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***“More Valuable Than Any Other Commodity:
Arabic Manuscript Libraries and Their Role in Islamic Revival
of the Bilad’s-Sudan”***

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَي سَيِّدِنَا مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِهِ وَصَحْبِهِ وَسَلَّمَ تَسْلِيمًا

“More Valuable Than Any Other Commodity:

Arabic Manuscript Libraries and Their Role in Islamic Revival of the *Bilad's-Sudan*”

Al-Hassan ibn Muhammad al-Wazaan az-Ziyaati (Leo Africanus) described the value that 15th century African Muslims placed upon books and literacy when he said:

"ويباع هنا الكثير من الكتب المخطوطة التي تأتي من بلاد البربر، ويجنى من هذا البيع ربح يفوق كل بقية السلع"

“Here many manuscript books are sold which come from the lands of the Berber. This trade fetches profits that outrival those of all other commodities.”¹ The high value that African Muslims have given to Arabic and *ajami* books is attributed to their high regard for learning and erudition. This is especially true with regard to religious and spiritual matters. It was for this reason that traders were attracted to these lands with the most rare Arabic books that reflected diverse opinions and wide authorship from all over the Muslim world. Because of this enthusiasm for erudition, there emerged in the *bilad's-sudan* the highly honored vocation of paper manufacturing following in the footsteps of the literary communities of North Africa². The flourishing of this intellectual life in the *bilad's-sudan* eventually produced indigenous Africa scholars who plunged whole-heartedly into the domain of authorship and literary composition³. They compiled invaluable works in all the diverse sciences of Islam. In spite of this indigenous outpouring, the thirst for rare Arabic manuscripts continued to flourish from then, through the volatile 18th century up until the present. Indeed, as Murray Last suggested the very direction of scholarship and reform was determined by the book trade and the contents of African libraries.⁴

This paper will attempt to shed some light upon the relationship between the transmission of Arabic manuscripts and Islamic reform in the *bilad's-sudan* and suggest some of the effects that this has had (or lack thereof) upon the contemporary trends in post-colonial Islamic Africa. The present situations in Northern Nigeria and Sennar Sudan will be used as examples to demonstrate the persistence and vitality of this tradition throughout the many centuries of Islamic reform in the *bilad's-sudan* that crossed pollinated over vast areas of the region.⁵ Subsumed in

¹ See al-Hassan ibn Muhammad al-Wazaan az-Ziyaati (Leo Africanus), *Kitaab Wasf Ifriqiyya*, Riyadh, 1977, p. 541.

² See Dr. Abd'l-Qadir Zibaadia, *Shimaal Ifriqiyya Fi 'l-'Usuur 'l-Wusta*, Maktaba al-Anjlu 'l-Misria, 1981, p. 222.

³ See J.O. Hunwick & R.S. O'Fahey, “*Islam in Africa: The Intellectual Tradition – A Proposal*”, unpublished paper presented July 21, 1999, Program of African Studies, Northwestern University, p. 1.

⁴ Murray Last, “The West African Book Trade Before 1900: A Plea for Research”, in *Africa: the Changing Role of the Ulama*, March 28-31, 1984, by the Program of African Studies, Northwestern University, (Illinois, 1984), p.1.

⁵ Examples of the many Arabic and *ajami* manuscripts will be cited which I was able to digitize during two trips to these regions: first during the month of *Ramadhan* of 1999 in the town of Maiurno where I was able to catalogue most of the Arabic and *ajami* works in the houses of the present Sultan of Maiurno – al-Hajj Abu Bakr ibn Muhammad Tahir and *Shaykh* Bello ibn Abd'r-Raaziq ibn Uthman ibn Abd'l-Qadir ibn al-Mustafa respectively;

this brief study will be a reassessment of the earlier works on the subject of calligraphic styles and the palaeography of manuscripts of the *bilad's-sudan*. This paper will indeed verify many of those assessments and make further suggestions for additional inquiry⁶.

Historically Arabic manuscripts have been among the most important commodities imported into the regions of *bilad's-sudan* beginning from the 12th century until the beginning of the 19th century. The majority of these rare books came from the *Maghrib*, Egypt and was sold at higher cost than any other merchandise. In Kanem- Bornu, rare books were imported from as far as the Hijaz and Syria at an extremely high cost. The most profitable and expensive books no doubt were those that came in to the *bilad's-sudan* from the Maliki centers of North Africa⁷. This was attributed to the fact that these lands were and remain adherents of the school of the thought (*madh'hab*) of *Imam* Malik. Consequently, the scholars and students of the *bilad's-sudan* attached great importance to the purchasing, acquisition, transcription, and possession of books.

Songhay-Timbuktu

As cited earlier al-Hassan al-Wazaan observed that in Songhay the people were highly devoted to purchasing rare books in the market places especially those from the *Maghrib* and Egypt. This was despite their high cost given the fact that Arabic manuscripts were the single most expensive commodities in Songhay during the 15th century followed only by gold.⁸ The Dyula/Wangarawa scholar merchants were mainly responsible for the importation of paper and books at that time.⁹ They created a vast trading network that went hand in hand with Islamic reform and social transformation.

The entire social strata of the society placed great value on collecting a substantial collection of rare books. The rulers, scholars, traders, and common people alike competed in this effort. This was the result of the magnificent intellectual movement and religious revival that pervaded the *bilad's-sudan* at this time. The wealthy endeavored to establish private libraries and the scholars competed in this effort as well. The *asaaki* of Songhay generously granted every effort in that direction. As-Sa'id mentions that *Askiya* al-Hajj Muhammad established a religious bequest of sixty handwritten *Qurans* and other works for the library of the Sankore' *masjid*. This library was in use up until 1611.¹⁰ As-Sa'id goes on to say that this library was thereafter renovated and maintained by al-Hajj ibn Saalim ibn 'Ubayd 'l-Misraati.¹¹ The calligraphic styles of most of these texts were what I would call *timbukti-andalusi* because it took its origin from the Andalus script that was prevalent in the western *bilad's-sudan* from 1056 of the *al-Murabitun* (Almoravid) confederation.¹² This distinctive delicate cursive script later devolved into a Sudanese type unique to the courts and learned circles of Timbuktu.¹³

second during a recent trip of *Ramadhan* 2001 in the town of Sokoto Nigeria. There I was able to digitize more than 500 works both from the Centre for Islamic Studies Usmanu Danfodiyo University and the Waziri Junayd History and Culture Bureau.

