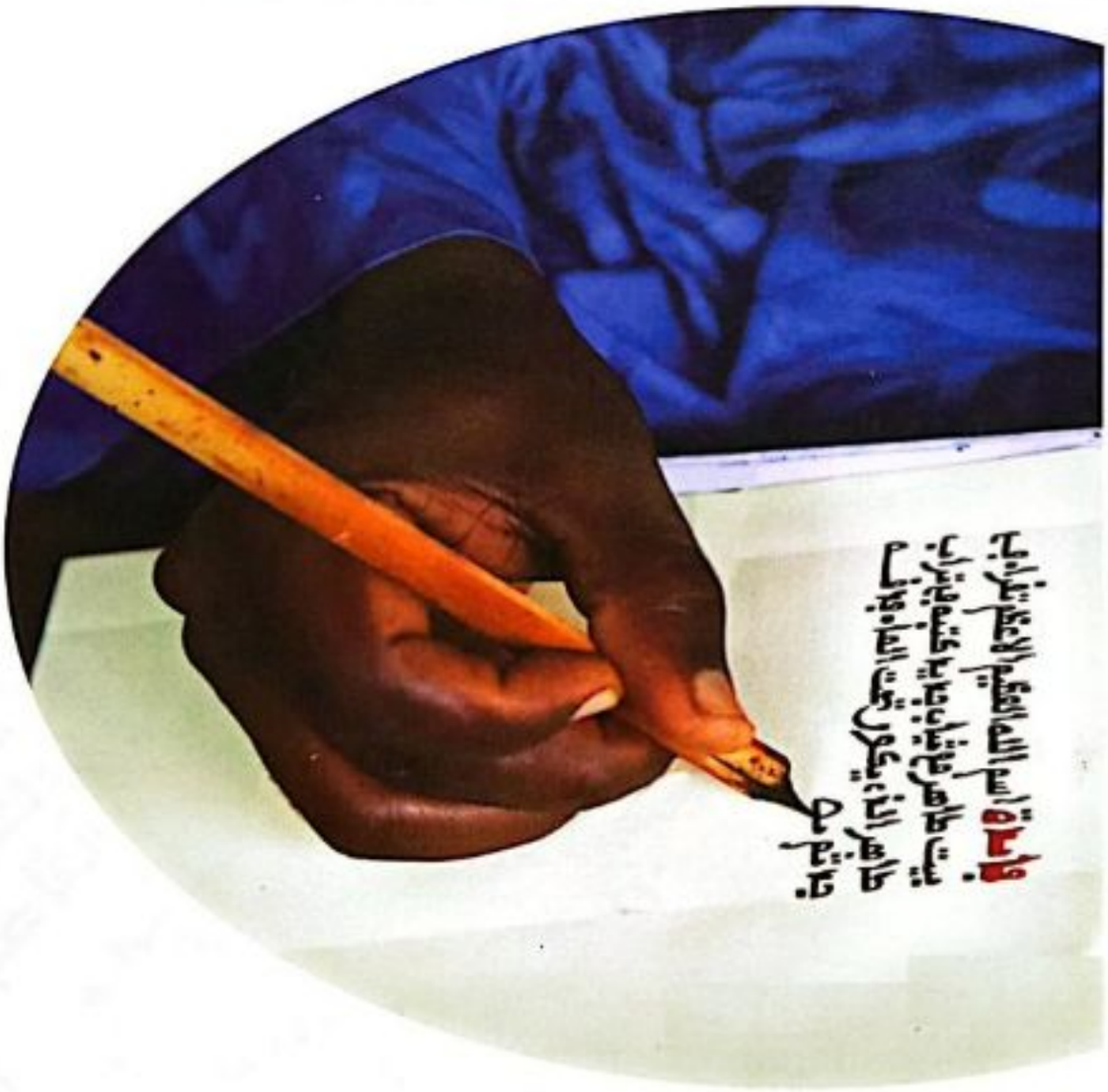
ARABIC MANUSCRIPTS IN THE ILORIN EMIRATE

