

THE BEGINNINGS OF ISLAM IN NUPELAND IN NORTH CENTRAL AREA OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nupe is one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The area it occupies is called Nupeland which falls within the lower basins of Rivers Niger and Kaduna in the Middle Niger region. The land is described as being generally in the area of low relief and abundant drainage formed by the influence of River Niger and its tributaries. Nupe can be seen in three perspectives: as a tribe, as a language, and as an ethnic group or nation. As a tribe, it has a distinctive identity. As a language, it is spoken as a mother tongue in several states of central Nigeria, including Niger, Kwara, Kogi, Nasarawa and Federal Capital Territory (F.C.T) Abuja. People who speak the language are called *Nupenchizhi* (plu). As a nation, or ethnic group, it evolved one of the greatest polities Nupe Kingdom, known both within and outside Nigeria. Nupe of old can be described as a nation rich in culture, civilization and power comparable with other world ancient civilizations such as Roman, Greek, Egyptian and Byzantium. This paper focuses on the introduction of Islam into Nupeland. It argues that contrary to the generally held view, the influence of Islam on the area far predated the 19th century Jihad movements in Northern Nigeria. A number of sources through which Islam penetrated into Nupeland have been highlighted. These include Muslim traders, scholars, and travelers. Others are Songhai, Hausa and Borno axes. The paper also examines the emergence of and activities of indigeneous Islamic reformers aimed at purifying and making Islam a state religion in Nupeland. It has been concluded that the early Islamic influence on Nupe prepared ground for the 19th century Sokoto Jihad in the area.

Keywords: Islam, Nupeland, Indigeneous Islamic Reformers, Beginnings

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of Islam into Nupeland followed the same pattern as was the case in other parts of Western and Central Sudan. As would be seen later in the paper, the Islamic influence came to Nupeland and other areas at least initially, not through any systematic or formerly organized method, but through emigrants, merchants and missionaries from the already Islamized states. Sidi, (2000:19) reports M. A. Alhaji to have suggested that the first pioneers of Islamic propagation in the western Sudan were the Wangarawa.¹ They are a group representing the Dyala branch of the Mande of Mali, who are said to have spread from an early

¹ Sidi, S. T. *Establishment of the Emirate System in Nupeland: The Emirate of Bida as a case study*, Kaduna: Fembo books and Graphics, 2000, p.19.

period over a large area of West Africa.²

This chapter focuses on the various sources through which Islam penetrated into Nupeland in the early period far predating the 19th century Islamic reformation movements in Northern Nigeria. We have therefore argued that contrary to general belief and suggestions, Islam had long existed in Nupeland long before the 19th century Sokoto Jihad. This took place through a number of sources. They include the efforts of Arab scholars, migrants, traders and Muslim clerics. Other sources were from Songhai, Hausa and Kanem-Borno areas.

Even though the impact of Islamic influence in the entire Nupeland in the early period cannot easily be accessed, we note the emergence of certain indigenous Islamic reformers in the area. They include, one of the *Etsus* (Kings) called Jibrilu (1746-1759)³ under Tsoede Dynasty. Another one was undertaken by one Abdulrahman bn Muhammad Sharif (1778 – 1830).⁴ Both reformers embarked on commendable reform activities aimed at making Islam a state religion. In the same vein however, such efforts were met with strong resistance from both the ruling and, to some extent, even the religious elites as will be shown later in the chapter. Despite the hostility however, there was evidence to show that the reformers' efforts in Nupeland were not all in vain. There emerged in the area certain important religious centers/towns that have been acknowledged for their high standard of Islamic scholarship.⁵

SOURCES OF EARLY ISLAMIC INFLUENCE

(a) Arab Travelers, migrants, Muslim scholars.

Contacts between the Western and Central Sudanese areas and Arabs and North Africa can be dated as back as 8th century A.D.⁶ The initial contacts may have been facilitated more by trade and commerce. This may have been followed by a curious desire by Arab geographers, historians, travelers and Islamic clerics to know about the Sudanese areas. Through the writings of such scholars and travelers the Nupes may have begun to have the knowledge of Islam and its practices. Levtzion,⁷ for instance refers us to the works of Al-Bakri, Ibn. Batuta, Ibn Khaldun, among others on the Sudanese areas and North Africa.

Al-Bakri's work on "Book of Roads and Kingdoms", written between 1067 and 1068 A.D, among his several other works, gives a detailed description of ancient "Ghana and its neighbours."⁸ Nupe may have been one of such neighbours, if not geographically, but at least, on trade and commercial relations. Al-Bakri is reported to have claimed that by 1068 A.D, here already existed a mighty and expansive kingdom called Al-Denden in Nupe headed by a powerful ruler.⁹ If such a kingdom did actually exist, it is probable that it maintained a wide range of relations with other places. Under this situation, though without concrete evidence, the possibility of Islam informally penetrating into Nupeland cannot be easily dismissed. Also, from the records and writings of Arab Muslim chroniclers including those from Ibn Munnabel in A.D. 738 and Al-Mas'udi in A.D 947, a lot of information on West Africa may have been obtained. By extension therefore, it is not unlikely that such information on early Nupe and their polity, among other places were obtained by recent ethnographic and anthropological evidence produced by Frobenius and Nadel¹⁰ respectively.

