



ILORIN AS A BEACON OF LEARNING AND CULTURE IN WEST AFRICA

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SECTION A

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CHAPTER 5

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF ISLAM AND ISLAMIC SCHOLARSHIP IN ALI-AGAN QUARTERS IN ILORIN

Yahaya ELIASU

INTRODUCTION

From 1000AD, it was not unlikely that Islam had started to find its bearing out of Arabia which was its main origin. In addition, it was this time or thereafter that we could mention Islam *per se* in Africa. But prior to this time, West African communities were ardent worshippers of gods and goddesses, animate and inanimate objects such as moon, stars, trees and so on. It must be pointed out that prior to the coming of Islam, West African communities had strong traditional background and were involved in the worship of deities. It was this situation that Islam later encountered in West Africa. By 722AD, there was a resurgence in Arabia. This resurgence culminated into the dispersal of many Arabs outside Arabia. Around 7th century, the Arabs had settled amongst the African communities and at the same time Islam was making its ways into North Africa. Islamic culture and traditional cultures created inter-group conflicts among the Muslim Arabs and the Berber settlers of North Africa. After sometime, the Arabs were able to establish themselves strongly in North Africa which resulted into exposing the Mediterranean region of North Africa which included places such as Libya and Morocco to Islamic faith. However, available evidences seem to suggest that Islam was known amongst the West African communities which antedated the time of the arrival of Arabs of North Africa.

Islam got to Bornuland through Muhammed Ibn Mani who was one of the itinerant scholars in West Africa. His coming was associated with the period of Ummel Jilmi who was the ruler of Bornu. Down South of Nigeria, (Gbadamosi, 1978:5) has observed that Islam gained currency in Oyo Empire in the 16th century during the reign of Alafin Ajagbo. It was reported that Afaa Yigi, an Arab was responsible for the coming of Islam into the area. Similarly, around 1830, some itinerant scholars of Islamic were mentioned to have arrived Yorubaland from the North, enroute

Ilorin. For instance, scholars such as Ahmad Qifu and Uthman bin Abu Bakr went to Ibadan during the period of Bashorun Oluyedun. Abu Bakr came from Kastina but had the ambition to teach and promote Islam in the south in Ijebu-Ode, Abeokuta or Ibadan. He was appointed Imam in Ibadan in 1839. However, Ilorin got a status as a centre of Islamic education during this period as there were reported evidences of Quranic schools and institutions in the city. (Fafunwa, 1974:57). More importantly, the Fulani leader, Alfa Janta known to history as Alfa Alimi and his *Jamaa* promoted the course of Islam in Ilorin. This situation can explain further the position of Islam, Islamic scholarship and its impact on the Muslim communities in the area under consideration.

Spread of Islam and Islamic Scholarship in Northern Nigeria: An Overview

Islam got to the savannah area of West Africa around the eighth century AD, the period from which the documented history of West Africa started. Renown scholars such as Ibn Munabbih and Al-Masudi, for instance, wrote as early as 738 and 947 respectively. As Islam reached the savannah area, commercial activities became established immediately in North Africa. Trade and commercial contact provided the avenue for material culture and gave impetus to intellectual development for which some areas of Sudan became popular. During the time of Dunama II (1221-59), connections were made through official letters with Tunisia in line with what Ibn Khaldun narrated. During this time, a college was built in Cairo called *Madrasah al-Rashiq*. However, Kanem metamorphosed into an academic and Islamic area because different scholars moved from Mali to Kanem to teach Islamic law. In the fourteenth century, a capital within the Kanuri empire had been built in the Bornu capital called *N'gazaragamu* by a ruler identified as Ali Ghazi (Ali Ghaji), 1476-1503. He was interested in studying the principles of Islam and visited Imam Umar Masaramba to study Islamic law. However, specific Islamic activities were believed to have taken its firm footing during the time of Idris Alooma (1570-1602), and this assertion has been corroborated by Ahmad Ibn Fartuwa (Fafunwa, 1974:53).

