



**Islam
and the
History
of
Learning
in
Katsina**

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and
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Published by
Spectrum Books Limited
Spectrum House
Ring Road
PMB 5612
Ibadan, Nigeria

in association with
Safari Books (Export) Limited
Bel Royal House
Hilgrove Street
St. Helier, Jersey
Channel Islands, UK

Europe and USA Distributor
African Books Collective Ltd.,
The Jam Factory,
27 Park End Street,
Oxford OX1, 1HU, UK

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First published 1997

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ISBN: 978-246-310-8

Printed by Kenbim Press Ltd. Ibadan.

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The Muqaddima: Islam and the History of Learning in Katsina

Dr. Ismaila A. Tsiga and Dr. Abdalla U. Adamu

Turning the pages of history has always been fraught with intellectual uncertainties. The parched crinkly pages are liable to crumble if turned too quickly. At the same time, they get more parched if left untouched for a considerable period of time. It is in order to keep the pages less amenable to historical weathering that the Katsina State History and Culture Bureau organised an international seminar on *Islam and the History of Learning* in what is presently Katsina State in Katsina, from 11th to 13th May 1992.

The seminar, which attracted hundreds of scholars from within and outside Nigeria, was the biggest intellectual event in Katsina in recent years. Renowned professors rubbed minds with mallams and other traditional scholars, as well as academics from the universities and other institutions of higher learning. More than five hundred participants attended the seminar. The debates that followed every presentation were always illuminating and lively, and helped considerably in shedding further light on the general objectives of the meeting.

The choice of the theme for the seminar was informed by the position of Katsina as the oldest seat of learning — medieval Islamic, contemporary Islamic and contemporary western — in Hausaland. This is especially valid when consideration is given to the geographic areas covered by the old Katsina kingdom prior to the advent of colonial rule. The kingdom then included Maradi and Zinder prefects in present day Niger republic, as well as other places like old Yandoto in present Zamfara State. The specific strategies of the seminar presentations were to review the processes and methods of learning in Katsina through collating available documents and appraising contemporary learning situations in the state. The broad objective was to provide clues to enable us to understand our past so that we could better appreciate our future, particularly with regard to learning in an Islamic community such as Katsina State.

Katsina State as defined above was home of many scholars, especially during the period before the Sokoto Jihad of 1804. Learning centres like Yandoto and Ranko were famous throughout Northern Nigeria and the West African sub-region. Similarly, in Katsina city the Gobarau Mosque was a popular institute of advanced learning especially in Islamic sciences. Indeed, Gobarau was one of the oldest universities in pre-colonial Africa, and could compare its intellectual

activities favourably with other black African medieval universities like Fez and Timbuktu.

The learning centres in Katsina produced a number of *ulama* who distinguished themselves in various fields of learning, such as tafsir, hadith, Islamic jurisprudence, astrology, mathematics, medicine, philosophy, etc. Among these were such great names like the celebrated seventeenth century scholar, Muhammad bn al-Sabbagh bn Muhammad al-Hajj bn Barakah bn Ibrahim al-Kashnawi, popularly known as *Dan Marina*. Dan Marina was a very active scholar who published a number of works, including his famous commentary on the book *Ishriniyyat* written by Abdul Rahman bn Yakhftan al-Fazaid (died in 1230 AD). In fact, the seminar considered for the first time an important poem titled, *Qasidah Kha'iyya*, which Dan Marina wrote in 1659, and which was only recently discovered in a collection in the North Western University, USA. Certainly this poem would rank among the oldest and most important discoveries in the intellectual history of Nigeria.

Thus, far more than any other area in this part of the country, Katsina State can be referred to as the Athens of what was to become Northern Nigeria. The *al-Kashnawi* scholars who flourished long before the Sokoto Jihad of 1804 were particularly famous not just in Hausaland, but throughout the West African sub-region. The works of these renowned scholars were eloquent testimony to the position of Katsina as the home of scholarship and intellectuals. It is therefore not surprising that more than half of the great teachers referred to by Sultan Muhammad Bello in his *Infaqul Maisur*, that veritable compendium on the Jihad, all came from areas which make up Katsina State today. Thus the *al-Kashnawi* scholars had made landmark contributions in various aspects of black African intellectual history hundreds of years before the first white colonialist set foot on the Nigerian coast.