⁶ The first seminal study done on this subject was that of A.D.H. Bivar in his "The Arabic Calligraphy of West Africa", *African Language Review* as well as his "Arabic Documents of Northern Nigeria", *BSOAS*, XXII, 2 (1959), 325-49. Later he joined with Mervyn Hiskett in their "The Arabic Literature of Nigeria to 1804: A provisional account," *BSOAS*, XXV, 1 (1962), 104-48.

⁷ Abd'l-Baaqi Muhammad Ahmad Kabeeru, *ad-Duwwal 'l-Islamiyya Fi Gharb Ifriqiyya Fi'l-Qaran 'l-Aashir 'l-Hijriyya*, Ph. D thesis (Cairo 1988), p. 340.

⁸ Al-Hassan al-Wazaan, *Op. cit.*, p. 541.

⁹ Murray Last, *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁰ Abd'r-Rahman as-Sa'id, *Tarikh' s-Sudan*, trans. O. Houdas, (Paris, 1913), p. 58.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² A.D.H. Bivar, "The Arabic Calligraphy of West Africa", *African Language Review*, p. 6.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 13. Bivar designates this style of calligraphy as 'devolved Andalus'.

During the rule of *Askiyya* Dawuud (1549-1583) he made major advancements in the formation of public libraries throughout Songhay. Mahmud Ka`ti describes the value which this *Askiya* placed upon books and libraries when he said:

" كان اسكي داوود سلطاناً مهيباً فصيحاً خليفاً للرياسة كريماً جواداً مبسوطاً فرحاً ذا مزاج وسع الله عليه في دنياه وهو اول من اتخذ خزائن المال حتى خزائن الكتب وله نسخ ينسخون له كتباً وربما يهادي به العلماء."¹⁴

"*Askiyya* Dawuud was a venerable ruler, eloquent in speech and naturally disposed to leadership. He was generous and openhanded as well as cheerful jovial and good humored. Allah enriched him in his worldly affairs. He was the first to establish the public treasury and even the first to found public libraries. He hired scribes who transcribed many books for him sometimes giving these as gifts to the scholars." The above demonstrates the vast importance that the rulers of Songhay gave to Arabic manuscript transcription and holdings during the height of Islamic reform during the 15th century. As demonstrated above *Askiyya* Dawuud possessed a magnificent library in which scribes were busy in the process of transcription, editing, and restoration of the finest rare Arabic works regarding diverse sciences. It was said that he never heard of a famous book except that he made efforts to acquire it. He was even known to have paid up to eighty *mithqals* of gold for an imported Arabic dictionary (approximately 374 grams in weight).¹⁵ This illustrious African Muslim ruler was known to have memorized the *Qur'an* by heart and had mastered a plethora of religious as well as linguistic sciences. He was known for his frequenting the circles of the scholars and keeping their company. It is this practice and precedence that he created, which led to the flourishing of the intellectual and scientific life of Songhay during his period.

The scholars of Songhay during the 15th century were also known for their possession of huge private libraries. The Aqit family emerged as the most notable learned family in this regard. Ahmad Baba mentioned that his father "had collected an extensive library of books which filled many coffers containing every precious and priceless work with which he was very generous in loaning out".¹⁶ Ahmad Baba also gives a description of one his chief teachers Muhammad Baghyugu that demonstrates the great love that scholars of Songhay had for learning and books. He said about him:

"He was a man stamped with goodness, perfectly loyal and pure in nature. He innately wished for the good and believed the best concerning people until they were all treated equally with him because of the excellence of his opinion towards them and his lack of knowledge of evil from them . . . He sincerely advised people towards the love of knowledge and being persistent in acquiring it. He used to spend his entire time on behalf of learning and keeping company with its people and his humility was perfect. He would generously loan the most rare and marvelous books on various sciences out to people and would not inquire of them after that, regardless of who are where they were taken. It was in this way that he lost many rare books, may Allah benefit him because of it. Sometimes a student would come to his door seeking a particular book. He would then give it to him without knowing who he was. In this regard he was truly amazing, doing it purely for the sake of Allah ta'ala and in spite of the fact that he had a great love of books and collected them through purchase and transcription."¹⁷

¹⁴ Mahmud Ka`ti, *Tarikh' l-Fataash*, trans. O. Houdas & M. Delafosse, (Paris 1964), p. 94.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 108.

¹⁶ As-Sa`adi, Op. cit., p. 42.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 44.

The above passage reveals a clear picture of the mutual trust between the scholars and students of learning of Songhay that resulted from this love of Arabic manuscripts their transcription and dissemination. Clearly, private and public libraries became one of the symbols of social reform and Islamic civilization during the golden age of Islam in Songhay. To further emphasize the connection between Islamic revivalism and the existence of the Arabic manuscript library during this period is in what Ahmad Baba indicated when the Moroccan armies plundered the library of Sankore' and those of his family in 1592. He said: "Among my family members I possessed the least amount of books and I lost during that plundering more than one thousand six hundred volumes".¹⁸ Some modern scholars suggest that this period of decline in Songhay among the learned of Timbuktu had direct influence upon the entire *bilad's-sudan*. Because Songhay acted as a stabilizing force for the entire region it's sacking by the Moroccans caused the reemergence of internecine warfare and paganism. It also opened the region to the European slavers in the south and Arab plunderers in the north.¹⁹ Consequently the city of Timbuktu became as Ka'ti described it: ". . . a body without a soul. Its affairs became turned upside down. Its conditions were changed and its customs were altered. The lowest of its people became its highest and its highest became its lowest. The most deprived of its people took mastery over its most influential. They began to sell the religion for this world's life and to purchase error with guidance. They overturned the judgment of the *shari`a*, put the *sunna* to death and gave life to heretical innovation. There remained no one who adhered to the *sunna*, nor anyone to steer people to the way of fearful awareness during that time."

