

Biographical sketch of GIDAN ZAGEZAGI and their contributions to the development of Islam in ZAZZAU

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Abstract

Gidan Zagezagi is one of the old learning centers in Zazzau before the advent of shaykh Uthman dan fodiyo. This paper is an attempt to examine their contributions to the development of Islamic Scholarship in Zazzau and beyond. The biography of Gidan Zagezagi can be traced through the two different groups, the first group was for malam Abdullahi and the second group was for malam Uthman who were said to have come from the same lineage. It was that that they were Arabs from Fezzan, but originally scholars from Iraq, who left their country for political reason. They were Arab merchants who due to their commercial activities finally settled in Zaria around the fifteenth century. The paper highlights the tireless effort made by the scholars for imparting knowledge. The method used in this research is qualitative using historical and observatory research methods. The study found that not much is written on them despite the contributions given by them. The paper ends with contribution and recommendations.

Keywords: Zazzau, development, Islamic Scholarship, malam Uthman

1.1 Introduction

Islam is an Arabic word which simply connotes submission, surrender or total obedience. Islam as a religion stands for a complete submission and total obedience to laws of Allah. According to Hunwick¹, Islam was said to have been first introduced into Hausa land in the fourteen century by *wangarawa* merchants. However, some records² shows that there was something of Islam which have been known before this through contact with Borno whose tradition of islam goes back some three centuries prior to this. According to Kano chronicle (1000-1800), islam was introduced into Hausaland in the fourteen century during the reign of Yaji (1349-85). It

¹Hunwick, J.O., *Arabic Literature of Africa: the Writing of Central Sudanic Africa*, New York: Collin E.J. Brill, 1995, pp. 351-352.

² Al-Ilorin, A.A. *Islam in Nigeria and Shaykh Uthman bn Fodiyo al-Fulani*, Lagos: Markaz Ta'alim al-Islamiyyah, 1978, p. 32.

was also stated that there was an elephant of Islam in Katsina too going back to the mid of fourteen century, but Islam did not gain much there, until fifteen century when Timbuktu scholars began to visit the city often on their way from pilgrimage. Such scholars include Muh'd bn Abdulkarim al-maghili who later settled in Kano.

According to Gwandu³ (1977) stated that Katsina and Kano were the first cities in Hausa States to come in contact because they had centuries been centers of trade. The history of Islam in Zazzau was most likely transmitted from Borno between the periods of 1515-1530 during the reign of Muhammad Abu. Although, nobody could however, say precisely when Islam reaches Zazzau State. For instance, the research conducted by Abdullahi smith was the view of Islam was transmitted to Zazzau by immigrants from Borno.

The coming of shaykh uthman bn fodiyo and his jihad contributed greatly in the development of Islam not only in Zazzau but in Hausaland in general. The Sokoto caliphate lasted a hundred years and it positively affected the whole northern Nigeria. By the end of nineteenth century the caliphate entered a period of weakness which eventually led to its decline.

2.1 Origin and development of *GIDAN ZAGEZAGI ZARIA*

The House of Gidan Zagezagi is one of the old centres of learning in Zazzau before the advent of the *jihad* of Shaykh Uthman bn Fodiyo. One of the traditions claimed that the Zagezagi are the descendants of some Arab merchants who due to their commercial activities finally settled in Zaria around the fifteenth century.⁴ These Arabs were believed to have been integrated and incorporated into the Hausa community as a result of intermarriages with the members of the *Habe* ruling families. The tradition pointed out that those Arab merchants who did not settle permanently within the city wall referred to this group of Arabs settlers as Zak Zak⁵. This name was gradually corrupted to zagezagi. The precise meaning of this word is not known. But according to local tradition zak-zak was Arabic word which means to walk gently and slowly like an old person⁶. It is plausible that Zazzau derived its name from these words too.

Another tradition maintained that the family of Zagezagi was a tribe of Zaghawa who were popularly known in the history of West Africa as warriors and preachers. They established many kingdoms in West Africa. For instance, the Kingdom of Kanem Borno was established by the tribe. The tradition also stated that the time of arrival of Zagezagi family was not certain, because of the large number of tribes which migrated from East towards West Africa at different times and of different circumstances, which took place around 16th to 17th century⁷.