Similarly, Katsina State had achieved a lot of prominence as the first centre of learning in Northern Nigeria after colonial conquest. The oldest institution of higher learning in the entire region was Katsina Training College, which was officially opened in March 1922, although actual classroom teaching had begun in 1921. This college served Northern Nigeria for more than seventeen years as the only one of its type. Students from all parts of the region trekked or rode on horses or camelbacks to Katsina. This was how most of the early political leaders in Northern Nigeria and other notable people in the country learned their first letters of alphabet in "western" education. Among these were the late Sir Kashim Ibrahim, governor, Northern Nigeria (admitted in 1925); Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto and premier, Northern Nigeria (1926); Alhaji Abubakar Imam (1927)

renowned author and editor *Gaskiya Ta fi Kwabo*; Alhaji Isa Kaita (1927) minister of Education, Northern Nigeria; Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (1928) first prime minister; Alhaji Abdulrahman Okene (1931), renowned politician and national leader; the distinguished civil servant and elder, Alhaji Yahaya Gusau (1931); Alhaji Bukar Dipcharima (1933) a famous nationalist; Alhaji Ahmed Talib (1934), former permanent secretary, Northern Region and Alhaji Aminu Kano (1937), the revered nationalist and frontline politician.

Later, the college was moved to Kaduna and subsequently Zaria where it transformed into Barewa College. All the while the college had sustained its tradition of producing Northern elite corps of industry leaders, policy makers and heads of state. The roll call includes Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki, former Sultan of Sokoto (1940); Alhaji Shehu Shagari, first civilian executive president of Nigeria (1941); Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim (1944), renowned businessman and political leader; General Amadu Rimi (rtd) (1945) of the Nigerian Army Medical Corp; Alhaji Muhammad Bashar, the Emir of Daura (1945); Brigadier Kur Muhammad (1948) late chief of staff, Army headquarters, assassinated in the 1966 coup; Professor Iya Abubakar (1948) former vice-chancellor, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and late General Hassan Usman Katsina (1948) military governor, Northern Nigeria; General Yakubu Gowon (1950), former Nigerian head of state and General Murtala Mohammed (1952), former head of state.

It is therefore something of an anomaly that in the face of such impressive intellectual tradition, Katsina State should today perform woefully in getting its students to pass their prescribed examinations at all levels of contemporary western schooling. For instance, figures released for 1990, which were the most comprehensive available before the seminar in 1992, indicated that a total of 52,974 children were registered into post-primary schools in the state. But in accordance with existing trends, well below ten per cent of these were expected to graduate from their schools after six years. Indeed, at the end of that year (1990) 4,336 students dropped out after three years of junior secondary school, in addition to 5,369 who failed the primary school leaving certificate examination.

A closer examination of the result scored by the state during the 1990 Senior Secondary School Examination (SSCE) would prove even more revealing. Altogether, 3,335 candidates sat for the examination from seventy schools in the state. Out of these, however, only 63 passed with five credits or more, representing a mere 2 per cent. Thus, 98 per cent of the 3,335 students who sat for the examination were not successful enough to be directly admitted into the next stage in their educational career.

A breakdown of the distribution figures for the individual schools

brings the point home even more graphically. For instance, of the 279 students in Government Secondary School, Funtua only two passed; one passed from amongst the 274 registered in GDSS, Katsina, while three girls' secondary schools in the state (GGSS, Mani, GGSS, Kankia and GGSS, Jibia), with a combined roll of 297 candidates recorded only eight successes. Even Government College, Katsina, which was often considered the profit margin of the state's secondary schools, could scarcely manage to score twenty-four passes out of 644 candidates who attempted the examination. Of the 156 graduates of the only boys' Secondary Technical School in the state at Mashi, only one passed outright.

