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ABSTRACT

In classical Islamic tradition, one of the basic rationale for undertaking a jihad is to expand the dar-al-Islam. The jihad which was started in Hausaland in the northern part of the later Nigerian region was no exception to this Islamic ideal. This study has attempted to re-examine critically what the authorities of Ilorin Emirate, one of the resultant emirates from the jihad, did with respect to that incumbent proselytizing duty during the nineteenth century in their conquered but essentially animist southern fields. The reconsideration has been deemed necessary in view of the conclusions expressed in some major secondary works, to the effect that the authorities of the emirate failed to pay attention to the Islamization of these fields.

KEY WORDS: Jihad, Islam, Proselytization, Dar-al-Islam

INTRODUCTION

A wave of jihads spread through the Western Sudan during the nineteenth century. One of them was the jihad which was started in Hausaland, in the northern segment of later Nigerian region, in 1804 by the Fulani Islamic scholar, Uthman bin Fudio. In line with classical Islamic tradition, one of the cardinal duties which bin Fudio enjoined on his co-jihadists was to spread Islam in the unbelievers’ or non-Muslim territories (Willis, 1967; Last, 1967). As far as the founding-fathers of the Sokoto Caliphate (which resulted from the jihad) were concerned, attainment of political power in various places by the jihadists was valuable primarily in so far as it would help in the promotion and spread of Islam in those places. In this respect, it must be noted that as soon as each of the constituent emirates of the caliphate was founded, one of the duties which the Caliph at Sokoto enjoined upon its emir was to expand the frontiers of Islam.

By about 1823, the Ilorin Emirate had been established on the northern fringes of Yorubaland and it subsequently became one of the emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate. Later, especially between the 1830s-1860s, the Ilorin Emirate conquered and incorporated vast territorial and demographic areas of basically animist Yoruba-speaking peoples in its southern direction. This study has attempted a critical re-examination of what the authorities of the emirate did, during the nineteenth century, with respect to their Islamic proselytizing duty, in the animist southern fields of the emirate. The rationale for the choice of Ilorin Emirate in particular for the study is the current weight of opinion which is observable in existing secondary works, to the effect that the authorities failed to consciously and vigorously prosecute the spread and growth of Islam in their conquered non-Muslim territories throughout the nineteenth century (Danmole, 1980; Raji, 1980; Banwo, 1996). Another important rationale for its choice is the fact that these animist territories contained a considerable physical and demographic proportion (more than half) of the total physical and demographic size of the emirate.

ISLAMIC PROSELYTIZATION VIS-À-VIS STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL, C. 1823-1900

In 1798, the Alaka of Old Oyo Empire appointed one of his leading military officers called “Afonja” as the Aare Ona Kakarlu (that is, "generalissimo") of the empire. In that capacity, Afonja was required to reside at Ilorin, the remotest outpost of the empire, in order to ward off enemy attacks from that insecure frontier. Being ambitious, Afonja decided to take advantage of the prevalent instability within the metropolis of the empire to carve out for himself an independent domain (as some of the other provincial chiefs were busy doing), with Ilorin as its base. In this secessionist bid against his suzerain the Alaka, Afonja sought and got the assistance, in men and Islamic charms, of an itinerant Fulani Muslim scholar then based at Ilorin, called Jalin al-Saahl. Afonja succeeded in his palace coup and declared himself and ilorin independent of the Alaka (Hermon-Hodge, 1929; Huguenin, 1930; Atanda, 1971; Law, 1977). He then proceeded to bring some towns in the north-east of the empire, such as Ijigbo, Igbon and Iresa, under his control. Afonja soon fell out with his Fulani-Muslim allies at Ilorin after the death of their leader, al-Saahl, about 1823. In the struggle between the two sides over the rulership of Ilorin, Afonja was defeated and killed and an emirate was established at Ilorin under al-Saahl’s elder son, Abdulsalam, as its first emir.

Consequent upon the foregoing circumstances which surrounded its foundation, Ilorin Emirate had to face a protracted political and military struggle for existence and survival during the rest of the nineteenth century. The struggle started in earnest as the authorities of the Old Oyo Empire embarked on a series of military onslaughts which were aimed at “...a total destruction of Ilorin under Fulani leadership and returning Ilorin to both Yoruba and Oyo’s imperial fold” (Balogun, 1978). The last such effort was the Eleduwe War of 1835/1836 in which a combination of Oyo’s imperial forces and the forces of their Batoumba allies seriously threatened the survival of the emirate (Hermon-Hodge, 1929; Akintun, 1992). The Emir, Abdulsalam, had to appeal to his immediate suzerain in the Sokoto caliphal set-up, the Emir of Gwandu, Ibrahim Khalil, for military assistance (Balogun, 1978). So grave was the danger posed for the emirate that Emir Mettu personally led the joint forces of Gwandu and Sokoto to aid Ilorin and decisively defeat Oyo’s allied forces (Anene, 1965; Akinkunmi, 1992). Ilorin followed up the victory by invading and sacking the empire’s capital, and its inhabitants fled in various directions, thus completing the ultimate demise of the Old Oyo Empire. That resounding victory of Ilorin over Oyo’s forces notwithstanding, the very fact of the founding of Ilorin Emirate in a Yoruba territory (all the other emirates were founded in non-Yoruba areas) made it inevitable that the emirate should be deeply involved in the politics of Yorubaland, as would be discussed later on.

Owing to a combination of political, military, strategic and economic considerations which are not directly relevant to the thrust of this study, the authorities of the emergent Ilorin Emirate embarked on wars of conquest in the East, Igbomina and Ibolu territories to the south-eastern and south-western directions. (Awe, 1884; NNAK IlorProf 6338). The wars led to the incorporation, into the emirate, of vast areas and populations, especially between the 1830s and 1850s. Like the generality of the Yoruba culture group at that time, the people of these southern areas were animists who practised
some forms of African Religions (AR). According to M. Last, however, one of the overriding motives for Iorin's incursions into these southern territories was to continue the jihad and to thereby spread Islam as was incumbent on every emirate in the Sokoto Empire. The Sokoto Emirate, which the authorities in the two territories, the emirate authorities put in place some form of administration. In theory, the Emir of Iorin was the political, military, fiscal, judicial and religious head of these places and of the other areas of the emirate. In practice, however, the people of the southern siefes were left to the devices of their pre-Iorin conquest traditional rulers in matters concerning their internal affairs. The most important requirements from the people were the payment of taxes and tribute (in cash and kind) and the supply of military subscriptions for Iorin's wars. To ensure effective performance of the requirements, the areas were parcelled informally into siefes. The siefes were assigned to the emirs' sons and other members of the Iorin aristocracy, such as the four Balogun (war-commanders) as their sief-holders. The sief-holders resided at Iorin. As absentee landlords, therefore, the sief-holders appointed their residential agents called 'baale' to perform their functions on their behalf by seeing to it that the siefes performed the above requirements (NKAM Report 739/1917). The people of the siefes, however, still had the latitude to conduct and control their internal affairs as they pleased. For example, they were free to select and appoint their traditional rulers and to practise their various forms of African Religion.

The establishment of the foregoing minimal administration in Iorin in the early 1830s, and southern areas went on pari passu with Iorin's continued expansionist and defensive wars, for it must be noted that Iorin's defeat of the Old Oyo Empire in 1835/1836 did not put an end to the struggle for survival by Iorin Emirate. The demise of the empire had led to a power contest among some older as well as some nascent states in Yorubaland for the filling of the vacuum which had been created by the demise. The states included Ibadan, Ijebu and Ilu-Uba. By the late 1830s, Ibadan, one of the new states, had gained indiscutible ascendancy over the other contestants. That state of affairs made a clash between Ibadan and Iorin inevitable as both of them had imperialist and expansionist designs in Yoruba land (Danmole et al. 1985). Most probably out of enlightened self-interest Ibadan also assigned itself the responsibility of ending the menace of alien Fulani rule in Iorin and reclaiming Iorin for Yorubaland. Then came the actual clash between Ibadan and Iorin, which culminated in the defeat of Iorin. In his conclusion in this regard, he said that the defeat put an end to Iorin's expansionist designs in the Ijebu sector of Yorubaland (Akintoye, 1977:34). Iorin therefore concentrated on expansionist efforts to the Ekiti and Igbomina territories while it had to simultaneously contend with the military activities of Ibadan and Ijebu which both "...began a systematic rolling back of the Iorin domination over the (Ijebu) Osun districts..." (Akintoye, 1967:34). During the next four decades, Iorin also busied itself with other military and strategic engagements, such as the struggle to get firmly entrenched in northern Ekiti against stiff opposition there by Ibadan. By 1878, however, the Ekiti-Ijebu War broke out between the north-eastern Yoruba peoples and their Ibadan suzerains.4 For reasons of its political interests, Iorin got involved in the war first, as an ally of the Ekiti-Ijebu Confederacy in an attempt to liquidate its rival and enemy, Ibadan and, later, as one of the major belligerents in the Offa section of the war from 1879 - 1887. Then followed the protracted peace negotiations by the mediators of the British Colony of Lagos, in the war-torn Ijebu sector of Yorubaland, between the Ibadan and Iorin belligerents. The negotiations culminated in the peace treaty of March 1853. The period 1893 - 1900 was characterized by increasing tension between the British authorities and the Iorin Emirate authorities. The resultant crisis culminated in the British military intervention against Iorin on one of its borders on March 1893. This was followed up with the establishment of British colonial rule over the emirate, through the signing of a treaty to that effect by both parties on 188 February, 1897 (Adeleye, 1971).

The essence of the foregoing analysis is to adequately demonstrate the key pressing and inevitable issues around which the authority in Iorin Emirate were preoccupied throughout the rest of the nineteenth century. It becomes pertinent at this juncture to critically examine how the emirate authorities fared during that century in their incumbent duty of spreading Islam in the non-Muslim southern siefes of the emirate. For this we have three in-depth secondary works on the study area as our authority. One is the unpublished doctoral thesis of H.O. Danmole titled, 'History of Badele's Igbomina Part of Iorin Emirate' 1853 - 1968. The other is an unpublished Master's thesis by A. O. Y. Raji titled, 'Demystifying the Proselytizing Mission: A Study of Iorin Overrule in Igbomina land, c. 1835 - 1968'. Thirdly, we have the published study by A. O. Banwo titled, 'The 19th Century Iorin Wars and the Growth of Islam in Yorubaland: A Re-Assessment.' According to Danmole who has the most liberal conclusions out of the three authors, the Iorin authorities concentrated on the political and economic aspects of their relationship with their non-Muslim southern siefes and made little cultural or Islamic pressure on the siefes minimal (Danmole, 1980). He explained further that it was through both direct and indirect proselytizing efforts of some groups other than the Iorin emirate authorities that Islam spread to and grew in a few areas of the southern siefes. The groups were Muslim Fulani herdsmen and farmers and Iorin malamis; and the affected southern siefes in this respect, according to him, were Ajase-Ipo and Igbaja. Thus, Islam's influence in Yorubaland was left unconverted to Islam by their emirate suzerains." (Raji, 1990:3). (3) "...efforts were not known to have been made by the Iorin elite to spread Islam even in the southern part of the emirate throughout the nineteenth century." (Raji, 1990:4) (4) "Generally, the religious enthusiasm of the Fulanis (authorities of the emirate - insert mine) had ebbed by the second decade of the 19th century..." (Raji, 1990:90). Writing in a similar vein although more from the perspective of economics: exploitation, of the southern siefes, by the Iorin aristocracy for the purpose of enhancing and consolidating their political power in the emirate, A. O. Banwo details how the Iorin Emirate authorities' main function among others, included the payment of taxes, tribute and tolls, and the regular supply of food crops, slaves and other forms of goods and services decreed by the aristocracy. The supply of these forms of surplus became the primary responsibility while the spread of Islam became relegated. (Banwo, 1995:88). (8) "The effect of the non-commitment of the Iorin aristocracy to the growth of Islam in Yorubaland clearly manifested in the socio-political development of the emirate in the 19th century and beyond." (Banwo, 1995:88) (3) "There is a possibility that political opportunism and the quest for economic power were the compelling motives, on the part of the aristocracy, for Iorin's wars especially...when viewed within the context of the unseemly commitment by the Iorin aristocracy at 'dipping the Koran into the sea'" (Banwo, 1995:94).

