

3 - Islam in West Africa. Introduction, spread and effects

Africa was the first continent, that Islam spread into out of Arabia in the early seventh century. Almost one-third of the world's Muslim population resides today in the continent. It was estimated in 2002 that Muslims constitute 45% of the population of Africa. Islam has a large presence in North Africa, West Africa, the horn of Africa, the Southeast and among the minority but significant immigrant population in South Africa.

The first West Africans to be converted were the inhabitants of the Sahara, the Berbers, and it is generally agreed that by the second half of the tenth century, the Sahara had become Dar al-Islam that is the country of Islam.

In this chapter, we shall look at the spread of Islam in West Africa as well as the effects of Islam. We shall also find out the activities of the Almoravids.

The Spread of Islam in West Africa

After the Berbers' Islamisation, the religion spread into the Western Sudan from the closing decades of the tenth century. First, Islam spread into the regions West of the Niger Bend (Senegambia, Mali), then into Chad region and finally into Hausaland.

According to some Arabic sources the first Black ruler to embrace Islam was the King of Gao who had done so by 1009. The first King of Mali to become a Muslim was Barmandana, who was reigning by the middle of the eleventh century. The Kings of Ghana, on the other hand did not embrace Islam until about the beginning of the twelfth century, after the Almoravid invasions.

In the Chad region, it appears from the Arabic sources that Umme Jilmi, who became the king of Kanem in 1086 was the first Muslim King. Islam was first introduced into Hausaland from either Kanem or Air in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, but it did not really take root there until during the second half of the fourteenth Century.

Reason for the spread of Islam in West Africa

The following are the reasons for the spread Islam in West Africa. By the end of the fifteenth century, Islam had spread southwards to the fringes of the forest belt.

i. The Nature of Islam

The nature of Islam as a religion accepting polygamy to some extent, its tolerance of traditional African religions, its simplicity of doctrine and mode of worship helped propagators to make converts in Africa. These factors also made Islam easily adaptable to the African communities with which it came in contact. Again, the Islamisation of Africa was paralleled by the Africanisation of Islam. The making and sale of charms and amulets, which

were believed to offer protection against evil forces and generally ensure success in life, were important in winning over converts.

ii. Trade

Another major reason that led to the rapid spread of Islam in West Africa was the trans-Saharan trade network. From the seventh century onwards, Muslim traders from the Maghreb and the Sahara started settling first in some of the market centres in the Sahel and then in the Savanna areas. Al-Bakri, a renowned Arabic Scholar and merchant wrote in 1067, that the capital of ancient Ghana was already divided into two parts; about six miles apart, the Muslim traders' part which had as many as twelve mosques and the King's part had one mosque for the use of the king's Muslim visitors. It was these resident Muslim traders who converted the rulers and the principal local town's people to Islam. Also, according to Kano Chronicles, during the reign of Yaji, the King of Kano from 1349 to 1385, the Wangarawa came from Melle bringing the Mohammedan religion. These examples grew the process of Islamisation or conversion to Islam, as it gathered momentum.

iii. Activities of Muslim Clerics

Islam also spread into West Africa through the activities of Muslim clerics, marabouts and scholars or mallams. These clerics or learned men founded their own religious centres which attracted students from all parts of the Western Sudan and who on the completion of their studies and training went back to their own homes to win converts. Many of them went on lecture or missionary tours to convert people, while others became advisers to Sudanese Kings on how to become effective rulers. Some clerics devoted a great deal of their time to writing books and instructions on all aspects of Islam for the education and conversion of people or the purification and strengthening of Islam. Some examples of clerics follow:

Ibu Khadija al-Kumi, a Muslim missionary and Abu Ishaq al-Sahili, a poet, scholar and architect from Granada were both invited by Mansa Musa to accompany him on his return from his celebrated pilgrimage in 1324/5. Both of them settled in Mali where they taught Islam. Al-Sahili also designed the great mosque of Timbuktu as well as a magnificent palace for Mansa Musa in the capital of Mali.

Again, the great Mande scholar, Abd Rahman Zaitte (now identified as Abd al-Rahman Jakhite) settled in Kano on the invitation of Rumfa, the King of Kano. He built a mosque and introduced the practice of Koran recital and other devotional exercises.

Another brilliant Berber scholar called Abd al-Rahman al-Maghili (1477-78) established his Zawiyaie Islamic school in Tuat in the Sahara, and from there went on a missionary tour of the Western Sudan which lasted from 1492 to 1503. During this tour, he visited Air, Takedda, Kano, Katsina and Gao and preached to both rulers and commoners.

iv. Activities of Rulers

Islam gained ground in West Africa through the activities of the individual rulers. The rulers of the Western Sudan encouraged the trans-Saharan trade and extended hospitality to both traders and visiting clerics, but perhaps one of the most important ways in which they

encouraged acceptance of Islam was through their own conversion. With a Muslim King or ruler it rapidly became a matter of prestige among the aristocracy also to convert to Islam in many kingdoms. Many rulers made considerable efforts to encourage Muslim institutions such as Islamic tax and legal systems or the provision of facilities such as mosques, through the appointment of Muslim officials such as judges and butchers who observe the Islamic code and to lead prayers, celebrating Muslim festival and ordering every town under their control to observe the ritual prayers. The pilgrimages that many of the rulers undertook – such as Mansa Musa and Askia Mohammed – had a considerable spiritual effect increasing their determination both to strengthen and purify Islam and to spread it even further.

v. Holy War

What is more, another way in which Islam was introduced and spread in West Africa in general and the Western Sudan in particular was the militant jihad, or the waging of holy war against infidels or lukewarm Muslims. This method allowed the third and final stage of the process of Islamisation to reach its climax with the nineteenth-century *jihad* in the Western Sudan, between Mali and Senegambia and Hausaland in northern Nigeria.

