

## *Islam in Yauri Emirate to the End of 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

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### **Abstract**

*Yauri Emirate is one of the four emirates that form the modern Kebbi State of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It is made up of three Local Government Areas of Kebbi State, namely Yauri, Ngaski and Shanga. The emirate originated from the defunct Yauri Kingdom which ceased to exist following the British conquest of the area at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. An important feature attached to the history of Islam in Yauri Emirate is that, though the religion reached the state way back in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and since that time its rulers have been largely Muslims, Islam continued to be religion of the aristocrats and Hausa people who were predominantly found in Birnin Yauri and Agwara (Ngaski), the only two towns with large Hausa population in the old Yauri Kingdom. Long before and after the coming of Islam in the kingdom the indigenous people in Yauri who include: Gungawa, Kambari, Dukkawa and Lopawa were followers of their respective traditional religions. The native people did not show interest in the new religion on one hand, and the past rulers of Yauri did not make much effort to islamise them on the other. However, the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked a turning point in the history of spread of Islam among the native people of Yauri, especially the Gungawa, Lopawa and Kambari. This was due to activities of different categories of people in the emirate who among others include: Muslim clerics, Sardauna Islamization campaign, Islamic organizations and Muslim youth. The focus of this paper is therefore, to show how and when did Islam come to Yauri and its gradual transformation from being religion of the minority to that of the majority.*

### **Introduction**

Islam is one of the three major universal religions, others being Christianity and Judaism. It has been described as a complete way of life. It is a fundamental basis for socio-political values and organization. The religion also influences and informs conception of identity, authority and legitimacy.<sup>1</sup> The first part of the Nigerian area that came into contact with Islam was the defunct Kanem-Borno as far back as the 9<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of Mai Humai Jilmi. The religion is said to have reached Hausaland during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It eventually

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<sup>1</sup>. M.S. Abdulkadir, "Islam in Non-Muslim Areas of Northern Nigeria, C. 1600-1900", *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. 1, No.1, 2011, p. 2.

penetrated to different sections of the country at different times. This paper aims at exploring the spread of Islam in Yauri Emirate, one of the four emirates in the present Kebbi State.

### Coming of Islam in Yauri Emirate

There are conflicting opinions regarding the actual time when Islam first came to Yauri. According to Mahdi Adamu in one of his works, Sarkin Yauri Jerabana II who reigned in the first and second quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (1620-1663) was the first Muslim ruler of Yauri. It was however during the period of Sarkin Yauri Ibrahim, 1689-1708 he further stated, when the proper Islamization process started in Yauri kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

In another work Mahdi Adamu considered the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century as the beginning of Islamic influence in Yauri. This according to him was due to the influence of large communities of Hausa *malams* (Muslim clerics) who established themselves in Birnin Yauri and Agwara, the only two towns in Yauri Kingdom with Muslim population at that time.<sup>3</sup>

But according to Balogun,<sup>4</sup> the acceptance of Islam in Yauri must have come about as a result of the position of Yauri as an important transit station in the kolanut trade between Borno in the east and Gonja in the west. It is possible, Balogun further stated, that some of the rulers of Yauri started accepting Islam from about the 17<sup>th</sup> century or earlier, due to the influence of Muslim traders who spread Islam along with their commercial activities.<sup>5</sup>

Hogben and Kirk-Green,<sup>6</sup> on the other hand provided two versions regarding the coming of Islam to Yauri. According to the first version, it was the fifth King of Yauri, Yauri by name, who reigned in the first quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (c.1505-1531),<sup>7</sup> that first accepted and

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<sup>2</sup>. See M. Adamu, "A Hausa Government in Decline: Yawuri in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century", *M.A. (History) Dissertation*, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, 1968, pp. 64-66.

<sup>3</sup>. This information is available in M. Adamu, *The Hausa Factor in West African History*, Zaria, Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1978, p. 51.

<sup>4</sup>. S.A. Balogun, "History of Islam up to 1800" in O. Ikime (ed.) *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, Ibadan, Heinemann Educational Books, 1980. p. 216.

<sup>5</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>. See S.J. Hogben and A.H.M. Kirk-Green, *History of Islamic States of Northern Nigeria*, Ibadan, Oxford University Press, 1967, p. 136.

