- The Doctrine of the Unity of experience (وحدة الشهاد) 30=2%
- Sufi ethics (وحدة الشهاد) 99= 7%
- Litanies and Supplication Prayers (الأذكار والدعاء)  657=48%

- Fervent Plea or Request for help and Assistance (التوسل والإستغاث)  203=15%

Total 1358=100%

(D.A. A. Tijani) in Balogun ARMS 2012 Aspect of Sufi Themes.pp 89-90

كتاب الأم البراهين As Sanusi's Creed Umm Al Barahin By Shaykh Muhammad b Yusuf al Husni al Sanusi al Tilmisan (note 3)
Poem in praise of Shaykh al Mahir on Tijjaniyya (note 4)
CONCLUSION

The themes are many and inexhaustible. However, with the challenges of change facing most of the manuscripts, the task has not come that easy. So far, in collaboration with stakeholders within and outside the Country, the Arewa House has achieved so much in drawing attention to the need to recover this treasure and save the history. The effort needs to be fully sustained with more stakeholders, governmental and non-governmental, so that at least Northern Nigeria would open up new chapter for further research into its past, which is full of events that also have impact on the people of the area, extending as far as across the Mediterranean Sea. With this effort so far, the Arewa House, in Kaduna Nigeria has provided new working fields for young and potential researchers from the International Community who are conducting research into the history of Nigeria, especially, Northern Nigeria.
NOTES:

1. Market copies manuscripts are the manuscript written in Arabic script print locally and sold in the market.

2. جواهر من الكلام written by Muḥammad al ṣāliḥ b ṣamd, al ṣāliḥ b ṣanafa al ajjīlī And copied by Amir, he copied it for his brother whose named Āṭṭayīb on Islamic Monotheism. This poem of Aujil is renowned in Nigeria though there was no information about its author, but it shows that his genealogy were in Aujila in Eastern Libya ALA II

3. كتاب الأم البراهين by Shaykh Muḥammad b Yusuf al Husni al Sanusi al Tilmisan, born inTlemssan,Algeria in 1435/1436. Trained in the traditional Islamic sciences, he acquired a reputation as a precocious scholar and eminent Sūfī. In particular, he was famed for his works on ‘aqīdah, or the Islamic tenets of belief, which were written at various grades of elucidation. The Umm al-Barāhīn was aimed at the primary level and thus came to be called the al-Sughrā. The al-Wustā and al-Kubrā, as their appellations indicate, were aimed at the intermediate and advanced levels respectively. An ascetic who gained a great reputation for mystical knowledge and miracles, in the year 1490. The book became an official syllabus for the studies of Islam in Nigeria. see H.Bencheneb,1997, “al-Sanūsī”,s.v.Encyclopedia of Islām,Leiden,Brill.

4. قصيدة الدالية في مدح الشيخ الماهرومينها ذكيما ما أشكل من طريقة التجانية An Eulogies praises of one of the leader of the Tariqah al tijjaniya (Qasidat fie Madh ʿSheikh Al Mahir) (1151AH)

REFERENCES:


