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*History of Yorubaland. An Abridged English Translation of Azhār ar-Rubā fī akhbār Bilād Yawrubā* (With Annotation). Originally written in Arabic by Shaykh Mustapha Zuglool Sanūsī, Second Edition, London: Zuglool International, 2023. Pp, 62 (English) + 158 (Arabic).

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Documentary narratives in Arabic by local authors in Nigeria on the history of Yoruba people (southwest Nigeria) are rare, the long contact with Islam and its literacy notwithstanding. The world renown historian, Jacob. F. Ade Ajayi (1929-2014), argues that the oldest history of the Yoruba, albeit now lost, was written in the seventeenth century in the Yoruba ‘*ajami*, that is, Yoruba language in the Arabic script.<sup>1</sup> This claim is, however, doubtful; the sophistication and skill required to write a work of that nature either by a settler or a native cleric-author would not have been available at that time. In any case, there seems to be a toehold for Islam and Arabic in the 17<sup>th</sup> C Yorubaland, even if not readily demonstrable. What is probably the earliest reference to the Yoruba race in any Arabic source is to be attributed to Aḥmad Bābā al-Timbuktī (1556-1627). In his *Mi‘rāj al-ṣu‘ūd* (completed in 1615); the Yoruba race is listed among other West African ethnic groups who could be legitimately fetched as slaves, as long as they were *kuffār* (disbelievers in Islam).<sup>2</sup>

The title under review which was authored by Shaikh Muṣṭafā Zughlūl al-Sanūsī (1938-2017) is one of the earliest published works in Arabic on Yoruba history as authored by a native Arabic scholar. Its first edition was published in Beirut in 1987. However, it is by no means a second edition, as the author never updated its contents before his death. This is, however, the first time an abridged version of it in English translation will be available to the reading public, so it can be generously characterised as the second impression.

My review will follow in two directions; viz, an examination of the Arabic original in terms of its content and style; and of the abridged translation in English. In general, the original Arabic and its translation offer some insights into the reality and history of the Yoruba people and their cultivation of Islam and literacy.

The title *Azhār al-Rubā fī akhbār Bilād Yawrubā* which is adopted by the work under review has its origin in an earlier exertion that was credited to Muḥammad b. Masani b. ‘Umar b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallah b. Nūḥ al-Barnāwī al-Katshnawi (b. *circa* 1003/1595- d. 12 Rajab 1667), otherwise known as Dan

Masani (wrongly rendered as Masni by the translator all through). This work of Dan Masani is not known to have survived nor referred to in any bibliographical source until in the *Infāq al-Maisūr* of Muḥammad Ballo (d. 1837) who must have had some access to it.<sup>3</sup> Reference to *Azhār al-Rubā* is also made by the most prominent Nigerian Islamic scholar author of the 20<sup>th</sup> C, Ādam ‘Abdullāh al-Ilūrī. (1917-1992) in his *Nasīm al-ṣabā*<sup>4</sup>, in which he also alluded to *Shu ‘ā’ al-Rubā fī taḥrīr fuqahā’ Yawruba* by Dan Masani as a work which was intended to give some scholarly information about Yorubaland. The earliest reference to *Shu ‘ā’* is to be found in al-Burtulī (1727-1805). Hunwick says it was a work made as a response to the inquiry by certain jurists in Yorubaland about how to determine the time of Maghrib prayer.<sup>5</sup>

The author Shaikh Zughlūl lists eight major Yoruba ethnic groups and their populations, according to the official 1963 census (pp. 12-13 Arabic section). There are some 371 ethnic groups in Nigeria and over 525 native languages, and according to the United Nations Worldometer elaboration data as at August 2023, Nigeria’s population estimate is given as 224,615,461, in which the Yorubas constitute over 20%. (<https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/nigeria-population/> accessed August 28, 2023).

The original Arabic by Zughlūl mentions several authors by their first names, and titles without full bibliographical details. For example, the author mentions Dr Lucas, Mr. Olatubosun, Mr Abiola (p. 22) with no details of their works as cited; the translation should have filled in these and other lacunae. Non-Arabic sources cited by the author should have been left in their original language or a translation of them in Arabic by him should have been allowed to go with their published titles. The author sometimes quotes non-Arab authors (whose names are rendered sometimes inaccurately into Arabic) without giving titles or details of their works. For example, he says: *wa l-mu’arrikh al-munṣif al-duktūr Bādhil [sic] [Basil] Davidson fī kitābihi . . .* (p. 22 without mentioning the title of the book). Basil Davidson (1914-2010) had over thirty published books on Africa, so, we need to know which title is being quoted from here. So also was an archaeologist by name Gordon mentioned without details (p. 22). Was it Gordon Childe (1892-1957), the iconic archaeologist that is being cited directly or through a secondary source here? The same query can be raised in respect of the author’s quotation from Ādam Na Ma’ji’s (1902-44) *al-Iktishāf al-mufīd fī ta’rīkh Najīriyā fī l-‘aṣr al-jadīd*, in regard to the ancient Oyo Empire (Oyo Ile) (p. 131). No page reference from the title is given nor any indication of whether our author had a direct access to the work or was relying on information from his influential teacher Ādam al-Ilūrī in whose possession a bound volume of *al-Iktishāf* was indicated to be available.<sup>6</sup>

Samuel Johnson’s (1845-1901) *The History of the Yoruba* was a major reference to the Arabic original, and nowhere is the quotation from or paraphrase

of him indicated with any precision by the author.<sup>7</sup> [Saburi] Biobaku, Dr Badamos? (Perhaps Murtala Bidmos/Harun Badmus? two contemporary authors on Yoruba Islamic scholarship) are also cited by Zughlūl without any definitive reference to the bibliographical details of their works.