(b) Trade and Commerce

Trade and Commerce played significant role in the introduction of Islam into Nupeland in the early period. Mason and Sule,¹¹ emphasise the importance of this factor. Through trade and commerce, between West

² *Ibid.*

³ East, R. M., (ed), *Labarum Hausawa da Makwabtansu*, 2 vols., Zaria: Northern Nigerian Publishing Company, 1932, pp.56 – 57. Other sources give slightly different dates. Nadel, S. F. *A Black Byzantium: The Kingdom of Nupe in Nigeria*. London: Oxford UP., p.406, puts 1746 – 1759.

⁴ Sule, M. *History of the Emirate of Bida to 1899*. Zaria: ABU Press, 2011, P.66.

⁵ Sidi, *op.cit*, p. 29.

⁶ Ifemesia, C.C., "the Peoples of West Africa around 1000 A.D.," in, Ajayi, J.F.A. and Espie., I., (eds). *A Thousand Years of West African History*. Ibadan: uP. 1965, pp. 39 – 54.

⁷ .Levtzion, N., "Early States of the Western", in Ajayi, J.F.A. and Crowther, M. (eds), *History of West Africa, vol.1, 2nd edition*, London: Longman, 1976, p.120.

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ Frobenius, L., *The Voice of Africa, Vol.2*, New York and London: Benjamin Bloni, Inc. 1913, and Nadel, S.F., *A Black Byzantium...*

¹¹ Mason, "The Nupe Kingdom...", p.42 Sule, *History of the Emirate...*, p.54.

Africa – Nupe inclusive and the Arabs through North Africa, exchange of goods between the two areas became a common phenomenon. The Arab traders in addition to trading, must have also attempted introducing the religion of Islam to their hosts. The hosts must have been receptive and accommodative (even if it was nominal) of the religion and its practices brought by their guests. Such reception, accommodation and liberality may have accounted for the involvement of Muslim scholars and clerics in the administration of the local kings. They are for instance, reported to have served as advisers, interpreters, diviners, chaplains on spiritual and secular matters among the court officials of the Nupe kings¹² - *Etsus* long before Mallam Dendo's arrival in Nupeland.

The *Ndaduma* (River Niger) provided a source of communication and transportation for the traders and Muslim clerics. Paul, E. Lovejoy asserts that by the 15th century, Wangarawa communities had already existed at *Nikki* and *Bussa* in the Borgu area in the Middle Niger region.¹³ It is possible such communities extended to Nupeland which formed their neighbours. Alhaji M. A. suggests that the first pioneers of Islamic propagation in the Western Sudan were the Wangarawa.¹⁴ Wangara is noted to have been well known in West Africa as the gold-producing country of the Upper Niger, from which the wealth of ancient Ghana and Mali was derived.¹⁵

(c) Songhai

The political instability following the dynastic disputes in Mali in the 15th century may have accounted for the wide spread and dispersal of Wangarawa traders and Islamic *Ulama*. With insecurity and fear in the empire, they were compelled to look for safety elsewhere, hence the migration of all sorts – traders Muslim clerics and preachers in search of security, new homes and markets.¹⁶ While some of these categories of people are said to have settled in Nupeland, others only visited the area on trading and adventurous missions.¹⁷

Since the introduction of Islam to Nupeland took place through trade, *Ulama* and other sources, it is not surprising that the already established commercial centres in the area received the early influence of the religion. Imam, Sule and Sidi,¹⁸ mention such centres as *Nku*, *Nupeko*, *Gbara*, *Zhima (Jima)*, *Mokwa*, *Labozhi*, *Raba*, *Eggan*, *Kulfo*, among others. Most of these towns at one time or another in history, served as capitals of Nupe Kingdom. As stated earlier,¹⁹ the political and economic elite in such centres may have at least initially, provided enabling environment for the Muslim traders and clerics to operate.

(d) Hausa and Borno Axis

The long established political and economic inter-group relations between Nupeland and Hausaland and Borno had significantly facilitated the pace of Islamization in Nupeland long before the 19th century Jihad movements. It has been suggested that between the 14th and 15th centuries, Islam had become well established in Kano and the process of extending it to other places had begun.²⁰ Regarding Kano as a "melting pot", Mahadi²¹ shows the long standing trade, commercial and inter-group relations between Nupe, Kano and Borno, in which exchange of trading goods took place, as well as settlement of Nupe traders and skilled workers in many parts of Kano and its environs. Another account relates that by the 1450's Kano had begun to import slaves and Kolanuts from Nupeland in return for horses and potash.²²

¹² Levtizion, "The Early States of...", p. 121 and Nadel, *Nupe Religion...*, p.232.

¹³ Lovejoy, P.E., "The Role of Wangarawa in the Economic Transformation of the Central Sudan in the 15th and 16th centuries", *Journal of African History*, xix, 2, 1978, pp.173 - 194.

¹⁴ Alhaji, M. A., "A 17th century Chronicles on the Origins and Missionary Activities of the Wangarawa", in *Kano Studies vol.1 (4)* 1968, p.

¹⁵ Abdullahi Smith, "The Early States of the central Sudan", in Ajayi, J.F.A. and Crowther, M. (eds), *History of west Africa, Vol. 1, 2nd edition*, 1976, pp. 158 – 201.

¹⁶ Sidi, *Establishment of the ...*, p. 19.

¹⁷ Abdullahi, S. A., "Nupe Kingdom Before and After the Jihad of Uthman Ibn Fodio: A Survey of its Political and Administrative Set-up". M. A. Thesis, Islamic Dept., BUK Kano, 1983, p.34.

