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**Education, Erudition, and Gender Equality
in Islam**

By Jeffery King, J.D.

Institute of Islamic-African Studies International

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Education, Erudition, and Gender Equality in Islam

By Jeffery King, J.D.

“The leadership of the world was at one time in the hands of the East entirely, then it fell to the West after the rise of the Greeks and Romans. After that, the *Judaic*¹, Christian, and *Islamic powers* brought it back to the East for a second time, but then the East fell into its long sleep . . .²”

Sheikh Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949)

In the overwhelming majority of scholarly works originating in the West, we see that Islamic societies in the Middle East have been characterized by negative stereotypes. One of the most prevalent stereotypes that we find in these works is the notion that women are oppressed in Islamic societies. We find this concept in scholarly works, the speeches of heads of Western states, in Western media, the cinema, and even in the statements and deeds of various world organizations. As an example of this, let us look at an article published by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People. Sr. Patricia Ebegbulem writes about the migration and prostitution among women from countries of Islamic majority and her main focus is Nigeria. She states that women in Nigeria and other Islamic countries “cannot find a viable means of livelihood” and “they are strongly tempted to take to prostitution”³. She goes on to state that “illiteracy is a factor that largely explains this phenomenon” and that “the inability to read and write robs women and girls of the opportunity to learn about life”⁴.

We can definitely appreciate the Vatican’s concern for illiteracy in African nations even when they happen to rank fifth in the world in terms of petroleum production and exportation. Maybe the Vatican’s interest in illiteracy and prostitution in Nigeria stems from the report that over 15,000 Nigerian prostitutes live and work in

¹ I have changed the available translation wherever you find italics in this quote. The original translation used Mosaic rather than Judaic, Muhammadan rather than Islamic, and dispensations rather than powers. The original Arabic text may be found online easily.

² Hassan al-Banna, *Majmu’at Rasa’il* (No Place of Publication: International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations, No Date), 177.

³ Sr. Patricia Ebegbulem. Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People: People on the Move. N*101 (Suppl.), August 2006. *Migration and Prostitution Among Women From Countries of Islamic Majority*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/pom2006_101-suppl/rc_pc_migrants_pom101-suppl_migraz-ebegbulem.html (Accessed April 29, 2010).

⁴ Sr. Patricia Ebegbulem. Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People: People on the Move. N*101 (Suppl.), August 2006. *Migration and Prostitution Among Women From Countries of Islamic Majority*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/pom2006_101-suppl/rc_pc_migrants_pom101-suppl_migraz-ebegbulem.html (Accessed April 29, 2010).

Italy held there in a state of captivity after being lured there by deception⁵. Perhaps the Vatican could sponsor scholarly works on how its sister nation, Italy, could free, educate, and repatriate these 15,000 Nigerian women which seem to be held in Italy illegally and against their will.

We will not deny that there are educational concerns in the Islamic societies of the Middle East. There was a time in history in which the language of research and scholarship was Arabic. Andalusia, Baghdad, Istanbul, and Timbuktu were all renowned centers of learning and scholarship and the surrounding Islamic countries flourished with public learning centers, libraries, and universities. Currently, Islamic countries top the world's of nations with problems of illiteracy, poverty, and lack of education. Beth Baron seems to timidly hint toward the source of the problem in Egypt when she states that "as long as the British set ceilings on state spending, real expansion of education remained blocked"⁶. Baron concludes that "it is only with nominal independence that Egyptians gained greater control⁷" over real educational expansion. We could substitute British for "Western Colonial Powers" and Egypt for "Middle Eastern colonized regions" and we would gain a better understanding of the situation as it presents itself in the post-colonial Middle East. Bradley Cook summarizes the most obvious and prevalent educational concerns as follows:

"Despite its glorious legacy of earlier periods, the Islamic world seemed unable to respond both culturally and educationally to the onslaught of Western advancement by the eighteenth century. Contributing to the imbalance of power was the introduction of foreign modes of administration, law, and social institutions by the expansionist West. One of the most damaging aspects of European colonialism was the deliberate deterioration of indigenous cultural norms by secularism."⁸

This diagnosis by Cook places the cause not with supposed Islamic chauvinism but rather with Western advancement, colonialism, and an inability to respond adequately by Middle Eastern Islamic governments.

