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Moshood Mahmood Jimba (ed). *Arabic Manuscripts in the Ilorin Emirate*. Ilorin: Kwara State University Press, 2019. 268 pp. ISBN 978 978 53920 8-1.

Reviewed by: Amidu Sanni, Vice-Chancellor/ President, Fountain University, Osogbo, Nigeria.

Manuscripts in formal Arabic and in African languages in the Arabic script have become a veritable source of new and authentic knowledge about Africa. Albrecht Hofheinz bemoans the neglect of Yoruba and Songhay in the discourse on African Arabic scripted languages[1]. The work under review has come to unearth the hidden treasure of Ilorin, a city that has produced "some of the most distinguished Yoruba scholars"[2.] But for John Hunwick (1936-2015) and Stefan Reichmuth, the manuscript heritage of Ilorin and its affiliated settlements would have remained in the dungeon.[3] Hence, this volume has come to throw more light on a little studied but important repository of the Islamic manuscript heritage.

The Kwara State University (KWASU) Centre for Ilorin Manuscripts holds some 220-manuscript items of about 2120 folios from which the volume under review is derived. It is the product of a painstaking exertion by the Ilorin Manuscript Group under the leadership of Moshood Jimba. The Preface by AbdulRasheed Na'Allah offers an insightful discussion on the multiplicity of the writing styles of Ilorin authors, as reflected in the multiculturalism of the city itself. This is common in most West African Muslim communities.[4] The Foreword by Emir of Ilorin Sulu Gambari laments the loss of many manuscript items from the "inexhaustible" treasures of the Emirate.

The Introduction (16-26) by Jimba offers an overview of the history of Ilorin up to the 18th century and the evolution of (manu)scriptology, including writing on slates, as a vocation or an avocation by families and individuals in the Emirate. However, one curious and thought-provoking fact that is illustrated by Jimba is the fact that Ilorin could boast of royal intellectuals, and the most prominent examples of this class were Ahmad and Mahmud Yanma, sons of Emir Shitta, the second ruler. Both were prolific authors. Jimba (p. 22) argues that the majority of the works by Ilorin authors are on "*asiri*" or "hidden knowledge" (a utilitarian genre that is often classified as *fawā'id* in the West African Muslim discourse).[5] Sadly, these materials are rarely accessible or understood, even by dependants or disciples of the original owners or custodians.

Chapter 1 (pp. 29-53) by Ismail S. Otukoko is entitled "Ilorin: An Introduction to its history and tradition of Islamic scholarship". Chapter 2 (pp. 59-81) by Razak Deremi Abubakre is entitled "Two centuries of Ilorin intellectual activities towards the efflorescence of Arabic scholarship in Yorubaland". Chapter 3 (pp. 83-95) by Hamza 'Abd al-Raheem is in Arabic and entitled "*Al-harf al-'Arabī wa-makānatuhū al-thaqāfiyyah wa-ahmiyyatuhū al-ḥaḍāriyyah fī makhṭūṭāṭ al-Iloriyyīn*" (The Arabic script: its cultural status and civilizational significance in Ilorin (Arabic) manuscripts". The final chapter (pp. 97-252), which is essentially the core of the work examines the 66 selected manuscript items. The selections are reasonably representative of the thematic spectrum of the Ilorin manuscript tradition. The oldest example is MS 46, p. 202, a 1736 codex of al-Jazūlī's (d. 870/1465) *Dalā'il al-khayrāt* which was brought to Oke Suna from Borno in the 19th century by a progenitor of the Maikabara house. The selections in this volume relate to the Qur'ān, *tafsīr*, ḥadīth (foundational texts), fiqh, sīra, literature, theology, language studies, personal correspondence, poetry, *al-Burda*, and the *alfiyya* of Ibn Mālik, among other curriculum texts. Others are on rhetoric, *kundi*;[6] the latter is interpreted by Jimba, perhaps incorrectly, as "spiritual

medicine." MS 59 & 60, p. 236 & p.238 are *Ajami waka* poems by Badamasi (b. Musa Agbaji) whose great grandson was Muqaddam 'Abd al-Wahhab Saura (1938-2016). MS 61 is a *Nupe Ajami* manuscript that is an invocation of names with reference to certain prophets.[7]