The subject-by-subject performance of these candidates was equally tormenting, especially in regard to the two subjects usually considered to be most important in post-secondary education: English and mathematics. Out of the sixty-three successful candidates only three had a credit in English language and another ten in mathematics; only one candidate passed both subjects.

Similarly, figures released by the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) indicate that in 1990 a total of 1,215 candidates applied for university admission from Katsina State. This represented only 0.45 per cent of the total applications received by the board for the year. Not only did Katsina State record the smallest figures amongst all states in the country, but it was the lowest score by any state for many years. In contrast, that year Imo, Bendel and Oyo States recorded over 39,000 applications each.

Translated into absolute figures in 1990, the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria offered direct admission to only 163 candidates from Katsina State out of the 3,820 admitted into the university that year, while Bayero University, Kano accepted a mere sixty-eight from the state, as against its total of 925. It should be emphasised that the two universities normally accounted for more than 70 per cent of undergraduate students of Katsina State origin in Nigerian universities, which goes to demonstrate how badly the state had fared in relation to other states in the federation.

One final point in this regard was that even the enrolment of Katsina State indigenes in the only national higher institution located in the state, the Federal College of Education, Katsina, reflected the state's educational underdevelopment. Of the 498 students admitted by the college for the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) programme in 1990 only 136 were from the state, well below half the total number. A little farther away, of the 455 students admitted into the Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State, in the same year, only sixteen came from Katsina State.

It was contemporary events like these results that brought to the

fore the powerful role of history in explaining human affairs. For it was only through an understanding of historical forces that we could begin to understand, and consequently, work out strategies for a more meaningful future. In effect, it was this concern with the poor quality of present-day educational provisions in Katsina State that prompted the seminar. The aim was to uncover the reason for the mass failure with a view to arresting the unfortunate situation.

During the seminar eclectic researchers from various fields of learning presented research reports and examined available documents concerning learning situations in Katsina State from antiquity to present day. In the bid to gain a more focused perspective, the seminar was divided into three sub-themes:

- (a) Learning in Katsina State from earliest times to the 1804 Sokoto Jihad.
- (b) Learning in Katsina State from Jihad to colonial conquest (1804-1903).
- (c) Learning in Katsina State from colonial conquest to date (1903-1992).

For three days over five hundred resource persons and participants considered the major issues within each sub-theme. The lively discussions that took place during the presentations often continued in the restaurant and hotel rooms of the participants until the small hours of the following day. Altogether, thirty-nine papers of varying depth, insight and quality were discussed, and at the end of the deliberations a thirteen-point communique was presented on the findings of the seminar. Most of the observations had affected the government and contained advice on how to recover the glories of the golden years in the intellectual history of Katsina State. Happily enough, this prompted the government to establish the *Committee on the Rehabilitation of Education in Katsina State* in June 1993, and which presented its detailed findings in January 1994.

Sifting through the papers presented at the seminar in order to select the few that would be peer reviewed for publication was an extremely difficult task. This was because although we would have wished to include each paper because of its unique contribution, this proved rather impossible due to the sheer number of the papers presented. In the final analysis thirty-two papers which were adjudicated by the editors to have fitted perfectly into the seminar themes without falling into grey areas, and which provided unique and original insights into understanding the evolution of learning in Katsina State, were short-listed and sent for independent reviews. All the thirty-two papers were thoroughly reviewed, with indications of either suggested modifications or lapses in their arguments which needed to be corrected before publication. The editors then faced the

more difficult task of selecting the best twenty-two. It is these that appear in the current volume.

Editing such a huge array of different, and yet often overlapping thoughts was both a challenging and rewarding task, if only for the detective instincts it brought out in the editors. For instance, many of the papers were poorly referenced. Tracing the original copies presented for clarification was often hampered by bureaucracy caused by the time lag between the seminar (1992) and editing the proceedings (1996). Although we attempted as much as possible to retain the original thoughts and analyses of the authors, we had to reduce some of the contents of the papers to lessen the duplication of historical narratives, particularly of the medieval intellectuals of Katsina. It is our hope that once this particular volume is published, funding would be more easily available for us to consider the rest of the papers presented during the seminar in possible future volumes on the history of learning in Katsina State.