What this present work will attempt to do is to look at the traditional Islamic educational system in one of these Islamic societies. We will discuss the standard Islamic educational career and then look at how women and men in that society at a

⁵ Iain Guest, "Italy, Forced Prostitution and Women from Nigeria," *The New York Times*, June 24, 2000.

⁶ Beth Baron. *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 143.

⁷ Beth Baron. *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 143.

⁸ Bradley J. Cook, "Islamic versus Western Conceptions of Education: Reflections on Egypt," *International Review of Education* 45, No 3 / 4 (1999): 341.

certain point in history gained their educations. We will look at educational attitudes as they relate to gender, women's opportunity to contribute, teach, lead, and otherwise participate as an equal member of society.

Before we start our discussion, we will need to define some of the terms that will occur throughout this work. First, we will specifically identify the term Middle Eastern society to primarily describe a country, nation, or an even smaller but cohesive group of peoples that are non-European, Arabic speaking, that claim Islam as their primary religion. This would include groups of people in Asia, Southern and Eastern Europe, North and West Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Subcontinent, and others.

The Islamic nature of these societies plays a huge part in their cultural commonality. Even though Muslims make up a small percentage of many of their populations and their governments are secular in theory, these societies have similar patterns of dress, marriage, socialization, mores, and even civil codes. It is this Islamic trend that is absolutely one of the most aimed at target for Western propaganda especially when discussing the oppression of women in the Middle East. So when we discuss the oppression of women in the Middle East, we must address the possible Islamic source of this oppression.

In the late 1700's and early 1800's, Sheikh Uthman ibn Fudi (1754-1817) led an Islamic revival movement through military action as well as educational reform in what is now Nigeria⁹. Sheikh Uthman was an Islamic scholar, teacher, military leader, and head of state. It is reported that he had over 40 children and his family members were active in all aspects of Sheikh Uthman's Islamic reformation movement in Nigeria. Since Sheikh Uthman was a religious scholar and leader in his society and the head of a famous clan, we believe that the Ibn Fudi clan serves as an ideal subject for our observations on Islamic treatment of women in the Middle East in matters of educational opportunity and overall opportunities at contributions to society.

What is the typical Islamic education? We will show that the typical Islamic education starts with study and memorization of the Qur'an either with one's father, uncle, or local religious leader. This is followed up with a study of Arabic language, grammar, and some elementary texts covering the basic requirements in the practice

⁹ Mervyn Hiskett, *Sword of Truth: The Life and Times of the Shehu Usman dan Fodio* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 3.

of Islam. These subjects and texts are commonly studied with one's close family members. As the level of study advances to jurisprudence, astronomy, medicine, mysticism, and other Islamic sciences, the limited availability of a family member that can teach the subject or text brings about the necessity of the would-be student to travel to or in search of a qualified teacher, Sheikh, or guide sometimes outside the immediate family, clan, or town. Ultimately, the student in Islam aspires to complete the memorization of Qur'an which makes the student a *hafiz* or *hafizah*. A student that studies Sufism, *tasawwuf*, or similar esoteric sciences will become a *sheikh*, *sheikhah*, or guide. There are also other levels of achievement such as *hafiz* (a different title which indicates a certain level of memorization of prophetic sayings), *qadi* (one qualified to judge), *mufti* (one qualified to give *fatwa* or religious proclamations), *alim* (scholar), *imam* or *sheikh* (those who are followed by a community or group). Once an student of Islamic sciences reaches one of these levels of qualification, it is customary for the now Islamic scholar to author some Islamic text that will pass on the knowledge that the scholar has attained usually to simplify the subject or to add a more advanced level of understanding to the field.

Education

To look for examples of this in our subject, we should look at Sheikh Uthman himself. We learn from Mervyn Hiskett that Sheikh Uthman ibn Fudi learned to read, write, and recite Qur'an from his father "who was a teacher, scribe, and the *imam*¹⁰, or religious leader, of his community". Abdullahi ibn Fudi, the great scholar and younger brother of Sheikh Uthman, says "he learned *al-Ishriniyat* and similar works from his Shaykh Uthman, who was known as Biddu 'l-Kabawi"¹¹. This *al-Ishriniyat* is a panegyric from Sheikh al-Fazzazi concerning Prophet Muhammad. The work has been used to teach grammar and rhetoric for hundreds of years. F. Daniel tells us that Sheikh Uthman traveled to the desert city of Agadez at an early age, was welcomed by the Sultan and "remained for some years of study"¹². Now to follow our description of taking instruction from a close family member other than ones father, we read the following quote:

"He read¹³ the *al-Mukhtasar* with our paternal and maternal uncle, Uthman, who was known as Bidduri ibn l-Amin ibn Uthman ibn Hamm ibn Aal. This shaykh of his was learned and pious. He was well known for righteousness, commanding the good, and forbidding the evil, and being engaged with what concerned him. He is the one whom our Shehu Uthman imitated in spiritual states and in actions."¹⁴

We get several important pieces of information from this quote. We see that Sheikh Uthman received advanced legal training from a noted Islamic scholar who was also his uncle on his mother's and father's side of his family. We can also take from this quote that it is important among Islamic scholars to have a teacher in ones resume that is not only scholarly but also pious. Finally, we see that the Islamic scholar may take a particular teacher to imitate and pattern themselves after in asceticism, creed, and deeds.

If we look at another example among the Ibn Fudi clan, we can examine the career of Muhammad Bello (1781-1837) who was one of the older sons and the first

¹⁰ Mervyn Hiskett, *Sword of Truth: The Life and Times of the Shehu Usman dan Fodio* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 17.

¹¹ Sheikh Uthman ibn Fudi. *The Revival of the Sunna and the Destruction of Innovation*, trans. Muhammad Shareef (Pittsburgh: Sankore' Institute of Islamic – African Studies, 1996), viii.

¹² F. Daniel, "Shehu Dan Fodio," *Journal of the Royal African Society* 25, Issue 99 (April 1926): 280.

¹³ The word "read" here is used as an Islamic scholarly term of art. When one reads the terms studies or read in reference to an Islamic scholar it typically means that either the student or teacher read or recited the work in question and the other listened once or repeatedly over a period of time. Typically, the student eventually memorizes the work or at least gains a comprehensive understanding of the text and receives a license (*ijazah*) to quote, pass on, transmit, or teach that text.

¹⁴ Sheikh Uthman ibn Fudi. *The Revival of the Sunna and the Destruction of Innovation*, trans. Muhammad Shareef (Pittsburgh: Sankore' Institute of Islamic – African Studies, 1996), viii.

successor of the Sokoto Caliphate to Sheikh Uthman ibn Fudi. Muhammad Bello was very active in studies, teaching, writing, and the overall Islamic revival movement of his father. H. F. C. Smith informs us that his father taught him “to understand the Qur’an” and “it was from his father that he received his real education”¹⁵. As Muhammad Bello’s education advanced and his father became increasingly preoccupied with affairs of the community, we see that Muhammad Bello’s education followed the traditional path. Smith says “[h]e was taught Arabic and rhetoric by his learned uncle Abdullahi with whom he studied Qur’an and the Traditions”^{16,17}. In this instance, Muhammad Bello took his basic education from his uncle Abdullah ibn Fudi. Smith explains to us later that Muhammad Bello learned Arabic Grammar “from his elder brother Muhammad Sa’d” but that finally “he learned the asceticism¹⁸ of the mystic” from his father”¹⁹. This follows our overview regarding what we term a *traditional Islamic education* and how it was received by one of the famous sons of the Ibn Fudi clan. Smith actually tells us this in his own words when he claims that Muhammad Bello “thus grew up in a family circle of great piety and learning, receiving a rigorous education in the *classical Islamic fashion*”²⁰.

At this time, we should examine one of the female members of the Ibn Fudi clan. Nana Asma’u (1793-1865) emerges as probably one of the most famous and accessible female members of this family. Nana Asma’u and her twin brother Hassan were the 22nd and 23rd children born to Sheikh Uthman. Now the Ibn Fudi clan is known to be a scholarly family in the Islamic tradition throughout many generations up to the present day. Actually, the clan name comes from the Fulani word “*fodio*” which means learned. Mack and Boyd report that this clan “had been Muslim religious scholars for at least ten generations”²¹ at the time of Nana Asma’u. We can get an understanding of Sheikh Uthman’s attitude towards the education of females in

¹⁵ H. F. C. Smith, “Muhammad Bello, Amir Al-Mu’minin,” Ibadan No Volume Number Found (June 1960): 16.

