

# The Impact Of Islam And Shariah On The Culture Of Ilorin Emirate

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**Abstract:** This study is to examine on how Islam and Shariah had influence on the culture of Ilorin, which include, the administration, social institution, such as: Naming, Marriage, Burial and inheritance ceremonies and to also figure out the great role which the earlier scholars had played to the grate town of Ilorin.

## I. A SHORT HISTORY OF ILORIN EMIRTAE

It is always difficult for historian to say with every degree of certainty what the pre-Fulani Ilorin was, because the period between the eighteen hundred to eighteen hundred and seventeen was obscure, and very little is known about it. This is why whenever, the history of Ilorin is being presented to the people, and the history is always stated with the revolt of one. *Afonja* who was the field marshal of Oyo Empire before the rebelled against *Alafin* of Oyo, and also the invitation which *Afonja* extended to one iterant preacher, *as-salih*, a Fulani by tribe, and their subsequent friendship before thing fell apart between them. (1)

However, we have some accounts which described Ilorin as a Yoruba settlement which a population of about one hundred thousand, 100, 000 in the early nineteen century. Unfortunately this account did not go further to tell us whether Ilorin as a settlement had s *Bale* or an *Oba*. Also we are not told in the account when Ilorin was founded.

## II. LOCATION AND CLINMATE

Ilorin is situated in a central position within the *suburah* towns which are parts and parcels of the Oyo Empire. It built on a low hill. It is physically on an undulation of plain with general elevation of one thousand, which rise northward to about one thousand and five hundred. (2)

Similarly, it is a fortified city and its walls were still standing by the beginning of this century. It's of tropical

climate experiencing dry and rainy season at reasonable intervals.

This dry season lasts from November till April while the rain takes over from early April till the end of October. From November till end of December harm tan is experienced but not as server as in places like Kano, Kaduna and Sokoto (3).

By this location in a transitional zone between the open savannah to the north and forest zone to the south. Ilorin is relatively in a movement of the traders from the north to the south and vice vases.

## III. TRIBES IN ILORIN

Basically, *Ilorin* is a Yoruba settlement. Their origin is traced to the old Oyo Empire and the founder of Ilorin was said to be one by name (*Tela*) (4). He was succeeded by another Yoruba man, *Ole* before the arrival of *Afonja* in the town. However, this source was into explicit enough as to whether these men were actually rulers of Ilorin either as *Oba*, *Bale* or *Magaji*. Another historian of note, Samuel Johnson ascribed the foundation of Ilorin to one hunter by name (*Laderin*) (5). Be that as it may it is curtaining clear that Ilorin was founded by a Yoruba hunter. But when it founded is a matter that could not even be well speculated. To demonstrate that Ilorin is a Yoruba town, the people of (*ARE*) compound (the descendants of *Laderin*) in *Idi-Ape*, Ilorin usually address their head, (*ARE*), as "*Kabiyesi*": meaning "your lordship" even though there is an emir that is ruling the town (6).

In addition to the Yoruba community in Ilorin we have Hausa/Fulani community which pre-dated the arrival of "Alimi. Most of these Hausa/Fulani communities were traders or slaves who were later converted to Islam by 'Alimi' on his arrival in Ilorin (7) The reason why Ilorin has as many tribes as Hausa and Fulani is said to be due to the protection which is naturally endowed the town with the presence of a hill in the outskirts of Ilorin called *Sobi*. (8) Another reason advanced for the proliferation of the people in Ilorin was the presence of *Afonja*, the field marshal of Oyo Empire in Ilorin (9).

Ilorin as a town is made of people from surrounding villages such as *Megida*, *Ogbodoroko*, *Alapa* and *Amanyo*. These people left their respective village to settle in Ilorin. They are also Yoruba. Their division consists of the Fulani and Hausa who are popularly referred to in the town as *Gambari*. They migrated to Ilorin from different parts of the north eight as traders or slaves (10).