¹⁸ Imam, I. N., "A History of Islam in Nupe" B. A. Dissertation, Bayero University, Kano. 1973, p.9; Sule, History of the ... pp.26 – 27 and Sidi, *op.cit*, p.27.

¹⁹ See footnote 12 above.

²⁰ Imam, I. N. *op.cit*, p.5.

²¹ Mahadi, A. "The State and the Economy: The Sarauta System and its Role in Shaping the Society and Economy of Kano with particular Reference to the 18th and 19th centuries, Ph.D Thesis, ABU Zaria, 1982, p.119.

²² Sidi, *op.cit*, p.20.

According to M. G. Smith,²³ the first Muslim ruler of Kano, Aliyu Yaji (C1349 – 1385)? led religious wars into the neighbouring states of Attagara (Igala Kingdom) and Jukun on the Gongola valley. If this account is to be relied upon, then, it is most probable Nupe had the influence of these wars. This is because Nupe used to be 'part' of, or at least, shared border with the Igala Kingdom of old ruled by the Attagara.

Another area in Hausaland which would seem to have facilitated the Islamization of Nupeland between the 14th and 15th centuries was Katsina. The first? Muslim King of Katsina Muhammad Korau (1492 -1541), for instance, is reported to have fought the Nupe due to border disputes between the two areas. Details of such disputes are not known to us. However, a peace treaty is said to have been signed between them to resolve the impass and to keep the trade route passing through Nupe to Katsina safe for the Wangarawa traders.²⁴ It is possible that Muslim clerics and traders from Katsina and Wangarawa did influence Nupeland by introducing Islam there. By the 15th century, Katsina, among other Hausa states such as Kano, Zaria, and even Bussa and Gonja had already become important commercial and Islamic centres.

Nupe's relation with Katsina may have however, been earlier than the 15th century. Traditions²⁵ from Nupe have it that sometime in the early past, one of the sisters of the King (*Etsu*) of *Jima* – one of the oldest historical settlements in Nupeland left the town for Katsina. Details of the circumstances leading to her departure may be unknown to us. However, according to the traditions on reference, her departure was to avoid witnessing an eminent defeat in the hands of invading aggressors. Before that time, there had been internal disputes within the ruling class which unexpectedly weakened the hitherto unity and strength enjoyed by the town. That, in the history of wars, *Jima* had never been defeated. As a prominent member of the ruling class, she would not stay to witness the apparent defeat, hence her migration northwards to Katsina where she got married with children, so the story goes.

In Nupe tradition, there exists a joking relationship between children of sisters and those of brothers. No wonder therefore, this may have been the genesis of the long standing joking relationship that has since continued to exist between Nupe (*Nufawa*) and Katsina (*Katsinawa*). The former has always claimed 'superiority' for being the master of the latter, while, according to the latter, the reverse is the case.

Now back to the early influence of Islam in Nupeland. The spread of Islam in Nupeland increased steadily as more Muslim traders as well as scholar and travelers came in with high concentration of their activities found in the political and commercial centres as noted previously.²⁶ Meanwhile, scholars and Muslim travelers had continued to traverse the length and breadth of Nupeland²⁷ in search of converts from and possible knowledge of the area. It is difficult however, as noted earlier, to access the extent to which the Muslim immigrants influenced the people of Nupe in the early period. It is suggestive however, that they settled among and intermarried with the local people as was the case with Sheikh Muhammad Sharif (to be discussed later). Under this type of situation, the possibility of conversion can hardly be dismissed.

(e) Formal Islamization Process

What we have discussed above can be regarded as an informal or accidental way of the introduction of Islam to Nupeland. The first clear statement relating to the formal Islamization of Nupe took place in the 1650's. A number of modern sources²⁸ refer to the importance of Islamic scholars of Yemeni origin who first settled in Borno before migrating southwards to settle in Nupe. According to Mason, either during or after the reign of *Mai* Ali bn. Haj. Umar (C.1641/2-1681/2) these *Ullama* abandoned their settlement at Belbec in Borno and went south-westwards.²⁹ A number of them are believed to have settled in Nupe where they remained for

²³ Smith, M. G., "The Kano Chronicle as History", in, Bawuro, M. B. (eds), *Studies in the History of Kano*. Kano: Bayero UP. 1983, pp.31 – 56, does seem to accept Aliyu Yaji as being the first muslim king of Kano. To him, the preceding King – Usmanu Zamnagawa (1343 – 1349) was more likely to be-having been "the second chief to bear an Islamic name", pp.37 – 40.

²⁴ Palmer, H. R. The Sudanese Memoirs, vol.3, *Frank cass and Co.Ltd, 1928, p.87.*

²⁵ Oral source – Alh. Moh'd Ndayisa – Village Head of *Jima* town 58years and Alh. Abubakar Naibi – the assistant Chief Imam of *Jima* 70 years, at *Jima* on 11/05/13. Also Alh. Alhassan Wasagi – 66 years gave similar information on 26/09/13 at Minna.

²⁶ See footnote 18 above.

²⁷ Sule, *History of the...*, p.58

²⁸ Abdullahi Smith, "The Legend of the Seifuwa: A study in the Origins of a Tradition," in, *Selected Historical Writings of Abdullahi Smith*. Zaria: The Abdullahi Smith Centre for Historical Research, 1987, pp.23 – 24; Mason, "The Nupe Kingdom...", p.44; Sule, *op.cit*, p.56, among others.

²⁹ Mason, *op.cit*, p.44.

sometime before returning to Yemen³⁰ their original home. There is no doubt that during their stay, they must have engaged in the formal spread of Islam and doing other things which must have affected the lives of many people. As Smith puts it:

*It is generally accepted that the influence of these people (Yemeni immigrants) later on extended beyond homeland of the Kanuri and affected the lives of a great variety of peoples of differing cultural traditions both Islamic and non-Islamic.*³¹

From Borno also came certain immigrants to settle in Nupeland at *Kutigi*, *Enagi* and other places around the 18th century. They came as traders and Muslim clerics. The present ruling dynasty in *Kutigi* and other places around it were founded by the Borno immigrant Muslims and traders. They still call themselves after their country of origin *Benu*, the Nupe corruption of Borno.³² Nadel describes them as 'Mohammadans' (Muslims), who came as wealthy traders with horses and cattle and soon gained political and economic supremacy over the other sections and were recognized as the official rulers of *Kutigi* and the neighbouring villages by *Etsu* (King) Majiya of Nupe.³³ In addition to political and economic activities they must have played role in the conversion and propagation of Islam among the local populace. The annual socio-cultural festival called *Gani* in *Kutigi* and its environs was introduced by the Borno immigrants. The festival is believed to have originated from *Kukawa* in Borno.³⁴

INDIGENEOUS ISLAMIC REFORMERS IN NUPELAND

In spite of the influence of Islam on Nupeland during the period under reference, the practice of some aspects of indigenous religion had continued. For instance, the worship of *Ndaduma* (River Niger) *Ketsa Rock*, among other rituals, had continued. This implies mixing of Islamic and non-Islamic practices, were still found to be predominant among the nominal Muslims. Sule³⁵ reports that this practice cut across all social class. According to him, common people, economic elite, members of the ruling class and even learned people in Islam – *manzhi*, were involved. Attempt to reform such practices and to practice Islam religiously led to the emergence of indigenous reformation efforts in Nupeland before the 19th century Sokoto Jihad in Northern Nigeria. The situation in Nupeland which led to the reform efforts can be likened to that in Gobir under Moh'd Kanta (prevalence of unislamic practices), which led to Usman bn Fodio's advocacy for the return to and practice of orthodox Islam.³⁶ For instance, despite the appointment of and presence of *Imams* and *Qadis* at some Nupe towns, such as *Gbara* and *Jima*³⁷, the worship of *Ketsa Rock* and *Ndaduma* (River Niger) had continued in Nupeland. This situation was capable of warranting a pious leader's intervention, hence, *Etsu* Jibrilu of Nupe.

King *ETSU* JIBRILU (1746 – 1759).

Different king lists assign different positions to *Etsu* Jibrilu on the genealogical tree of Tsoede Dynasty. This ranges from 12th, 15th to 17th position (see the attached appendix). Nupe tradition has it that *Etsu* Jibrilu was the first on the Tsoede Kinglist to become a Muslim.³⁸ We may be cautious in taking such tradition as true. For, contact between Nupe and other Islamised states, noted previously, was much earlier than Jibril's reign. Some of his predecessors professed the religion of Islam, at least nominally. Moreover, the genealogies of the *Etsus* referred to above show names of his predecessors suggesting Islamic influence.³⁹ Another source affirms:

As from the mid 17th century all the Etsuzhi (Kings) had been Muslims. Etsu Maman Wari (1670 – 79), Etsu Abdullahi Waliyu (1679 – 1700), Etsu Aliyu (1700-1797), Etsu Ibrahim

³⁰ *Ibid*

³¹ Smith, A. *op.cit*, p.23.

³² Nadel, S. F., "Social Symbiosis and Tribal Organization", in, MAN, vol.38, (85), 1938, pp.85-90.

³³ *Ibid*, p.86.

³⁴ For details of this Festival, see Nadel, "The *Gani* Ritual of Nupe: A Study of Social Symbiosis", Journal of the international Institute, vol.xi, (3), 1949, pp.178 – 186.

³⁵ Sule, *History of the Emirate...*, p.61.

³⁶ Abdullahi, R. Augi, "The Gobir Factor in the Social and Political History of the Rima Basin, C.1650-1808 A.D.", Ph.D Thesis, ABU Zaria, 1984, p.459.

³⁷ Imam, I. Ndatu, "A History of Islam in Nupe", B. A. Dissertation, Bayero University, Kano, 1973, p.12.

³⁸ *Ibid*

³⁹ Sidi, S. T., *Establishment of Emirate System of Government in Nupeland: The Emirate of Bida as a case study*. Kaduna: Fembo Books and Graphics, 2000, pp.22 – 23 39.

(1713 – 1717, *Etsu Abubakar Kolo and Abdullahi Tsado, all bore Muslim names.*⁴⁰

In light of the above therefore, rather than being the first Muslim *Etsu*, Jibrilu can safely be described as the first pious and Islamic *Etsu*-reformer in Nupeland. Like Muhammad Rumfa of Kano, Idris Aloma of Borno and Ibrahim Maje of Katsina, *Etsu* Jibrilu who mounted the throne in 1746 was jealously determined to reform Islam in his kingdom.⁴¹ Towards this end, he is reported as waging a series of religious wars (both military and non-military Jihad)⁴² against the pre-Islamic Nupe religious practices. It was possible the *Etsu* may have first replaced the traditional religion with the *Sharia* as the law of the land a step towards making Islam a state religion. The *Etsu* is reported to have appointed a great Islamic scholar – Umar B. Muhammadu – a grandfather of the author of *Kitab al-Tarikh*, as the Chief Qadi of Nupeland with his seat at *Gbara* town.⁴³

Efforts were made to spread and impose Islam to all parts of Nupeland and, possibly beyond Nupeland, including even communities that had not hitherto been influenced by Islam. Institutionalization of Islam from the centre to the local level was made. In this regard, certain towns such as Abaji, Dabban, Eggan, Agaie, Bida Jima, Katcha became important Islamic centres.⁴⁴ Another device towards making Islam a state religion was the appointment of judges throughout the kingdom and the encouragement of the common people to accept Islam by ordering polytheists to pay heavy tributes while exempting the converts.⁴⁵

As would not be unexpected, especially in a situation where Islam had not been deeply rooted, *Etsu* Jibrilu's reform efforts were not without challenges; both within and outside the ruling elite. According to Adullahi:

*The Etsu's reformist activities no doubt created enmity between him and his subjects. This accounted for his deposition and exile to Kutigi where he finally died.*⁴⁶

It was not only the subjects that refused to wholeheartedly accept *Etsu* Jibrilu's Islamic reform agenda. The opposition also came from the ruling class. The succeeding *Etsus*, at least, the immediate ones, did not pursue the same religious cause with zeal as did Jibrilu, for fear of probable enmity between them and their subjects.⁴⁷

However, even though the *Etsu* could not realize making Islam a state religion in Nupeland his efforts attracted attention from far and wide as Mason remarks:

*...Etsu Jibrilu who ruled around the middle of the century, pursued the interest of the reforming party so assiduously that he was deposed for his pains. His fame nevertheless spread far and has endured long.*⁴⁸

In the same vein, sultan Bello of Sokoto is reported to have written a century later of *Etsu* Jibrilu as:

*There was a certain just Sarki (King) Jibrilu who ruled over them (Nupe) in former times. Islam spread because of him. And they hated him because of his firmness and strict observance of the religion. They deposed him and installed one who agreed with them in their folly and shamelessness.*⁴⁹

Sheikh Abdulrahman Ibn. Muhammad Sharif

There emerged yet another indigeneous Islamic religious reformer in Nupe. Conflicting reports exist on the birth place of this reformer.⁵⁰ Similarity of the names can be observed *Abaji* and *Gbaji*. However, the later

⁴⁰ Imam, *op.cit*, p.12

⁴¹ *Ibid*

⁴² Sule, *History of the...* 69 – 76.

⁴³ Imam, *op.cit*, p.12

⁴⁴ Sidi, S. T., *Establishment of Emirate...*, pp.24 – 2.

⁴⁵ Imam *op.cit*, pp. 14 – 15.

⁴⁶ Abdullah, S. A. "Nupe Kingdom Before and After the Jihad of Uthman Ibn. Fodio: A Survey of its Political and Administrative set-up. M. A. Thesis, Islamic Studies Dept Bayero University, Kano, 1983, pp.37 – 39.

⁴⁷ Sidi, *op.cit*, p.24.

⁴⁸ Mason, M., "The Antecedents of the 19th century Islamic Government in Nupe". *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* vol.10(1), 1977, p.65.

⁴⁹ Arnett, E. J. (trans.) *The Gazatter of Sokoto Province*, London: Frank cass, 1920, p.16.

⁵⁰ Both Mason, "The Antecedents of the ..." p.678 and Saidu Ibrahim, *The Nupe and their...*, P.23, refer to *Abaji* presently part of the federal capital Territory (FCT) as his place of birth, while Ndatsu, Imam – "A History of Islam..." p.16, puts Abdulrahman's birth place at *Gbaji*, a Nupe village near Agaie town of Niger State.

appears more likely to be the correct place. Abdulrahman's Arab father – Muhammad Sharif is said to have settled in Nupeland⁵¹ as an Islamic cleric for sometime before returning to his Arab home. According to this source, the cleric got married to a Nupe girl who gave birth to a son named Abdulrahman, whom the father left behind in *Kin Nupe*.

Abdulrahman grew up under the care of his mother and maternal grandfather. He started his Islamic education from his grandfather at *Gbaji*. He is reported to have been attached to various Islamic scholars at various times and places. Such places included *cetukpan*, *Agaie*, *Abugi*, *Abaji*,⁵² among others. Under his teaching, various aspects of Islamic religion were learnt. They included Quranic sciences, theology, Jurisprudence morphology, and Hadith.⁵³ Before long, Abdulrahman became a great scholar, and at the age of 22 years⁵⁴ had started his itinerant journeys to the surrounding towns and villages preaching and teaching.

Both oral and written sources agree that Abdulrahman was specially talented and gifted with knowledge.⁵⁵ This ability attracted peoples from far and near to him for the acquisition of knowledge. Apart from the Nupe, other groups such as *Gbagyi*, *Yoruba*, *Hausa* and others,⁵⁶ are said to have trooped to the Sheikh for his tutorship. As a strategy, Abdulrahman, adopted public places, such as market places and frequently trekked roads for his preaching and teaching to large numbers of people. He was accorded special recognition in Nupeland and beyond because of his Islamic religious activities. He became known in Nupe tradition as *Shehu* or Sheikh (great scholar) and was credited as being a *Walli* (saint, or the beloved one of Allah). Because of his piety, he was referred to as Abdulrahman *Tsatsa* (a pure or holy man).⁵⁷

Apart from teaching and preaching, Sheikh Abdulrahman bn Muhammad is reported to have written more than 70 pamphlets⁵⁸ to his credit. Like *Etsu Jibrilu*, discussed previously, Abdulrahman's religious activities may have captured the attention of the Caliphate in Sokoto. He was full of zeal not only to spread, but to purify Islam in Nupeland and beyond.⁵⁹ As a contemporary of Sheikh Usman Bin Fodio, Abdulrahman may have been influenced by the former's *Jihad* activities. This according to a source,⁶⁰ should not be surprising, given the fact that Dan Fodio started his teaching and preaching in Gobir in 1774, while Abdulrahman started his in Nupeland in 1778. The latter's visit to the former at *Degel* may have been as a result of the Jihadist zeal exhibited by the two scholars. While there, the latter is said to have demonstrated to Bin Fodio and his brother, Abdullahi, his unshakable scholarship beyond the expectation of his hosts.⁶¹

The show of knowledge demonstrated by Abdulrahman seemed to have been a source of friction between him and Abdullahi, as the latter felt highly disgraced⁶² and belittled for his inability to tutor the former. He was found to be more knowledgeable than Abdullahi bn Fodio. He seemed to have joined forces with Bn Fodio to fight against Gobir. On his return to Nupe, Sheikh Abdulrahman became more determined to wage a *Jihad* against the un-Islamic practices. However, the extent to which he was able to achieve his reform agenda in the area is difficult access.

Taking *Agaie* town as his base, Abdulrahman is known to have spread and settled in other places in Nupeland and beyond. Among such places were *Dabban*, *Akere*, *Abaji*, *Bida Katcha*, *Eggan* and *Jima*.⁶³ Meanwhile, the growing popularity of the reformer earned him some displeasure from the ruling class in Nupeland and, to some extent, even, from the Caliphate. The reigning *Etsus* – *Muazu* and, later *Majiya*, saw the reformer not only as a religious, but also as a political threat to their authority. Sule posits that this development forced Abdulrahman to adopt the 'military aspect of the Jihad'.⁶⁴ This was confirmed by later events between him and the Nupe rulers on the one hand and the Sokoto Jihadists on the other. Details of

⁵¹ Sule, *History of the...*, p.67.

⁵² Imam, *op.cit*, p.16

⁵³ *Ibid*

⁵⁴ Imam, *Ibid*.

⁵⁵ Oral source – Alh. Nma Kiyakiya Bida – 83 years 20/12/13 at Bida and, East, R. M. (ed), *Labarun Hausawa da Makwabtansu*, 2 vols., Northern Nigerian Publishing Company, Zaria 1932, p.80.

⁵⁶ Sule, *op.cit*, p.69.

⁵⁷ Oral evidence Alh. Nma Kiyakiya, *op.cit*.

⁵⁸ Imam *op.cit*, p.17.

⁵⁹ Sidi, *Establishment of...*, p.26.

⁶⁰ Sule, *op.cit*, p.70.

⁶¹ East, R. M. *op.cit*.

⁶² *Ibid*.

⁶³ Sule, *op.cit* p. 72 and, Sidi, *op.cit*, p.26.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 71 – 72.

these may be outside the scope of our focus.⁶⁵

On the whole however, the role played by the Nupe indigeneous Islamic reformers in Nupeland cannot be over-emphasized. Even though they could not achieve desirable success in their Jihad movements in the area, such attempts had left indelible foot prints in the annals of Islamic education and propagation in Nupeland. For instance, *Etsu* Jibrilu's fall (deposition) is seen more as a failure of a party rather than a failure of an ideology.⁶⁶ For the *Etsu's* religious activities continued to enjoy support from people even after his exile and finally, his death at Kutigi.

As for Sheikh Abdulrahman bn. Muhammad Sharif no less significant Islamic impact was made in Nupeland during and after his reformist attempts. Several places visited by him in the cause of his religious campaigns in Nupe still identify themselves with him. This demonstrates the extent to which such places must have been influenced by his religious idea. Up till the present day, places like *Bida*, *Eggan*, *Abaji*, *Agai*, *Kere*, *Dabban*, among others, are being acknowledged throughout Northern Nigeria for their high standard in Islamic scholarship.⁶⁷ In fact, it is claimed that the descendents of Sheikh Abdulrahman can still be found in a ward called *Katambako* in Bida.⁶⁸

However, this does not imply that the efforts of the two reformers made Islam acceptable by everybody in the kingdom. Urban and commercial centres, given the nature of their political and economic positions, were more influenced by the religion than the rural areas. This seems to have been the situation even after the Sokoto Jihad and eventual establishment of Fulbe dynasty in Nupe.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, we have noted that Islam came to Nupeland much earlier than the 18th and 19th century Jihads carried, or attempted to be carried out by indigeneous Islamic and Sokoto reformers respectively. As was the case from many other places in West Africa, Nupeland received early Islamic contact and influence from several sources. These include Hausaland, Borno and Gonja. Its strategic natural and geographical location accounted for the multi-directional influence of the religion on it.⁶⁹ It is also noted that the fall of the Muslim towns of Timbuktu, Jenne and others in West Africa around the 1460's led to the massive migration of Muslim clerics, traders and scholars to less troubled areas in the south. This was to avoid apparent persecution in the hands of Sonni Ali.