¹⁶ Here, Traditions is used to mean *ahadith* or prophetic sayings.

¹⁷ H. F. C. Smith, “Muhammad Bello, Amir Al-Mu’minin,” Ibadan No Volume Number Found (June 1960): 16.

¹⁸ Here, we can understand asceticism here to mean Sufism. It would be appropriate for Muhammad Bello to study Sufism with none other than his father, Sheikh Uthman, because his father was recognized to be one of the foremost Sufi leaders of his century.

¹⁹ H. F. C. Smith, “Muhammad Bello, Amir Al-Mu’minin,” Ibadan No Volume Number Found (June 1960): 16.

²⁰ H. F. C. Smith, “Muhammad Bello, Amir Al-Mu’minin,” Ibadan No Volume Number Found (June 1960): 16.

²¹ Beverly Mack and Jean Boyd, *One Woman’s Jihad: Nana Asma’u, Scholar and Scribe* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 6.

an excerpt from Mervyn Hiskett where he explains that Sheikh Uthman “deplored the state of ignorance to which women were normally abandoned” in the then predominately Hausa, polytheistic state and he “advocated that they should receive a basic education in literacy and in religious knowledge”²². Hiskett goes on to say that Sheikh Uthman “actively encouraged his own daughter Asma to acquire this”²³. To summarize the views of Sheikh Uthman as a religious leader of his community, an Islamic scholar, and as a model for others, Mervyn Hiskett mentions the following:

“In all of this the Shehu became learned, through the study of certain Arabic texts which became standard works among the scholars of his community, and he encouraged his daughter Asma to acquire such knowledge. His son Bello was also an expert in this study and so, no doubt, were his other children.”

This shows us that there is definitely Islamic support and tradition for women to acquire basic, advanced, and religious education as well as men.

At this point, we should examine exactly what Nana Asma’u studied and attained in her educational career to ensure that it was similar to the educational careers of her other family members least we face the challenge that her education consisted of only the basics studies and homemaking skills. Jean Boyd tells us that with “other boys and girls Asma’u attended classes, whilst she was still too young to learn to read, but when old enough she began to recite” Qur’an and committed it to memory²⁴. So we see that Nana Asma’u was allowed to attend classes before she could even read and write. We can see how Nana Asma’u’s basic education follows the traditional path set out above and further delineated by the educational careers of her father Sheikh Uthman and her brother Muhammad Bello. However, Nana Asma’u’s education did not stop at basic literacy and basic religious requirements. Mack and Boyd instruct us that Nana Asma’u “studied Islamic philosophical texts on prayer, mysticism²⁵, legal matters, *fiqh* (which regulates religious conduct), and *tawhid* (dogma)²⁶”. Now if the education of Nana Asma’u stopped here and we had

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²² Mervyn Hiskett, *Sword of Truth: The Life and Times of the Shehu Usuman dan Fodio* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 31.

²³ Mervyn Hiskett, *Sword of Truth: The Life and Times of the Shehu Usuman dan Fodio* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 31.

²⁴ Jean Boyd, *The Caliph’s Sister: Nana Asma’u 1793-1865 Teacher, Poet, and Islamic Leader* (London, England: Frank Cass, 1989), 7.

²⁵ Here we can understand mysticism to mean asceticism or Sufism as discussed above in footnote #9.

²⁶ Beverly Mack and Jean Boyd, *One Woman’s Jihad: Nana Asma’u, Scholar and Scribe* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 7.

no further information regarding what she studied, her transcript up until this point is very impressive for a man or woman even in the present day.

We think that it is important to include here a short discussion of the Islamic esoteric (i.e. sufi) training available to women in this society. In many societies around the world, esoteric science or initiation is limited to men in the community alone. We find this even in the masonries and fraternal orders in Western societies. However, we find in this Islamic community, that women were included in learning and teaching the sufi sciences. Boyd and Mack state that Nana Asma'u was "well versed in sufi philosophy"²⁷. They mention that she obviously studied the popular works that had made it to the community from abroad, other texts written by her family members, and that she actually authored a sufi philosophical text entitled *The Path of Righteousness* when she was still only 27 years old. Nana Asma'u wrote many other sufi works instructing students how to use certain verses of Qur'an for medicinal and esoteric purposes as well as works instructing students how to improve their character and remove blameworthy characteristics. Muhammad Shareef informs us that Sheikh Uthman guided no less than four wives and six of his daughters to spiritual realization in the Qadiriyyah path²⁸. This is an incredible report and testament to the liberality of Islamic culture and learning in a community that existed over 200 years ago.