The first *jihad* in the Western Sudan which has accounts was that waged by the head of the Sudanese confederation. It was Tarsina against the Sudanese people in 1023, soon after his return from the pilgrimage to Mecca. He was killed during these clashes. The second is that of the King of Takrur, War-Ajabbi, before his death in 1040. The third and the best known of these early jihads was the one declared by the Almoravid movement of ancient Ghana between 1048 and 1054 by the scholar, Abdallah Ibn Yasin. Between 1056 and 1070s, the Almoravid conquered the whole area between ancient Ghana and Sijilmasa. By 1087 the Almoravid Empire stretched from the Senegal in the south across the Mediterranean to Spain in the north.

vi. Inter-marriage

Islam also spread on to West Africa through inter-marriages. The Muslim merchants from North Africa came down settled and married the African women who became Muslims including their children.

vii. Scholars

The early Muslim missionaries opened Islamic schools and colleges. The products of these schools and colleges also did well by spreading the religion. They worked with the rulers as advisors, councilors etc. for instance, Ibn Yasin established a Zaniyaor college and founded the Almoravid movement which contributed considerably to the spread of Islam in the Sahara and Western Sudan. Also one of the greatest clerics and missionaries of the Western Sudan was al-Hajj Suware, the Soninke scholar founded the important Zawiga at Diakha – Bambuk which attracted students from all over the Western Sudan during the first half of the thirteenth century. Scholarship was indeed also attractive to rulers in West Africa, because the widespread use of the Arabic script made administering their kingdoms easier, and tax revenues easier to accrue. Thus, Timbuktu became known for its famous

Djingnereber Mosque and prestigious Sankore University, both of which were established in the early 1300s under the reign of the Mali Empire, most famous ruler Mansa Musa.

THE EFFECTS OF ISLAM IN WEST AFRICA

Islam had a great impact on the people and states of Western Sudan and for that matter West Africa in general. Unlike Christianity, Islam is not a just a religion or a mass of doctrines or beliefs and rituals, but rather a complete way of life or civilization. The following are the effects of Islam in West Africa.

POLITICAL EFFECTS

i. Unity

Islam cut across family, clan and ethnic ties and loyalties and emphasized unity and brotherhood. It enabled rulers to build larger Kingdoms and empires embracing different peoples and Linguistic groups. It also provided them with a commonly accepted basis of authority in place of African traditional religious which differed from place to place. Many of the rulers of Western Sudan, such as Mansa Musa of Mali, Askia Mohammed of Songhai and Idris Aloomo of Borno did attempt to use Islam in these ways to generate a feeling of unity and as a basis of their authority.

ii. System of Administration

Most of the Muslim rulers of Western Sudan adopted the Muslim systems of justice and taxation. Thus, Islam promoted a more efficient administration in some of the states of Western Sudan since it enabled the rulers to employ educated Muslims as secretaries, administrators, judges and diplomats and also to correspond with provincial rulers and administrators. It is significant that even non-Muslim rulers such as those of ancient Ghana before the eleventh century employed some Muslims in their administration. Furthermore, the holy wars which some rulers waged helped to extend the frontiers of their states.

iii. Establishment of Diplomatic Relations

The rulers of Western Sudan established strong diplomatic relations with other Muslim rulers abroad as Mansa Musa and Idris Aloomo did with those of Egypt and Tunis respectively. Other diplomatic connections were with the Ottoman Empire, and Al-Andalus in southern Spain.

iv. Army

The *hajj* brought pilgrims into contact with technology and scholarship at the centre of the Muslim world, which were often adopted and introduced when the pilgrims returned home. For instance, Idris Aloomo of Borno brought back from his pilgrimage musketeers and Turkish military instructors, and created musketeers corps in his army which enabled him to extend the frontiers of his state relatively with ease.

RELIGIOUS EFFECTS

v. Pilgrimage to Mecca.

The pilgrimage or *hajj* which Muslims were expected to undertake if they were able to do so, contributed in many ways to the growth and strength of some of the states. The *hajj* enabled the pilgrims to acquire first the highly coveted title of Al-Hajj and more importantly, the *Barka*, that is, the spiritual power which a pilgrim acquired by touching the black stone of the Ka'ba or Great Temple in Mecca and visiting the tomb of the Prophet at Medina. This power was of great importance, especially for the rulers, since it greatly increased their reputation and religious standing among their subjects.

Indeed, it is because of the acquisition of this power that the *hajj* was and is still so popular among Muslims, especially, Muslim rulers.

vi. The Pillar of Islam

There was the replacement of the worship of false gods in some areas. Converts seriously observed the five pillars of Islam, namely; daily prayers including the Friday congregational prayer, fasting, compulsory alms-giving and pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*).

SOCIAL EFFECTS

vii. Literacy

Islam introduced literacy as well as Muslim education into West Africa. Literacy made it possible for scholars to preserve the history and the oral traditions of some of the states in books. Examples of such books are the *Tarikh es Sudan* written by Al-Sa'di in Timbuktu in the seventeenth century. Literacy also enabled people in the Western Sudan to join access to the invaluable Islamic literature, sciences and philosophy which broadened their knowledge, improved their statecraft and widened their horizon.

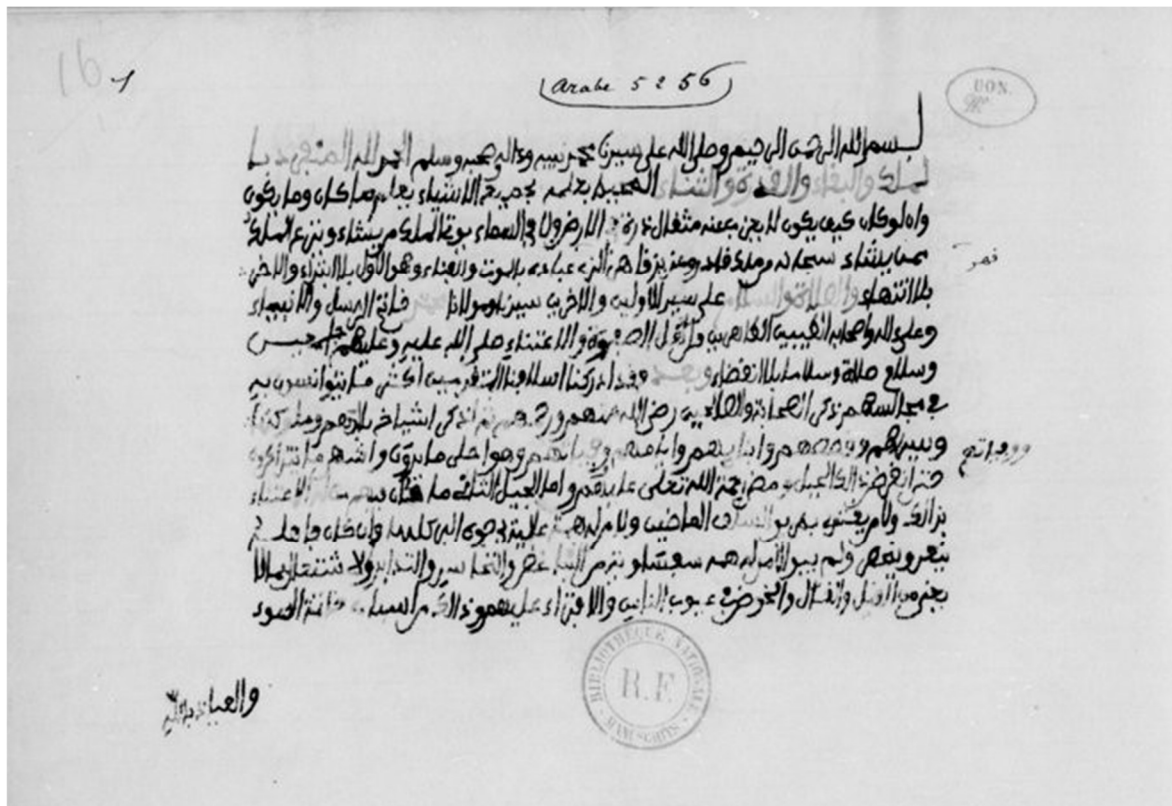
viii. Establishment of Schools

As Islam continued to spread in West Africa, schools and educational centres were established in large towns and cities in Western Sudan. Such towns include Jenne, Timbuktu, Gao Kano and Katsina, and were as much creations of the Islamisation of the Western Sudan as they were of the trans-Saharan trade.

ix. Great Scholars

Islam produced great scholars in Western Sudanese states and West Africa as a whole. Among them are; Mahamud Kati(1468-1593) a Soninke scholar who wrote the *Tarikh al Fettash* (The Chronicle of the Seeker). The second was Abdurrahman-as Sadi a government

secretary and diplomat who wrote the *Tarikh al Sudan* (The Chronicle of Sudan). The third was Ahmed Baba, the author of fifty works on law and a biographical dictionary. Thirteen of his writings are known. He was also the owner of an important library.



Abdurrahman-as Sadi, *Tarikh al Sudan* (Ta'riḥ al-Sūdān), public domain, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, Arabe 5256, <http://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc20347c>

x. Change in Culture

There was also the change in cultural life as a result of the introduction of Islam in West Africa. In all the states of Western Sudan-Muslim wives of prominent men were required to live in *purdah* (seclusion) and to veil their faces when they went out.

ECONOMIC EFFECTS

xi. Architecture

Islam helped in the introduction of burnt brick for example, Ibrahim As-Sahil designed a magnificent brick mosque in Gao, Timbuctu and a stone palace in Mali for Mansa Musa.

xii. Trade

Islam promoted trade between West Africa and the Mediterranean. The religion developed and widened the trans-Saharan Caravan trade. The trade enriched the West African and the

Muslim traders. Muslims from North Africa came in their numbers and settled in the commercial centres. This helped in the development of the cities such as Timbuctu, Gao, Jenne and Kano.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS

The Islamic religion had a great effect on West African societies. In the first place, it challenged traditional African religion, weakening the basis on which some of the Sudanese states such as Kanem and ancient Ghana rested, contributing to their downfall.

Secondly, it often divided the ruling group into Muslim and non-Moslem factions, conflict between which further weakened some of the states such as Songhai.

Thirdly, the jihad not only caused periodic outbreaks of instability and chaos in the Western Sudan but also precipitated the downfall of some states like the Hausa.

From here it is important to understand the history of Islam in West Africa through different movements. So the remainder of the chapter looks at some key moments: the Almoravids and Ghana, the role of the Jakhanké the rise of Sokoto in Nigeria, and the importance of Omar Tal in the 19th century.

A KEY PHASE IN ISLAMIZATION: THE ALMORAVID DYNASTY

The term 'Almoravid' comes from the Arabic word 'al-Murabit, literally meaning "one who is trying" but figuratively meaning "one who is ready for battle at a fortress".

The Almoravid dynasty was an imperial Berber Muslim dynasty centered in Morocco. It established an empire in the 11th century that stretched over the western Maghreb and Al-Andalus. The dynasty was founded by Abdallah Ibn Yasin. The Almoravid capital was Marrakesh, a city which was the ruling house founded in 1062. The Gdala nomadic Berber tribes of the Sahara, traversing the territory between the Draa, the Niger and the Senegal rivers.

The Almoravids were crucial in preventing the fall of Al-Andalus to the Iberian Christian kingdoms, when they decisively defeated a coalition at the Battle of Sagrajas in 1086. This enabled them to control an empire that stretched 3,000 kilometers North to South, from Senegambia to Spain.

Abdallah Ibn Yasin was a Gazzula Berber and probably a convert rather than a born Muslim. His name can be read as "son of Ya Sin". Ibn Yasin certainly had the ardour of a puritan zealot, his creed was mainly characterised by a rigid formalising and a strict adherence to the dictates of the Quran and orthodox tradition.

Ibn Yasin's arguments were disputed by his audience. He responded to questioning with charges of apostasy and handed out harsh punishments for the slightest deviations. The Gudala soon had enough and expelled him almost immediately after the death of his protector, Yahya Ibn Ibrahim, sometime in the 1040s.

Ibn Yasin, however, found a more favourable reception among the neighbouring Lamtuna people. Probably sensing the useful organizing power of Ibn Yasin's pious fervor, the Lamtuna chieftain Yahya Ibn Umar al-Lamtuni invited the man to preach to his people. The Lamtuna leaders, however, kept Ibn Yasin on a careful leash, forging a more productive partnership between them. Invoking stories of the early life of Muhammed, Ibn Yasin preached that conquest was a necessary addendum to Islamicization, that it was not enough to merely adhere to God's law, law was necessary to also destroy opposition to it. In Ibn Yasin's ideology, anything and everything outside to Islamic law could be characterized as "opposition". He identified tribalism, in particular, as an obstacle. He believed it was not enough to urge his audiences to put aside their blood loyalties and ethnic differences, and embrace the equality of all Muslims under the Sacred Law, it was necessary to make them do so. For the Lamtuna leadership, this new ideology dovetailed with their long desire to refound the Sanhaja union and recover their lost dominions. In the early 1050s, the Lamtuna, under the joint leadership of Yahya Ibn Umar and Abdallah Ibn Yasin-soon calling themselves the al-Murabitin (Almoravids)-set out on a campaign to bring their neighbours over to their cause.

The Almoravid Conquest In Northern Africa

From the year 1053, the Almoravids began to spread their religious way to the Berber areas of the Sahara, and to the regions south of the desert. After winning over the Sanhaja Berber tribe, they quickly took control of the entire desert trade route, seizing Sijilmasa at the northern end in 1054, and Aoudaghost at the southern end in 1055. Yahya Ibn Umar was killed in a battle in 1057, but Abdullah Ibn Yasin, whose influence as a religious teacher was paramount named his brother Abu Bakr Ibn Umar as chief. Under him, the Almoravids soon began to spread their power beyond the desert, and conquered the tribes of the Atlas Mountains. They then came in contact with the Berghouata, a Berber tribal confederation, who followed an Islamic "heresy" preached by Salih Ibn Tarif three centuries earlier. The Berghouata resisted. Abdullah ibn Yasin was killed in battle with them in 1059, in Krifla, a village near Rommani, Morocco. They were, however, completely conquered by Abu Bakr Ibn Umar, and were forced to convert to orthodox Islam. Abu Bakr married a noble and wealthy Berber woman, Zaynab an-Nafzawiyat, who would become very influential in the development of the dynasty. Zaynab was the daughter of a wealthy merchant from Houara, who was said to be from Kairouan.

In 1061, Abu Bakr Ibn Umar made a division of the power he had established, handing over the more-settled parts to his cousin Yusuf Ibn Tashfin as viceroy, and also assigning to him his favourite wife Zaynab. Ibn Umar kept the task of suppressing the revolts that had broken out in the desert. When he returned to resume control, he found his cousin too powerful to be superseded. In November 1087, Abu Bakr was killed in battle – according to oral tradition by an arrow, while fighting in the historic region of the Sudan.

Yusuf Ibn Tashfin had in the meantime brought the large area of what is now known as Morocco, Western Sahara, and Mauritania into complete subjection. In 1062 he founded the city of Marrakech. In 1080, he conquered the kingdom of Tlemcen (in modern-day Algeria) and founded the present city of that name, his rule extending as far east as Oran.

The Almoravid Conquest of the Ghana Empire

According to Arab tradition, the Almoravids conquered the Ghana Empire sometime around 1076. An example of this tradition is the record of historian Ibn Khaldun, who cited Shaykh Uthman, the faqih of Ghana, writing in 1394. According to this source, the Almoravids weakened Ghana and collected tribute from the Sudan, to the extent that the authority of the rules of Ghana dwindled away, and they were subjected and absorbed by the Soso, a neighboring people of the Sudan. Traditions in Mali related that the Soso attacked and took over Mali as well, and the ruler of the Soso, Sumaouro Kante (Sumanguru Kante) took over the land.

DECLINE OF THE ALMORAVID DYNASTY

Three years afterwards, under Yusuf's son and successor, Ali Ibn Yusuf, Sintra and Santarem in Portugal were added, and he invaded Iberia again in 1119 and 1121, but the tide had turned, as the French had assisted the Aragonese to recover Zaragoza. In 1138, Ali Ibn Yusuf was defeated by Alfonso VII of Leon, and in the Battle of Ourique (1139), by Afonso I of Portugal, who thereby won his crown. Lisbon was conquered by the Portuguese in 1147.

According to some scholars, Ali Ibn Yusuf provided a new generation of leadership that had forgotten the desert life for the comforts of the city. He was defeated by the combined action of his Christian foes in Iberia and the agitation of Almohads (the Muwahhids) in Morocco. After Ali Ibn Yusuf's death in 1143, his son Tashfin Ibn Ali lost ground rapidly before the Almohads. In 1146 he was killed in a fall from a precipice while attempting escape after a defeat near Oran.

His two successors were Ibrahim Ibn Tashfin and Ishaq Ibn Ali, but their reigns were short. The conquest of the city of Marrakech by the Almohads in 1147 marked the fall of the dynasty, though fragments of the Almoravids (the Banu Ghanaiya,) continued to struggle in the Balearic Islands, and finally in Tunisia.

Military organization

Abdallah Ibn Yussin imposed very strict discipline measures on his forces for every breach of his laws. The Almoravid first military leader, Yahya Ibn Umar al-Lamtuni, gave them a good military organization. Their main force was infantry, armed with javelins in the front ranks and pikes behind, which formed into a phalanx, and was supported by camelmens and horsemen on the flanks. They also had a flag carrier as the front who guided the forces behind him, when the flag was upright, the combatants behind would stand and when it was turned down, they would sit.

Al-Bakri reports that, while in combat, the Almoravids did not pursue those who fled in front of them. Their fighting was intense and they did not retreat when disadvantaged by an advancing opposing force, they preferred death over defeat. These characteristics were possibly unusual at the time.

The Jakhanke Islamic Movement

A history of Islam in West Africa cannot be complete without a mention, however brief, of the Jakhanke Islamic Movement which arose in the 12th century under the charismatic scholar Alhaji Salim Suwareh who helped to spread Islam in the present day countries of Mali, Guinea, Senegal and The Gambia, the most Islamized countries in West Africa today. The Jakhanke Islamization effort indeed have borne rich fruit! But let us begin by addressing the brass tacks: who were the Jakhanke? Why do they deserve attention in our study of the spread of Islam in West Africa?

The highly regarded Gambian historian Lamin Sanneh who is also the leading authority on the Jakhanke calls the Jakhanke a 'specialized caste' of Muslim clerics and educators. 'Caste' gives them an aura of belonging to a bigger group, the Serahuli ethnic group also called Soninke in other writings. Today, they are erroneously categorized as Mandinka. They speak a dialect of Mandinka, but their 'Mandikanization' was largely because they were hosted by Mandinka chiefs when the Jakhanke moved from present day Republic of Mali to the Senegambia region. 'Clerics and educators' indicate their profession as literate and therefore able to proselytize and do missionary work. Apparently, the Jakhanke who are found in the Senegambia region today in large numbers do not put much premium on their ethnic origins but rather on their work as propagators of Islam in the past 800 years.

This is exactly why the Jakhanke should interest us. They started a peaceful propagation of Islam in the Senegambia region. This is all the more relevant as we write today because of the rampant violence associated with Islam in many parts of the world. Much of the subsequent styles, and techniques associated with the peaceful spread of Islam in Senegambia is their creation. In a nutshell, they set the standards for missionary work.

What were these standards? Chiefly, they professed the peaceful path to Islam. They did not raise the sword to spread the religion. They resorted to more peaceful methods such as establishing Koranic schools and mosques, upgrading of mosques, holding sessions on Koranic exegesis, preservation of holy sites where yearly Islamic gatherings take place and being itinerant traders who took Islam to their clients and customers. But just as they had methods, they also had tactics! For example, they believed in numbers and therefore were keen to multiply their talibes or disciples. The disciples having gone through years of tutelage, would be allowed to disperse and then mass up new disciples themselves. Through massification, the Jakhanke helped to strengthen their religion. Also, they had a tactic of withdrawing into enclaves far from the maddening crowds, so to speak. Generally, Jakhanke needed the quietude of the monastery and thus were very good at establishing theocratic entities sometimes deep in the Senegambian Savannah, where they developed self sustaining communities dedicated to Islamic scholarship and renditions. Sutukuho, Sutukung, in The Gambia and Niokhlo and Suna Karantba in Casamance are extant examples of such religious villages.