The papers presented during the seminar, as they appear in this volume, cut across the themes outlined above and are arranged in clusters of inter-related disciplines for a deeper study and analysis of the broad themes discussed. There are therefore four sections in the book.

Section I provides an overture to the entire seminar and contains the entire opening speech of the guest speaker, Dr. Yusuf Bala Usman of the Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, in a presentation which provides thoughtful commentaries of the author's unique views on the contemporary contexts of history and learning, not only in Katsina, but in Africa as a whole. The subsequent papers in the section provide various analyses of the intellectual legacies of Katsina from the diaries of adventurers and explorers to the influence of the recent wave of Islamic revivalism that cuts across the Islamic world. This section more or less focuses a significant attention on the *history* portion of the seminar's theme.

Section II is a series of attempts to provide another look at the historical corridor and trace further the contemporary origins and structures of education in Katsina, with specific focus on education and change in the state, across the two genders. Papers are presented which often provide uncompromising analyses on the development of the concept of learning in Katsina, and a unique anthropological perspective of women education in early colonial Katsina.

Section III presents the various poetic traditions of Katsina, from medieval odes to contemporary renderings that encapsulate the history of Katsina. The papers include an entire reprint (from *Sudanic Africa*, Vol. 2 1981 pp 133-44) of *Falkeina I: A Poem by Ibn Al-Sabhagh (Dan Marina) in Praise of the Amir-al-Mumin Karyagiwa* by Hamidu

Bobboyi and John Hunwick, no doubt one of the rare documents of the literary history of Katsina and Nigeria in general.

Finally, Section IV provides specific case studies aimed at providing cogency in institutional structures that lead to the excellence of education in Katsina. Having paused, rather than ended the journey into the understanding of historical forces as they affect learning in Katsina State, this final section provides vital clues about the future direction of education in Katsina State.

There is no doubt that the current volume provides not only an insight into the evolutionary nature of learning in Katsina State and its possible future directions, but its findings can equally be generalised to other parts of *Hausaland* which are indeed facing the same problems as Katsina State.

Thus we hope this volume would stimulate a move towards a series of seminars along the lines of *Islam and the History of Learning in Kasar Kano*, *Islam and the History of Learning in Kasar Sakkwato*, *Islam and the History of Learning in Kasar Bornu*, etc. It is our hope that through such soul searching and looking back on our roots, we would be able to determine the *real* reasons for the educational problems of Northern Nigeria.

This book is the outcome of an international seminar on Islam and the history of learning in what is presently Katsina State. The seminar, which drew many scholars from various parts of the world, provided insights into the complex nature of learning in Katsina State from the Middle Ages to contemporary times. It captured the essence of Islam and the tradition of learning not only in Katsina, but also the entire Hausa kingdoms. What emerged was a mosaic of simmering patterns, centrally connected together by a singular theme of the forcefulness of the Islamic intellectual tradition in shaping ideas, economic and political institutions.

By analysing the development of the intellectual tradition within the Islamic framework, it provides an avenue for greater understanding of the cultural and intellectual development of the various societies in Northern Nigeria.

It is invaluable for education students in tertiary institutions, researchers on Islamic history and general readers on Islam in Nigeria.

The Editors

Dr. Isma'ila Abubakar Tsiga is currently the deputy director, Education Department, Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria. It was under his tenure as the director, Katsina State History and Culture Bureau that the seminar was organised. Dr. Tsiga was the head, Department of English and European Languages, Bayero University, Kano. He has contributed several articles to local and foreign journals. His most recent publications include *Where I Stand* (with Sheikh Abubakar Gumi), published by Spectrum Books Ltd in 1992, and *Building the Citadel: 30 Years of University Education in Kano*, published by Bayero University Kano in 1994.

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