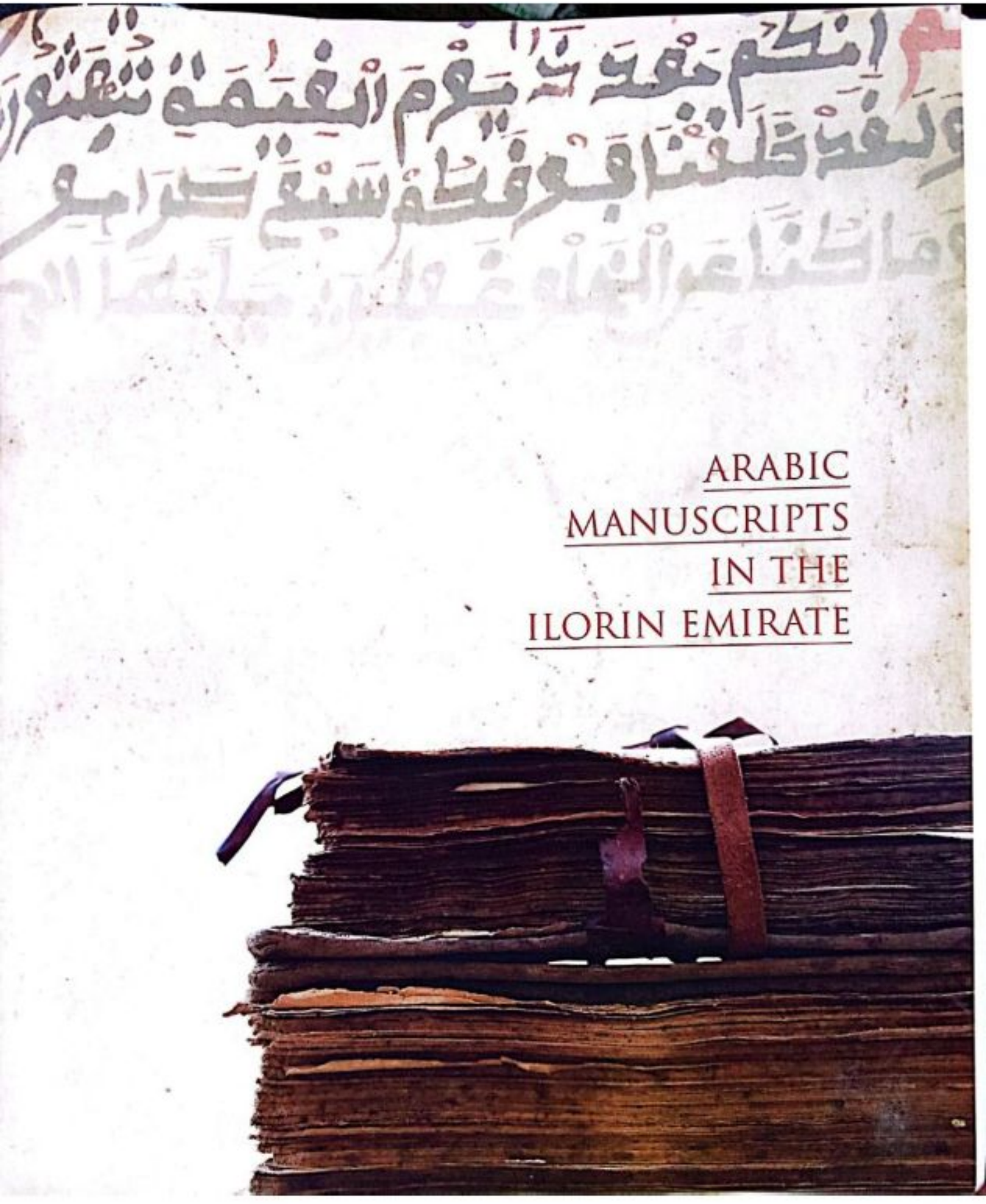
Edited by

Moshood Mahmood Jimba





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EDITED BY
MOSHOOD MAHMOOD JIMBA

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CHAPTER ONE

ILORIN: AN INTRODUCTION TO ITS HISTORY AND TRADITION OF ISLAMIC SCHOLARSHIP

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Introduction

The city of Ilorin is located in the north-central geo-political zone of modern Nigeria. Geographically located in the transitional zone between the open Savanna to the north and the forest region to the south, the city was the headquarters of the Ilorin Emirate, which was the southernmost frontier of the Sokoto Caliphate following its transformation into an emirate in c.1823-24. Situated on latitude 8^0 24'North and 8^0 36' North and longitude 4^0 10'East and 4^0 36^0 East, the ancient city presently occupies an area of about 100km^2 (Ajadi et al. 2011) and is some 300 kilometres north of Lagos and about 400 kilometres from Abuja.

The vegetation of Ilorin used to be the thickly wooded savanna with much of the landscape being dominated by thick bushes adorned with several types of trees. Today, the vegetation is made up of tall grasses including the spear and elephant grasses as well as a variety of trees. The geological features of Ilorin include the Precambrian basement complex rock, loamy soil with sodium and low fertility whilelateritic soil 'tends to constitute the major soil types (Ajadi et al. 2011). The Ilorin land is largely undulating with the elevation in the western part of the city ranging from 273m to 333m (that is 900 feet to 1,100 feet) above sea level and from 273m to 364m (that is 900 feet to 1,200 feet) in the eastern part with the highest point being the Sobi hill with an elevation of 394m (1,300 feet) above sea level (Oyegun 1985, 3-5; Balogun 1978, 17-25; Ajadi et al. 2011). Both the rainy and dry seasons are experienced at interval. The major river that passes through the city is the *Asa* River. Other smaller streams include *Aluko, Odo-Okun, Amule, Alalubosa* and *Foma.*

Ilorin's location between two geo-ecological and economic zones made, and still makes, it attractive to various groups of people from both the savanna and forest zones as the environment and conditions were, and are,suitable for various occupational activities including farming, hunting, animal husbandry and pottery making among others. The historic convergence of different ethnic groups in Ilorin since the late 18th century was facilitated by this strategic location across the two geo-ecological zones and on major trade routes that passed through the town (Faluyi 1999) as well as the relative security that the town enjoyed during the turbulent period of the early 19th century.

The Founding of Ilorin

The Ilorin Emirate was established in c. 1823-24 following the success of an Islamic movement initiated by Shaykh Alimi in northern Yorubaland in the late 18th century and the religious transformation that accompanied the movement. However, the history of what was Ilorin before that transformation dated back to preceding centuries. Extant local traditions on this period focus mainly on such aspects as the etymology of the name "Ilorin", the identity of the founder(s), the circumstance(s) that informed or surrounded the founding of the settlement that came to be called "Ilorin" as well as

the appearance and disappearance of various individuals. These issues remain among aspects of pre-emirate Ilorin history on which scholars are yet to come to terms. The different postulations for the possible origin of the name "Ilorin", and therefore, for the circumstances surrounding its founding, are associated with some of the geological features of the settlement and the main occupational activities of those considered as the 'early' settlers. These included hunting of wild animals (i.e. elephants), iron working activities, and traditional herbal medical practice.

The name "Ilorin" is, therefore, variously postulated to have been derived from (1) *"Ilu Erin"* or 'the land of elephants'; (2) "*Ilu irin*"or 'the town or land of iron'; (3) "*Ilọ irin*", that is, 'the object [stone] for' as well as 'the act of sharpening iron') or (4) the act/process of "iron grinding" ("*Ilọ irin*") and (5) "*Irọnì*", which is said to be a *Baruba* word meaning "alligator pepper, an indispensable item among *Baruba* warriors and charm makers" (Ikokoro 1912; Johnson 1921, 119-120; Hermon-Hodge 1929; Sulu 1953; Jimba 1990; Onikoko 1992, 1; Jimoh 1994, 18; Hasan and Jawondo 2006; Omoiya 2012, 20-35). Although Ikokoro posits that the "Ilu Erin" tradition was the "soundest" and "the most reliable of the traditions handed down", each of the other traditions has come to be associated with at least one geological, physical or historical feature of Ilorin. These include the legendary "*Okuta Ilọrin*" said to have been used by the early settlers 'for sharpening iron tool'; *"Oko Erin"* (i.e. 'elephants' forest'), an area hitherto on the outskirts of Ilorin but now located to the south of the city where elephants were hunted and where an elephant was reportedly killed during the reign of the first Emir, Abdul-Salami (c.1823-c.1836), and, lastly, the emphasis on "*irin*" (iron) in the dominant traditions and the name of the town (Johnson, 1921: 120; Hogben and Kirk-Greene, 1966: 285; Hermon-Hodge, 1929, 63; Omoiya 2009, 62-63; Omoiya 2012, 20-35).

Whichever of the above traditions one holds to, the fact remains that the name "Ilorin" most likely had something to do with the resources, skills and activities for which the settlement and its early settlers were renowned. These included wild animals, ironstones or iron-ores, iron-working, hunting, or herbal medical practice as lately postulated. For instance, that the early settlers were probably skillful ironworkers may be inferred from Ilorin's praise poem, which is also reported to be a popular saying that was very current in the 19th century though credited to the Oyo Yoruba. Jimba (1990, 13) and Oyedeji (1998, 451-9)report the saying thus:

Ilọrin,
Ilu ti n lọ irin
Abòntásêeniyan

Meaning:
Ilorin,
The city that grinds iron to powdery dust
Not to talk of human beings.



Inside Ojude-Oba Mosque

Today, archaeologists have established that "iron grinding" (*Ilọ/Lilọ irin*) was among the processes involved in pre-modern African tradition of metallurgy in the Nigerian area. Other similar processes included "crushing", "pounding" (*Ignn/Gignn* as in "Igunrin"), "smelting" and "sharpening" (*Ipọn/Pipọn* as in "Iponrin") (Aremu 2004; Akinjogbin 2004).

Presently, it cannot, however, be established if such possible connection with traditional process of iron production belonged either to any of the periods suggested for the 'founding' of Ilorin including "1450", "1675", "during" or "around the 16th century", "around 1600 and 1700", "before the 17th century" or "late 18th century or to any of the personalities that have come to be variously identified as the 'founder' of pre-Islamic Ilorin (Jimba 1990, 6; Onikoko 1992, 1; Jimoh 1994, 25; Hasan and Jawondo 2006, 1-20; Alabi 2010, 1-29; Osogbue 2011; Alaga 2012). Apart from the pieces of information on the founding of Ilorin and subsequent arrival and departure of few notable individuals, there are no adequate, reliable historical records of significant developments in the area prior to the late 18th century.

By the latter period, which also coincided with the advent of Shaykh Alimi and his religious activities in northern Yorubaland, available historical sources indicate that what was then Ilorin was

not unknown in the region as it was becoming 'famous' for some of the activities of her settlers. First, the Ilorin region was emerging as a centre of some commercial activities patronized by some prominent Oyo citizens (Balogun 1978) as well as traders from Hausaland and Borno. Secondly, the Ilorin region had equally become one of the main centres of local manufacturing especially in the area of the production and distribution of pottery products to other areas in the northern Yoruba frontier (Usman 2003; 2005; Usman et al., 2009). Apart from Ilorin's possible role in pottery manufacture and export at this period, Oke Suna in particular has been described as "an essentially Muslim trading settlement"(Reichmuth 2010), which had apparently attracted people from different places. Being comparatively secured from the troubled metropolis of Old Oyo, Ilorin was becoming a centre of refuge for those fleeing from the crisis and insecurity in the Oyo capital. By that period, the Oke Suna area of Ilorin was also a Muslim settlement and possibly a centre for the diffusion of Islam and Islamic influence.

Islam and the Transformation of pre-Emirate Ilorin

The exact period of the introduction of Islam into the Ilorin region cannot be determined with any measure of certainty due to dearth of dated historical evidence. It is, however, established that Islam was already established in the Ilorin region, particularly at Oke Suna, prior to 1800. It is not impossible that the establishment of Oke Suna as 'an essentially Muslim settlement' and 'one of the earliest centres of Islamization' followed the pattern established during the earliest phase of the introduction and spread of Islam in West Africa. Within that tradition, the earliest Muslims who were initially small communities offoreign long-distance traders and clerics established themselves in separate, exclusive Muslim quarters, which were clearly distinct from the settlements of their non-Muslim trading host communities (Trimingham 1962, 25-6, 28, 52). This was to provide for the environment needed to practice their religion and to organize and regulate their lives, including commercial activities, in accordance to the dictates of their religion. To such exclusive Muslim community of foreign traders and clerics was added other local converts as time went on; it was also from such centres and 'foreign' Muslims that early Imams and religious teachers were 'recruited' to lead or guide the emerging centres of Muslim population (Gbadamosi 1972, 229-237; Gbadamosi 1978, 5).

The presence of Islam in Yorubaland, suggested to be not later than the 17thcentury, would appear to have followed a similar pattern. Although there is no written evidence, at present, to date the establishment of Islam in the Ilorin region, there is consensus of opinion that Oke Suna was 'perhaps the "first" organized Muslim community in Yorubaland' and one of the earliest centres of Islamization at least in the region (*Cf.* Danmole 2012; Abubakre 2004; Oseni 2006; Sanni 2015). Like in other areas south of the River Niger, it is not unlikely that the Ilorin area, given its geographical



Inside Ilorin Old Central Mosque, Idiape, built in 1880

location on trade routes, must have had contacts with the early sources of the introduction and spread of Islam and its influence to the Nupe and Old Oyo regions. Such early sources included the Kanuri, Hausa, Malian, Dindi, and Nupe Muslim traders,teachers, preachers and healers. These elements, together with Yoruba converts, also made up the early Muslim communities in various parts of Yorubaland (Gbadamosi 1978, 6). As is now known, Oke Suna community had Muslim elements from such Muslim groups as Kanuri, Fulani, and Yoruba among others.

Apart from Oke Suna, another early centre of Islam in the region was the small village of Kuho, located some 36 kilometres from Ilorin. Solagberu is said to have been established there as a chief before relocating to Oke Suna in the late 18th century. Kuho was also to be a base for the itinerant religious activities of Shaykh Alimi prior to 1817 and it was there that the progenitors of a number of scholarly families joined Alimi before they finally moved to Ilorin in c.1817 (Onikoko 1992; Jimoh 1994; Muhammadu 2014; Aliyu 2003). It could, therefore, be asserted that Shaykh Alimi also established an Islamic education 'centre' at Kuho where his disciples and pupils were taught and groomed in line with the ideology or principles of *Tajdid*, that is, the periodical renewal of Islamic enthusiasm and purification of Islamic practices through education and re-education' (Danmole

1980) or the larger *Jihad* activities of Shaykh Usman Fodio. Both processes are sides of the same coin and are within the context of the Qur'an injunction of 'enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil'.

