

## Arab–Islamic Civilisational Presence in West Africa: A Summary

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### Abstract

*This article addresses the subject of the Arab–Islamic civilisational presence in West Africa, noting that the existing relations between the northern and western parts of the African continent and the civilisational communication between them led to the emergence of the Islamic religion among the tribes of West Africa, particularly in the lands of the “Hausa”. With this civilisational expansion, the Arabic language, the language of the Qur’an, attained an elevated status and acquired significant importance despite the multiplicity of African dialects, beginning from the first Hijri century. This Islamic expansion coincided with commercial activity, and Muslim merchants were the first missionaries. Sultans from the Yusi and Wangara communities, from the fourteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century CE, also played an important role in disseminating Islamic teachings. The Islamic Caliphate (al-Maktaba) emerged and endured for approximately a century (1804–1903), encompassing northern Nigeria, parts of southern Nigeria, and the present-day republics of Niger and Cameroon. This development protected the Muslims of the region from British ecclesiastical Christian missionary activity. The Arabic language advanced and became the language of composition among the peoples of West Africa (Western Sudan), and Arabic vocabulary entered the African dialects as loanwords. Thus, Swahili society became a community influenced by Islamic customs and principles. Swahili literature, written in the language of these peoples, emerged, drawing on Arab–Islamic literature and initially composed of Arabic, before being expressed in local languages. The emergence of written Yusi literature was the product of the intellectual revolution that accompanied the jihad movement in the lands of the Hausa and the establishment of the Maktaba Caliphate. The flourishing of scholarly activity had among its pioneers Shaykh Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Maghbilī al-Tilimsānī in the late fifteenth century, as the Yusa lands were greatly influenced by him. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, small schools for local scholars appeared; they flourished and developed into centers of learning that attracted students from Africa. These emigrants were the spark from which the movement of thought and literature ignited and developed, culminating in the intellectual revolution that accompanied the idea of jihad. The city of Timbuktu was among the foremost and most important centers of scholarly and civilisational radiance.*

**Keywords:** Arab–Islamic Civilisation, West Africa, Hausa Scholarship, Swahili Literature, Sokoto Caliphate, Arabic Intellectual Heritage.

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### Introduction

There is no doubt that the region's geographical location played an important role in this process. As a result, Arab–Islamic culture spread along these coasts, encompassing most aspects of life, and its influence was reflected in the Swahili language. We find that, at earlier times, the region of West Africa, specifically the lands of Borno and Hausa, did not experience direct contact with Arabs to the same extent as East Africa did. Nor did the Islamic call reach the Hausa lands in any tangible way until the mid-fifteenth century. Nevertheless, the Islamic history of this region was distinguished by the early development of centers of intellectual radiance, founded upon an elite group of local scholars who excelled in composition in the Arabic language, such as Dān Masti (Ibn al-‘Ārif), Dān Marīnā (Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh), Jibrīl ibn ‘Umar, and the scholars of the Sokoto Caliphate, among others. These scholars left behind hundreds of valuable works in Arabic and in the Arabic language itself. The scholars and literati of Swahili society confined themselves to composition in Swahili; if there were works in Arabic, they were relatively few, and most were authored by scholars of Arab or Persian origin.

#### *Arab–Islamic Presence in the Region of West Africa*

History does not speak of direct relations between the Arabian Peninsula and the region of West Africa, specifically the lands of the Hausa, nor even with the lands of the Maghrib, from which the Islamic expansion set out into the interior of the continent and then to the lands of the Hausa; for the Great Desert separates them. Thus, geography here appears to have played no notable role in linking the lands of the

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Arabs with West Africa. However, it later played an important role in protecting this region from the decline of Arab–Islamic culture, as witnessed in East Africa. Islamic conquests continued from Egypt to the lands of the Maghrib (and then al-Andalus). The Berbers took up the banner of Islam from the Arabs and carried it across the Great Desert. The mujāhidūn took it up from among the local populations, particularly the Takrūr, the Fulani, and the Mandingo. Several Islamic kingdoms and empires were established throughout the region known to early historians such as Western Sudan: the Muslim Kingdom of Ghana (1076–1085 CE), the Empire of Mali (approximately 1100–1754 CE), and the Empire of Songhay (1473–1591 CE). Similarly, Islam reached the lands of Kanem and Bornu via Fezzan from the first Hijri century. With respect to the lands of the Hausa (northern Nigeria and southern Niger at present), Hausa society arose as Magian and remained so in general until the fourteenth century CE. Nevertheless, these lands certainly became acquainted with a form of monotheism and a measure of Islam, practised in a manner intermixed with paganism, from the thirteenth century CE onwards.

Although the first traces of Islam reached the lands of the Hausa from the neighboring Kingdom of Kanem–Borno to the east, the decisive Islamic expansion reached them from the west. At the outset, it accompanied commercial activity. The first group of Muslim missionaries mentioned in the book *Tārīkh Arbāb Kano* was the Wangarawa, a Mandinka people who combined trade and missionary activity. They arrived in Kano during the reign of the righteous King Yāḥyā ibn Thāmāh (1349–1358 CE), coming from Malle (in reference to the ancient Kingdom of Mali). With the assistance of that king, they succeeded in disseminating a purer form of Islam on a broader scale in Kano and its environs. In this context, Aḥmad Kānī speaks of one of the Wangarawa groups that migrated to the Hausa lands en route to the pilgrimage. It comprises approximately 3,630 individuals, including scholars and Qur’ānic reciters. One may conceive of the profound impact that this group left upon the lands of the Hausa, evident in the emergence of Qur’ānic schools and scholarly circles that subsequently provided a fertile foundation for intellectual and cultural production.

In the following century, specifically during the reign of King Ya‘qūb ibn ‘Abd Allāh Burjā (1452–1463 CE), four groups of newcomers arrived in Kano, all for missionary activity, some also engaging in trade. The most important of these groups was the Fulani community, which came from Mali as part of a large migration that began to settle on the western fringes of the Hausa lands, led by Shaykh Mūsā Jakollo, the thirteenth forefather of Shaykh ‘Uthmān ibn Fūdi. Moreover, the principal migration continued to Kano, including a considerable number of scholars. The sources agree that these Fulani brought with them important books on the science of divine unity, the Mālikī school of law, and Arabic. Several years later, the Arab contingents referred to in the narrative of *Tārīkh Arbāb Ketu* as the “Ashrāf” began to flow into those regions. Among them were the eminent and renowned Moroccan scholar Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Maghīlī al-Tilimsānī (d. 1504 CE), who arrived in Kano during the reign of King Muḥammad Rimfa ibn Ya‘qūb (1463–1499 CE), at the head of a select group of scholars, after a brief stay at the court of the Kingdom of Katsina.

The arrival of Shaykh al-Maghīlī in the lands of the Hausa coincided with the accession of three kings in three of the most important Hausa kingdoms: Muḥammad Rimfa in Kano, Muḥammad Korau (and after him Ibrāhīm Maje) in Katsina, and Muḥammad Rabbo in Zazzau (Zaria). Aḥmad Kānī related that all three devoted exceptional care to reviving religious rites, combating paganism, and cloaking political systems in Islamic garb. He adds that Shaykh al-Maghīlī brought with him books on jurisprudence and composed a special treatise for the king of Kano entitled *Tāj al-Dīn fīmā Yajibu ‘alā al-Mulūk*, which was regarded as a draft “Islamic constitution” and which the king adopted as a foundation for reorganising the departments of his state.

Islam thereafter spread steadily from the central kingdoms to the outlying regions. Scholars who came from outside the lands of Hausa, together with the group of local scholars who had studied under them, played a considerable role in this development. Nevertheless, many pagan practices persisted among the general populace and in the courts of certain sultans, who retained the custom of consulting sorcerers and astrologers to consolidate their authority. It appears that missionary activity during the seventeenth century

until the middle of the eighteenth century succeeded in broadening the sphere of Islam but failed to halt the pagan practices practiced alongside Islam to the extent that they were regarded as part of Islam itself.

In the mid-eighteenth century, when scholars perceived the danger of this situation for Islam, some of them, such as Shaykh Jibrīl ibn ‘Umar al-Ṭāriqī, undertook to confront this phenomenon and began directing criticism at the sultans in open defiance of the conventions of that age. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Shaykh ‘Uthmān ibn Fūdī and his brother ‘Abd Allāh (a disciple of Shaykh Jibrīl), assisted by the former's son (Muḥammad Bello), went further still and proclaimed jihad against the Hausa kingdoms to purify and renew the religion. After four years of battles, they succeeded in overthrowing all the existing regimes at that time and in establishing an Islamic caliphate founded upon the Law of God, namely, the Sokoto Caliphate.

The Sokoto Caliphate endured for a full century (1804–1903 CE). It encompasses all of northern Nigeria and parts of its southern regions, as well as extensive areas of the present-day republics of Niger and Cameroon. The scholars of this caliphate strove to consolidate the values of the true religion and to educate successive generations therein, with particular emphasis on the dissemination of knowledge and learning. Consequently, when this caliphate fell into the hands of British colonial rule, the ecclesiastical missions found no foothold among its Muslim population. Throughout the colonial period, fathers were careful to preserve the teachings of Shaykh ‘Uthmān and to protect their children from the negative influences of Western culture. After Nigeria attained independence in 1960, Sir Aḥmadu Bello, grandson of Shaykh ‘Uthmān and the first prime minister of northern Nigeria, worked to connect northern Nigeria with the Islamic world by dispatching students to study in Arab–Islamic countries, particularly Sudan and Egypt. This first generation of such students deserves credit for imparting an Islamic character to all matters related to intellectual activity, education, the judiciary, and administration in general in northern Nigeria up to the present day.

#### *Arab–Islamic Influences upon the Arabic Language and Swahili Culture*

Contact between people occurs only through communication, and communication takes place only through language. It follows, therefore, that the necessity of contact and communication requires one of the two peoples to learn the language of the other. In cases of extreme necessity, a hybrid language may arise, founded upon the stronger language, whether in terms of the number of its speakers or their political and economic influence, and nourished by a considerable quantity of words and expressions drawn from the weaker language or languages. In all circumstances, however, language remains the most important element in the processes of contact and communication.

The Swahili language is regarded as the language most influenced by Arabic, to the extent that some have gone so far as to claim that it originated in Arabic. In contrast, others have supposed that it is a mixture of Arabic and Bantu. In reality, anyone with even modest knowledge of linguistics is well aware that the Swahili language did not originate in Arabic. Moreover, some linguists maintain that the emergence of mixed languages is impossible.

In any case, there is now widespread recognition that Swahili is a Bantu language with a considerable degree of Arabic influence. These influences are more abundant among the inhabitants of the coast and gradually diminish as one penetrates the interior of the continent. However, what has not been made clear to many researchers is how this influence occurred and how these terms entered into the core of the Bantu language. Many of them rely on the notion of natural borrowing, meaning that speakers of Bantu languages borrowed Arabic vocabulary. However, such an assumption, which would virtually render the recipient language a hybrid, can occur only in a situation of bilingualism, as in the case of Arabic and the local languages in Sudan, where nearly all speakers of the local languages also speak Arabic as a second language.

In our estimation, what occurred on Zanzibar and other islands and coasts of East Africa was that the Arabs themselves began speaking the simple Bantu language (Unguja), supplementing what they lacked of its vocabulary or what was lexically absent by means of words from their mother tongue, namely, Arabic.

Thus, most Arabic influences on sounds, words, expressions, maxims, and proverbs were introduced into the Bantu language by the Arabs themselves through their efforts to communicate with local inhabitants. The local population then received them in this new form. If there was borrowing in the opposite direction, it must have occurred later.

It is difficult to estimate the proportion of Arabic vocabulary in the Swahili language because this influence, as previously noted, varies between the coast and the interior. Nevertheless, it encompasses most aspects of life, particularly Islamic practices, commerce, administration, and certain customs and traditions. Numerous extensive and detailed studies on this subject exist, which render further elaboration unnecessary in the present article.

With respect to Swahili culture, Sayyid Ḥāmid Ḥarīz has indicated that the features of Arab culture within Swahili society differ from place to place within the Swahili region in terms of their strength and intensity, naturally, according to the proximity or distance of the location from the coast and the islands, as previously mentioned. In some places, this culture is confined solely to language and dress, whereas in others, it is reflected in language, customs, beliefs, attire, housing, and the arts. In such places, many elements of culture and heritage are derived from Arab life in its early periods, particularly the ‘Abbāsīd era (the tales of *One Thousand and One Nights*). Similarly, the customs of birth, circumcision, upbringing, marriage, and mourning are entirely marked by an Arab–Islamic character.

#### *Arab–Islamic Influences upon Hausa Language and Culture*

We observed, in the case of East Africa, that the contact between Arabic and the Bantu language from which Swahili developed was direct and involved speakers of both languages. Indeed, we have seen that the Arabs were the first to speak the Bantu language and supplemented their needs with Arabic words and concepts. In contrast, contact between Hausa and Arabic was, in most cases, indirect, that is, through literary traditions and, in certain instances, through intermediary languages, the most important of which were Berber and Kanuri.

Historical sources have indicated the presence of Arabs in the cities of Kano and Katsina in northern Nigeria since the fifteenth century CE, in the form of individuals and groups, and that the Shuwa Arabs had settled around Lake Chad (in Nigeria, Chad, and Cameroon) since ancient times. However, these Arabs never exerted significant influence on the sociolinguistic conditions in the places where they settled. Rather, as a minority, they learned the prevailing languages of those regions and communicated in them.

In reality, the history of Arabic in the Hausa lands is closely bound up with the spread of Islam in those regions, and the Hausa themselves regard Arabic and Islam as two sides of the same coin. Four centuries of contact between the two languages through Islam, literature, commerce, and other aspects of life were sufficient to allow the Hausa language to absorb numerous Arabic words and expressions from both oral and written sources. The list compiled by the American linguist Joseph Greenberg (1947) included approximately 460 presumed Arabic words in Hausa, whereas the list of the Italian linguist Sergio Baldi (1983) included approximately 1,250 words. This number of words, together with their derivatives, amounts to nearly 10 percent of the total Hausa vocabulary, as listed in Abraham's dictionary (1962).

It is difficult to speak of Arab cultural influences in Hausa society comparable to those observed in Swahili society because of the absence of influential Arab communities in Hausa territory. What may be referred to here as cultural influences are, in reality, primarily Islamic influences, limited to matters such as the solemnisation of the marriage contract and the celebration of major religious occasions, such as the noble Prophet's birthday and the principal festivals. Apart from this, Hausa society remains attached to its customs and traditional practices in all aspects of social life, including appearance, dress, architecture, the customs of birth, marriage, and mourning, and the nature of relations among family members and society.

*The Emergence and Development of Literature Written in the Swahili and Hausa Languages**The Emergence of Written Swahili Literature*

Among the most significant Islamic influences on the people who were blessed with Islam in Asia and Africa was the development of written literature in those peoples' languages, rooted in Arab–Islamic literature. By way of example, one may cite modern Persian literature, Turkish literature, and Urdu literature in Asia and Swahili literature, Hausa literature, and Fulani literature in Africa. What occurred in Asia was a process of development, for those people possessed latent literature in scripts other than Arabic prior to being influenced by Arab–Islamic culture. In contrast, the aforementioned African peoples did not have written literature before the advent of Islam, and their literature arose from the outset as branches of Arab–Islamic literature written in Arabic script.

Researchers concerned with the literature on Muslim people in Africa have reported that intellectual activity among these people always begins in Arabic. That literature in the local languages subsequently emerges. Thus, the earliest manuscripts discovered on the coasts of East Africa were those of Kilwa, Pate, and Lamu, all of which were composed in Arabic. Phrases in Arabic have also been inscribed upon certain tombstones dating back to the eighth century CE. Researchers do not exclude the possibility of a written literary heritage in Arabic script prior to this date, which has yet to be discovered. In any case, there is no doubt that all these آثار are attributable to the Arabs themselves, and there is nothing to suggest that the local inhabitants had any role therein.

The more important questions in this context are as follows: When did the written literary heritage of Swahili in Arabic script appear, how did it arise, and who were its pioneers? Were they Arab Swahili or the local inhabitants? As is the case with the Muslim peoples of West Africa, and the Hausa in particular, as will be seen later, the beginning of composition in the Swahili language was in verse. The earliest texts in this genre are four long didactic poems dating back to the eighteenth century. Perhaps the most important and oldest among them was the *Hamziyyah* of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Rūs ibn ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Alī, which constitutes a translation of the Arabic poem by Sharaf al-Dīn al-Būṣīrī. Some excerpts from the Mawlid poems have also been translated from Arabic poems. However, the English scholar specialising in the Swahili literature, Knappert, does not exclude the existence of poems originally composed in Swahili. Swahili poetry also includes long epic poems. However, since epics are unknown in Arabic poetry, Knappert suggests that the Swahilis may have received this genre from models of Persian or Urdu poetry.

Swahili poetry arose in an Islamic character and has remained so to the present day. Even when poetry was composed after the colonial period, although its themes may not be Islamic, it is Islamic in spirit and form. Swahili poetry has employed several Arabic metrical forms, the most important of which, according to Knappert, are *Kisarambe*, *Utenzi*, *Shairi*, and *Kawafi*. It has been observed that the first two metres are used for poetry concerned with worldly themes, whereas most of what was composed in the latter two metres pertains to religious themes. The *Utenzi* metre was the oldest of these, for the *Hamziyyah* poem was composed in it.

Among the most important works in the *Kisarambe* metre is the poem *al-Inkishāf* by Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Alī ibn Nāṣir. This metre consists of stanzas of four hemistichs, in which the first three hemistichs carry an independent rhyme. In contrast, the rhyme of the fourth hemistich constitutes the principal rhyme of the poem, as illustrated in the following example from *al-Inkishāf*:

*Wasiriye karwa kala bwa dudi*

"They have become food for worms,"

*na kuwatafuma zao na mtwa na tungu huwafisidi jisadi*

which suck their bodies and gnaw at them;

*majoka na pili wawataliye*

serpents and the snakes surrounding them.

These verses were composed of descriptions of death, the torment of the grave, and the terrors of the day of resection. These are the same images reflected in the celebrated Hausa-language poems of Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh ibn Fūdī, such as *Bulaliya* (The Whip), *Jan Mari* (The Red Shackle), and *Bakin Mari* (The Black Shackle). The above metre is likewise regarded as one of the recurrent metres in Hausa poetry.

Knappert observed a strong resemblance between Swahili and Hausa poetry, leading him to suggest that the two cultures had been in contact. However, history has not recorded any contact between the lands of the Hausa (the Sokoto Caliphate) and the region of East Africa at any time. The resemblance between the poem *al-Inkishaf*, for example, and similar Hausa poems such as those mentioned above is attributable to the fact that the scholars in both regions pursued the same objective, namely, exhortation, followed a single method (encouragement and warning), and relied upon the same sources (the Qur’ān, the ḥadīth, and certain classical works).

Before concluding this section concerning the emergence of written Swahili literature, it should be noted that prose also occupies a significant place within this literature. Among the earliest materials recorded in the written Swahili literature in Arabic script were texts not derived from Islam, such as bills of lading and unloading of goods, personal letters, diplomatic correspondence, and similar documents. There were also texts rooted in local oral literature, such as riddles, proverbs, and tales of hidden spirits. Arab–Islamic literature was represented primarily by the Prophetic Biography, the stories of the Prophets, the literature of the ‘Abbāsīd period, and the tales of *One Thousand and One Nights*.

#### *The Emergence of Written Hausa Literature*

If Swahili literature arose gradually, written Hausa literature, by contrast, was the product of the intellectual revolution that accompanied the jihad movement in the lands of the Hausa and the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate. History has not preserved for us, until the final decades of the eighteenth century, works of literary value in the Hausa language. Whatever existed in earlier periods did not go beyond panegyric expressions composed of court poets for kings, depicting certain heroic exploits; nor did they reach the level of customary oral poetry. Recently, it has been claimed that a poem in praise of Bawa Jangwarzo, King of Gobir, dating to the third decade of the eighteenth century, has been discovered; however, such works, whose authors are not even known, cannot be relied upon to speak of written Hausa literature during that period.

The leaders of the jihad movement in the Hausa lands possessed considerable knowledge of the Arab–Islamic literature. They composed numerous works in the Islamic sciences of monotheism, jurisprudence, acts of worship, jihad, transactions, exhortation, and the like, in Arabic, both in prose and in verse, to guide society and prepare it for the change they sought, as will be seen later. However, a time came when these scholars realised that writing solely in Arabic did not achieve their intended purpose in the required manner, as the target audience of this endeavour, the Hausa peasants and the Fulani pastoralists, were illiterate and had no knowledge of Arabic. It therefore became incumbent upon the movement's leaders to seek another practical means of conveying knowledge to their community, and this did not entail first teaching them Arabic, for how long would that have taken? Hence, the idea of resorting to the prevailing local languages, most importantly Hausa and Fulfulde, arose.

With the beginning of the nineteenth century, a new phase of the intellectual jihad movement commenced, namely, the phase of transmission and translation, that is, the transfer of sciences directly related to the general populace, which had previously been written in Arabic prose, their translation, or their recasting in the local languages in the form of rhymed didactic poems. This process resembled the movement of translation from Greek, Roman, Persian, and Indian cultures into Arabic during the early ‘Abbāsīd period. Moreover, alongside translation and transmission, the shaykhs also composed didactic poems directly in

local languages, particularly in the field of exhortation. Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh ibn Fūdī was the most prominent among those who composed in Hausa, alongside Asmā’, daughter of Shaykh ‘Uthmān ibn Fūdī, who translated her father’s poems from Fulfulde into Hausa and rendered some of them in five-line strophic form.

The Hausa poem emerged like the Arabic poem, bearing within it all the elements of Arabic poetry in terms of structure and modes of artistic expression, including metrical patterns and rhetorical embellishments. The English orientalist Mervyn Hiskett reported that Islamic Hausa poetry employed ten Arabic metrical patterns and differed from Arabic poetry only in its subject matter, which here is confined to religious and jihad-related themes. In its external structure, the Hausa poem follows the pattern of the religious didactic poems prevalent in that period: it begins with the customary prelude, namely, praise and thanksgiving to the Generous Creator, followed by blessings upon the Chosen Prophet, his family, his Companions, and the eminent Followers. It then alludes to the date of its composition by means of a word or phrase in which each letter represents a specific numerical value, in accordance with the system known as *ḥisāb al-jummal* (for example, the phrase *‘ām sharika* corresponds to the year 1224 AH).

#### *Arab–Islamic Intellectual Heritage in the Arabic Language in the Region of West Africa*

As mentioned in the introduction, Islamic intellectual activity in the Arabic language constitutes the principal axis of this article. In the foregoing discussion, we have examined various intellectual and cultural aspects expressed in the local languages Swahili and Hausa, in particular, which developed as a result of Arab–Islamic contact with the regions of East and West Africa, whether that contact was direct (East Africa) or indirect (West Africa). The reader is now entitled to ask, where does the Islamic intellectual heritage expressed in the Arabic language stand within the literary and intellectual map outlined above? How did this heritage arise, if it indeed exists, and who were its pioneers?