³ Gwandu, A.A. *Abdullahi bn Fodiyo As A Muslim Jurist*, School of Orientals Studies, Elven Hill Durham, 1977, p. 88.

⁴ Suleiman, U. *A History of Birnin Zaria from 1350- 1903*, Unpublished M. A. Dissertation, Submitted to the Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 2007, p. 103.

⁵ Suleiman, U., *A History of Birnin Zaria from 1350- 1903*, Unpublished M. A. Dissertation, Submitted to the Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 2007, p. 104.

⁶ Suleiman, U., *A History of Birnin Zaria from 1350- 1903*, p. 104

⁷ Suleiman, U., *A History of Birnin Zaria from 1350- 1903*, pp. 104-105.

The Zagezagi tradition however, traced their history to two different groups, the first group was for Malam Abdullahi and the second group was for Malam Uthman who were said to have come from the same lineage.⁸ It was said that they were Arabs from Fezzan, but originally scholars from Iraq, who left Iraq for Political reason. The first group of Malam Abdullahi was said to have come from Borno. History revealed that Malam Abdullahi was an erudite scholar who knew various fields, as *Fiqh*, *Lughah*, Arabic civilization, *Hadith*, theology, history and *Sirah* of the Prophet (SAW)⁹. He devoted himself in teaching people in the school. Some of the books that were taught by him are taught today by his successors. He came to Zaria along with other scholars with same motive i.e. teaching and preaching. This has continued to the end of his life where his son Abubakar succeeded him. After Abubakar, then Malam Suleiman, then Malam Abdullahi, then Malam Abbas, then Sayyidi Ali, then Malam Ishaq, the present *Khalifah*. Despite the fact that these people were prominent scholars in all aspects, however, the present *Khalifah* who is an aged person, for this reason he was not charged with the responsibility of teaching in the school, unless during Ramadan period and few occasions¹⁰. Therefore, he assigned somebody from the house to teach.

History revealed that Malam Uthman of the second group was also an erudite scholar who knew almost every subject in Islamic knowledge and Arabic sciences. He too came along with other scholars for the purpose of teaching and preaching and resided at Zagezagi ward. Malam Uthman was successful with the way *Habe* rulers and their people accepted Islam through him.¹¹ The relationship between them was very cordial. Most of the *Habe* children were sent to his school. The knowledge of Malam Uthman and his piety were very obvious to the extent that in a short period of time most of the *Habe* rulers became his friends. It should be noted that by the time Malam Uthman arrived Zagezagi ward the leadership of the school was entrusted to him.¹² After his death, Malam Ahmad was entrusted and then Malam Isma'il, then Malam Ahmad popularly called Malam Adani, then Malam Ibrahim who was called Malam Balarabe, then Malam Aliyu who was nicked Sarki.

The style of their leadership was based on knowledge and credibility. They exhibit leadership by example, leadership by practicing trust and sincerity. If not, each one would have his own separate school. Secondly, the leadership was entrusted to anyone who is most knowledgeable

⁸Abbas, I., *Gabatar da Wasu Bangarorin Rubce-Rubecen da Aka Samu a Makarantar Gidan Zage-zagi a* Conference Paper, Presented at Arewa House, Kaduna, July, 2010, p. 2.

⁹Abbas, I., *Gabatar da Wasu Bangarorin Rubce-Rubecen da Aka Samu a Makarantar Gidan Zage-zagi...*, p. 3.

¹⁰Abbas, I., *Gabatar da Wasu Bangarorin Rubce-Rubecen da Aka Samu a Makarantar Gidan Zage-zagi a* Conference Paper, Presented at Arewa House, Kaduna, July, 2010, p. 3.

¹¹Abbas, I., *Gabatar da Wasu Bangarorin Rubce-Rubecen da Aka Samu a Makarantar Gidan Zage-zagi...*, p. 4.