As one of the 'earliest' centres of Islam in the region, Oke Suna reflected that early tradition and settlement pattern of Muslims in West Africa. The convergence of Muslims from such places as Gbanda, Kobayi, Kobe, Kuho, etc. at Oke Suna from the late 18th century strongly indicates the strong presence and practice of Islam in the Ilorin region prior to c.1797 when the flight from Oyo-Ile and surrounding areas to more secure areas like Ilorin began. While other Muslims might have settled down in other parts, those who had founded or settled at Oke Suna associated themselves with the traditions and practices (*Sunnah*) of the prophet of Islam, hence the name "Oke Suna", that is 'hilltop' or 'settlement of the [Upholders] of Prophetic Traditions' (i.e. 'Sunni Muslims'). It has, however, been explained that "Oke Suna"'is the name which the Yoruba give to an area inhabited mostly by Muslims' (Gbadamosi 1978: 19). In line with the need for an organized religious life, and in addition to Solagberu's leadership, Oke Suna also had its own religious head, an Imam who is said to be the progenitor of the Imam Matashe family (Al-Ilori 1982, 20; Jimoh, 1994*cf.* Gbadamosi, 1972).

Next to Oke Suna in terms of the presence of Islam and pursuit of Islamic education in pre-emirate Ilorin was the Gambari 'quarters'. Though mainly populated by traders and artisans of northern origins, it could not have been a settlement without the transmission of Islamic knowledge in one form or another. Thus, as suggested by Aliyu 'some form of Islamic education must have taken place' in the Gambari area during this period (Aliyu 2015, 39). This may be corroborated by references to such individuals as Alfa Salihu Gobir of Maiyaki Compound, and a Kanuri scholar, Alfa Abdul-Mumini, progenitor of the Imam Gambari family as being among those who already were at Ilorin in the pre-emirate era (Hogben and Kirk-Greene 1966, 288; Sulu 1953; Jimoh 1994, 474). In addition to Oke Suna and the Gambari quarters, there was probably another group of Muslim traders and preachers from Mali and Sudan already resident in what became known as Agbaji/Oke-Imale area although our sources are not clear on the date of the establishment of this area of Ilorin (Omoiya 2009; Danmole 1989/1990, 25-42).

The presence of Islam, those Muslims and their activities in these areas facilitated the eventual transformation of Ilorin into a centre of Islam and Islamic scholarship, that is, *Ilu Aafa*. However, the fact still remains that much of the developments that characterized that historic transformation of Ilorin into a citadel of learning were connected with the advent and activities of Shaykh Alimi and various Islamic scholars he attracted to Ilorin during the early 19th century. The recognition of Shaykh Alimi's role in this transformation is reflected in Ilorin's epithet as '*Ilorin, Garin Alimi*'.



Ile Kewu Wala, Inu-odi, Agbarere

Garin Alimi, Ilu Aafa: Foundations of an Enduring Tradition of Islamic Scholarship

The epithet '*Ilorin Garin Alimi*' reflects the transformation of the Ilorin from a partly pagan and partly Muslim region into an essentially Islamic community following the Islamic movement initiated by Shaykh Alimi. The movement, which bolstered Ilorin into a community of Muslim scholars and preachers, began in the northern Yorubaland in late 18th century (Gbadamosi 1978: 4-5). It involved both the *Tajdid* and *Jihad* activities of Shaykh Alimi, his successors and their helpers drawn from a collection of different groups and peoples all being devoted to Islamic religious worship and scholarship. As a result of this transformation, Ilorin came to be described as:

Ilorin, Garin Alimi,
Ilu t'obit'oyikol'egungun, Ilu t'oyi, kol'oro
Esinl'egungunilewọn, ọkọsil'orobẹẹ

Meaning:
Ilorin, the city of Alimi,
A city as big as this but has no cultic masquerades or [pagan] tradition!

Ilorin, where cavalry and horsemanship are their masquerades
[and] spears [or lances] are the only tradition.

Although the Shaykh had played some role in the survival of pre-emirate Ilorin (that is in helping, spiritually and/or militarily, to strengthen Ilorin against Oyo-Ile in the period between 1797 and early 1800), the above praise poetry definitely refers to the Ilorin that emerged after the final settlement of Alimi in c. 1817 and especially after the success of the Islamic movement he had started in the region. As it is well-known, pre-emirate Ilorin area (excluding the exclusive Muslim settlement of Oke Suna, Gambari and Gaa Olufadi) was essentially a community of pagans among whom *Egungun*, *Sango* and possibly *Oro* cults were parts of the religious life (Na'Allah 1996; Ezekiel 1989, 13-14). The final event, which heralded the beginning of the end of paganism in Ilorin is said to have been precipitated by some Egungun worshipers who violated the sanctity of Alimi's residence (Jimoh 1994, 56-60).