If we recall what has been stated concerning the antiquity of the connections between the Arabian Peninsula and the coasts of East Africa, the density of Arab presence during various historical periods in that region, and the early arrival of Islam there in comparison with West Africa, one would expect the existence of a body of Islamic intellectual heritage in Arabic proportionate to the magnitude and degree of these factors. However, what one finds in reality is an image entirely the reverse of what might have been expected: namely, a noticeable paucity of Islamic intellectual production in Arabic in the region of East Africa, coupled with a weakness in its scholarly value, whereas in West Africa, there is an abundance combined with a high scholarly standard. Let us therefore present a brief account of the emergence and development of the scholarly movement and Arabic authorship in West Africa to understand the limited scope of this activity in East Africa.

#### *The Flourishing of the Scholarly Movement in the Lands of the Hausa*

The scholars who accompanied Shaykh Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Maghīlī al-Tilimsānī, mentioned earlier or who followed in his footsteps to the lands of the Hausa during the final decade of the fifteenth century, deserve credit for the emergence of the scholarly movement in those lands. With the beginning of the sixteenth century, small circles of local scholars began to grow and flourish, eventually becoming centres attracting migrants from other Islamic regions, particularly the Kingdom of Kanem–Bornu, North Africa, and Egypt. These migrant scholars to the lands of the Hausa, or those who maintained contact with them, in reality represented the spark from which the movement of thought and literature in the Arabic language ignited in those lands. This movement continued to grow and develop until it culminated in the “intellectual revolution” that accompanied the jihad movement and the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in the first decade of the nineteenth century.

Although the period from the beginning of the seventeenth century until the middle of the eighteenth century produced only a few distinguished local scholars, the works of these scholars, by the standards of that age, were of a quality worthy of consideration. Among them was the Kano scholar ‘Abd Allāh Thaqa (Sika), who composed a didactic poem entitled *al-‘Atṭiyab li’l-Mu’ṭi*, in which he set forth the various aspects

of acts of worship. This poem is regarded as the beginning of local verse composition and as a model for the genre, which is spread throughout the region. Among them was the Katsina scholar Ibn al-Ṣabbāgh, known as Dān Marīnā (d. 1655), who, for the first time, explained and analysed al-Mazzāzī's *al-Isbrīniyyah* in a work entitled *al-Wasā'il al-Munqibalab*. Among his well-known works is *Mazjarat al-Ṣibyān*, in which he set forth the branches of knowledge and learning addressed and mastered by the scholars of his age in his land, including the Sharī'ah, theology, ḥadīth, grammar, astronomy, the arts of recitation, prosody and rhyme, and philosophy. Among the renowned scholars of Katsina were also Shaykh Dān Masfī and Ibn al-'ārif. Shaykh Muḥammad Bello ibn Fūdī attributes to Ibn al-'Ārif works indicative of the abundance of his knowledge, including *al-Naḥḥab al-'Anbariyyah fī Sharḥ al-Isbrīniyyah*, *Buḥūgh al-Shamsiyyah fī Sharḥ Tadhīr al-Isbrīniyyah*, and *Iḍḍihār al-Rubā fī Akhbār Būriyā*.

Among the scholars of that land during that period were Shaykh Hārūn al-Zakzakī and the Shaykh of the Fulani shaykhs, as Muḥammad Bello referred to him. He composed poems and works, among them a didactic poem on the transmitters of al-Bukhārī, that is, the transmission of the branches from the roots. Among them were Shaykh 'Alī Jib, the author of a commentary on *al-Kubrā* and a commentary on *Lāmiyat al-Af'āl*. These were the eminent scholars of that age. There is no doubt that many others besides them did not reach their level.

The social and spiritual decline that afflicted the society of the lands of the Hausa during the second half of the eighteenth century led to the emergence of a new type of writing that criticised society for its laxity in Islamic practice and for its mixture of such practices with Magian customs, openly censured rulers for their injustice and deviation from the right path, and called for them to rise to purify religion and reform society. The most renowned pioneer of this genre was Shaykh Jibrīl ibn 'Umar al-Ṭāriqī in his poem *Shifa' al-Ghalil*. Thereafter, the banner was taken up by the group of scholars who led the jihad movement, namely, the two sons of Muḥammad Fūdī, 'Uthmān and 'Abd Allāh, together with their sons, companions, and disciples.

Devotion to religious learning was an inherited trait within the Fūdī family. However, the resolve of those mentioned to undertake the reform of society, with all that this entailed confrontation with those whom they termed the corrupt scholars allied with the kings, compelled them to arm themselves with yet greater knowledge and deeper mastery thereof. This indeed became their constant practice. Shaykh 'Abd Allāh ibn Fūdī states in his book *Ibda' al-Nusūkh min Akhbār min al-Shuyūkh* that he studied under fifteen of the most eminent scholars, from whom he acquired various branches of knowledge and learning within the lands of the Hausa and beyond. However, he concludes by saying, "The shaykhs from whom I acquired knowledge I cannot now enumerate, but these are the most renowned among them."