The *Madrasah* (Islamic schools) were founded and the mode of operation of the schools was the same in accordance with Muslim cities. According to Fafunwa, (Fafunwa, 1974:54), the importation or spread of Islam in

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Hausa was as a result of the activities of scholars and traders respectively. He mentioned specifically that around forty Wangarawa traders were believed to have introduced Islam into Kano during the period of Ali Yaji, 1349-1385. A mosque was immediately built and *Imam*, *Muezzin* and *Qadi* were also given the mandate to discharge their various Islamic duties during this time. Fulani Islamic scholars migrated to Kano area during the time of Yaqub, 1452-63, and carried along with them, volumes of books on Islamic law and theology.

Fundamentally, a famous scholar and theologian called Al-Maghili from Timbuktu among many scholars arrived Kano to spread the tenets of Islam. In particular, during the time of Muhammad Rumfa, Al-Maghili otherwise known as AbdulKareem authored the book which specialized on Islamic government popularly called *The Obligation of Princes*. Before Al-Maghili got to Kastina, the place had already become an Islamic centre. Different pilgrims and scholars from University of Sankore visited the place to teach Islamic divinity. By the 17th century, Katsina had reputable Islamic scholars such as Muhammadu Dan Masina (Masani) and Muhammadu Dan Marina (*Ibid:54*).

The Position of Islam in the Early 19th Century in Ilorin Emirate

Ilorin is preponderantly a Muslim community in Nigeria. The precise time when Islam arrived Ilorin may not be easy to decipher and scholars have not been able to arrive at a consensus on this matter. Significantly, the role of Ilorin in the Islamization of Yorubaland and the development of Islam has been documented in the province in the early nineteenth century (*Ibid:10*). However, Shaykh Alimi bn Salih arrived to meet a good number of Muslim scholars from different parts of the 'world'. These scholars involved different descents such as the Fulanis, Hausas, Gobiris, Nupes, Malians and Kanuris in Ilorin. Therefore, the town turned into a melting pot of Muslims and their various culture. Perhaps this could explain why a quarter in Ilorin was popularly referred to as *Ribwat al-Sunnah* (Oke-Suna) named after the observance of the prophet's tradition prevalent among the people of the quarter. (Al-Ilory Adam Abdullahi, 1986:61-62).

Thus, evidences of pre-Islamic activities in this area under consideration are not yet known to history because of the following reasons.' One, the

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founder of Ali-Agan lineage was a Muslim and still a Muslim. Secondly, when he arrived Ilorin, he had a number of *Jamaa* in his company. Thus, the settlement of Ali-Agan was started by Mallam AbdulGaniy. When he arrived into the scene as the first Mallam, he went to the reigning Emir then, AbdulSalam (1816 to 1842) to request for land for his large Muslim crowd to settle. As was the norm then, the Emir in his exalted position referred him to Magaji Agudamu (Agbadamu) for settlement and asked for the break of *Odi* (city wall) which was granted. AbdulGaniyu popularly called Ali-Agan, apart from being an Islamic scholar was also regarded as a warrior. Hence, was being referred to as *Ajagun bi Agan*, Ali-Agan or Ali who married a barren woman.

Historical Antecedence of Mosques in Ali-Agan Quarters in Ilorin Emirate

The first major effort in the development of mosques in Ilorin was around the end of the nineteenth century. This was the time when Islam made a steady progress in the town consequent upon increase in the number of mosques in the city of Ilorin. Apart from the central mosque (*Masalasi Jimoh*) which was dated to the Shaykh Alimi's time, other mosques were said to have been established in all the four wards of the town which included Balogun Fulani, Balogun Gambari, Balogun Ajikobi and Balogun Alanamu. By 1983, the numbers of mosques and praying sites were said to be around three thousand (Danmole, 1983:4).

The first congregational prayer was performed by Shaykh Alimi and this was held at *Ori-Oke* during that time (Jimoh, 1994:468). This congregational prayer was moved to Munabai Mosque at *Oke-Kura*. This mosque was later shifted to Makana before it was lastly shifted to *Idi-Ape* in 1870. This mosque was in *Idi-Ape* until Ultra-Modern Jumat Mosque in front of Emir's Palace was declared opened. It must be pointed out that the shifting of the mosque founded during the time of Shaykh Alimi was necessitated when the first one built during the Shaykh Alimi's time was reconstructed by Emir Zubair (1860-1868) and was subsequently expanded by Emir Aliyu (1868-1891). The 1986 census carried out in Ilorin Township pointed out that there were about six hundred mosques and more than thousand ones located within and perhaps outside the city of Ilorin (Jimoh, 1994:468).