The eventual triumph of the Muslims over those pagans and their masquerades transformed Ilorin into an essentially Muslim community where masquerades (*Egungun*) and other pagan fetishes (*Oro*) were not only eradicated but no longer accommodated as a religio-cultural heritage. The emergent status of Ilorin as an Islamic centre attracted a continuous influx of Muslims from far and wide and thus another transformation of Ilorin from a small 'village' into a large town of huge but mixed population ('*Ilu t'obit'oyi*') of Islamic adherents. According to Clapperton, Richard Lander and John Lander who visited the Oyo Kingdom in 1826 and 1830, by the 1820s, Ilorin had become 'a large and considerable town of prodigious size' and possessed "a great number of horses", that is, *ẹsin*, and, by extension, *ọkọ* or lances (Clapperton 1829; Lander 1830; Lander and Lander 1832). Thus, from the time of the triumph of the *Alimids* (Alimi's *Jama'a* and *Jihadists*) in c. 1824, the 'Ilorin horse' and their lances became the dread of their enemies during much of the 19th century (Lander 1830; Johnson 1921); cavalry and lances thus emerged as a cherished tradition and 'cult' of the Ilorins as warriors.

The Ilorin praise song '*ẹsinl'egun, ọkọl'oro*', therefore, captures an important aspect of what Reichmuth calls "the dual character [of Ilorin] as a town of warriors and religious scholars" (Reichmuth 2010: 35-54). Throughout the 19th century, Ilorin excelled in its tradition of warfare ('*ẹsinl'egun, ọkọl'oro*') and recorded military victories, against great odds, over her adversaries and their allies in the period between 1824 and 1836 when Ilorin horses and spears triumphed over the Old Oyo and her Baruba allies and thus finally put an end to the greatest threat to her survival as an Islamic city. In the post-1836 period, Ilorin remained a force to reckon with in the military tradition of '*ẹsinl'egunọkọl'oro*' until all warfare came to an end with the imposition of the *Pax-Britannica* by the end of the 19th century. Ilorin, however, continues to thrive in the second aspect of her 'dual character', that is as a town of religious scholars with a rich tradition of Islamic scholarship as expressed in the epithet '*Ilorin, Ilu*

Aafa'—that is, 'Ilorin, a citadel of religious scholars.'

In its singular form, '*Ilu Aafa*' would appear to be another rendering of "*Garin Alimi*", the Shaykh being widely acknowledged and addressed as "*Aafa* [Shaykh] *Alimi*". Hence, in the Ilorins' parlance, this epithet would be seen to have been derived from, and reflected in, the saying "Aafa [Shaykh Alimi] ni Baba Oba", that is, the father of the Emir is a scholar' (*Cf.* Reichmuth 1995) and also in the consensus of opinion that he and other scholars (*Aafa*) laid the foundations of the Islamic Ilorin. In its plural form, however, '*Ilu Aafa*' is an epithet that is collectively used to refer to Ilorin as the 'City of Scholars and Preachers' as a reflection of the fact that Islamic religious worship, propagation and indeed Arabic and Islamic scholarship were and are the major preoccupations of the Ilorins. These were part and parcel as well as an aftermath of the religious transformation, which Ilorin witnessed as a result of Shaykh Alimi's Islamic movement.

The *Ilorins* are, therefore, generally regarded as *Aafa (scholars)* while their city is popularly known as "*Ilu Aafa*" meaning 'a Land of the Learned and of Learning'. Ilorin's *Aafa* or scholars include saints, ascetics, preachers, teachers, and propagators of Islam. This is in acknowledgement of Ilorin's status as 'a scholarly community', 'a regional centre of Islamic learning and Arabic manuscripts production' in Nigeria. It is also in recognition of the immense intellectual contributions of its indigenes particularly in the field of Arabic and Islamic scholarship over a period that is not less than two hundred years.

Ilorin: The Foundations of an Islamic Tradition of Scholarship

The advent of the *Aafa* culture or tradition of Islamic scholarship in the Ilorin area is difficult to date in view of the absence of written, dated evidence in the pre-Jihad period. However, of the possible early centres of Islam and Islamic education in the Ilorin region, Oke Suna remains a major centre about which some historical reconstruction can be attempted. Usually described as having been located on the 'outskirts' of what was then known as 'Ilorin', the area of ancient Oke Suna is now located in the southwestern part of modern Ilorin city. Although sometimes identified as being one of the four 'quarters' that traditionally made up the pre-emirate 'Ilorin conglomerate', Oke Suna seems to have been not only a distinct community of Muslim faithful but also a separate settlement (Al-Ilori 1982; Johnson 1921) that had existed as virtually an autonomous settlement. Also, the little information available on the settlement suggests that it was quite extensive than often reckoned to be and was probably a town or at least large settlement 'at no great distance from [pre-emirate] Ilorin' (Herman-Hodge 1929, 67; Lloyd 1971, 40-47; Al-Ilori 1982, 20; Onikoko 1992, 2; Jimoh 1994, 52). The settlement was gradually incorporated into the emergent Ilorin Muslim community that developed around the personality and religio-spiritual influence of Shaykh Alimi after 1817. It

seems to have remained virtually autonomous until it was destroyed and abandoned around 1825-6.