E. Hodgkins points out that the invasion of Songhay fostered millenarian feelings among the scholars of the western *bilad's-sudan* from the 1600s until the 1800s²⁰. Many of the prominent scholars fled Songhay and settled in regions where the Moroccans had not reached. The above-mentioned Aqit family, along with many of their Sudanese clients and students, fled to Tuat. Others went to Walata, Awaran, Dagomba, Futa Toro, Bundu, and Hausaland. Thus, a new stage emerged for the scholar notables wherein 'messianic' movements would arise among the clerical communities attempting to establish reform and the ideal Islamic society. E. Saad gives us a the narration of a prophecy from an unknown source that cited the destruction of the city of Timbuktu and the collapse of Songhay as an eschatological event:

"Oh people of Timbuktu, if it should come to pass, by Allah's decree, that you should be driven out of this town, whereby it will be destroyed, and some of its people will die in chains, after having been dispersed from it - prepare you then for meeting your Lord with evidence of good deeds, for that is one of the signs of the end of the world."²¹

Kanem-Bornu

From as early as the 12th century al-Bakri and al-Qalqashandri both recognized the existence of extensive trade between the Muslim world and the region of Kanem-Bornu.²² There

¹⁸ Abu'l-Abass Ahmad ibn Khalid an-Naasiri as-Salaawi, al-Istiqsaa Li Akhbaar Duwwal'l-Maghrib'l-Aqsa, Daar'l-Bayda, 1955, p. 130.

¹⁹ See Elizabeth Hodgkin's "The Ulama Under 'Colonialism': The Timbuktu Ulama After the Moroccan Invasion" and Assad Busool's: Expose of the Actual Relationship Between the Ulama and the Government in the Islamic Empire During the Period of Decline", both in Islam in Africa: the Changing Role of the Ulama, March 28-31, 1984, by the Program of African Studies, Northwestern University, (Illinois, 1984).

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 2-3.

²¹ Elias Saad, The Social History of Timbuktu: the Role of Muslim Scholars and Notables, Cambridge, (1982), p. 183.

²² J.O. Hunwick, "The Influence of Arabic in West Africa: A Preliminary Historical Survey", Transactions of the Historical Society Ghana, Vol. VII, (1964), p. 26.

were at least three important routes that trade entered this region. The first came from the north where the government of the *Maghrib* began from Tripoli and Tunis passing through the Fezan and then crossing the great Sahara desert until it terminated in the town of N'djamena the capitol of Bornu.²³ The second route came from the east where it disembarked from Egypt crossing the Western Sahara, passing the town of Qaws in Egypt, and reaching the town of al-Fasher, the capitol in Dar Fur. From there it would proceed on the well-known *darab araba`een* ('the forty days road') and on westward, passing Wodai until it reached Bornu.²⁴ Finally, the third route branched off after leaving the town of Qaws in western Egypt and then head westward, crossing the Sahara passing the region of Kufra in the southern Fezan. It would then pass the mountains of Tebesti and Burku and terminate in the western region of Bornu near Lake Chad.²⁵

The commodities that were exported out of Bornu following the above routes were mainly leather-tanned skins, ivory tusk, and slaves. Through these same routes were exported woven cotton and silk, perfumes, copper, cowry shells, salt, horses, weapons, and finally Arabic books.²⁶ Like the people of Songhay, Arabic manuscripts were among the most desirable imported commodity in Bornu especially during the 15th century. Books were brought into the region from every region of the Muslim world and fetched the highest prices.²⁷ Although the book trade was extensive, the scholars of Bornu gave more attention and investment in the local scribes and professional copyist.²⁸ The script utilized in this region under the Sifawa dynasty, was undoubtedly the most ancient style of calligraphy employed in the *bilad's-sudan*.²⁹ It takes its origin from the monumental Kufic script as well as the official *Qur'ans* prevalent in North Africa and can be traced back to the earliest *Qur'ans* commissioned by Uthman ibn Afan during the first century of Islam. This style of calligraphy came to be known as Ifriqi and was refined by scribes of the Fatimid courts in Tunisia between 1009 and 1106.³⁰ However the Bornu courts developed a type of Kufic-Ifriqi which was uniquely its own which I have designated as *barnawi-ifriqi*.

As early as the 11th century the rulers of Kanem-Bornu attached importance to the intellectual life of its people. This was due to the significant role that knowledge and the scholars played in reorganizing the political affairs of the region and in giving direction to the society. The spread of Islamic sciences and Arabic language in Kanem-Bornu began with the arrival of the renowned scholar Muhammad ibn Maani to the town of N'djamena in the middle of the 11th century. *Sultan* Hummay ibn Abd'l-Jaleel, [1086-1097] received him well and appointed him over the first *masjid* erected in the capitol. Ibn Maani initiated the instructions in the *Qur'an* Islamic sciences and Arabic language that resulted in the emergence of a first great center of learning in the region.³¹ Later around the year 1259, Mai Dunama began to send students from Kanem-Bornu in order to acquire knowledge at the al-Azhar university in Cairo and even established there a student hostel for that purpose. After the return of these students from Egypt, there emerged an extensive system of Islamic education throughout the different regions of the empire.³²

²³ Na'im Qadaah, *Ifriqiyya al-Gharbiyya Fi Dhill 'l-Islam*, Damascus (1965), p. 129.

²⁴ E.W. Bovel, *The Golden Trade of the Moors*, London, (1961), p. 303.

²⁵ Oliver Roland, *States of the Central Sudan*, Vol. 1, London, (1970), p.

²⁶ Al-Hassan al-Wazaan, Op. cit., p. 554.

²⁷ Abd'l-Baaqi M.A. Kabeeru, Op. cit. pp. 340-1.

²⁸ Murray Last, Op. cit., p. 2.

²⁹ A.D.H. Bivar, Op. cit., p. 5.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 7.