Agbaji was the first to build mosque which served Ali-Agan quarters then. Oral evidence reveals that Agbaji area embarked on the building of *Gigi* mosque and that Ali-Agan used to attend prayer in the mosque. This was the situation until Ali-Agan made effort to build his own mosque because of prevailing circumstances then. Unity prevailed among the duo because Ali-Agan was accorded great respect by Agbaji as no prayer would commence until *Baba Fada* appeared in the mosque. But now Agbaji area has possessed an ultra modern mosque led by Imam Alhaji Tantolohun. However, the exact date of the establishment of mosque may be difficult to state. The list of Imams of Agbaji mosque present a guide to the date of the first mosque of Agbaji area.

Table 1: List of Imams of Agbaji Mosque, 1788 - 2008

S/N	Name of Imam	Period	Duration
1.	Alfa Agba Musa	1788-1828	40 years
2.	Shaykh Amada Rufahi	1828-1836	8 years
3.	Shaykh Abdullahi	1874-1882	7 years
4.	Shaykh Kasim	1882-1889	7 years
5.	Shaykh Ibrahim Baba Agba	1989-1930	4 years
6.	Shaykh Nafiu Babansasa	1930-1934	4 years
7.	Shaykh A. Baba Ada	1934-1941	4 years
8.	Shaykh Ahmad Badawi	1941-1969	28 years
9.	Shaykh Amadu Shafiyi	1969-1971	2 years
10.	Shaykh Umar Ona Ara	1971-1973	2 years
11.	Shaykh Salaudeen	1973-1982	2 years
12.	Shaykh Akibu Gusaau	1982-2005	23 years
13.	Shaykh Aminullahi Tantolohun	2008-date	

The second mosque was built by Ali-Agan family. Although the exact time of the building of the mosque could not be mentioned with accuracy, it was stated that Ali-Agan mosque was built during the reign of Emir AbdulSalam (1816-1842). Eminent Islamic scholars involved in the affairs of the mosque since its inception included the following; Alhaji Yakub Imam Muhammed Buseri, Imam Muhammad Raji, Imam Bello, Imam AbdulSalam and Imam Abdullahi. About seven Imams have so far offered different prayers in the Imam Ali-Agan mosque. In addition, since the inception of the mosque, about twenty four houses were reported to have formed and constituted the entire *Jama'a* of Ali-Agan mosque. Other mosques in the area included Solagberu mosque, Eleyinla mosque, Olosan

mosque and Alfa Iwo mosque. The following houses are under the coordination of Ali-Agan mosque.

Table II: List of Houses In Ali-Agan Quarters

1.	Ile Ali-Agan
2.	Ile Alalubosa
3.	Ile Alagbede
4.	Ile Ekunsoro
5.	Ile Adodo
6.	Ile Awenimaye
7.	Ile Onilaru
8.	Ile Akaje
9.	Ile Layeri
10.	Ile Lembele
11.	Ile Tapa
12.	Ile Abidogun
13.	Ile Oloduowo
14.	Ile Afa
15.	Ile Afa Oba
16.	Ile Imam Ali-Agan
17.	Ile Ayigoro
18.	Ile Onilemarun
19.	Ile Ikapo
20.	Ile Afa Ewe
21.	Ile Lawan Ladodo
22.	Ile Baba Agba
23.	Ile Kelebe
24.	Ile Aka'aba

Table III: List of Imams of Ali-Agan Mosque

1.	Imam Abdullahi
2.	Imam Abdulsalam
3.	Imam Muhammad Bello
4.	Imam Muhammad Raji
5.	Imam Abubakar
6.	Imam Buseri Muhammad
7.	Shaykh Imam Yakub Ali-Agan the present Imam of Ali-Agan mosque