So far absent in our discussion is the figure of Alhaji Salim Suwareh, the founder of the Jakhanke Islamic movement we have discussed above. He was a central figure in the success of the Jakhanke missionary work and therefore deserves our brief attention. His early life is shrouded in mystery, but a few strands deserve serious attention and are revealing. He died around 1500 and reputedly made seven pilgrimages to Mecca where he had relatives and lived before relocating to Black Africa to spread Islam, settling in the Jaka region of Masina, in present day Mali. Hence the name of his people Jakankhe, meaning in Mandinka 'those who hail from Jaka'. When he completed his seventh hajj, he returned to Africa and stayed. He led his people from Jaka Masina to Jaka Bambuku. When the animist ruler of Bambuku became hostile, Suwareh did as the prophet of Islam did when Meccans started to throw stones at him: flee into exile. Suwareh led his band of talibes towards present day Senegambia. The historian Professor Sanneh writes that since this hijra or flight like movement, Jakhanke 'have been united by a close bond of solidarity based on fidelity to Suwareh characterized by bonds of solidarity'.

So dedicated were the Jakhanke to the spirit of peaceful spread of Islam that when a Serahuli religious hothead, Momodou Lamin Drammeh(1835-1887) opted to wage war to convert Bundu (eastern Senegal) into Islam, the Jakhanke disowned him and fled further down to present eastern Gambia. His swashbuckling style was quite in contrast to their orderly ways of Islamization! Without bearing the sword, the Jakhanke were able to fasten the spread and reform of Islam in contrast to the jihadist like Drammeh, Umar Taal, or Maba Jahou Bah. The paradox here may not be obvious but is palpable: how Jakhanke whose mentor, Suwareh, lived and had relatives in Mecca could have disavowed the uncompromising Wahabi doctrine to espouse the 'path of accommodation'?

To conclude therefore, what is the significance of the Jakhanke movement? Simply put, the Jakhanke epitomized peaceful and community led spread of Islam which made a deep impact on the recipient societies of Islam as the way of peace. The present day bomb throwers who claim to spread this religion by doing so may want to learn a lesson or two from the Jakhanke movement which started over 500 years ago

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THE SOKOTO CALIPHATE

Introduction

Created by a jihad launched by Usman dan Fodio (also spelt Usman Ibn Fodio, Uthman Dan Fuduye, or Uthman Ibn Fodio) between 1804 and 1810, the caliphate of Sokoto was the largest and most populated state of nineteenth-century Africa. According to a nineteenth-century account, it took four months to travel from west to east and two months to travel from north to south. The caliphate was organised as a decentralised state seeking to establish Islamic law over its large territory. The jihad and caliphate officially ended with the 1903 British conquest, but has since been widely studied and its legacy endures today, especially in Nigeria. Many observers have tried to understand the jihad, the caliphate and especially the figure of Usman dan Fodio. The jihad, itself at the origin of a rich Islamic scholarship, has now given place to a wide and varied literature.

The jihad and the creation of the caliphate

For dan Fodio, the main reason for the jihad was the purification of Islam in territories which were already Muslim at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The legitimacy of his struggle stemmed from his belief that, until this point, Muslim leaders had only practiced an impure form of Islam.

Some historians understood the jihad of Sokoto as a revolution because of the Hausa kingdoms' socio-economical inequalities at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Dan Fodio's success rests on his preference towards a form of equality and his proclaimed fight against corruption. As a champion of the people, dan Fodio launched his fight against the king and the aristocracy of Gobir in 1804. Even if the social dimension of the jihad should not be totally neglected, dan Fodio himself declared mainly religious reasons to be at the origin of the jihad in *Kitab al-Farq*. Correspondence exchanged with the leader of Borno in the 1800s is here revealing. After attempting to invade the kingdom that had existed since the ninth century, dan Fodio tried to convince Mohammed el-Kanemi of the religious and legal merits of his struggle. For dan Fodio, the jihad was mainly (but not only) conceived as a way of reforming lax Muslims by pure Muslims.

In the 1970s, some historians stressed an ethnic dimension in the jihad of Sokoto. According to this interpretation, dan Fodio was the descendant of Fulanis installed in Hausa regions since the fifteenth century, and would have pitted Islam against Hausas. However, even if most leaders of the Sokoto jihad were Fulani, it is difficult to argue that the numerically inferior Fulani would have believed that they could have overthrown the Hausa kings on exclusively ethnic grounds. Dan Fodio himself wrote against any ethnic discrimination in his treatise *Bayan Wayan Wujub al-Hijra*.

Scholars have also tried to show to what extent the jihad was not totally new in West Africa. Indeed discussions on the place of Islam in society had already taken place before the jihad

of dan Fodio whether it was about food bans, marriage laws or clothes that women had to wear. It was this last point that had attracted the attention of Shaikh Jibril b. 'Umar, one of the masters of Usman dan Fodio. Other jihads had already taken place in West Africa before that of dan Fodio (Bundu, late seventeenth century, Futa Jallon, 1725, Futa Toro, 1776). In other words, some Muslim scholars had already become reformers-conquerors before the advent of Usman dan Fodio.

The religious questioning of the jihad of dan Fodio was therefore not completely original. It is his lasting political victory over a vast territory that ensured his long-term success.