³¹ Dr. Ali ibn Abu Bakr, *at-Thaqafiyya'l-Arabiyya Fi Nigeriyya*, Tabi` an-Nigeriyya, (1960), p. 53.

³² Ibrahim Turkhaan, *Imbaraatuuriyya al-Bornu al-Islamiyya*, Cairo, (1975), p. 73.

While the scholars of Songhay laid heavy emphasis upon the sciences of jurisprudence, the scholars of Kanem-Bornu were famous for the stress they laid upon the sciences related to the *Qur'an*. Regarding this *Sultan* Muhammad Bello said in his famous *Infaq' l-Maysuur*:

" وقد انتشر فيها الإسلام انتشارا بين سلاطينهم ووزرائهم وعامتهم بل لا يوجد في هذه البلاد عامة إلا معتنون بقراءة القرآن وتجويده وحفظه وكتابته منهم ولم تزل العامة هكذا حتى قام هذا الجهاد."³³

"Islam spread among them extensively, even among the rulers, his attendants and his common subjects. Rather, you could not find in his country a single common person except that he was concerned with reading of the Quran, melodiously reciting it, memorizing it, and writing it down. The common people of this country continued to be established in that until this *jihad* was established." Kabeeru mentioned that both Arabs and non-Arabs were amazed at the recitation of the people of Kanem-Bornu due to the excellence of their tongue and the care that they gave to the pronunciation of the letters.³⁴

Major Denham reported in 1822 that the people of Kanem-Bornu used to produce handwritten *Qur'ans* and have them sent and sold in Egypt and North Africa for an amount equal to nearly forty to fifty dollars.³⁵ Murray Last stated that the *Qur'ans* from Bornu were of a high quality and created a demand throughout the *bilad's-sudan* and North Africa.³⁶ These *Qur'ans* were written much the same way they are today throughout the central *bilad's-sudan*. They are written on separated sheets of paper where three different colors of ink are used. The letters themselves are written in black ink and the vowel markings are done in red. The *hamza* is indicated in yellow while the name and number of verses is recorded in red. Each *hizb* is specified by a beautiful geometric circle and is colored in a variety of colors and designs. *Three golden circles arranged in a triangle designate qur'anic verses*. Every five verses have a red lotus flower while every ten verses have a circular design filled with various colors. On the margins of each page are parallel geometric designs indicating an eighth, a fourth and a half of a *hizb* respectively. The letter (ث) indicates an eighth of a *hizb*. The letter (ب) indicates a fourth while the letter (ن) indicates a half of a *hizb*.³⁷ The pens utilized in the writing of the *Qur'an* are like those used throughout the *bilad's-sudan* made of reed. The black ink is produced from burnt coal of a particular type of tree and the red and yellow ink are made from stones and camphor.

The teachers and the students of the *Qur'an* received stipends from the government as well as its people in the form of charity and endowment. The Kanem-Bornu government expended money from the public treasury for the *Qur'an* schools and centers of learning. The younger students also hired themselves off as farm laborers in order to provide for their livelihood during their period of study.³⁸ In addition, the majority of the advanced students earned their keep from working as scribes for the government or privately for scholars who desired the copying of rare books. In fact the profession of the scribe was the highest paid profession in Kanem-Bornu second only to the book and paper merchants.

Although this region of the central *bilad's-sudan* was renowned for the study of *Qur'an* and its related sciences, there is no doubt they produced many scholars well versed in the other related Islamic sciences. Among the most famous of these scholars were *Shaykh* al-Bakri, *Shaykh* at-Tahir ibn Ibrahim al-Fulani, *Shaykh* Muhammad ibn al-Hajj al-Ajurum, *Shaykh* Sulayman ibn

³³ Muhammad Bello, *Infaq al-Maysuur Fi Tarikh Bilaad 't-Takruur*, edited by C.E.J. Whitting, London, (1957), p. 9.

³⁴ A.M.A. Kabeeru, Op. cit., p. 454.

³⁵ Hajia Hamsatu, *The Foundation of Islamic Scholarship in Borno Before the Nineteenth Century: An Aspect of the Intellectual History of Borno*, University of Maiduguri, (1985), p. 28.

³⁶ Murray Last, Op. cit., p. 4.

³⁷ Abkura al-Imam Ali, *Ta'leem 'l-Qur'an Fi Borno*, unpublished paper, University of Sokoto, (1978), p. 34.

³⁸ Hajia Hamsatu, Op. cit., p. 13.

al-Wali, *Shaykh* Muhammad ibn Sulayman al-Wali, *Shaykh* Waldeedi, *Shaykh* al-Muqrani ibn A`isha, *Shaykh* Ahmad ibn Furtuwa, *Shaykh* Umar ibn Uthman, Shamsudeen at-Takadaawi, and many others. These scholars authored texts on Arabic grammar, astronomy, history, jurisprudence, etymology, *tasawwuf*, and theology. They were responsible for the intellectual renaissance that brought about the reform that would reach its climax in the western regions of Hausaland in the 18th and 19th centuries.³⁹

Hausaland

According to the *Tarikh Kano* ('Kano Chronicles') Islam entered into the central *bilad's-sudan* of Hausaland during the 14th century at the hands of Dyula Mande speaking scholars who were known as *Wangara*.⁴⁰ From the beginning of the 15th century, the people of this region began to experience the general political and cultural revitalization that was affecting the whole of the *bilad's-sudan* at the time. However, Islamic learning and specialization did not spread in the region until about the 16th century. In the *Kitaab Aslu al-Wangariyun* it mentions the story of the transmission of learning into the region and reflects the lack of learning that affected the region at the time:

"وشاع في الناس أن رجلا مشرقيا جاء بكتاب يقال له الخليل قد أعجب الناس فرعيتيه ومشهور كلامه حتى قال الشيخ غدا إن شاء الله سأركب الى هذا الرجل لأسمع قراءة هذا الكتاب."⁴¹

"The news spread among the people of a man from the east who came with a book that he called 'al-Khalil'. The people were amazed with his explanation and the popularity of his teachings until eventually the chief said: 'Tomorrow Allah willing I will journey to this man and listen to his reading from that book.'"