Islamic Schools and Scholarship In All-Agan Quarters

Quranic education formed the major bed-rock and foundation of Islamic scholarship in Ilorin and in particular, in the area under consideration. Thus, from the time immemorial, there were two types of Quranic schools in Ilorin, viz, Quranic schools otherwise known as *Makarantar Alo* (Oseni, 2006:48), and advance schools popularly called *Makarantar Ilmi*. In the former as the name connotes, the subject matter centres on the Qur'an and the main aim is to get pupils acquainted with the recitation of the chapters of the Qur'an as many times as possible. The language of the Qur'an is Arabic and at this level, little effort is made to understand the meaning of the words in the Qur'an. Children learn by doing or repeating after their teachers and this method is carried on until the verse has been finally committed to memory. Each child has a slate on which the teacher writes some verse of Qur'an on *Wala* or *Alo* for study, using *tada* or ink to write. After accomplishing the Quranic education, a passing out ceremony takes place. It is usually a festive moment in which both the teacher, pupils and parents and the entire community participate and rejoice (Albert and Ocho, 1980:8).

The second type is the *Makarantar Ilmi* where the student begins to acquire elaborate knowledge. He starts with the learning of Islamic theology, jurisprudence, hadith text, Islamic history to mention but a few. The learning of the Qur'an has metamorphosed into the use of *Al-Qai dat al-Baghdiyyah* which has replaced the use of wooden slate (Oseni, 1984:48). This is followed in quick succession by the *Ibtida'iyyah* (primary) school which lapses for three years in a quasi formal school fashioned on the modern Arabic education type. The following subjects are taught under this category: Qurani texts, Hadith, Jurisprudence, Islamic monotheism, History, Ethics, Arabic Grammar, Literature, Comprehension, Composition, Translation, General knowledge and English. *Idadi'yyah* (intermediate or junior secondary school) is the third stage. This has three years duration. Apart from the subjects mentioned above, the following are also learned, basic logic, geography, social studies, arithmetic, rhetoric and science all in Arabic. The last or fourth stage is the *Thamawiyyah* (senior secondary) level in which complex study of the disciplines mentioned above are studied. This is also known as the *al-Taujjihiyyah* (ibid:50).

Az-Zymmratul Adabiyyah Arabic school was the pioneer private Arabic school established by Shaykh Muhammad Kamalud-deen in Lagos in 1929 (Onikijipa, 1993:70-71). This school was an extension of Shaykh Adabiy. By 1930, it had succeeded in attracting a large number of some parents and their sons. The school has contributed significantly to the production of hundreds of Arabic and Islamic scholars in Nigeria and Ali-Agan quarters not an exception.

Some Quranic and Modern Arabic Scholars and their Various Institutions in Ali-Agan Quarters in Ilorin Emirate

There are some Quranic and modern Arabic institutions in this area under consideration. Amongst such schools may be mentioned the following: *Ile-Kewu* Ayigoro was the first in this area established around 1900. The *Musd* was established in 1910 by Alfa AbdulMajid. The *Sharafdeen* Arabic school was built by Shaykh Imam Ali-Agan in 1925 (Aliy-Kamal, 1984:30). *Ile-Kewu Makondoro* (Turbaned Islamic Clerics) was established by Alfa Yusuf in 1930. Alfa Yusuf Agbaji was the founder and popularize of the *Makondoro* institution. He studied under the supervision of Shaykh Zakariyau Babakini which consequently led to the establishment of his own school (Ibid:61). *Ataragba Adabi-Ilory* school was put in place by Alfa Faruq in 1950. *Al-Jawahirul Islamiyyah* school Agbaji Ilorin was established in 1960 by Shaykh Abdullahi Ghali. This school has three sections which may be mentioned thus; *al-Tahdiri* (preparatory) *Ibtidaiyyah* and *Idadiyyah*. This school is still very productive because it turns out competent scholars and is successfully producing vibrant and sound Arabic and Islamic scholars.

Madarasatul Mahasaru Salihina was founded by Ibrahim Salman in 1969. It was established to produce Arabic and Islamic learning of Muslim children in the area. More importantly, *Madrasatul L-Ummatul Islamiyyah al-Adabiyyah* was established in 1973 by Shaykh Imam Yakub Ali-Agan because of influence and profound interest given to Arabic and Islamic learning, this school was sited in Ilorin central mosque. This school is affiliated to *Al-Ma'had al-Dini al-Azhari*, Ogidi Ilorin. It runs both *I'dadiyyah* and *Thanawiyyah* arms (Oseni, 1984:52)..