The leader of Fulani community was said to be *Olufadi* (11). However, one feels reluctant to accept this view in view of the fact that the name has Yoruba connotation whereas we are talking about Fulani tribe. Although it may be argued that it is not impossible that the Fulani leader adopted the name or that the name was imposed on him, this argument may not hold water because of the reference which the name made to *ifa*, whatever the case may be the significant point that could not be disputed is that the Fulani co-existed with the Yoruba in Ilorin before the arrival of *Alimi*.

In respect of Hausa community in Ilorin, there is no ambiguity in the fact that they too peacefully with other tribes in Ilorin. Secondly, their leader is said to be called *Bakko*(12). It is very interesting to note here that the meaning of the name itself tells story, and the story it told is that the Hausa community came to join other tribes in Ilorin hence the reference been made to their leader as *Bakko* which means stranger or visitor.

## RELIGION

The religion of the pre- Fulani people in Ilorin is what is called indigenous religion of Africa. The religion is said to have been handed down from generation to generation by the forebears of the present generation of Africans (13). This religion consists of the creation of the world, the liturgy which is the prescribed forms of rituals for public worship, the songs, piety, sayings, proverbs, adages, epigrams riddles and a body of organized recitals connected with cult of the oracle divinity like the *Odu* which is connected with the cult of *Orunmila* (*ifa*) (14).

However, it is believed that in the *Okesuna* quarter in Ilorin a handful of Muslims were there under the leadership of a powerful Yoruba chief, *Sholagberu*. This was even before the arrival of *Alimi* to Ilorin. *Sholagberu* was even said to be a *tijani* (15).

Concerning Hausa and Fulani communities of the pre-Fulani Ilorin, it is not impossible that some of them were already Muslims before they migrated to Ilorin while some others may worshippers of the indigenous religion. This is because some of these Hausa and Fulani were said to have converted into Islam when *Alimi* came of Ilorin later in the second decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century (16).

It should be noted that owing environmental factor a particular deity whom the people of Ilorin were worshipping was said to be residing in Ilorin. Third deity is referred to as *Oye*. It was thought to be residing in Ilorin because Ilorin is an important town in the direction from which the wind blows. It was the belief of the people not only in Ilorin alone that the deity to be worshipped. In order to be protected from the wind is *Oye*, and so people worship it earnestly.

It is also very significant to note that Islam has long been practiced in Ilorin side by side with indigenous religion before the coming of "ALIMI". However, it is not clear whether it was Islam which was held in high esteem by the inhabitants of Ilorin or indigenous religion. It was also very ambiguous whether its practices were limited to *okesuna* quarter alone or could be felt in some other quarters in the town.

## OCCUPATION

The major occupation of the pre-Fulani people of Ilorin includes agriculture, weaving, pottery and mining. However, emphasis was placed on agriculture because majority of the inhabitants were from villages where, a part from hunting there was no other profession. In addition, the fact that the town is blessed with abundant fertile lands made people to practice agriculture very much, above all the quest for self-sufficiency in food production also accounted for the high interest the people of Ilorin had in agriculture. Some section of Ilorin, on the other hand, pre-occupied them with weaving as a means of livelihood. It used to be made in different forms and colours. Sometimes it could be a highly decorated uni colored Yoruba attire or a multi-colored one.

Of particular importance in the major occupations of the people of Ilorin is pottery. It is a popular craft work in Ilorin. This craft work was said to have been brought to Ilorin by the men of *Alimi* from old Oyo after it was sacked by the Fulani (17). This simply means that this occupation of pottery making was not popular before the sacking of old *Oyo* by the Fulani. It was hence forwarded that Ilorin became a leading producer of decorative pottery. Mining was also an important occupation of the people of Ilorin, although it could not stand the test of the time as it was stopped as a result of non-availability of the material. Speculation are rife that Ilorin once served and functional as a smelting center hence the name Ilorin. Other areas with similar names because of their previous position as smelting center are *agunrin*, *igunrin* and *iponrin* and *iporin*, a town of about forty (40) kilometers in the northern part of the town.(18) The significance of this speculation is that the town derived its name from the smelting activities of the people and not from a stone where *ojo-isekuse* used to sharpen his iron or because *oko-erin* is close to Ilorin as has been previously by the historians.(19).