From the above it is clear that the intellectual life of the region was affected, for the most part by scholars from abroad. The banner of learning was steered mainly by the scholars from Songhay and Kanem-Bornu. From the 15th century, onward Hausaland began receiving the repeated arrival of scholars and merchants from the west and east and they are credited with broadening and deepening the scope of the region's intellectual life.

Among the first of the governors of the region to show interest in social reform in Hausaland were the famous ruler of Kano – Muhammad Rumfa [1463 - 1499] and the ruler of Katsina – Ibrahim ibn Muhammad [1493 - 1498].⁴² It was during their rule that the region witnessed the arrival of numerous scholars from abroad. The first of them was renowned *al-Imam* Abd'l-Kareem al-Maghili who is regarded as the actual founder of the intellectual and reform movement that affected the region. His writings both religious and political opened the door of social reform in the lands of Songhay, Kanem-Bornu, and Hausaland. Likewise, *al-Imam* Jalaludeen Abd'r-Rahman as-Suyuti in turn shared in nourishing the intellectual renaissance that impacted the region through his many letters and legal decisions to their rulers.⁴³

The author of the *Tarikh Kano* mentioned that during the rule of Muhammad Kayasuki [1509 – 1565] there arrived numerous scholars into the region. Among these were *Shaykh* at-Tunusi who brought with him the famous *as-Shifa* of *Qadi* Iyad ibn Musa. This text was the fundamental text on understanding the nature of the prophethood of *sayyidinaa* Muhammad and the rights due to him from beliefs obedience and revival of his *sunna*. Wherever the *as-Shifa* was

³⁹ A.M.A. Kabeeru, Op. cit., p. 462.

⁴⁰ *Kitaab Tarikh Kano*, (manuscript), folio 14; see Adam al-Ilorin, *Muujaz Taarikh Nigeriyya*, Beirut, (1978), p. 81.

⁴¹ Prof. Ahmed Kani, "Mudhaahir al-Itisaalaat 'l-Fikriyya Bayna Shimaal Ifriqiyya wa Wast 's-Sudan", *Mujalat 'l-Buhuuth 't-Taarikhiyya 'l-Libiyya*, Vol. 1, January (1981), p. 14.

⁴² *Kitaab Tarikh Kano*, Op. cit., folio 22.

⁴³ Prof. Ahmed Kani, *The Intellectual origins of Islamic Jihad in Nigeria*, London, (1981), p. 27.

studied there also emerged active reform. Another fundamental text that was introduced into the region during this same period was the *al-Mudawwana' l-Kubra* of Sahnun. The *Tarikh Kano* mentions that a *Shaykh* Abdullahi was the first to pioneer the study of this fundamental text on Maliki jurisprudence and the legal deduction of the social behavior of the people of Medina. He also introduced the study of the *al-Jaami' as-Saghir* of as-Samraqandi.⁴⁴ The chronicle goes on to mention two other scholars who arrived in Hausaland during the same time who were disciples of the famous Moroccan historian *Shaykh* Ibn Ghazi – *Shaykh* Makhluḥ al-Balbali and *Shaykh* Abd'r-Rahman ibn Suqan.⁴⁵ Likewise, three other scholars arrived into Hausaland from Bornu and were received well by Mai Kayasuki. One was appointed a regional judge and the other two were given an endowment of land in order to establish two schools that eventually flourished and attracted many students.⁴⁶

During the beginning of the 16th century, Hausaland witnessed a large influx of scholars from the region of Timbuktu due the turmoil created by Sonni Ali. The chronicles clearly affirm that the political turmoil and social upheaval that was taking place in Songhay at that time had positive consequences upon social reform in Hausaland especially in the domain of its intellectual life. The educational system of Songhay with its didactic methodology and paths of transmission of learning was completely transferred into the regions of the central *bilad's-sudan* to the point where little distinction could be made between what was transpiring in the city of Timbuktu and that of Kano and Katsina. This connection was the result of many scholars who had migrated into Hausaland from Songhay. Among them west was the grandfather of the famous Ahmadu Baba, *al-Hajj* Ahmad ibn Umar ibn Muhammad Aqit, about whom he said:

" [كان] محبا في النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم ملازما لقراءة قصائد مدحه وشفاء عياض على الدوام فقيها لغويا نحويا عروضيا محصلا اعتنى بالعلم طول عمره وكتبه كتب عدة كتب بخطه مع فوائد كثيرة وترك نحو سبعمائة مجلد⁴⁷"

“He was a lover of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, exemplified by his constant singing of praise songs for him and his unfailing reading of the *Kitab 's-Shifa* of *Qadi 'Iyad*. He was a jurist, linguist, grammarian, an expert in the science of prosody and very erudite. He was an assistant to the cause of learning and education throughout his entire life. He composed numerous books, writing them with his own hand that contained enough room on the sides for annotations. He is alleged to have left behind a library which contained 700 volumes.” In this way *al-Hajj* Ahmad was able to share in establishing the principles of knowledge and erudition in Hausaland. It is known that he did not return to Songhay until after the change of the guard take took place at the hands of *Askiya* Muhammad.⁴⁸

Among the more influential scholars of Timbuktu who helped bring about social reform in Hausaland was Muhammad ibn Ahmad at-Tazakhati. “He was a jurist, scholar and a wise master of the science of prophetic traditions. He was versatile and proficient in diverse sciences and an excellent calligrapher. He possessed superb comprehension which became manifest in the many discussions he engaged in.” He traveled to Egypt and studied with many venerable scholars, like the *Shaykh 'l-Islam* Zakariyya, the dialecticians: al-Qalqashindi, Ibn Abu Shareef⁴⁹, Abd 'l-Haqq' s-Sunbati,⁵⁰ and others. He then went to Mecca and studied with Abu'l-Barakat 'n-

⁴⁴ *Kitaab Tarikh Kano*, Op. cit., folio 24.

⁴⁵ J.F. Ajayi, *History of West Africa*, London (1974), Vol. 1, p. 278.