In the same vein, early trade and inter-group relations established between Nupe and Hausaland on one hand and Borno on the other, facilitated the penetration of Islam into Nupeland in the early times. We have observed that as early as the 14th century or even earlier, Nupe and Kano, as well as other states in Hausaland had maintained long distance trade and commercial relations. It has further been noted that a group of Muslim scholars of Yemeni origin who first settled in Borno migrated southwards to Nupe. They, in no small measure contributed to the propagation of Islam in the area. In fact, a descendent of such migrant Islamic scholars, Sheikh Muhammad Abdulrahman Sharif became one of the indigeneous Islamic reformers in Nupeland. At different times this descendent and *Etsu* Jibrilu of Tsoede dynasty in their reformist efforts ensured true adherence to and practice of the religion of Islam in Nupeland.

The introduction of Islam in Nupe can be said to have further strengthened the already established trade and commercial, as well as the inter-group relations. Mason suggests that by the mid-17th century, Nupeland was known as far away as Lake Chad, most likely as a country through which roads to both Gonja and the sea coast passed.⁷⁰ According to him knowledge of the existence of Nupe as an important "nation" had gone even beyond Borno and Magreb. For the first time, the name 'Nouffy' (Nupe), along with others such as "Bousa" (Bussa, "Borgou" (Borgu), "Yaorry" (Yauri) "Gabi" (Kebbi) and "Courourfa" (Kororofa) as important commercial states in the Niger – Benue valley, appeared on the 1772 map, drawn by a French cartographer, Del'Isle.⁷¹ Finally, the early Islamic influence in Nupeland may have prepared grounds for the subsequent 19th century Sokoto Jihad movements in the area.

⁶⁵ For greater details, see Saidu, I, *The Nupe and their...* pp.23 – 28; Ndatsu, Imam, "A History of Islam in...", pp.16 – 21; Sule, M., *History of the Emirate...*, pp. 66-78, among others.

⁶⁶ Sidi *op.cit*, p.29.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*.

⁶⁸ Saidu, I., *he Nupe and their...*pp.27 – 28.

⁶⁹ Sidi, *op.cit*, p.29.

⁷⁰ Mason, "The Kingdom of Nupe...", pp.44-45.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p.45. For the Map, this source refers us to the British Museum map collection, K117 – 14.

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ORAL EVIDENCE

- Alhaji Abubakar Naibi 70 years. The assistant Chief Imam of Jima village on 11/05/13.
- Alhaji Alhassan Wasagi – 66 years, a retired public servant, at Minna on 26/09/13.
- Alhaji Moh'd Ndayisa – Village Head of Jima Village, 58 years at Jima on 11/05/13.
- Alhaji Nma Kiyakiya 83 years, interviewed at Bida on 20/12/13.

APPENDICES

DIFFERENT GENEALOGICAL TREES AND KING LISTS OF NUPE 'ETSUZI' (TSOEDE DYNASTY)

Slightly different and varying genealogies and king lists of the Nupe *Etsuzhi* have been given. Among these are those of Goldsmith, H. S. in Dupigny (1920), Elphinstone (1921) and Nadel (1942). While some of the lists give dates of reign, others merely indicate names of the *Etsus* in their chronological order.

(A) **GOLDSMITH'S LIST (See Dupigny 1920:8)**

NAME OF ETSU	PERIOD OF REIGN
1. <i>Etsu</i> Shaba	09 years
2. <i>Etsu</i> Zangunla	35 years
3. <i>Etsu</i> Jiga	45 years
4. <i>Etsu</i> Mamman Wari	09 years
5. <i>Etsu</i> Abdullahi Wiya	21 years
6. <i>Etsu</i> Aliyu	09 years
7. <i>Etsu</i> Saci Ganamache	03 years
8. <i>Etsu</i> Ibrahim	04 years
9. <i>Etsu</i> Idrisa	04 years
10. <i>Etsu</i> Abdullahi Sado	21 years
11. <i>Etsu</i> Abubakar Kolo	04 years
X 12. <i>Etsu</i> Jibrilu	13 years
13. <i>Etsu</i> Muazu	18 years
14. <i>Etsu</i> Zebeiru	10 years
15. <i>Etsu</i> Iliasa	06 years
16. <i>Etsu</i> Muazu (reinstated)	19 years
17. <i>Etsu</i> Kolo	
Few months, driven out on account of his manners.	
18. <i>Etsu</i> Muhammadu	01 years,
Killed in a war	

(A) SOURCE: Dupigny, E.G.M. The Gazetteers of Nupe Province in the Gazetteers of Northern Provinces of Niger London, 1920, p. 8.