With particular reference to the promotion of Islamic learning in Ilorin, Oke Suna would appear to be the earliest centre of Islamic education in the region (Aliyu 2015, 38; Sanni 2015). However, very little information is available on the early endeavours, content of studies or level of Islamic scholarship accomplished. Thus, a detailed historical reconstruction of the Islamic education system at Oke Suna is quite difficult to attempt. We are informed, however, that Solagberu was '*a great Koranic Mallam with many students*' (Sulu 1953) and that there were several other Islamic scholars with him at Oke Suna (Al-Ilori 1982; Jimoh 1994; Onikoko 1992; Sanni 2015). That there was initially little or no literary evidence of their scholarly activities including Arabic manuscripts could not have been an indication that they were not involved in serious Islamic learning activities or that there were very few learned scholars among them. The absence of such evidence might have been due to the destruction that attended the fall of Oke Suna community in c. 1825/6 and the exodus of a number of its residents to areas outside Ilorin although many of the survivors relocated to Ilorin (Jimoh 1994; Mekabara 2013; Gazali 2005, 190-205).

Furthermore, scholars of Oke Suna were familiar with and made use of such Islamic texts as *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*, *Mukhtasar* of Khalil b. Ishaq (d. 1374); *Risala* of Ibn Abi Zayd al-Qayrawan for adjudication of cases (*cf.* Isiaka 1985, 11-13, 43, 47; Onikoko 1992, 8-10; Jimoh 1994, 422; Reichmuth 1995) and other texts such al-Jazuli's (d. 1465) *Dala'il al-Khayrat* for religious worship. For instance, an extant, dated copy of Jazuli's *Dala'il al-Khayrat*, which manual copyingwas completed on 2 April 1736, was reportedly brought to Oke Suna during the 18th century by one Ilyas b. Mekabara (Mekabara 2013). According to Reichmuth (2010), the Arabic manuscript is "the oldest dated Arabic text" so far identified in Ilorin.

In addition to the above, Shaykh Alimi is known to have met the scholars of Oke Suna with a volume or 'half' of the *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* (i.e. that by Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli, d. 1459) and promised to help them obtain the second volume of the exegesis of the Qur'an (i.e. the volume by Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, d. 1505). It is also established that Shaykh Alimi fulfilled the promise when he finally settled in Ilorin in c.1817 (Onikoko 1992) and that the scholars of Oke Suna copied and learned the second volume of the *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* from him (Al-Ilori 1982, 20; Oseni 2006). All this suggests that such texts must have been sources of some of the content of Islamic studies at a higher level prior to the establishment of the emirate in Ilorin.They also suggests the existence of some form of 'Ilmi school at Oke Suna prior to the establishment of a similar 'school' and teaching of such texts as the *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* by Shaykh Alimi and other schools in the Ilorin Emirate after c.1823/4.

Apart from the above, some of the early 19th century Muslim scholars who contributed to the growth of Islamic learning in Ilorin Emirate and hence to build Ilorin as *Ilu Aafa* had connections with Oke

Suna. These, among others, included such scholars that relocated to Ilorin from Oke Suna both prior and subsequent to its destruction during the third decade of the 19th century. Among such scholars may be mentioned Imam Umaru Matashe of Bornu or Dendi origin; Imam Ibrahim Bature from Agades; Shaykh Muhammad al-Amin Munabahu of Yoruba origin; Shaykh Abdul-Qadir Onagun of Bornu origin, Salah Ojibara of Fulani origin; Shaykh Abubakar as-Sunni, the progenitor of the Oninabu family of Kuntu, and Ilyas bn Mekabara, both of Bornu origin (Jimoh 1994; Reichmuth and Abubakre 1995; Reichmuth 2010: 213-239; Gazali 2005, 190-191, 200-206; Jimba and Ismail 2015, 63). Their role in the spread of Islam and growth of Islamic learning in the Ilorin Emirate included being pioneers in the establishment of mosques and Qur'anic schools in various parts of Ilorin town where they settled and serving as preachers and teachers. As teachers, the scholars were also copyists who contributed to the reproduction of existing Arabic and Islamic texts. There were also those among them who served as the official Qur'an reciters (*Ajunasi* to Shaykh Alimi and successive Emirs of Ilorin (Reichmuth and Abubakre 1995). Also, in line with what Reichmuth calls "the dual character [of Ilorin] as a town of warriors and religious scholars" (Reichmuth 2010), some of the scholars (such as Abdul-Qadir Onagun) doubled as both scholars and warriors and apparently took part in the wars of the survival and consolidation of the Emirate in the period up to the 1840s.