It may be apposite here to draw attention to a few of the grey areas or drawbacks in the work. Many African writers follow Western scholarship, even in error. Jimba talked about "Sub-Saharan" Africa in reference to African countries south of the Sahara. The term is a pejorative term for Sudanic Africa. Though I am uncomfortable with its usage, I am not going to say much on this issue in this review. Jimba also talked about Sokoto Caliphate, a derogatory nomenclature that was popularized by Murray Last's 1967 magisterial work, *The Sokoto Caliphate*. What Shaykh Usman Dan Fodio established was not a caliphate but a sultanate; a political institution, which possessed authority that extended as far as present-day Niger, Cameroon, Chad, and parts of West Africa, with enduring networks up until today.

In serious academic works, materials extracted from WIKIPEDIA are hardly admissible and this should be avoided as much as possible; and Mali and Mauritania are geographically situated in West not North Africa (p. 16). Besides, there are few linguistic issues for which one may pose the question: What is the origin of the word "kundi, and "matasi"? There are, of course, several 'foreign' words in Yoruba that originated from Songhai, Hausa, Fulbe and other regional languages. In (Wolof) Murid 'ajami discourse, for example, '*nja`ngum te´ere*' means 'book-based education'[8]. The Yoruba word for "book" or "written work" is 'tira'. One may then validly ask if the Yoruba word is an adaptation or an instance of borrowing. This is, however, an issue for scholars to investigate further, as they explore trans-West African linguistic shifts and exchanges. There is also the possibility of borrowing the word from the Mauritanian Hassaniyya Arabic 'turra' (pl. turar), as indicated in the marginal notes that are written by mahazra teachers for their students[9]. Words such as "saare" (grave), "borokini" (nobility), "yigi" (marriage), "parakoyi" (business tycoon) etc have found their way into the Yoruba lexicon from the Niger bend and old Mali Empire.

The two mss given as samples of ḥadīth (Mss 7 & 8) would hardly qualify as such: an apocryphal dialogue between the Prophet and Jibrīl and some recommended supplications during certain lunar months. *Isrā'iliyyāt* should properly be interpreted to mean the corpus of foreign, largely biblical narratives (not Israelite traditions) which have found their way into the Islamic scriptural exegesis (Qur'ān and ḥadīth), mystical, and *akhbār* genres.[10] If indeed the necromantic Ibn Sīrīn (d. 111/729) and al-Suyūṭī (911/1505) had, as argued by Jimba, anticipated Ibn Labīb (1284/1868) in regard to the science of palmomancy/fateful spasms, what he calls 'body twitch' *ikhtilāj* (MS 58), then a case of anachronism would have occurred by the concession of priority to Ibn Labīb.[11] But for Omo Ikokoro's original historical work on Ilorin (MS 16), other ms items in this volume are largely and essentially classical texts as used in the informal educational curricula of Muslim learning in Ilorin and Yorubaland. *Al-Wardiyyah* (MS 33) is by no means didactic (moralistic) text, but it is rather a technical text on the science of grammar. It is somewhat problematic (MS 28, p. 164) when paraenetic and apocalyptical poems by anonymous/unknown authors are characterized as *shawārid* (anomalies/exceptions); a term which may be rendered in English as 'stray'/'unfamiliar. Although Jimba does admit that some of the poems so classified are contained in one of Ādam al-Ilori's collectanea, namely his *al-Fawākih al-saqiṭah*,(low-hanging fruits) the question that would naturally arise will be about who classified them as *shawārid*.