If the educational career of Nana Asma'u was an isolated incidence and there were no other scholarly women in this society, none of this matters and Islam does in fact represent a religion and culture that systematically restricts the education of women. Again we can look directly to the Ibn Fudi clan for evidence due to the fame of its members and the amount of source material. Boyd and Mack tell us that the number of learned women (i.e. women Islamic scholars) reached as many as one hundred according to one of Nana Asma'u's poems entitled *Sufi Women*²⁹. Boyd and Mack go on to reveal the more important fact that the presence of women Islamic scholars such as those in the Ibn Fudi clan "was not unique in its day, but echoed

²⁷ Jean Boyd and Beverly Mack, *Collected Works of Nana Asma'u, Daughter of Usman 'dan Fodiyo (1793-1864)*. (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1997), 4.

²⁸ Sheikh Uthman ibn Fudi. *The Revival of the Sunna and the Destruction of Innovation*, trans. Muhammad Shareef (Pittsburgh: Sankore' Institute of Islamic – African Studies, 1996), xxiii.

²⁹ Jean Boyd and Beverly Mack, *Collected Works of Nana Asma'u, Daughter of Usman 'dan Fodiyo (1793-1864)* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1997), 3.

other comparable groups throughout West Africa”³⁰ especially those affiliated with the Qadiriyyah sufi order.

Erudition

We cannot seriously discuss the career of an Islamic scholar without discussing whether they memorized and/or produced texts. This is the cornerstone of Islamic learning. In order to complete this discussion, we must discuss the contributions of the scholars as the result of their education.

We start with the texts that were memorized or mastered by Sheikh Uthman. Abdullah ibn Fudi tells us that Sheikh Uthman memorized the Qur’an, *al-Khulasa* (grammar), *al-Mukhtasar* (maliki jurisprudence), studied and received *ijazah* in the whole of the voluminous *Saheeh al-Bukhari* (collection of prophetic sayings usually found in 20 volumes), *al-Ishriniyyat* (rhetoric), *al-Witriyyat* (rhetoric), the Six Poets (rhetoric), the books of Sanusi and their commentaries (tawheed), *al-Ajrumiyyah* (grammar), *al-Mulhi*, *al-Qatr*, *al-Akhdari* (fiqh), *al-Ashmawiyah* (fiqh), *ar-Risala* of Ibn Abi Zayd (fiqh), and *al-Madkhal* (fiqh). This list is only a fraction of the texts studied and memorized by Sheikh Uthman but it allows us to see the extent and the capacity of the scholar in the Islamic tradition^{31,32}. As for the texts authored by Sheikh Uthman, it has been verified and documented by John Hunwick that Sheikh Uthman was the author of over 100 works extending to every branch of Islamic science³³. There are many more works attributed to Sheikh Uthman for which his authorship has not been verified at present. In this present work, it is not necessary to delineate each and every one but we will discuss some of the more popular, accessible, and some of the currently translated works. We will begin with what is referred to as the magnum opus of Sheikh Uthman which is the *Ihya Sunnah wal Ikhmad al Bidah* (“The Revival of the Sunnah and the Removal of Innovations”). Other works written by Sheikh Uthman include *Bayan al-Wujub al-Hijra* (“Discussion of the Legal Obligation to Emigrate”), *Kitab al Farq* (political science text), *Najm al-Ikhwān* (legal discussion

³⁰ Jean Boyd and Beverly Mack, *Collected Works of Nana Asma’u, Daughter of Usman ‘dan Fodiyo (1793-1864)* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1997), 4.

³¹ **Ida n-Nusukh, Sheikh Abdullah ibn Fudi, unpublished Arabic manuscript, 1812**

³² I also found this same text translated in the following source:

Mervyn Hiskett, “Material Relating to the State of Learning among the Fulani before Their Jihad,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 19, Issue 3 (1957): 555-562.