⁴⁶ *Kitaab Tarikh Kano*, Op. cit., folio 25.

⁴⁷ Abd'r-Rahman ibn Abdullahi as-Sa'adi, *Taarikh 's-Sudan*, edit Houdas, Paris, (1974), p 37.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, P 37.

⁴⁹ He was Ibrahim ibn Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr, [833 -923 A.H./ 1426-1516 C.E.], a Shafi' scholar of Cairo.

⁵⁰ He was Abd 'l-Haqq ibn Muhammad 's-Sunbati, [842 - 931 A.H./ 1435-1524 C.E.], a Shafi' scholar of Cairo.

Nuayri, his paternal cousin Abd 'l-Qadir, Ali ibn Naasir 'l-Hijazi, Abu 't-Tayyib 'l-Busti and others. "He then returned to the *bilad 's-sudan* and took up permanent residence in the town of Katsina. There he was honored by its people and was appointed over the judiciary. He died in that same region in the year 936 A.H. at the age of sixty and some odd years⁵¹. He composed a commentary as notes on the margins of the al-Mukhtasar of *Shaykh Khalil*⁵².”⁵³

There were others scholars such as Muhammad ibn as-Sabbagh, and al-'Aqib ibn Abdullahi al-Masufi. *Sultan* Muhammad Bello gives us a more comprehensive list in his Infaq of the scholars who laid the foundation of social reform and education in the Hausaland from the 16th century up until the 19th century, when he says:

“Among the scholars of this country is the erudite *imam* the learned *Muhammad al-Kashnawi al-Fulani*... It was said that he took learning and spiritual bounty from the scholars of the two sacred places and Egypt . . . Among them was the learned *shaykh*, the proficient scholar - *Muhammad Massina*. He produced many scholarly works... Among these were his an-Nafhat al-'Anbariyya, a commentary upon the al-'Ishriniyya; his Bazuugh as-Shamsiyya, a commentary upon the al-'Ashmawiyyat; and his Azhaar ar-Ribba Fi Akhbaar Yoruba ... Among them was Hashim and Ibn Taakuma ... Among them was *Shaykh Harun az-Zakzaki*, the *shaykh* of the *shaykhs* of the Fulani... Among them was the erudite *shaykh Ramadhan ibn Ahmad*. He was originally from Fezan, but settled in Zanfara. He produced many poems and scholarly works... like his versification of the narrators of the as-Saheeh of al-Bukhari and his al-Jawhara concerning the evils of the science of astrology... Among them was the learned and erudite *shaykh* of proficient understanding, the eloquent - *Umar ibn Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr at-Turuudi*. He was originally from Kebbi ... He produced many publications and poetry... like his Takhmis on the al-Kawaakib 'd-Duriyya of al-Busayri. He also produced a Takhmis on the Baanat Sa'aad... Among them was the *Shaykh Ali Jobo*... He authored a commentary upon the al-Kubra and a commentary upon the Laamiyat 'l-Af aal.”⁵⁴

All of these scholars brought erudition into Hausaland from Songhay, Kanem-Bornu, Ahir, Sus'l-Aqsa, Ifriqiyya, Morocco, Egypt, and the Hijaz. Along with the transmission of knowledge came thousands of rare Arabic manuscripts covering the fundamentals sciences of Islam and its branches. The influx of western and eastern scholars into Hausaland had major influence upon the development of calligraphic styles. As mentioned above the styles of *timbukti-andalusi* came into the region from Songhay while the styles of *barnawi-ifriqi* was introduced from Kanem-Bornu. For more than three centuries, the two styles overlapped and coalesced and there emerged a new style of script, which A.D.H. Bivar designated as *jihadi*.⁵⁵ This style was characterized by its simplicity and compression. Examples of the hand of Muhammad Bello and the earlier scholars of the *Jihad* give clear samples of the efficiency of this script.

Among the key scholars of this time who acted as forerunners to the Fulbe' led reform movement was *Shaykh* Jibril ibn Umar, *Shaykh* Uthman Bidduri, and *Shaykh* Mukhtar al-Kunti.

⁵¹ This occurred in 1530 C.E.

⁵² The name of this text was Taqaayeed wa Turar 'Ala Mukhtasar Shaykh Khalil.

⁵³ As-Sa'adi, Op. cit., p 39.

⁵⁴ Muhammad Bello, Op. cit. pp. 23-26.

⁵⁵ A.D.H. Bivar, Op. cit. p. 12.

These scholars led to the explosive period of the 19th century where the Fulbe' Toronkawa initiated their reform throughout the lands of the Hausa. In addition Abdullahi Dan Fuduye' mentions more than 25 scholars from whom he and his brother *Shehu* Uthman took knowledge and mentions at least 45 texts with their commentaries.⁵⁶ Even this list is meager as the author admits; "In short, the *shaykhs* of *Shehu* Uthman were many. Some of them I knew and some of them I did not know." Moreover, in the end of the text he says: "I am unable to enumerate all of the *shaykhs* from whom I acquired knowledge, but these were the principle ones among them. How many scholars and seekers of knowledge came to us from the east from which I profited, so many that I cannot count them. In addition, how many scholars and seekers of knowledge came to us from the west from which I profited, so many that I cannot count them." Gidadu ibn Laima mentions more than 89 *shaykhs* from whom the *Shehu* studied knowledge.⁵⁷ He also cites more than 82 students of the *Shehu* who had attained success in their spiritual goal and had attained the station of 'teaching *shaykh*'.⁵⁸

Perhaps the most significant indicator of the transmission of knowledge and reform during the *jihad* period was the transmission of knowledge through the line of the scribes. Gidadu ibn Laima gives a list of the scribes of the *Shehu* in Rawdat'l-Janaan: "They were his close companion, the renown scribe Malam al-Mustapha, nicknamed Malam Tafa, Muhammad Bello, Umar al-Maghribi, al-'Azihisi, Buuli, Muhammad Ahmed, nicknamed Ahmed Malle', Salaah Hassan Nabaadiku, the *Amir* of the scribes Sanbo, Muhammad Ghaanih, Muhammad al-Magribi, Isma'il, Muhammad Nagharu, Muhammad Kuule', Muhammad Ghaabidu, Sa'id, and Bunduwa."⁵⁹