<sup>7</sup>. The date was based on Sahabi Adamu, *A Brief History of Yawuri*, (A Monograph), Kaduna, Master Prints Inc, 2000, p.7.

introduced Islam. The second version concurs with Mahdi Adamu and said that Islam was first introduced to Yauri during the period of Jarabana II who reigned from 1620 to 1663.<sup>8</sup>

From the foregoing, regardless of the actual time when Islam first came to Yauri, most of the scholars are of the opinion that the first time when the religion came to Yauri was in 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The Spread of Islam in Yauri Emirate**

Although it is stated above that Islam was introduced to Yauri as far back as the 17<sup>th</sup> century or even earlier, it continued to be the religion of the Hausa people living in the area for quite a long time. The non-Hausa elements in the territory (Kambari, Dukkawa, Gungawa and Lopawa), did not for quite sometimes show any form of interest towards Islam probably due to the fact that the rulers of Yauri neither encouraged the religion nor forced anybody to abandon paganism.<sup>9</sup> The level of accepting Islam amongst the non-Hausa elements therefore consistently remained unimpressive for quite sometimes.

The spread of Islam among the native people of Yauri Emirate was consequent upon four major developments in the area: i.e. the activities of Muslim clerics (*Malamai*), Sardauna's Conversion Campaign, the role played by the Muslim youths, as well as Islamic religious organizations like *Jama'atu Nasirul Islam* (J.N.I), *Jama'atu Izalalil Bidi'ah Wa Ikamatu Bid'ah* (JIBWIS), Federation of Muslim Women Organization (FOMWAN) etc.

### **The Role of Muslim Clerics (*Malamai*)**

The task of converting quite a number of native people of Yauri Emirate from their traditional religion to Islam was started by Muslim clerics (*Malamai*). Some of the early scholars who participated in the spread of Islam among the native people of Yauri Emirate included Malam Sulaiman Yauri (Malam Yauri), Malam Alabira (Malam Mai Tandu) and Malam Salka. These scholars have championed the task of converting the native people of Yauri into Islamic faith.<sup>10</sup> These clerics lived with the people propagating Islam and guarding various Islamic practices from paganism. Some of the earliest natives of Yauri converted to Islam by Malam Yauri included Malam Abdullahi from Baha, Malam Usman from Rikubalo, Malam Shehu

<sup>8</sup>. S.J. Hogben and A.H.M. Kirk-Green, *History of Islamic States... op.cit.*

<sup>9</sup>. M. Adamu, "A Hausa Government..." *op.cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>10</sup>. Oral information collected from Malam Aliyu Zagin Dangaladiman Gungu, aged 60 years interviewed at his residence in Tsohon Garin Tondi on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> July, 2010.

from Hinanbiro and the grandfather of Malam Abdullahi Hutawa, who is now one of the prominent Islamic Scholars in Hutawa.<sup>11</sup> In the case of Malam Mai Tandu he was believed to have converted many Kambari and Gungawa from Tateku and Kabirba (near Wara), the Lopawa of Hoge Island, Cipamini and Gafara, as well as the Gungawa of Zamare, Jijima and Gumbi.<sup>12</sup> While Malam Salka was responsible for the conversion of one Mai Goge in Baha and Mai Lage's family in Zamare, as well as many other Dukkawa from Shanga District and Lopawa, Kambari and Gungawa from Wara, Ngaski, Birnin Yauri, Ula'ira, etc.<sup>13</sup>

In the recent past, the Imams and other religious leaders have also been used in Yauri Emirate since time of Emir of Yauri Alhaji Muhammadu Tukur (1955-1981) for the purpose of spreading Islam, especially in the non-Muslim dominated areas of the Emirate. From the inception of *Jama'atu Nasril Islam* in the emirate in 1976 all the known Imams and other Muslim scholars in the Emirate were mandated by the Emirate council under the leadership of the Emir of Yauri, to embark on individual work of propagating Islam in their respective areas. Monthly meeting between the Emir of Yauri and all the recognised Islamic scholars in the Emirate was then introduced in order to review the success or otherwise of the individual Muslim scholars mission of propagating Islam. In order to ensure continuity and sustainability of the system, the late Emir of Yauri Alhaji Muhammadu Tukur, introduced a token monthly allowance of ₦10.00 (ten naira only) to each recognised Islamic scholars in the Emirate<sup>14</sup>.

### **Sardauna's Conversion Campaign**

The Islamic conversion campaign led by the late Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto and Premier of the Northern Region of Nigeria (October 1954-15<sup>th</sup> January 1966),<sup>15</sup> played

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<sup>11</sup>. Oral Interview with Alhaji Bawa Bulama aged 55 years, at his residence Unguwan Sabon Gari in Yelwa, on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> January, 2011.

<sup>12</sup>. Oral interview with Malam Muhammadu Sani Dantani aged 91 years, in front of the residence of Walin Yauri, on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> January, 2014.

<sup>13</sup>. Malam Sadiqu Ahmad Wali, aged 45 years, interviewed in front of Walin Yauri residence, on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2014.

<sup>14</sup>. Oral Interview with Alhaji Abubakar Yusuf (Sarkin Malaman Yauri), aged 65 years, on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> August 2014. According to this Islamic scholar who also benefited from the payment of the said allowance it was meant to encourage them leave their houses periodically and embark on Islamic propagation expedition especially among the pagans communities of the Emirate because ₦10.00 by that time was substantial amount of money that could cater for one's responsibility.

<sup>15</sup>. His full name was Ahmad son of Ibrahim son of Abubakar Atiku son of Muhammadu Bello son of Shaikh Usmanu Danfodiyo. He was said to be born in either 1909 or 1910. See J.N. Paden, *Ahmadu Bello Sardauna of Sokoto: Values and Leadership in Nigeria*, Zaria, Hudahuda Publishing Company, 1986, pp. 72-73. For more details See

Yasin ABUBAKAR, *Islam in Yauri Emirate to the End of 20th Century*, pp. 131 - 140

another vital role in the conversion of many natives of Yauri Emirate to Islam. Between 1963 and 1965, Sir Ahmadu Bello was believed to have led series of campaigns in different parts of northern Nigeria, converting non-Muslim to Islam. By 1966 the Islamization campaign of Sardauna along with the NPC, the then ruling political party in northern Nigeria was believed to have converted over 187, 000 people to Islam.<sup>16</sup> One of the areas that benefited from the Sardauna's conversion campaigns was the Yauri Emirate. It is important to note that prior to the period of the conversion campaigns, Sardauna, along with the Emirs of Gwandu and Katsina, the Lamido of Adamawa, the Ohinoyi of Igbirra, Emir of Fika and the representatives of the Sultan of Sokoto were in Yauri, in December 1956 to attend the installation of the then Emir of Yauri, Muhammadu Tukur (1955-1981).<sup>17</sup> Subsequently Sardauna paid several other visits on his conversion expeditions where he converted to Islam the non-Muslim communities in Yauri especially the Kambari, Lopawa, Gungawa and Dukkawa. According to Usman and Zakari,<sup>18</sup> the strategy Sardauna adopted in the Islamizing different communities in Northern Nigeria was the communal method in which an entire community was encouraged to proclaim the *Kalimat Shahada* and gradually became practicing Muslims. Sardauna supported all the new converts with some token material benefits including cash and materials (*Atamfa*) and white clothes that were very difficult to get during the time. But Sardauna was consistently clear in his campaigns that he was urging people to accept Islam for the sake of Allah and not for his sake or for the material benefit he was presenting to them. Sardauna was therefore able through the struggle he adopted to persuade many non-Muslims in the emirate to forsake their traditional religion for Islam. The massive conversion of the native people of Yauri started during the Sardauna Islamization campaign. It was in order to ensure continuity

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also, I. A. Zakari, "Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto's Conversion Campaigns and Spread of Islam among the Gbagyi People in Minna Chiefdom", *MA (Islamic Studies) Dissertation*, Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto, 2006, p. 54.

<sup>16</sup> A.E. Barnes, *Making Headway: The Introduction of Western Civilization in Colonial Northern Nigeria*, Rochester, University of Rochester Press, 2009, p. 255. For details on where did the Sardauna conversion campaign started and how it was carried out in different parts of northern Nigeria, See J.N. Paden, *op.cit*, pp. 566-569.

<sup>17</sup> J.N. Paden, *op.cit*, p.195.

<sup>18</sup> M.T. Usman and I.A. Zakari, "Islamization Campaigns in the Gbagyi Area of Former Minna Chiefdom, 1963-64", *Lapai Journal of Central Nigeria History*, Journal of the Department of History and Archaeology, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Niger State, vol. 1 no. 1, December 2007, p. 117.

in the spread of Islam that Saradauna ordered the inclusion of mosques in the architectural plans for all the riverine communities in the emirate.<sup>19</sup>

Malam Garba Abubakar (the Village Head of Tillo)<sup>20</sup> has given the following names as some of the prominent Gungawa from Tillo Island, who were converted to Islam as a result of Saradauna's conversion campaign: Noma Kibiya, Ubandawakin Hilala, Koshi Bukabu, Noma Shekwa, Garba Mai Goge, Goge Kurmi, Lafiya Masu, Lafiya Utunu, Gangu Jerabu, Noma Kurmi, Goge Higuda and Bori wan Toro.