³³ John Hunwick, ed., *Arabic Literature of Africa, Vol 2: The Writings of Central Sudanic Africa*. (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1995), 52.

on revolution), *as-Salaasil adh-Dhahabiyyah* (sufi text), *al-Wathiqah* (often referred to as his Declaration of Independence), *Umdat al Ulama*, *Umdat al Ubaad*, *Tareekh al Jannah*, *Siraaj al-Ikhwan*, and *Tanbeeh al Ikhwan*. All of these texts and others may be found in hand copied forms in Kano and Sokoto, Nigeria or in Maiwurno, Sudan. Some of these texts have also been provided and translated in journal articles such as The Wathiqat Ahl al-Sudan: A Manifesto of the Fulani Jihad, by A. D. H. Bivar³⁴, Kitab al-Farq: A Work on the Habe Kingdoms Attributed to Uthman dan Fodio, by Mervyn Hiskett³⁵, and Material Relating to the State of Learning among the Fulani before Their Jihad, by Mervyn Hiskett³⁶.

At this point, we lack source material regarding what Muhammad Bello studied. However, we may provide some of what his teacher Abdullah ibn Fudi studied instead. This should serve our purpose in that Abdullahi ibn Fudi was also a member of the Ibn Fudi clan. He was also a teacher of Muhammad Bello and would have likely taught to him many if not all of the works that he himself had learned for Sheikh Uthman. In *Ida n-Nusukh*, Abdullah ibn Fudi indicates that he first learned and memorized the Qur'an. He tells us that he next "recited to" Sheikh Uthman the "*Ishriniyyat*, *al-Witriyyat*, and the Six Poets"³⁷. Again, "recited" or "read" in this usage means that Abdullah read and recited the works repeatedly until he had memorized the texts. Abdullah also studied the *Maqaamat*, *ash-Shudhuur adh-Dhahab*, *ar-Ramiza*, *al-Farida*, *al-Bahjat l-Mardiya*, *at-Tuhfat al-Wardiya*, and *Minhaj as-Saalik*. Abdullahi ibn Fudi mentions learning, in *Ida n-Nusukh*, nearly 100 works from a multitude of teachers. So we can see that the Ibn Fudi Clan systematically studied and memorized many texts during their education.

Muhammad Bello also authored many works. John Hunwick lists over 160 texts that can be verified as being authored by Muhammad Bello³⁸. Many of Bello's texts deal with societal studies, politics, and medicine. However, he also deals with history, religious matters, language, and many other subjects. Again, we only find it

³⁴ A. D. H. Bivar, "The Wathiqat Ahl al-Sudan: A Manifesto of the Fulani Jihad," *Journal of African History* II, 2 (1961): 235-243.

³⁵ Mervyn Hiskett, "Kitab al-Farq: A Work on the Habe Kingdoms Attributed to Uthman dan Fodio," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 23, Issue 3 (1960): 558-579.

³⁶ Mervyn Hiskett, "Material Relating to the State of Learning among the Fulani before Their Jihad," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 19, Issue 3 (1957): 550-578.

³⁷ Mervyn Hiskett, "Material Relating to the State of Learning among the Fulani before Their Jihad," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 19, Issue 3 (1957): 550-578.

³⁸ John Hunwick, ed., *Arabic Literature of Africa, Vol 2: The Writings of Central Sudanic Africa*. (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1995), 114.

necessary to list the most popular, accessible, and influential works here. Muhammad Bello most important work may have been *Infaq al-Maysur* (The Easy Disbursement). This work gives a historical account of the Bilad as-Sudan or the “Land of the Blacks” in which he lives as told by the historians and scholars of the region from the earliest times up to Muhammad Bello’s time. He also wrote *Risalat li’Amraad*, *Tanbeeh as-Saahib*, *Usul as-Siyaasa*, *al-Kawakib al-Durriyyah*, *Kifayat al-Muhtadin*, and *Nur al-Fajr*. Again, these texts and others may be found in hand copied Arabic and Fulani forms in Kano and Sokoto, Nigeria and also in Maiwurno, Sudan. Although we have not been able to find any of Muhammad Bello’s works translated and provided in any journal articles, there is a very important correspondence from an Ottoman Governor in Tripoli to Muhammad Bello as the head of the Sokoto Caliphate in Arabic Documents of Northern Nigeria, by A. D. H. Bivar³⁹.