The most prominent of these scribes was Malam al-Mustafa who was also numbered among the personal servants of the *Shehu*.⁶⁰ This is important because as a servant and scribe to the *Shehu* the level of education that he received from the *Shehu* was selective. Proximity to the teacher guaranteed a deeper level of transmission. This can be demonstrated by the following oral tradition narrated by Mervyn Hiskett regarding Malam Muhammad Tukur where the *Shehu* said: "Indeed, what Muhammadu Tukur knows is far beyond what you know [because you live apart, while Muhammadu Tukur lives here in this compound with me]".⁶¹ If this is an indication of the level of transmission a student may attain from the teacher, then Malam al-Mustafa as personal servant and scribe had access to a great deal of learning from the *Shehu*. Malam Mustafa studied in the home of the *Shehu* first under his son Muhammad Sa'd ibn *Shehu* from whom he learned Arabic grammar and calligraphy.⁶² He then studied with another famous scribe and calligrapher – the brother of the *Shehu* – Abdullahi Dan Fuduye'. Ibn Qadi al-Hajj describes Abdullahi as being "passionately devoted to teaching and writing down knowledge at all times and this remained his habit from childhood until the time he passed away to his Lord."⁶³ Abdullahi himself mentions his dedication to transcription in his 'Ida 'n-Nusuukh:

⁵⁶ See Mervyn Hiskett, "Material Relating to the State of Learning Among the Fulani before the Jihad", Bull. School of Oriental and African Studies, Vol. XIX, 1957.

⁵⁷ [See Gidadu ibn Laima, Rawdat 'l-Janaan, trans. Muhammad Shareef, Sankore Institute ©, Fairfield, 1994, pp. 22-23].

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 19.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 18.

⁶¹ Mervyn Hiskett, The Sword of Truth: the Life and Times of the Shehu Usman Dan Fodio, New York, (1973), p. 32.

⁶² Abdullahi ibn al-Qadi al-Hajj, Wajeez Fi Ta'reef as-Shaykh al-Mustafa ibn Muhammad at-Turuudi, trans. Dr. Umar Bello, Sokoto, (1973), p. 5.

⁶³ Ibid. p. 8.

" وحصل لي بحمد الله التبصّر في الدّين من فيضان نوره ومن تواليفه المفيدة العربيّة والعجميّة فما ألف كتابا من أوّل تواليفه إلى الآن إلا كنت أول من نقله عنه غالبا"⁶⁴

"By the praises of Allah, I attained insight into the religion by means of the overflowing of the lights of the *Shehu* and through his beneficial writings, both in Arabic and non-Arabic (*ajami*). For he never composed a work from his first composition until the present except that I was, for the most part, the first to copy it down from him." Sa'ad ibn Abd'r-Rahman mentioned that Abdullahi was responsible for training more than 750 students to whom he transmitted the ideals of the *jihad* and reform. Malam al-Mustafa was among the leaders of these disciples. Among the other teachers of Malam al-Mustafa was *Imam* Zayd al-Muhadith with whom he studied the sciences of prophetic traditions.⁶⁵ Among them was *Shaykh* Mode Mamari, with whom he studied the sciences of grammar, syntax, arithmetic, and the science of inheritance. With him he studied many books on linguistics such as the *Diwaan as-Shu'araa as-Sitta*, and the *Maqaamat* of Hariri. He also studied the science of *tafsir* with this renowned scholar.⁶⁶ Among them was *Shaykh* Ali Ghoy. This teacher instructed him in the *al-Kawkab' s-Sati'* of *Imam* as-Suyuti. He also learned from him the sciences of genealogies and historiography.⁶⁷ Among his teacher was *Shaykh* Ibrahim Barnawi, with whom he studied the *Mukhtasar* of Khalil and its commentary from al-Kharashi.⁶⁸ The scholars who were the colleagues of Malam al-Mustafa in the pursuit of knowledge were Nana Asma'u, Uthman ibn Is'haq, Muhammad Bello, Gidadu ibn Laima, Ali ibn Abdullahi Dan Fuduye', and Ibrahim Khalil ibn Abdullahi. Malam al-Mustafa was responsible for creating a cadre of students who took the torch of knowledge and reform into the following generation. Among these were Muhammad al-Bukhari ibn *Shehu*, his own son Abd'l-Qadir ibn Malam al-Mustafa, Abd'l-Qadir ibn *Shehu*, Muhammad ibn Muhammad Julde', Alfa Umar ibn Abdullahi, Sa'd al-Gharbi, and Ahmad an-Nakalif.⁶⁹

The second generation of the Sakkwato scholars carried on the tradition of transmission and book production right into the 20th century. There exist both in Nigeria as well as the Republic of Sudan Arabic manuscripts that reflect the persistence of this scholarly tradition. Among the second generation scholars, whose works were found in Sudan, were Abd'r-Rahman ibn Uthman ibn Abd'l-Qadir Dan Tafa, who composed an excellent poem on the science of *tawheed* called *Nadhim't-Tawheed*. He was also the scribe for the famous manuscripts called *Risaalat wa Nasehat* written by the Chief Judge Abdullahi Mode' Abdu in 1901. I rediscovered this manuscript in the home of Shaykh Bello ibn Abd'r-Raaziq ibn Uthman ibn Abd'l-Qadir Dan Tafa in 1987. There are several works by Abd'l-Qadir ibn Gidadu. There is a poem in praise of the *Amir'l-Mu'mineen* Ali by the chief judge of Gwandu, Ahmad ibn Sa'd. Ahmad 'r-Rufai', Muhammad ibn Jolla, al-Qadi Abdullahi Mode Abdu, Bashir Ahmad ibn Abdullahi, Bello ibn Uthman, Ibrahim ibn Abd'l-Qadir ibn Gidadu, Muhammad ibn Said ibn Bello, Uthman ibn Sanbu ibn Abd'r-Rahman, and Uthman Wali ibn Abd'l-Qadir ibn Gidadu.