Table IV: Some Quranic and Modern Arabic Schools in Ali-Agan Quarters in Ilorin

S/N	Name of School	Year Established	Proprietor	Location
1.	Ile-Kewu Ayigoro	1900	Alfa Ayigoro	Ayigoro Compound
2.	Ihman Kusa	1910	Alfa AbdulMajid	Alakuko Compound Agbaji
3.	Sharafdeen Arabic School	1925	Shaykh Imam Ali-Agan	Ode Agan
4.	Ile-Kewu Makondoro	1930	Alfa Yusuf Agbaji	Adara's Compound Agbaji
5.	Ataragba Adabi Ilorin Arabic School	1950	Alfa Faruq	Ataragba Compound Agbaji
6.	Al-Jawhiru Islamiyyah School	1960	Shaykh Abdullahi Ghali	Aburo's Compound Agbaji
7.	Mahasaru Salihina	1969	Alfa Ibrahim Salman	Solagberu's Compound Agbaji
8.	Madrasatul L-Ummatul Islamiyyah al-Adabiyyah	1973	Shaykh Imam Yakub Ali-Agan	Ode Agan
9.	Al-Adabiyyah Muslim Community School	2009	Shaykh Imam Yakub Ali-Agan	Ode Agan

The Impact of the Islamic Scholars in Ilorin Emirate

The place of Islamic scholars in the Islamization of Yorubaland generally has been documented for posterity, and points to the entrenchment of Islam in the area by the early nineteenth century (Gbadamosi, 1978:10). When Shaykh Alimi came to Ilorin large number of Muslim itinerant scholars followed suit and they contributed tremendously to the growth and development of Islamic propagation in the entire area. Thus, the role of Ali-Agan scholars and teachers in the transformation of their area and the entire neighbourhood cannot be overemphasized. It has been

mentioned that Islamic scholars can be classified into two, namely, those who assumed political role and those who functioned on their own. For instance, the first group included Imams and Islamic Judges (Alkali), while the second category involved teachers or preachers. The Ali-Agan and their neighbours fit very well into these groups (Ajetunmobi, 2006:76). For instance, some notable Mallams in the area under consideration could be mentioned as follows: Shaykh Badamasi B. Musa Agbaji from the western part of Ilorin belonged to the first generation of schools. Imam Agbaji also belonged to the second generation of scholars from the eastern part, while Shaykh Ibrahim Dasuki Asukuti was among the third generation of Islamic scholars who have contributed immensely to the propagation of Islam within and outside the town. The legacies left behind were strictly followed by the scholars of repute amongst whom were late Shaykh Muhammad Kamalud-deen al-Adabi (Ibid:81) and late Shaykh Adam Abdullahi Al-Iloriy. Amongst many of their achievements were the turning out of reputable scholars of Ali-Agan compound and their neighbours who impacted positively on Ilorin, Nigeria and beyond.

Shaykh Imam Yakub Ali-Agan and His Contributions in the Field of Arabic and Islamic Education

He had Quranic education under his father as he was taught *Talabal Ilmi, Alkati Salati* to mention but just a few. His mother was a trader and this influenced him greatly. In addition, he studied from the then Imam Alanamu called Muhammad Miqdad. This teacher had a vision about him and requested that he stays with him to learn his Islamic education further. When Imam Alanamu his teacher died, the name of late Shaykh Muhammad Kamalud-deen Al-Adabi was suggested to him. The Islamic scholar under consideration has contributed immensely to the development of Islam in Ilorin Emirate. He was a pioneer Arabic teacher at both the Ansarul Islam Society Schools Balogun Oja and Ikotun respectively, where the schools metamorphosed into secondary schools. Imam Ali-Agan has succeeded in establishing his own nursery and primary schools. A scholar of merits, he built Madrasatul Ummatul Islamiyyah al-Adabiyyah. He got a legacy of gift of oratory from his teacher Shaykh Musa Alfanla as a pre-Juma'at preacher at the Ilorin Ultra Modern Juma'at Mosque every Friday (Adisa-Onikoko, 2007:84-85). He is now the Imam of Ali-Agan mosque, Ode Agan, Ilorin. Imam Ali-Agan trained some of the following young Islamic scholars who have also established their own

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Islamic schools within and outside Ilorin. They include the following, Ibrahim Abubakar Layeri of Ebute-Meta Area, Lagos. He has built mosque and Islamic school respectively. Hussein Jimoh was another scholar and Adam Musa was another scholar based in Kano and Lagos. (Oral Interview; Shaykh Yakub Ali-Agan: 2014).