Finally, let us examine the works contributed by Nana Asma’u. The list of works left to us by Nana Asma’u has been numbered and verified at eighty texts by John Hunwick. Other texts have been attributed to Nana Asma’u that could not be verified⁴⁰. Over 60 of these works have been provided to us and translated by Jean Boyd and Beverly Mack in their collaboration *Collected Works of Nana Asma’u, Daughter of Usman ‘dan Fodiyo (1793-1864)*⁴¹. We will discuss some of the important works briefly. The first work is *The Way of the Pious* which is mentioned above and was written by Nana Asma’u at age 27. This is a sufi work delineating blameworthy as well as praiseworthy characteristics. Then there is her poem entitled *Qur’an*. This poem is a mnemonic device used to teach students the titles of the chapters of the Qur’an. Many students attribute special esoteric and protective qualities to this poem although Asma’u never did. Maybe most important to this work is the work *Sufi Women*. In this work, Nana Asma’u delineates the names and praiseworthy qualities of great Muslim women scholars and sufi masters. The next work, *Medicine of the Prophet*, is one of the most popular even to the present day. This is an advanced sufi work in which Asma’u gives the student numerous uses for various chapters and verses of the Qur’an for solving daily problems, curing illnesses, and attaining some goal. One may also find a handwritten Qur’an in Nigeria and

³⁹ A. D. H. Bivar, “Arabic Documents of Northern Nigeria,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 22, Issue 1 / 3 (1959): 324-349.

⁴⁰ John Hunwick, ed., *Arabic Literature of Africa, Vol 2: The Writings of Central Sudanic Africa*. (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1995), 162.

⁴¹ Jean Boyd and Beverly Mack, *Collected Works of Nana Asma’u, Daughter of Usman ‘dan Fodiyo (1793-1864)* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1997).

Sudan with the text of *Medicine of the Prophet* written in the margins near the appropriate verse or chapter. Some other noteworthy texts include In Praise of Ahmada, The Story of the Shehu, Remembrance of the Prophet, and Yearning for the Prophet which is considered a collaboration between Sheikh Muhammad Tukur and Nana Asma'u who translated his work into Hausa in order to make it accessible to the common people⁴².

At the conclusion of this section, we would like to share an excerpt from Sufi Women by Asma'u.

*Exalted, able to see the unseen, radiant
She had a mastery over learning and exceeded all women
She was the outstanding pious person of her time*

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⁴² Jean Boyd and Beverly Mack, *Collected Works of Nana Asma'u, Daughter of Usman 'dan Fodiyo (1793-1864)*. (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1997), 304.

Conclusion

Our conclusion here is simple. Western media, scholars, and powers would like to tell us that the educational problems of the Middle East are directly related to the Islamic nature of those cultures and societies. We are trained with movies, by the Western news media, works by Western scholars, and even the words of world leaders such as former president George Bush when he uses the term Islamo-fascist. This term is used to lead us to believe that there is one basic response to Western influence and manipulation. However, we can look at the subject community of this work and see that education rather than fascism is the appropriate Islamic response to Western influence. When discussing the reform community in Nigeria, Ibraheem Sulaiman states the following:

“The scale of research and scholarship was astounding. There seemed to be the realization in the *community* that the revolutionary process depended almost entirely on the soundness and vastness of the learning its members were able to acquire. Scholars among them gave their time to developing other scholars and learning more themselves. Students strove for intellectual excellence: Muhammad Bello told us in Shifa al-Asqam that in all he read as many as twenty thousand books. Books were bought, others were borrowed from different parts of Hausaland, and many were written in response to the demands of the *community*⁴³. What came out of this extraordinary devotion to learning was an intellectual revolution on a scale unprecedented in Hausaland.⁴⁴”

Further, many of these sources would have the world to believe that Islamic law or culture demands the restriction of privileges to and the oppression of women. We do not deny that there is a problem or lack of education among women in Islamic societies. We simply prove here that the problem is not rooted in the Islamic nature of these societies. We also offer the possibility that the problem may be rooted in the vestiges of Western colonialism, continued Western influence/exploitation, and/or a lack of an appropriate solution on the part of the Middle Eastern societies.

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⁴³ We have changed the translation here from “Jammāt” to “community” for the purpose of ease of understanding.

⁴⁴ Ibraheem Sulaiman. *A Revolution in History: The Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio*. (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1986), 20.

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