It was to the credit of Shaykh Alimi that many of the scholars at Oke Suna, Kuho, and other areas were attracted to him and united under his leadership and guidance to build up Ilorin as an Islamic community and a centre of learning (Al-Ilori 1982, 14, 19-20, 22-23). Thus, following Shaykh Alimi's settlement in Ilorin, the preaching and practice of Islam received a major boost: mosques, both for daily and Friday congregational prayers, including the one at *Makana*, were built.Such mosques also served as centres of Islamic learning and propagation where the teaching of Islam, Qur'an exegesis or *Tafsir* was established and where open-space Da'wah sessions were carried out, and many were converted to Islam (Jawondo 2004). Many Islamic scholars were gradually invited from near and far to come and join Alimi in Ilorin.

One of the most noted activities of Alimi in Ilorin was the provision and teaching of additional Islamic literature especially on Qur'an exegesis. As already noted, it is reported that Alimi provided and taught the two volumes of the Qur'an exegesis known as the *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* written by Jalal al-Din al-Mahali (d. 1459) and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 1505) while the Muslims at Oke Suna copied and learnt one of the two volumes from him. There is no doubt that Muslims in the Ilorin area acknowledged and respected Shaykh Salih Jantaas 'the most learned scholar' in their midst and reflected such in their readiness to learn from him and accept his religio-spiritual leadership. As Al-Ilori reported, it was those scholars whoeventually gave the Shaykh the epithet Alimi, which has come overshadow his name (Al-Ilori 1982, 14).

With Alimi's settlement and educational and religious activities in Ilorin, therefore, the Muslims in the different quarters and those at Oke Suna were gradually drawn together for intellectual and religious purposes. In other words, his presence and personality provided a common forum for the coming together of the disparate Muslim groups in the Ilorin area. Alimi's reputation gradually paved the way for the unification and consolidation of the Muslim population in Ilorin area. This also facilitated the growth and development of an Islamic tradition of scholarship in Ilorin. Thus, in addition to Shaykh Alimi, other early founders of early centres of Islamic learning (Qur'anic/Islamic 'schools') in Ilorin included such members of his family as Shitta as well as his son and grandson namely Mahmud bn Shitta and Ahmad Yanma (Reichmuth and Abubakre 1995; Aliyu 2015, 40; Jimba and Ismail 2015).

Others who contributed to the expansion of Islamic scholarship in the city include Ahmad Iwo of Bornu origin; Abubakar Bube (d. c.1854) of Gobir origin; Badr al-Din and his son, Muhammad al-Busiri b. Badr al-Din (d. 1915) of Bornu origin; Ibrahim Qabr al-Ulum (*"Sare Imo"*) of Bornu origin (d. 1870); Muhammad bn Ahmad Begore of Fulani origin (d. 1913) and Muhammad al-Takunti b. Abi Bakr al-Nufawi of Nupe origin (d. c.1900). These and other scholars contributed greatly to the growth of Islamic learning in Ilorin such that by the 1850s several Qur'anic/Ilmi schools were reported to be in existence in Ilorin with scholars 'engrossed with their books' (Campbell 1861, 85; Clarke 1972, 84). These foundations were built upon by later Islamic scholars who helped transformed Ilorin into a renowned centre of learning in the region.

As a widely acknowledged centre of Islamization and Islamic scholarship, early Ilorin scholars and their successors have made immeasurable contributions to indigenous production of knowledge for over two hundred years. During this period, Ilorin scholars produced (through authorship and copying of imported Arabic/Islamic literature) numerous Arabic manuscripts (both in Arabic and Ajami) on various branches of knowledge and human endeavors. The Ilorin manuscripts today make up what has been described as "the invisible library of Ilorin" and shared elements from ancient Arabic literary and calligraphic traditions from far and wide including Kanem-Borno, Hausa land, Mali and the Maghreb among other regions. Reichmuth (2010), for instance, identifies 'some of the important aspects of the literary culture of Ilorin to include its early connection with the calligraphic tradition of Borno, its occasional contacts with the Middle East, its higher level of legal and philological literature and a peculiar expression of prophetic piety'.

The above survey shows that, in terms of Arabic and Islamic religious scholarship, Ilorin is also a melting-pot of traditions of Islamic scholarship from different sources, including Kanuri, Fulani, Hausa, Nupe, Malian, Sudanese, Dendi, and Yoruba among others (Abubakre 2006, 99-116; Reichmuth 2010, 213-239). All of such traditions have, however, merged into a very rich Ilorin tradition of Islamic scholarship, which has continued to be sustained till the present times and has



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made the city attractive to Muslims and Islamic scholars in search for knowledge from different regions. The Ilorins, as *Aafa* (teachers and preachers of Islam), have also played significant roles in the introduction and spread of Islam, Arabic and Islamic education to places outside the city and the Nigerian area (Oseni 2006, 44-74; Ajetunmobi 2006; Abubakre 2006, 99-116).

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