APPENDICES

(B) ELPHINSTONE'S LIST (See Elphinstone, 1921:43,44)

1. Tsoede 98 years, died at Yanlugi
2. Shaba 09 years, died at Mokwa
3. Zagunla 35 years, died at Mokwa
4. Jiya 45 years, died at Mokwa
5. Mamman Wari 09 years, died at Zhima
6. Abdulla Wuya 21 years, died at Zhima
7. Aliu 09 years, died at Zhima
8. Sachi Ganaomache 03 years, died at Zhima
9. Ibrahim 28 years, died at Zhima
10. Idrisu 04 years, died at Nupeko
11. Abdullahi Tsado 21 years, died at Nupeko
12. Jibrifu 13 years, died at Kutigi
13. Abubakar Kolo 11 years, died at Gbara
14. Muazu - son of Abdullahi
Left Nupeland to Yawuri 08 years
15. Zubairu Jiya 10 years, died at Kpada
16. Iliasa 09 years, (abdicated)
17. Muazu - son of Abdullahi
Returned and reigned for another 10 years, died at Gbara
18. Kolo Dauda 04 years, died at Gbara
19. Ikanko 04 years, died at Tsolugi
20. Mamman Jimada 18 years, killed at Ragada
21. Idrisu, son of Jimada 16 years, died at Gbara
22. Muazu, son of Idrisu 18 years, died at Bida
23. Idrisu Gana, son of Muazu 31 years at Bida.
Mr. Wallace settled him at Patigi. Reigned 02 years here and died in 1900.
24. Muazu Yissa, son of Idrisu, succeeded November 1900 (present Etsu Patigi and was born C. 1882)

(B) SOURCE: Elphinstone, Gazetteers of Northern Provinces of Nigeria, Vol. 11, London, 1921, pp. 43-44.

(C) NADEL'S LIST (See Nadel, 1942:406. Historical Chart Of Nupe Rulers)

1. Birth of Tsoede 1463?
2. Tsoede taken as slave to Idah 1493
3. Tsoede's flight from Idah 1523
4. Tsoede 1531
Established himself as king of Nupe in Nupeko
5. Tsoede's death 1591
6. Etsu Shaba 1591 - 1600
7. Etsu Zavaunla 1600 - 1625
8. Etsu Jigba 1625 - 1670
9. Etsu Mamman Wari 1670 - 1679
10. Etsu Abdul Waliyi 1679 - 1700
Foundation of the capital Jima
11. Etsu Aliyu 1700 - 1709
12. Etsu Etsu Ganamace or Saci 1710 - 1713
13. Etsu Ibrahim 1713 - 1717
14. Etsu Idrisu 1717 - 1721
15. Etsu Tsado 1721 - 1742
16. Etsu Abubakari Kolo 1742 - 1746
17. Etsu Jibri 1746 - 1759
He was the first Mohammedan king of Nupe.
He was driven from his kingdom after 13 years' reign, died in exile in Kutigi, where his grave can still be seen.
18. Etsu Ma'azu's first reign 1759 - 1767
Power of Jima at its height. He resigned the throne and left Nupe to live in Yauri.
19. Etsu Majiya I 1767 - 1777

P.T.O.

(C) SOURCE: Nadel, S.F., A Black Byzantium: The Kingdom of Nupe in Nigeria, Oxford: University Press, 1942, p.406.

APPENDICES

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| 20. | <i>Etsu Iliyasu</i>
He is said to have disappeared suddenly. | 1778 - 1778 |
| 21. | <i>Etsu Ma'azu's second reign</i>
After having been requested by the people to return to Nupe. Mallam Dendo (Mankö), the fulani emissary, appeared in Nupe | 1778 - 1795 |
| 22. | <i>Etsu Ali Kolo-Tankari</i>
Reigned for only 8 months and was deposed by the people. | 1795 |
| 23. | <i>Etsu Mamman</i>
Laid foundation of the capital at Raba.
Division of the Kingdom. | 1795 - 1796 |
| 24. | <i>Etsu Jimada 1796 - 1805</i>
Reigning at Jima. War with Majiya II. Jimada was killed in battle in Ragada | |
| 25. | <i>Etsu Majiya II reigning at Raba.</i> | 1796 - 1810 |
| 26. | <i>Majiya's war against the Fulani</i>
Seige of Ilorin and defeat of Nupe Armies | 1806 |
| 26. | <i>The Fulani conquered Raba</i>
Supported by Idrisu, son of Jimada. Majiya fled to Zugurma. Idrisu (Yisa) installed as shadow-king of Nupe in Adama Lelu near Egga, by Fulani. | 1810? |
| 27. | <i>Etsu Idrisu (Yisa) reigning at Adama Lelu 1810 - (1813 - 1830)</i> | |
| 28. | <i>rebellion against the Fulani</i>
He was killed in the battle. Mallam Dendo recalled Majiya from his exile and made him shadow king of Nupe in Zugurma. | 1830 |
| 29. | <i>Etsu Majiya's second reign in Zugurma</i> | 1830 - 1834 |

PTO

1) NUPE KING-LIST (GENEALOGY) UNDER TSOEDE DYNASTY.

1. Tsoede (1461[?] - 1529[?]) at Gbara
2. Etsu Sha'aba (Tsoede's son) (1529 - 1537) at Mokwa
3. Etsu Zagunla (Tsoede's grandson) (1537 - 1592) at Gbara
4. Etsu Jibrilu (1592 - 1637)
5. Etsu Mamma Wari (1637 - 1647[?])
6. Etsu Abdullahi Wiya (1646[?] - 1667)
7. Etsu Aliyu (1667 - 1676)
8. Etsu Sachi Ganao Mace (1676 - 1679)
9. Etsu Ibrahim (1679 - 1708)
10. Etsu Idrisu (1708 - 1712)
11. Etsu Abdullahi Tsado (1712 - 1733)
- *12. Etsu Jibrilu (son to Abdullahi Tsado) 1733 - ?? He was the first Muslim Etsu (king) under Tsoedy Dynasty.

SOURCE: Idrisu Ganao III, (late Etsu Patigi) "The History of Nupe Kingdom and Nupe Dynasty," undated, pp. 3-4.