Shaykh Danialu Ali Agan and His Contributions in The Field of Arabic and Islamic Education

He was born about 70years ago from the family of Ali Agan. His scholarship spirit took him to Lagos and finally returned to Ilorin in 1950s where he continued with his Islamic learning. He was posted by the Ansarul Islam society headquarters in Ilorin to Ikare Akoko where he has succeeded tremendously in the development and propagation of Islam and Islamic learning. By 1963-65, he was an overseer and a teacher in Ikare Akoko. He was able to lay a solid foundation for Ansarul Society in Ikare Akoko because through his influence the society was able to establish a primary school in the name of Ansarul Islam Society of Nigeria. The society built a robust two classroom which was approved by the government as one of his major roles in the propagation of Islam in the larger Ilorin Emirate and even beyond. (Oral Interview: Shaykh Danialu Ali-Agan: 2014)

There are other scores of teachers and erudite scholars who have played tremendous roles in the development of Islam cum propagation in Ilorin Emirate. Some may be mentioned among many scholars. For instance, Dr. Abubakar Imam Yakub Ali Agan of the Department of Religions, University of Ilorin was a popular teacher on Radio Kwara programme titled *Fatwa* collectively handled by Dr. AbdulHamid Olohunoyin and Dr. Abubakar Imam Yakub Ali Agan. He performed his role as his preaching programme sanitized to a very large extent, some of ills of the society. During his tenure, as a programme presenter of *Fatwa*, he was able to advocate for the Muslim mortuary which he succeeded in achieving. He is at the present directing another Islamic programme on Radio Osun and Federal Radio, Harmony FM 103.5 Idofian, Kwara State.

Table V: Some Islamic Scholars/Teachers In Ali Agan Quarters

1.	Imam Agbaji – Shaykh Badamasi B Musa Agbaji
2.	Alfa Dasuki Asukuti
3.	Imam Ali Agan Baba
4.	Alfa Ile Solagberu
5.	Alfa Ile Ikapo
6.	Alfa Ile Adara, Alfa Yusuf Agba
7.	Alfa Dogo Ali Agan
8.	Alfa Mofolorunsho
9.	Alhaji Imam Yakub Ali Agan
10.	Alfa Muhammad Ikare
11.	Alfa Sharafdeen Ali Agan
12.	Alfa Abubakar Imam Ali Agan
13.	Alfa Balarabe Ali Agan
14.	Alfa Ismail Ali Agan
15.	Alfa Yusuf Imam
16.	Alhaji AbdulWahab Ali Agan
17.	Dr. Abubakar Yakub Imam Ali-Agan
18.	Dr. Khidr Mustapha Agbaji
19.	Alhaji AbdulRahman Ibrahim Atanda

Conclusion

We have discussed in this paper the beginning of Islam and specifically Islamic scholarship in the area under consideration. The foundation of Islam and Islamic scholars has been brought into light. Islamic scholars as well as their proprietors have been mentioned in the article. In particular, the place and impact of Islamic scholars have been elucidated in the larger Ilorin Emirate with particular reference to the Ali Agan quarters which forms the centrality of this article. The paper has shown that from the time immemorial and till the present, Islam has always been the tradition of the area with specific reference to Islamic practices, establishment of mosque and so on. The Ali Agan drew a lot of inspiration within the larger Ilorin Emirate which makes the quarters a unique one.

We have also mentioned with specific reference to Islamic scholars who have contributed significantly not only in the area of Islamic propagation but also in the area of Arabic and Islamic education which has remained a lasting legacy in the lineage. We have also pointed out the various

contributions of scholars and teachers in the establishment of various Quranic and indeed modern Arabic institutions through their personal efforts in the quarters. This has accelerated the pace of Arabic and Islamic learning in the area generally.

We have also seen the development and impact of Islamic scholarship on the generality of Muslim community in Ilorin and beyond. This impact led to the proliferation of various *Islamiyyah* schools patterned and modeled by the younger Islamic scholars on the tradition of their teachers. As a result of this, Ilorin has continued to wax stronger in the field of Islamic learning in Nigeria.

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