The following are the second-generation scholars whose works are still extant in Northern Nigeria. Among them are Abu Bakr ibn Uthman ibn Abdullahi, Ahmad Sa'd, Ahmad ar-Rufai', al-Qadi Abdullahi Mode Abdu, Malam Maani Sokoto, Muhammad ibn Jibril, Muhammad Mu'allah Yede ibn Abd'l-Qadir Dan Tafa, Muhammad Sanbu Dan Dayye', Muhammad al-Awwal ibn Uthman ibn Is'haq, Muhammad al-Wali ibn Sulayman al-Felati, Mustafa ibn

⁶⁴ Abdullahi Dan Fuduye', *Ida' 'n-Nusuukh Man Akhadhtu Min's-Shuyukh*, manuscript, folio 5.

⁶⁵ Abdullahi ibn al-Qadi al-Hajj, *Op. cit.* p. 8.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 12.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 13.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p. 14.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 20-21.

Muhammad al-Bukhari, Saad ibn Abd'r-Rahman, Said ibn Muhammad Bello, Umar ibn Muhammad al-Bukhari, Waziri Muhammad al-Bukhari ibn Ahmad, and Waziri Junaydu.

The most interesting element of this study is the transmigration of scribal hands across vast distances of the African continent. One particular case is the scribe Dhayaaku Uthman ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abu Bakr. He is significant because it shows how the hand of a scribe can be carried from Northern Nigeria to the town of Maiurno on the Blue Nile in Sudan. I found the first manuscript in the home of *Shaykh* Bello ibn Abd'r-Raaziq ibn Uthman ibn Abd'l-Qaadir ibn al-Mustafa in 1999 during the month of *Ramadhan*. I photographed the manuscript along with 84 other texts with the Sony F505 digital camera. The manuscript is the famous *Ida`n-Nusuukh* of Abdullahi Dan Fuduye'. It was written on ledger paper that is about 7.5 inches X 6.5 inches. The inscription itself is 5.5 inches X 4 inches. The text is 8 folios. The style of calligraphy is the *jihadi* style very akin to the actual hand of Muhammad Bello. The scribe signed it:

" ثم الخط وقت الضحى يوم الجمعة على يدي افقر التلامذة وافقرهم إلى رحمة الله ذياك عثمان بن محمد بن أحمد بن أبي بكر الملقب بالعدل " ⁷⁰

"The calligraphy was completed at the time of forenoon on Friday by the hands of the most wretched of the pupils and the most needy of them of the mercy of Allah – Dhayaaku Uthman ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abu Bakr nicknamed *al-`Aadil*."

The second manuscript was photographed during the month of *Ramadhan* of 2000-1. It is located in the Waziri Junayd History Bureau in Sokoto. The manuscript is about 8.5 inches by 5 inches. The actual inscription measures 6 inches by 3.6 inches. The manuscript is 10 folios made of vellum and the scribe signs the manuscript with the following:

" تم الخط بحمد الله وحسن عونه وتوفيقه على يد عبيده الحقير الفقير الراج رحمة الغفور المجير ذاك عثمان بن محمد " ⁷¹

"The calligraphy was completed with the praise of Allah and the best of His help and success by the hand of the diminutive servant the needy miserable in hope of the mercy of the Forgiving Benefactor – Dhaaku Uthman ibn Muhammad."

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⁷⁰ Abdullahi Dan Fuduye', Op. cit. p. 8.

⁷¹ Uthman Dan Fuduye', *Usuul at-Tariqa*, manuscript, folio 9.

Conclusion

The concept of social reform in Islam emerges not just from individuals but also from the ideas they leave behind. Islamic reform in the *bilad's-sudan* can be traced back to the seventy-two individual Muslims that made the first emigration to Abyssinia but moreover to the original letter sent by *sayyidinaa* Muhammad to the Negus of Abyssinia. From that time onward through to the present Arabic manuscripts have been the direct cause and the result of social reform throughout the region.

The living calligraphy of the *bilad's-sudan* is probably the oldest transmitted script in the Muslim world. In the east and the west, the style of writing is consistent and is traced back to the earlier *andalusi* and more archaic *ifriqi* styles. These in turn are traced back to what scholars call the *Kufic* style. However, close examination of the letter of Muhammad to the Negus may suggest a prior connection, especially between the lands of Kanem-Bornu and Abyssinia.

Songhay and the lands under its control witnessed the emergence of a comprehensive educational system that revolved around jurisprudence and its branches. The Dyula, Turuudi, and Zawaya clans supplied the region with paper and books that nourished the intellectual renaissance of that kingdom. The rulers, clerics, and common people alike competed with one another for the collection of rare Arabic manuscripts that were needed for the social reform. In Kanem-Bornu, rare Arabic books were the most expensive commodities sold in the markets. Like Songhay, Kanem-Bornu enjoyed an all-embracing intellectual resurgence especially in the area of *Qur'anic* transcription, memorization, and recitation. The Hausa states inherited these didactic methodologies from both Songhay and Kanem.

The 19th century witnessed the flowering of this intellectual legacy under the reform movement created by the Toronkawa scholars in Hausaland. They combined the militant reforms that were taking place in the far western *bilad's-sudan* along with the care that the eastern lands gave to the *Qur'an*. These were fused to create even a more efficient style of writing called *jihadi*. The scholars of the newly formed Sokoto Caliphate like their new calligraphic style created concise texts that incorporated the ideas of the earlier periods of Islam and met immediate needs of the people of the time.

These ideas of reform were preserved by the scholars in their Arabic manuscript libraries and were no doubt utilized in their defense against European imperialism. Arabic texts were carried from one part of the *bilad's-sudan* to another, even reemerging in the lands of Bahia, Panama, Jamaica, and the United States by enslaved African Muslims. Like the primordial Arch of the Covenant of the Banu Isra'il – Arabic manuscripts have preserved the intellectual and cultural life of the *bilad's-sudan*. The future will tell whether the African Muslims will in turn conserve and safeguard the relics that define who they were and are.

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