### **The Muslim Youths**

The youths among the native people of Yauri Emirate were also amongst the earliest converts to Islam. Several of the native youths who accepted Islam persuaded quite a number of elderly ones.<sup>21</sup> The efforts of the youths in this direction yielded some positive results as considerable number of the native elders were convinced and eventually became Muslims. The Muslim youths in several ways informed the elders that traditional religion was an old fashion. Stigmatization from the surrounding Muslim communities such as denying marriage to and from the natives as well as the desire showed by the native youths to marry from the Muslims, were some of the strategies adopted by the youths in their conversion campaigns.<sup>22</sup> It is important to also note at this point that the resettlement exercise of 1968 of the riverine communities of the emirate from the islands and banks of the River Niger to the mainland, which brought them outside their isolated environments and exposed them to external social and economic influences, had also aided the youths to intensify their Islamization campaign.<sup>23</sup>

### **Jama'atu Nasril Islam and Spread of Islam in Yauri Emirate**

The idea of establishing *Jama'atu Nasril Islam* (J.N.I) was initially conceived by Saradauna of Sokoto and Premier of Northern Nigeria, Sir Ahmadu Bello and Sheikh Abubakar Mahmud Gumi, former Grand Khadi of Northern Nigeria during their pilgrimage to Mecca in 1962. On

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<sup>19</sup>. Such mosques can now be seen in such resettled towns and villages in the emirates as Yelwa, Wara, Tillo, Rikubalo, Zamare, Shabanda etc.

<sup>20</sup>. Malam Garba Abubakar (Village Head of Tillo), aged 75 years, interviewed in front of his residence in Tillo village on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> July, 2014.

<sup>21</sup>. Oral interview with Malam Garba Ma'aji, aged 80 years, interviewed in his residence in Tsohon Garin Tondi, on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> July, 2010.

<sup>22</sup>. Malam Garba Abubakar (Hakimin Tillo), *op.cit.*

<sup>23</sup>. Oral Interview with Malam Abdullahi Hutawa, aged 47, on Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> July, 2014.

their return from Mecca, they encouraged the formation of a Muslim body that would be charged with responsibility of enlightening Muslims about their religion and its practice. The organization was eventually formed in 1963.<sup>24</sup> The broad aim of the organization was to propagate the principle of Islam and win adherents from the diverse people of Nigeria. It however, has the following specific objectives:

1. To revive and maintain Islamic moralities among Muslims of all ages and sexes and also encourage intellectual religious activities.
2. To promote friendly relationship among Nigerian Muslims in particular and World Muslim in general.
3. To put into practice the ideal of Islam as thought in the holy Qur'an, Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and *Ijma*.
4. To establish and run schools for propagation of Islam and its culture as well as promotion of studies of Arabic language.
5. To establish and run hospitals, maternities, clinics and dispensaries for the purpose of curing all categories of sicknesses.
6. To organise lectures, sermons, exhibitions, conferences, seminars, classes and similar activities on Islamic ideals.<sup>25</sup>

In view of achieving the above aim and objectives, branches of the organization were established in all the Emirates of Northern Nigeria and even beyond. In Yauri Emirate the branch of *Jama'atu Nasril Islam* was established in 1976, during the reign of Emir of Yauri Alhaji Muhammadu Tukur who was the branch chairman of the organization in his Emirate.<sup>26</sup>

At the formation of the branch organization of the *Jama'atu Nasril Islam* in Yauri Emirate in 1976, its members included the following personalities:

1. His Royal Highness Emir of Yauri, Alhaji Muhammadu Tukur Chairman
2. Sheikh Ahmad Hussaini (Walin Yauri) Member
3. Malam Tammaha (Chief Imam of Yauri) Member
4. Malam Umaru Awwale Member
5. Malam Hamidu Limamin Gyabe Member

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<sup>24</sup>. U. Tanko, "Jama'atu Nasril Islam and Its Contribution in Propagating Islam", *B.A. (Islamic Studies) Project*, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, 1999, p. 10.

<sup>25</sup>. *Ibid*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>26</sup>. Oral Interview with Alhaji Abubakar Yusuf ..., *op.cit*.