The structure and economy of the caliphate

The first six years of jihad (1804-1810) were fundamental in the creation of a political and religious foundation for a state that was never an empire, but a collection of territories under the authority of the caliph in Sokoto. Indeed the Caliphate of Sokoto was a highly decentralised state ruled by the Caliph. The Caliphate itself was a novel phenomenon in the Hausa regions and conferred moral and political authority on dan Fodio and his successors. Companions of the caliph, Fulani scholars who had become jihadists, were thus placed as emirs at the head of each territorial subdivision who answered directly to the caliph. Because of its size, the caliphate became divided between the western emirates under the authority of Sokoto and the eastern emirates which remained more or less autonomous.

The different successors of dan Fodio had to carry out military campaigns to assert their authority, thus making jihad a virtually uninterrupted phenomenon until the mid-nineteenth century. Mohammed Bello, dan Fodio's son and direct successor, took the title of sultan and led many campaigns which he likened to the conquest of the Arabian Peninsula by the first Muslims in the seventh century. Bello's policy consisted of appointing family members as heads of frontier towns, settling Fulani nomadic populations in villages and building fortified villages to monitor some borders. It thus became necessary to ensure the security of the caliphate at its borders but also in the buffer zones between each emirate. Thanks to soldiers recruited during the dry season, the troops of Sokoto could quash any rebellion or Tuareg incursion from the north.

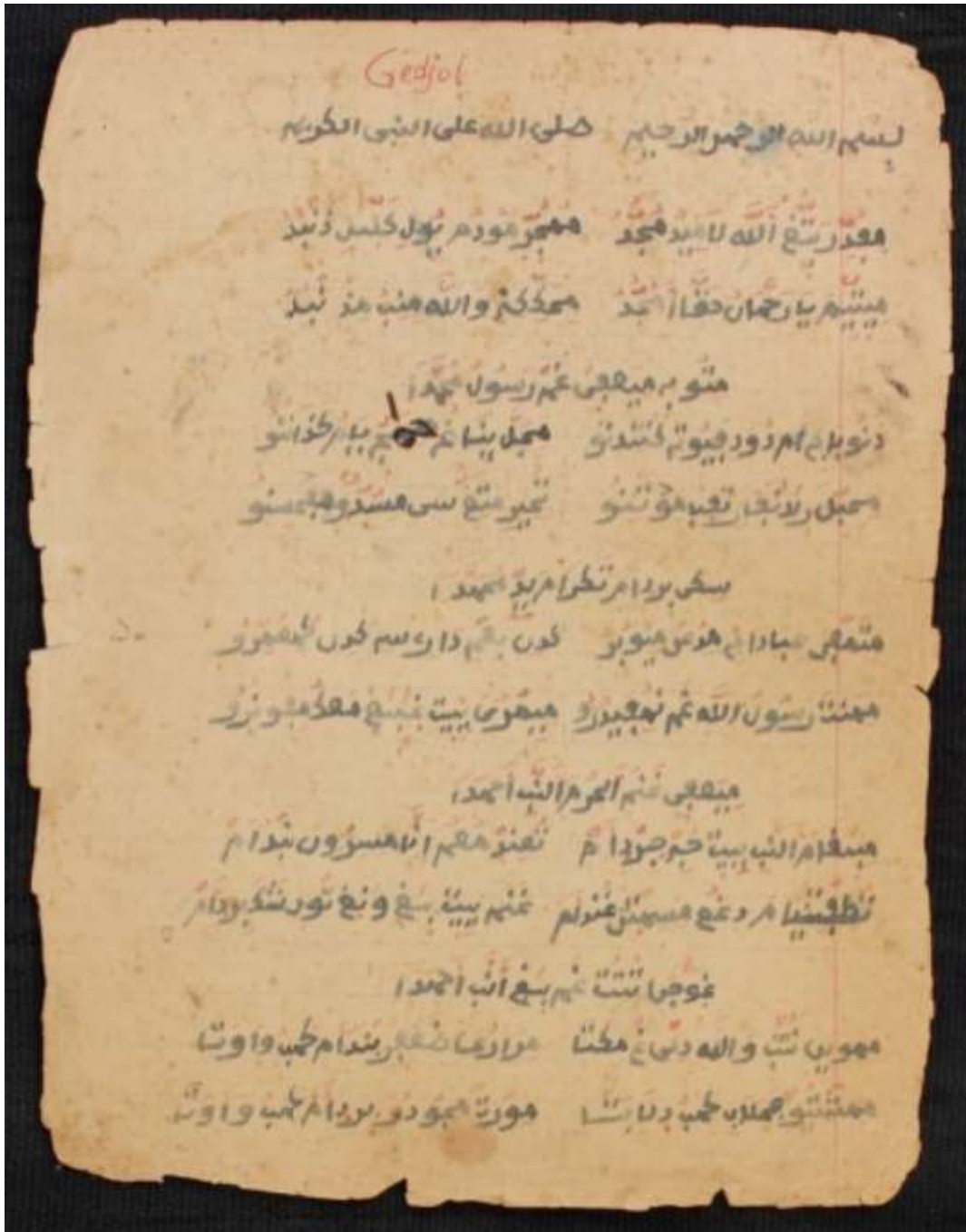
The caliph's authority derived from his ability to control his borders, redistribute spoils from military campaigns or taxes to allies and members of his family. In replacing the taxes of the Hausa leaders by Islamic taxes like the *zakat*, revenues of the Caliphate were in theory subject to Islamic law. However, these taxes depended largely on each emirate with, for example, the existence of a property tax in Kano or Zaria outside of the emirate of Sokoto. Sokoto's centralizing tendencies on the rest of the caliphate were therefore limited by the pre-jihadic structures of the Hausa cities as well as the impossibility of reaching large parts of the population in the countryside.