An important issue thrown up by some of the mss, especially those dealing with personal narratives or correspondence, is the problem of a standard orthography of Yoruba *ajami*. Standardization of Yoruba *ajami* orthography is a key issue that requires the attention of linguists and Arabists. Illustration of creative writing in formal Arabic by Ilorin authors in the form of personal or communal correspondence (MS 37-45) clearly shows their level of linguistic capability and the influence of their mother tongue(s). Some were polyglots. For instance, Sheikh Mustafa the founder of the Soro Islamic Centre, is reported to be efficient in at least six languages that were spoken in the Emirate, namely Kanuri, Hausa, Fulfulde, Yoruba, Nupe and Dindi.

In conclusion, this volume is largely an important eye-opener as regards the intellectual heritage of Ilorin and Yorubaland. It is hoped that the current efforts in digitisation, preservation, conservation, among other enterprises, in manuscriptology would be beneficial to the West African manuscript tradition in general and to the Nigerian tradition in particular.[12]

ENDNOTES

[1] Review of M. Mumin and K. Versteegh (eds**.)** *The Arabic Script in Africa: Studies in the Use of a Writing System.* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), in Islamic Africa, 9 (2018), 113-132.
[2] John N. Paden, *Muslim Civic Cultures and Conflict Resolution. The Challenge of Democratic Federalism in Nigeria* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), 65
[3] *Arabic Literature of Africa Vol 2, The Writings of Central Sudanic Africa*, Compiled by John Hunwick (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 439-92; 493-549; S. Reichmuth, *Islamische Bildung und soziale Integration in Ilorin (Nigeria), seit circa 1800*, Muenster: LIT, 1998).
[4] Andrea Brigaglia, "Central Sudanic Arabic Scripts (Part 1): The Popularization of the Kanawı¯ Script", *Islamic Africa*, 2, No 2, 2011, pp. 51-85; Andrea Brigaglia & Mauro Nobili, "Central Sudanic Arabic Scripts (Part 2): *Barna¯wı, Islamic Africa,* Vol. 4, No. 2, 2013, pp. 195-223.
[5] Cf. Anne K. Bang, "Islamic Incantations in a Colonial Notebook", *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 236 (2019), 1025-1046; Rudolph Ware, *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic education, embodied knowledge, and History in West Africa*, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

[6] The term, as far as one recalls, is either used with reference to unbound volumes or leather pouches/hard covers in the book industry; it may not necessarily refer to the subject matter as reflected in this instance.
[7] On West African *Ajami* /Arabic script writing tradition, see, Fiona McLaughlin, "Everyday Ajami Writing Practices in Senegal"; online: https://africa.ufl.edu/files/2017-mclaughlin.pdf; https://ajami.hypotheses.org/; Fallou Ngom, Muslims *beyond the Arab World. The Odyssey of Ajami and the Muridiyya*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Muhammad U. Ndagi, "Athematic Exposition of the Nupe Ajami Manuscript Heritage of Northern Nigeria", *Islamic Africa*, 2, no 1 (2011), pp. 11-33.
[8] Ngom, *Odyssey*, p. 75.
[9] *Arabic Literature of Africa 5*, p. 39.
[10] See *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (New ed. 12 vols- Brill: Leiden 1986-2004, Vol 4 (1997), s.v. '*isrāʾiliyyāt*', pp. 211-212; *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* Ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, 6 vols, (Brill: Leiden 2001-2006), *passim*.
[11] See Salvatore Costanza "Fateful spasms: Palmomancy and Late Antique Lot Divination", in AnneMarie Luijendijk, William E. Klingshirn (eds) *My Lots are in Thy Hands: Sortilege and its Practitioners in Late Antiquity*, Brill: Leiden, 2018, pp. 78-100.
[12] See for example, L.W.C. van Lit, *Among Digitized Manuscripts. Philology, Codicology, Paleography in a Digital World* (Brill: Leiden 2020); OPEN CULTURE: The Internet Archive is Digitizing and Preserving Over 100,000 Vinyl Records; Ahmed Chouqui Binebine, *The Arabic Manuscripts in North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa* (London: Al-Furqan), 2013; Michaelle Biddle, 2008. *Saving Nigeria's Islamic Manuscript Heritage* (http: //works.bepress.com/mbiddle/1).

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