A glance elsewhere in this same book suffices to convey the abundance and high level of the knowledge they sought to acquire: "Among the shaykhs from whom I acquired knowledge was the Commander of the Faithful, my brother 'Uthmān ibn Muḥammad... My father left me in his care after I had completed the recitation of the Qur'ān at the age of thirteen. I read to him the *Isbrīniyyat*, the *Witrīyyat*, and the six collections of poetry; I acquired from him the science of divine unity from the Sanūsī works and their commentaries and others. Hardly a book reached our land of which I became aware without copying it. I studied with him the *Ajurrūmiyyah*, the *Mulḥab*, the *Qaṭr*, and similar works with their commentaries. I acquired from him the science of Sufism pertaining to moral refinement and to spiritual realisation such that, God willing, I was not in need of others. I studied with him the books of jurisprudence required for individual obligation, such as the *Akhdariyyah*, the *Ashmāwiyyah*, and the *Risālah* of Ibn Abī Zayd, and others. I studied with him the exegesis of the Qur'ān from the beginning of al-Fātiḥah to the end of the Qur'ān, many times beyond my reckoning. I acquired from him the science of ḥadīth, both by studying al-'Irāqī and by transmitting al-Bukhārī, beyond which he did not train me. I acquired from him arithmetic, both elementary and advanced; and by God's praise, I attained insight into religion from the effusion of his light and from his beneficial compositions, in Arabic and in the vernacular. From his earliest writings until now, he has not composed a book without my usually being the first to study it."

These leaders acquired and assimilated this abundant knowledge and employed it to address the pressing issues of their society. Their output was commensurate with, or even exceeded, the abundance of what they had acquired. All this was accomplished despite their engagement in the jihad movement and the establishment of the new Islamic state. The members of the Fūdī family, Shaykh ‘Uthmān, ‘Abd Allāh, Muḥammad Bello, and their descendants, left behind, by themselves, a total of 723 works in the Arabic language alone, ranging from lengthy didactic poems to large volumes, apart from what they composed in the local languages Hausa and Fulfulde, the details of which are as follows:

- \*- Shaykh ‘Uthmān ibn Fūdī: 154 works, the largest of which is *Bayān Wujūb al-Hijrah ‘alā al-‘Ibād*.
- \*- Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh ibn Fūdī: 112 works, the most substantial of which are *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ fī al-Naḥw*, comprising 4,000 verses in the manner of Ibn Mālik’s *Alfyyah*, and *Ṣafā’ al-Ta’wīl fī Ma‘ānī al-Tanzīl*, a work of Qur’ānic exegesis.
- \*- Shaykh Muḥammad Bello ibn Fūdī: 162 works, the largest of which is *Infaq al-Maysūr fī Tārīkh Bilād al-Takrūr*.
- \*- Their descendants: 295 works (of which I have not been able to examine a sufficient number).

These works encompassed nearly all branches and disciplines of the Islamic sciences. Some of them addressed subjects and issues specific to their own society; Shaykh Muḥammad Bello, for example, wrote on Prophetic Medicine and contemporary medicine (according to the standards of his age). Perhaps the most significant matter to note in this context is what Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh ibn Fūdī wrote in the Arabic language, particularly his aforementioned work *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ fī al-Naḥw*, his other work *al-Ḥiṣn al-Raṣīn fī ‘Ilm al-Taṣrīf* (360 verses), and his dīwān *Taḥyīn al-Waraqāt bimā Lā min al-Abyāt*, which contains poems drawn from the finest specimens of Arabic poetry.

It cannot be inferred from the foregoing that composition in Arabic during the period of the Sokoto Caliphate was confined to the Fūdī family. If we return once more to numerical evidence, we find that the total number of manuscripts and printed works in the Arabic language discovered from the time of the Fūdīs until 1995, within the area formerly known as the lands of the Hausa from the outskirts of Borgu to the western boundaries of the Emirate of Sokoto, amounted to 1,594 works, ranging from poems to large volumes, including the works of the Fūdīs themselves. This number suffices to demonstrate that composition in Arabic had become an established tradition in northern Nigeria.

It cannot be denied that the school system based upon Western models has adversely affected the vitality of this tradition. Nevertheless, the adherence of northern Nigerian society to traditional Qur’ānic schools and scholarly circles has greatly contributed to the continuity and preservation of this tradition. The list of works by Shaykh Nāṣir Kābara, who died in Kano less than 10 years ago, stands as testimony to this, comprising approximately 150 Arabic works.