¹²*Interview*, Iliyasu Abbas, 50, Lecturer, Department of Arabic Language, Ahmadu Bello Univeirsty, Zaria at Gidan Zagezagi 10/4/2018, 5:30pm, 08035933592.

and piety among them, irrespective of the group he belongs to. For these reasons the *Khulafah* (successors) are chosen from both groups (of Malam Abdullahi and Malam Uthman).¹³

Another tradition further states that Malam Uthman and Abdullahi left Fezzan following a succession dispute after the death of their father. Before coming to Zaria they settled at places like Azbin of Borno Empire, Bagaldi and Nagoyi of Zazzau emirate. On their arrival they were accommodated by the then *Habe* ruler at a place near the compound of Magajiya on which they built houses and another land was given to them for farming.¹⁴

In nineteenth century, this house became a prominent school in Zaria where they taught subjects like Qur'an, *Fiqh*, *Tauhid*, and Arabic. The lineage of the Zagezagi was said to be very cordial and loyal to *Habe* ruling class, this brought the reasons why they refused to support the *jihad* forces during the outbreak of the *Jihad* in 1804. On account of this, they were ejected out of their compound. Later on, a new one was given to them and eventually they were allowed to come back. In view of this, the name of the ward was changed to Anguwan Katuka. However, despite this change, people still refer to the ward as Anguwan Zagezagi. The zagezagi families were not courageous to participate fully in the new administration and that they experienced the desertion following the defeat of the *Habe* dynasty in 1808 C.E.¹⁵

3.1 The books and nature of teaching in the Centre

The school usually starts after *Subh* prayer and ends before sunset every day except on Thursdays and Fridays. The school teaches small children the Qur'an using slate. The books that are taught in the school include; *Kitab al-Qawa'id al-Salah*, *Mukhtasar al-Akhdari*, *Muqaddimah Ashmawi*, *Manzumah al-Qurtubi*, *Muqaddimah al-Iziyyah*, *Kitab al-Risalah* and *Irshad al-Salik (Askakri)*. Others are; *al-Burdah*, *Ishriniyah*, *Ashariyah*, *Witriyah* and *Muqamat al-Hariri*.¹⁶

4.1 Some prominent disciples of the Centre

The school had produced a good number of students who learnt how to read Qur'an perfectly. Apart from this there were prominent scholars who were students of Gidan Zagezagi. These include:

- i. Shaykh Ahmad bn Uthman bn Isma'il (the son of Malam Uthman)
- ii. Shaykh Abubakar bn Abdullahi (the son of Malam Abdullahi)
- iii. Sarkin Zazzau Isiyaku (Jatau)
- iv. Shaykh Musa Na Magajiya.

¹³Interview, Iliyasu Abbas. 50, Lecturer, Department of Arabic Language, Ahmadu Bello Univeirsty, Zaria at Gidan Zagezagi 10/4/2018, 5:30pm, 08035933592.

¹⁴Suleiman, U., *A History of Birnin Zaria from 1350- 1903*, Unpublished M. A Dissertation, Submitted to the Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 2007, p. 104.

¹⁵Suleiman, U., *A History of Birnin Zaria from 1350- 1903..*, p. 105.

¹⁶Interview, Iliyasu Abbas. 50, Lecturer, Department of Arabic Language, Ahmadu Bello Univeirsty, Zaria at Gidan Zagezagi 10/4/2018, 5:30pm, 08035933592.

- v. Prof. Iiyasu Abbas, H.O.D Arabic Language, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.
- vi. Prof. Muhammad Shafi'iu Abdullahi (Registrar, National Board for Arabic and Islamic Studies), to mention but a few¹⁷.

The entire Zagezagi lineage studied at home before they went out for further their studies to the wards around Zagezagi such as Anguwan Magajiya, Kwarbai, Anguwan Liman, Amaru, among others.