The caliphate of Sokoto, faithful to the original intentions of the jihad, looked to establish Islamic law in the courts of the whole caliphate. The need for educated men encouraged the emergence of schools in urban centres, even though the first years of the Caliphate were

marked by a shortage of qualified personnel. Indeed, a defining feature of the Caliphate of Sokoto was the literate staff working in the administration of each emirate. Born free or in slavery, these men formed part of a functioning bureaucracy.

It was once again the lack of labour which provoked the numerous expeditions with the aim of capturing slaves to either sell or to make work in the plantations and other places of production of the caliphate. Thus, work in the salt mines of the north of the caliphate was based on slave labour. The same applied to the iron, cotton, indigo, or leather industries of the central regions of the caliphate. The wealth of the state was therefore based on a servile economy fuelled by wars or raids. North African merchants provided a number of slaves in the town of Kano of the 1820s: for every freeman there were thirty slaves in the city.

Islam, which had penetrated the Hausa regions during the fourteenth century via travellers / traders from neighbouring Borno and regions north of the Sahara, spread through jihad. The pre-Islamic religions, often called 'traditional' religions, persisted but the Islamic culture permeated the whole region through books written by the family of dan Fodio or sold through the Sahara. Whether through the pilgrimage to Mecca, trade or the dissemination of brotherhoods, the Hausa regions became more and more integrated with the Muslim world. While the phenomenon of integration within the Muslim world may have existed before, the jihad greatly accelerated the process.



Poem written by Nana Asma'u Fodio, daughter of Usman dan Fodio. Gedjol, 19th century, British Library, EAP387/1/2/6, <https://eap.bl.uk/archive-file/EAP387-1-2-6>

The fall of the caliphate

Following a brief British military campaign, the Sokoto Caliphate was incorporated into the protectorate of northern Nigeria in 1903. This date marks the defeat of the Sokoto Sultan against the British armies and the beginning of the colonial period. The British troops, as in was often the case in Africa, were essentially composed of Africans with European officers at their head. Involving predominantly Hausa soldiers, the British conquest might therefore also be understood as the result of an internal war in the Sokoto caliphate. Nevertheless, the Caliphate did not quite disappear entirely in 1903, as the British used the Sokoto Caliphate to build upon their theory of Indirect Rule.

Factbox:

The phrase 'caliphate of Sokoto' was not used by the inhabitants of the state created by the jihad in the nineteenth century. In fact, the term 'caliphate' was first coined by anthropologist Murray Last in 1967 in his seminal work, *The Sokoto Caliphate*. Last roots the term in the title assumed by Mohammed Bello and his successors. As *amir al-Muminin*, the sultan of Sokoto was the de facto caliph; a title that was also used by the rulers of neighbouring Borno between the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century.

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AL HAJJ UMAR TAL AND THE OMARIEN DYNAMIC IN WEST AFRICA

If Alhaji Salim Suwareh did not raise the sword to spread Islam, Al Hajj Umar Tal (1797-1864) did and with as much success as the Jakhanke missionaries. Before we examine his eventful life, we might as well start our discussion with his swift jihads in present day Mali and Guinea Conakry which lasted from 1848-1864. His first target was the gold states of Bambuk and Bure then ruled by and inhabited by animist Malinke. Within a short period of six years between 1848-1854, he conquered and forcibly converted the Malinke of Bandjougou, Bougary and Farabana all in present day Republic of Guinea Conakry. He raised the flag of Tijaniya sect of Islam and pitched his tent at Jalafara, his first capital. His success pushed him to attack the Bambaras of Kaarta and Segou, and the animist Fulani of Macina, in present day Republic of Mali. By 1854 Tal had established a huge Muslim state which included aarta, Segou, Macina, and Khasso. He had brought the only well organized fighting force in this part of the Sahel, the Bambara, into submission under his Tijaniya sect. The eminent Malian historian Sekene Mody Cissokho commented 'Al hajj Umar brought Islam to the Western Sudan' a worthy accolade to this brilliant scholar turned jihadist and empire builder.

But this success was apparent even in his early year. At the age of 23 in 1820, he had finished his studies and was awarded the title 'alfa' or scholar. In the same year, he made a pilgrimage to Mecca and stayed in Arabia for 13 years, and was ordained the Kalifa or emissary of the Tijaniya sect in West Africa. He had now gotten the recognition and stamp of approval to lead the jihads in the Sahel. He briefly passed through Kanem Borno, Sokoto where jihads had just been completed and must have learnt some lessons on how to prepare his own in the Sahel.

Cissokho tells us that Umar's aim was less to destroy existing polities but more to convert their rulers and people from animism into Tijaniya Islam or from Qadriya into Tinjaniya. But we must not attribute his quick success to the sword of the Jihad alone; Umar's version of Tijaniya was also pro poor, and socially uplifting. He was quick to free slaves for example in conquered territories and assisted the poor and down trodden to meet their basic needs.

Until he met his demise at Dinguiray in 1864 after a bloody encounter with the French, he remained the popular jihadist turned empire builder. His son Amadou Seku replaced him but struggled to wield together the vast Imamate his father had wrought.

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