Coming to the translation section of the work under review, an introduction would certainly have provided some information about the significance of the work, its style of material utilisation and analysis, among others. Insofar as the translation is an abridgement of the entire work, an indication of the page range of the sections as translated according to the Arabic original should have been given all through. This would have assisted the reader to establish the correspondence between the original and the translation, thus making cross-referencing and equivalency possible with minimal effort. A consistent system of transliteration is conspicuous by its absence. As earlier mentioned, the translation should have updated the demographic and statistical data deriving from the 1963 census figures given in the Arabic original. Of course, an updated bio-bibliographical notice of the author should have been provided. Existing literature lists, apart from the *Azhār* under review, other works by Zughlūl; namely, *Sa-ya'ūd al-'Arab ilā Filasṭīn* (Beirut, 1965), *al-Mar'ah bayna l-ḥijāb wa-l-sufūr* (Beirut, 1966), and *Miftāḥ al-ḥadīth* (Beirut, 1967, see *ALA* 2, 526). It is highly probable that Shaikh Zughlūl would have had some unpublished manuscripts before his death and, of course, some correspondence in Arabic with local and/or international respondents, and perhaps, epistles and sermons which may well need to be unearthed and studied. In other words, there is a need to bring together, at least in listing, ALL the works of our author. We may preface our conclusion of this review with a serio-comic poser; when did the author assume the honorific name Zughlūl which is apparently in admiration of the Egyptian revolutionary statesman Sa'd Zaghlūl Pasha (1859-1927)?

By all account, the translation presented here, in an abridged form notwithstanding, and the original work itself in a new garb have opened our eyes to the wonderful contribution of the author to the history of Yorubaland from an Arabic-Islamic tradition. An efficient copyeditor would have been helpful in polishing the language of the translation, but this may be considered in a future translation of the work and indeed in other works by students of Arabic-Islamic studies and researchers who might be interested in projecting Yoruba history to a wider readership; after all, the history has continually attracted new insights and perspectives over the past few years.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ade Ajayi, J. F. , "Religious Pluralism and Tolerance among the Yoruba", <http://groups.google.com/group/yorubaaffairs>. September 2006 <accessed on 23 October 2006>.

<sup>2</sup> Aḥmad Baba al-Timbuktī, *Mi'rāj al-ṣu'ūd*, John O. Hunwick and Fatima Harrak, Annotators & Translators), *Ahmad Baba's Replies on Slavery*. Rabat Institute of African Studies, 2020

‘...*wa-ṣinf Yawruba... fa-kulluhum kuffār mā zālū ‘alā kufrihim ilā l-ān*’, 69-70, Arabic section).

<sup>3</sup> Muḥammad Ballo b. Uthmān *Infāq al-Maisūr*, Rabat: Institute of African Studies, 1996, 71. On al-Ilūrī, see note 7 below; J. O. Hunwick, Compiler, *Arabic Literature of Africa*, Vol 2, Central Sudanic Africa, Leiden: Brill, 1995, 516-526. Henceforth *ALA 2*.

<sup>4</sup> *Nasīm al-ṣabā*. Agege-Lagos: Matba‘at al-Thaqāfah al-Islāmiyya, [Third Edition, 1990], 47. An English translation of *Nasīm* was attempted by Francesco Lobello in 2017 in which the *Shu‘ā* was wrongly transcribed and translated as *Shifā*. . . : “The Remedy against Asthma: a History of the Scholars of Yorubaland” (145, fn viii), and *Azhār al-Rubā* translated as “The Blooming Flower. . . fn vii).

<sup>5</sup> Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Burtulī, *Fatḥ al-Shakkūr fī ma‘rifat a‘yān ‘ulamā’ Takrūr*, ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm al-Kattānī & Muḥammad Ḥājjī, Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1981, 131; *ALA 2*, 30. A French translation of *Fatḥ* by Chouki al-Ḥamed appeared in 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Stefan Reichmuth, “Shaykh Adam al-Ilori as I came to Know Him: Memories of an Islamologist”, *Shaykh Adam ‘Abdullah al-Ilori in the Tableau of Immortality*, ed. by Razaq ‘D. Abubakre (Ilorin [Nigeria]/Riyadh: The Nigerian Centre for Arabic Research, 2012, 9-18. For more on Na Ma‘ji, see Amidu Sanni, [“From the Intellectual Powerhouse of Ilorin \(Nigeria\): Elegy in the Work of Adam ‘Abdullah al-Ilori”](#), in Michael Kemper & Ralf Elger (Eds), [The Piety of Learning. Islamic Studies in Honour of Stefan Reichmuth](#), Leiden: Brill, 2017, 38-61.

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, Samuel, *The History of the Yorubas from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British protectorate*. Lagos: CMS [first published 1921] 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Some recent works on Yoruba history include: Akin Ogundiran, Akin, *Yoruba: A New History*, Charlotte: Indiana University Press, UNC, 2020; Aribidesi Adisa Usman, and Toyin Falola (eds), *The Yoruba from Prehistory to the Present*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019; S. Adebajji Akintoye. *A History of the Yoruba People*. Dakar: Amalion Publishers, 2010.

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