4.2 Successors of the Centre

The succession of Gidan Zagezagi was based on hereditary. Whoever will be chosen as *Khalifah* must come from the family, especially the eldest among them. The successors of the school are many; some of them are as follows¹⁸:

- i. Malam Uthman bn Isma'il.
- ii. Malam Abdullahi.
- iii. Malam Ahmad.
- iv. Malam Abubakar.
- v. Malam Isma'il.
- vi. Malam Abdullahi.
- vii. Malam Ahmad (Adani).
- viii. Malam Suleiman.
- ix. Malam Ibrahim (Balarabe).
- x. Malam Aliyu (*Sarki*).
- xi. Malam Abdullahi.
- xii. Malam Abbas.
- xiii. Malam Zulkiflu.
- xiv. Malam Sayyadi Aliyu.
- xv. Malam Ishaq (the present *Khalifah*).

4.3 Some writings of the Centre

This school of Gidan zagezagi has many writings, but a good number was lost. Malam Iiyasu Abbas one of the great-grandsons of Gidan zagezagi lamented the loss of the works for different reasons as follows:¹⁹

- i. Some of the successors of the scholars did not know the significance of the manuscripts.
- ii. Improper keeping and preservation of the manuscripts.

¹⁷Interview, Iiyasu Abbas. 50, Lecturer, Department of Arabic Language, Ahmadu Bello Univeirsty, Zaria at Gidan Zagezagi 10/4/2018, 5:30pm, 08035933592.

¹⁸Abbas, I., *Gabatar da Wasu Bangarorin Rubce-Rubecen da Aka Samu a Makarantar Gidan Zage-zagi*, a Conference Paper, Presented at Arewa House, Kaduna, July, 2010, pp. 3-4.

¹⁹Abbas, I., *Gabatar da Wasu Bangarorin Rubce-Rubecen da Aka Samu a Makarantar Gidan Zage-zagi* a Conference Paper, Presented at Arewa House, Kaduna, July, 2010, pp. 5-6.

iii. Borrowing of the manuscripts without returning.

Despite the above challenges, there were manuscripts left behind by the predecessors. These are as follows:²⁰

A. Wake ta Hausar Ajami.

1. *Labaran Gidan Wuta da Aljannah.*
2. *Wakar Zamanin Uthman Dan Fodiyo.*
3. *Wakar Lahira.*
4. *Wakar Sarakunan Zazzau Na* (Malam Abbas).
5. *Gangar Wa'azu* (Kasida ce wacce ta kunshi wa'azi da shiryarwa).

B. Lughah (Lexicography)

1. *Jahiliyyah* poems of (Haris bn Harun Shanfari).
2. A portion of *Muqamat al-Hariri.*
3. *Fa'idatun fi Dirasat al-Lughah fi al-Asma'i.*

C. The Books of Taurari (Astronomy)

1. *Abul Muqri'i* of astronomy.
2. *Ilm al-Falaq* (Malam Abbas)²¹.
3. *Tarjiz bil Hisab* (Malam Abbas).
4. A portion of a book of Astronomy

D. Al-Qur'an and Hadith

1. The glorious Qur'an
2. The History of the Prophet (SAW) the original *Rawis* (reporters) of Malam Nahrin Jalauddin Suyuti).

All the above mentioned books were handwritten and in manuscripts form; the character of writing is bold.

5.1 Conclusion

The wisdom behind writing about Gidan Zagazagi was for the recognition of their contributions in teaching and learning to the people of Zazzau. It is among the prominent schools which were established before the *jihād* of Shaykh Uthman bn Fodiyo. A good number of people from Gidan Zagezagi have been recognized for their knowledge. Some of them became Professors, Doctors and working in various capacities.

²⁰Abbas, I., *Gabatar da Wasu Bangarorin Rubce-Rubecen da Aka Samu a Makarantar Gidan Zage-zagi a* Conference Paper, Presented at Arewa House, Kaduna, July, 2010, pp. 7-10.

²¹ He is Abbas bn Abdullahi, born in the year 1910 CE and died in 1991 CE.

5.2 Recommendations

1. People should dedicate themselves in learning their religion (Islam) as a way of good life in this world and the next to come.
2. It is advisable to the successors of this learning centre to bring out works left by their predecessors, so that people would have access to them and benefit from them.
3. Muslims should reflect on the life and history of these scholars in order emulates them in learning, character and humbleness.

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