It is deemed necessary not to undertake a critical appraisal of the above conclusions by the three authors because it does not seem entirely correct to opine that the emirate authorities made no committed effort at Islamic proselytizing in the non-Muslim southern siefes during the nineteenth century. We have it on the authority of K. V. Elphinstone in his Gazetteer of Iorin Province, and corroborated by archival records, that at least one of the emirs, Ennor Zubeiru (1858 - 1895), was known to be an active proselytizing zealot. Accordingly to Elphinstone, "Zubeiru [sic] was a bigen [Moslem]; he burnt the juju and juju houses and swore that he..."
would put to death all pagans; an immense wave of Islam swept over the country in consequence." (Ephrinston, 1972: NNAK IkorProf 53). In fact, his people acknowledged his Islamic zeal with this epithet which they coined to describe him: "A gbọna bi elẹko idi" meaning, literally, "he was as hot as a pot of steaming early morning paep", in reference to his Islamic fervour. (Hogben, 1966:295). Yet, according to Raji above, that was part of the period when the religious enthusiasm of the Ilorin aristocracy was supposed to have ebbed. In fact, archival records inform us that it was during Zubehrui's reign that a recallitrant Oore or Oba of Otun in the Ekiti area of the southern fiefs, cognizant of the emir's proselytizing fever, decided to appease him and return to the good books of his overlord by declaring (even if it was merely a nominal declaration, as was quite possible) his conversion to Islam (NNAK IkorProf 53). With the declaration, the emir forgave him for having earlier on invited the Ibadan to aid him militarily against Aaye, a neighbouring Ekiti settlement. (In the process, the Ibadan had seized the opportunity to also drive out the ilorin ajele in Otun and replace him with their own ajele).

Moreover, Raji informed us that some Igbomina Oba (and most probably, some Ekiti and Ilebo Oba as well) became nominally converted to Islam during the nineteenth century because they were aware that at least a tacit allegiance to Islam was necessary to win the favour of their emirate suzerains (Raji, 1990: In Raji's words, "...We know that with the creation of Ilorin Emirate, Islam became the gateway to the Fulani (Ilorin) world and conversion to it was the price for entry," Raji, 1990:95). Such nominal and diplomatic avowal of conversion by some of the traditional rulers of the southern fiefs demonstrates that these animist traditional rulers and people realized that their emirate overlords were interested in the spread of Islam to their areas. It would seem inappropriate to make blanket conclusions to the effect that the Ilorin aristocracy during the nineteenth century, were disinterested in, made no concrete effort at, or relegated, Islamic proselytization in their animist southern fiefs. A more realistic appraisal of the issue would seem to be that some peculiar political and military circumstances led to the establishment of the emirate right on Yoruba soil. Consequently, the emirate became preoccupied, for the rest of that century, with a series of wars for the very survival of the emirate during that period of intermecine wars in Yorubaland. The wars, in turn, precluded the possibility of the Ilorin authorities being able to simultaneously devote time, resources and attention to a consistent and vigorous policy of Islamic proselytization in their non-Muslim southern fiefs. Viewed in this light, even the expansionist wars in Yorubaland on which the emirate embarked could be interpreted, in the final analysis, as wars of survival because often, the best form of defence is to undertake the initiative in the offensive sphere. As the Yoruba proverb has it "Igiganganran ma gu mi oju, a tokere laa ti wo." Meaning, "If you don't something to harm you, then you have to take precautionary steps early enough." Any overt and consistent policy of Islamizing the fiefs was potentially capable of leading to their revolt or, at least, a spirited resistance by the southern fiefs against Ilorin Emirate. Such would have been a very costly development for the emirate. For one thing, it would have involved the emirate in war on an additional front with all the implications in terms of human and material resources. This view is underscored by the point made by T. G. O. Gbadamosi with respect to the spread of Islam among the entire Ekiti-speaking peoples, but which could be correctly extended to the Ilebo and Igbomina southern fiefs of Ilorin Emirate as well. According to him, one of the two major obstacles which confronted the spread of Islam among the Ekiti throughout the nineteenth century was that their first contact with Islam had been through the wars and raids of Ilorin, a militant Muslim state, and this therefore generated considerable opposition, among the Ekiti, against Ilorin and the religion with which it was associated (Gbadamosi, 1978). Furthermore, such a resistance, while it lasted, would have robbed the emirate of much-needed taxes, royalties and military subscriptions from the fiefs, and thereby weakened the aristocracy economically and militarily. Finding themselves confronted with making a choice between vigorous Islamic proselytization and the very survival of the emirate, the Ilorin aristocracy wisely chose the latter option. The attempt by Emir Shittah to consciously spread Islam to non-Muslim peoples (in this case, specifically to the Alafia and, by logical extension, also to the people, of Old Oyo Empire) had been a major cause of the Eleduve War by Alafia Oluwewu against Ilorin in 1835/1836 (Johnson, 1978). Also, when during the 1840s, Ayungun, the Òfòro of Oke-Ora (Oke-Ora) Ora among the Ilebo, southern fiefs before a Muslim, he was disarmed and exiled by popular protest (Ephrinston, 1972: Danmole, 1983). It therefore sounds quite expedient for the Ilorin aristocracy to have gradually come to the conclusion not to make "any concrete bid to minister Islam" to the people of their southern fiefs. Danmole itemized two important issues in the relationship between Ilorin and the fiefs viz., unresolved hostilities and incomplete conquests (Danmole, 1983). The aristocracy might therefore have been in the decision to avoid the circumstances which the emirate faced both internally and externally, a policy of vigorous Islamic proselytization would be counter-productive to the overall interests of the emirate in the short run as well as in the long run.

In matters of foreign policy, Banwo gave an in-depth picture of the continually shifting nature of Ilorin's alliances with Muslims and non-Muslims alike. From this, he buttress his view above that political and economic interests, and not an Islamic zeal, determined, for the Ilorin aristocracy, the pattern of the emirate's alliances (Banwo, 1995). This does not seem to have been the case. Rather, the aristocracy seemed to have been trying to ensure the emirate's survival and if possible, expansion, at all costs and by all means since in matters of inter-state politics and diplomacy generally, "the end justifies the means". This point is buttressed by H. O. Danmole's summation of the issue of Ilorin's shifting alliances when he referred to the common dictum that it was a case of having no permanent friends (or enemies as the case may be) but, rather, permanent interests where matters of external relations were concerned (Danmole, 1983b). As for Banwo's copious discussion of the extensive appropriation of surplus capital from the fiefs by the Ilorin aristocracy instead of prosecuting the jihad, this needs not be surprising because the prosecution of warfare both in the past and present times required and still requires a heavy capital outlay (Banwo, 1995). Finally, the three essays works that have been appraised in this study are unanimous on the fact that the duty of evangelizing Ilorin's southern fiefs was undertaken by Muslim scholars and Mallams, but not by the Ilorin aristocracy. This seems understandable in spite of the on-going wars discussed above. Missionaries, be they Islamic or Christian missionaries, can and do operate even in war zones. They regard the risks and sacrifices involved in such an undertaking as an integral part of their divinely ordained duty. For a state, however, the equation is not as simple as that. It must be emphasized that it was virtually impracticable for a state which was constantly embroiled in warfare during the nineteenth century, as Ilorin Emirate was, to simultaneously prosecute vigorous evangelization as a matter of state policy. The situation today with the great technological advances such as nuclear and biological warfare weapons might, of course, be different.

With the benefit of hindsight of developments in the southern fiefs during the colonial era (then called "southern districts"), 1900 – 1960, one is inclined to conclude that had the circumstances been different during the nineteenth century, the Ilorin aristocracy would have concretely prosecuted the spread of Islam in the non-Muslim areas. Two examples will suffice here to show how the aristocracy utilized the stability and security which were provided by the colonial state to consciously, consistently and overtly prosecute the
spread of Islam in the southern districts. First could be cited the fact that the Emirs of Ilorin, in their capacity as Sole Native Authority in Ilorin Emirate or Division, regularly advised the colonial government against granting permission to the Christian missionaries to establish and operate in the southern districts (Afolayan, 1985). Secondly, in 1950, Gabriel Adeoye, who had been duly selected by the kingmakers and people of Oko-Olabi (among the Igbonima) as their Oba was rejected by the Emir and, therefore, by the government, because he was a Christian (Raji, 1990). The Emir appointed and turbaned instead a Muslim contestant, Jimoh Oloaye, whom the kingmakers and townspeople had rejected on the grounds that he was a leper and was also not a rightful claimant to the stool (Raji, 1990). The essence of such measures was to deter other members of the aristocracy in particular and the people in general in the southern districts from conversion to Christianity, as well as to encourage their conversion to Islam. These pro-Islam efforts of the Emirs of Ilorin during the colonial period cannot be interpreted as having been due to the aristocracy having suddenly woke up from their disinterestedness of the preceding century. It was a matter of now exploiting the favourable circumstances which surrounded the emirate to prosecute the spread of Islam in the non-Muslim chiefdoms, as was incumbent upon them.

CONCLUSION

The Ilorin Emirate was one of the emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate, which resulted from the early nineteenth century jihad in the northern part of later Nigerian region. In classical Islamic tradition, the Ilorin Emirate, like the other emirates in the caliphate, was expected to continue the jihad by spreading Islam into non-Muslim areas. The weight of opinion in some existing major secondary works is that the authorities of Ilorin Emirate failed to carry out this requirement but instead concentrated on their personal interests and the political and economic consolidation in the emirate. The conclusion from this study, however, is that contrary to that view, the difficult and hostile circumstances in which the emirate found itself throughout the nineteenth century precluded the possibility of the aristocracy sparing time, resources and attention to vigorous Islamic proselytization.

NOTES AND REFERENCES


Afolayan, F. op. cit., p. 5. See also p. 7. This was a common policy among the Emirs in Northern Nigeria during the colonial period. In the case of Igbonima land, however, the emirs did not quite succeed with the colonial government in this policy. See ibid., passim.


Although Raji’s work is focused on the Igbonima, nevertheless, he often extended his conclusions to the other peoples of the southern chiefdoms of Ilorin Emirate.


Banwo, A. O. op. cit., p. 94.


Banwo, A. O. op. cit., p. 88.


Elphinstone, K. V. op. cit., p. 15; and Danmole, H. O., 1983. op. cit., p. 8. Some writers, such as F. Afolayan, put the date at the 1860s. Since Elphinstone tells us that the event occurred during the reign of Emir Shittu, which ended about 1861, then the 1840s seems to be the more probable date. See F. Afolayan. “Religion, State and Society in Colonial Central Nigeria: The Igbonima Experiences.” Paper presented at the 31st Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria, University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University), Ile-Ife, 18th – 24th May, 1986, p. 3.


Ibid., p. 136.

Ibid. p. 94.
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Ibid. p. 96.


Last, M. 1967, op.cit., p. 56


Loc.cit.

Loc.cit.

Loc.cit.

NNAK ILorProf 739/1917, "History of Awtun, Ilorin District, as told by Usman Mijindadi, Ajele at Otu [sic] from c. 1864-1897." The Southern fiefs of Ilorin Emirate consisted of some Ekiti, Igbonina and Ibo Yoruba peoples.

NNAK ILorProf 53, op.cit.


Raji, A. O. Y. op.cit., p. 95.

Raji, A. O. Y. op.cit., p. 176. Such a hostile policy towards Christian traditional rulers was, again, a common feature of the entire Northern Nigeria. For such instances, see E. A. Ayandele, "The Missionary Factor in Northern Nigeria, 1870 – 1918." JHSN, Ill, 3, December 1966, p. 519; and M. Y. Mangywat. "The


Raji, A. O. Y. op.cit.


There was, of course, also a religious consideration, that is, the desire to spread Islam, but that is directly relevant to our concern in this study. For details of those other considerations, see Nigerian National Archives, Kaduna (NNAK) ILorProf 6338, "Notes on History of Igbonina, Ekitis, Ajasse, Awtun, Obbo, and Osi, 1917 – 40;” and B. A. Awe. "The Rise of ibadan as a Yoruba Power, 1851 – 1893.” D. Phil. Thesis, Oxford, 1964, p. 128.