#### *Authorship in the Arabic Language in East Africa*

Knappert (1971), who is regarded as the principal authority on the Swahili literature, did not refer to any work in the Arabic language, whether in verse or in prose, dating back to past centuries and composed by a Swahili author, even one of Arab descent, let alone by local inhabitants. Sayyid Ḥāmid Ḥarīz has affirmed that poets in East Africa are composed in the Arabic language on various themes; however, without identifying any particular poet, this suggests the limited scope of this activity. Since we are concerned here with comparison to what occurred in West Africa, it would also have been important to identify those poets. We have already observed that the earliest Swahili poems discovered in East Africa were composed of poets of Arab (or Persian) origin.

With respect to Arabic prose, Sayyid Ḥāmid Ḥarīz, in his comprehensive work on Arab influences in Swahili culture, did not cite any works on the subject. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Aḥmad ‘Uthmān, in the bibliography

appended to his book *Islamic and Christian Influences upon Swahili Culture*, listed four books and five manuscripts by authors from within the region under study or its environs. The authors are Sa‘īd ibn ‘Alī al-Mughīrī, Shaykh Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Kilwī, Salma bint Sa‘īd ibn Sulṭān, Shaykh Idrīs ibn Muḥammad al-Qādirī, Burhān ibn Makallā al-Qamarī, ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad Bākathīr al-Kindī, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Zayn al-Wasaṭ al-Saqqāf, in addition to Rāshid al-Barāwī, who wrote on modern Somalia. It is evident from these names that most of the authors were nonlocal. It is likewise noticeable that there is an absence of substantial intellectual works in the Islamic sciences, such as theology, jurisprudence, exegesis, or speculative theology, or works in the Arabic language comparable to the writings of Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh ibn Fūdī mentioned above.

It is well known that the Nabahānī and Mazrū‘ī families contributed significantly to advancing intellectual life in East Africa, and some of their members authored numerous works in Swahili. One would have expected to encounter their works in Arabic as well. Naturally, it is not possible to rely solely upon the list provided by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Aḥmad ‘Uthmān to judge the scale of authorship in Arabic in East Africa. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān himself stated that he was unable to examine many manuscripts, particularly those in the possession of the families of the Ibāḍī sultans. However, even if we assume the existence of works of scholarly significance in this regard, it is unlikely that they attained, in quantity and quality, what was achieved in the other region of the continent; otherwise, why did they not acquire renown, publication, and dissemination? More significant is the observation that all that was produced in the lands of the Hausa, 1,594 works in the Arabic language, was authored by local scholars whose origins lay within the region itself.

From this arises the central question of this article: why did the scholarly movement in the lands of the Hausa develop early, and why has its flame continued to burn to the present day, leaving behind this vast body of Arab–Islamic heritage expressed in Arabic? Why did nothing comparable occur in the region of East Africa, despite the very early Arab presence there?

By virtue of its strategic position on the trade route between Europe and the West Indies and its commercial wealth, East Africa remained a zone of conflict and rivalry among the various great powers throughout history. It fell under Portuguese control for two centuries, during which time Islamic intellectual activity found no significant opportunity to flourish. That period thus constituted a phase of stagnation, or perhaps even “hibernation”, for such activity. In contrast, the region of the lands of the Hausa, situated far from the coast and lacking the commercial resources that would have aroused the interest of the great powers during the Middle Ages, allowed Islamic intellectual activity to grow along its natural course without external impediment until it reached its zenith with the jihad movement previously mentioned. That region did not experience colonial rule until the beginning of the twentieth century. By that time, religious consciousness among the general populace had reached a level that rendered any form of penetration impossible. At first, the Muslims of the Sokoto Caliphate resolved to resist everything associated with the “infidel” coloniser, and some even went so far as to abandon their homes to safeguard their religion. They then gradually came to accept Western sciences, yet without this affecting their cultural heritage, which was grounded in the Arab–Islamic tradition. It is, therefore, no wonder that Shaykh Nāṣir Kabara, who died in Kano less than ten years ago, left behind approximately 150 works in the Arabic language.

## Conclusion

The conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing is that the relationships between the inhabitants of the Sahara and those of the regions beyond it were strong, ancient, and historically Islamic, scholarly, cultural, Ṣūfī, literary, juridical, and political, embracing all social bonds. Cultural relations were realised through religious teachings, the influence and flourishing of the Arabic language, the adherence of rulers to Islamic law and their exertion of utmost effort to disseminate the religion and their patronage of Islamic scholars. Muslim merchants likewise played a major role in the process of commercial exchange with the lands of the Sudan; they carried goods alongside the Islamic creed, spreading it in those lands and establishing commercial centres that also functioned as Islamic civilisational centres.

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