6. Limamin Mai Kaho Member
7. Malam Lawali na Baba (Present Chief Imam of Yauri) Member
8. Alhaji Abubakar Yusuf (present Sarkin Malaman Yauri) Secretary<sup>27</sup>

All the District Heads in the Emirate and Muslim Scholars (*Malamai*) in the Districts have also served as chairmen and members of the organization in their respective Districts respectively.<sup>28</sup> The Yauri branch of *Jama'atu Nasril Islam* in a bid to achieve the aforementioned aim and objectives of the organization, embarked upon Islamic propagation expeditions in all the nook and corner of the Emirate especially in the non-Muslims dominated areas of the Emirate. The Emir, Alhaji Muhammadu Tukur from his part continued to sponsor the activities of the organization in his Emirate and gave them all the moral support they needed up to the end of his reign in 1981. Although here too there is no accurate data that recorded the exact number of non-Muslims who eventually accepted Islam as a result of activities of *Jama'atu Nasril Islam*, Sarkin Malaman Yauri, Alhaji Abubakar Yusuf explained that their committee recorded a lot of success in terms of converting many non-Muslims to Islam across the Emirate.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Role of Izala Movement**

The movement was founded in 1978 by Sheikh Ismaila Idris in Jos, Plateau State of Nigeria and was formally registered on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1985.<sup>30</sup> The movement has eventually carried a number of activities aimed at propagating the course of Islam in northern Nigeria in general and specific attention in particular. One of such northern Nigerian territories that witnessed the activities of propagating and promoting Islam was Yauri Emirate. This was through a number of activities of the movement in the area, such as *da'awah*<sup>31</sup> and preaching. From the

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<sup>27</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup>. Oral Interview with Alhaji Sa'idu Yakubu Abarshi (Ubandoman Yauri and District Head of Yelwa), aged 67 years, on 15/01/2011.

<sup>29</sup>. *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup>. A. I. Yandaki, *Matsayin Izalah a Nigeria*, Kaduna, Fisbas Media Services, 1992, p. 7. See also, Sulaiman, Khalid, "Izala Movement and religious reform in Northern Nigeria: A case study of Sokoto", *B.A. Dissertation*, UDUS, 1985.

<sup>31</sup>. The word *Da'awah* is an Arabic word which literally means "issuing a summons" or "making an invitation". Technically it refers to proselytizing or preaching of Islam. A Muslim who practices *Da'awah*, either as a religious worker or in a volunteer community effort, is called a *Da'i*. Thus, a *Da'i* is a person who invites people to understand Islam through a dialogical process, and may be categorized in some cases as the Islamic equivalent of a missionary as one who invites people to the faith, to the prayer, or to Islamic life. See B.L. Yusuf, "Islamic



commencement of the activities of the Izala movement in Yauri Emirate in late 1980s, considerable numbers of non-Muslims have embraced Islam, due largely to its activities.<sup>32</sup>

### **FOMWAN and Spread of Islam in Yauri Emirate**

The Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) was established in October, 1985 and registered with Nigeria's Corporate Affairs Commission the same year. Its headquarters is presently under construction at Utako, Abuja and it has affiliates in all the 36 states of the federation. The mission of this noble association is to propagate the religion of Islam in Nigeria through *Da'awah*, establishment of educational institutions and other outreach activities; and to improve the socio-economic status of the populace especially women, youth and children. This can be achieved according to FOMWAN, through training, provision of qualitative education, provision of health and humanitarian services, micro enterprise scheme and advocacy. Thus, the broad aim of FOMWAN is propagating the religion of Islam and educating the Muslim women by promoting the understanding and practice of the teachings of the holy Qur'an and Sunnah of the holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W).<sup>33</sup>

The FOMWAN in Yauri has recorded considerable number of success in terms spreading Islam among the non-Muslim communities of the Emirate. The success was achieved through a number of activities of the organization such as *da'awah*, preaching, medication and presentation of gifts to the pagan communities in the emirate. In virtually all the 15 districts of the emirate, FOMWAN has converted quite a number of non-Muslims to Islam through its activities.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the existence of pagan factor among the native people of Yauri Emirate in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the spread of Islam has recorded an impressive success especially among the Gungawa, Lopawa and Akimba group of Kambari. These communities were, by the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century more than ninety percent (90%) Muslims. This was largely as explained in the paper due to the giant strides of different categories of people and forces that included the

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Da'awah in Nigeria Today", *The Muslim World League Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 8, *Sha'aban* 1414, February, 1994, p. 53

<sup>32</sup>. Oral Interview with Alhaji Abubakar Yusuf ..., *op.cit.*

<sup>33</sup>. B.L. Yusuf, "Islamic Da'awah in Nigeria Today" ..., *op.cit.*

activities of Muslim clerics (*Malamai*), Sardauna's Conversion Campaign, the role played by the Muslim youths, as well as Islamic religious organizations like *Jama'atu Nasirul Islam* (J.N.I), *Jama'atu Izalalil Bidi'ah Wa Ikamatu Bid'ah* (JIBWIS), Federation of Muslim Women Organization (FOMWAN) etc.

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