As it has been noted before, smelting as occupation did not last long in Ilorin because of non-availability of material. But other occupations namely agriculture, weaving and pottery persistently remain with the people of Ilorin even up till today.

This, in a nutshell, was the position of Ilorin before the establishment of the emirate. We can see that the foundation of the town and existence of the religion of Islam in Ilorin are almost inseparable, at least, the references that had been

carried out all pointed to the same fact that in the pre-Fulani Ilorin there existed Islam at a place called *okesuna*. It is a pity the date of foundation of Ilorin is yet to be ascertained, otherwise one would have been guided as to the time of emergence of Islam in the town (20).

#### THE EMERGENCE OF ILORIN AS AN EMPIRE

The considering how Ilorin emerged as an emirate, we need to see, first and foremost, the growth of Islam in the town. The date of entrance of Islam in to Ilorin, like is the case with Yoruba land as a whole is a matter of speculation. One thing is clear, however and that is Islam has already been introduced to Ilorin before the arrival of an itinerant teacher and preacher, *Alimi* who settled down in Ilorin as a pious Muslim scholar of the nineteenth century. This fact manifests itself in our earlier discussion that a Yoruba chief in person of *Sholagberu* who salted in Ilorin was described as a powerful Muslim leader. He was said to have been a Muslim before the year 18172 before *Afonja*, the field marshal of Yoruba land declared Ilorin independent of Oyo Empire in the year 1824 during which *Alimi's* help was sought to maintain the independence of the town (21).

This, therefore, suggests that Islam might have penetrated into Ilorin from the then capital of Oyo Empire. *Oyo ile* which was about the closest city to Ilorin then. It is interesting to note that Islam was already spread in the Yoruba capital of *Oyo ile* very much earlier than the eighteenth century. Writing on the penetration of Islam in to the Yoruba land a contemporary historian gave the period of its penetration to be around seventh century.

It could be speculated that Islam might have come to Ilorin through some commercial activities of some Muslims who traded to Ilorin from *Oyo ile*.

The emergence of Ilorin as an emirate was not unconnected with the *Afonja's* revolt against his leadership, the *Alafin* of Oyo on one hand, and the expected wish of the people led by *Abdul-salam* the eldest son of *Alimi* who was the first emir of the town after he had been sent for by his father following the advice of *Afonja* to do so in order to have better dealings with the *jama'*(22).

For the purpose of adequate comprehension of how Ilorin became an emirate, it will be relevant at this juncture to shed light on the each of the three principal figures, namely: *Afonja*, the field marshal of the Yoruba land who revolved against Oyo empire and declared Ilorin independent; *al-salih*, an internet Muslim preacher and teacher who was popularly known as *Alimi* and *Abdulsalam*, his son, who first headed the emirate as an emir and on whose shoulder felt the tasks of consolidating the new emirate and *Sholagberu*.

#### AFONJA

The historical figure referred to as *Afonja* was described variously as a war general of the highest rank in Yoruba land. He was also referred to by some historians as the ruler of the Northern Yoruba. While some other historians described *Afonja* as a refugee who sought for an asylum and military as in Ilorin after he has rebelled against his overlord, the *Alafin* of Oyo Empire.

Soon after the arrival of *Afonja* in Ilorin he became popular amongst the inhabitants. He also became very powerful and other people from different places stated coming down to Ilorin. All the Hausa slaves in the adjacent towns higher to employ as bather, rope-makers, and cowherds, now deserted their masters and flocked to Ilorin under the standard of *Afonja*, the *kakanfo* and were protected.

As determined warriors, *Afonja* continued to seek for military and first from a Muslim leader called *sholagberu* and later from a Fulani itinerant preacher by name *Alimi* who was invited to Ilorin by *Afonja*. In addition he also determined for spiritual assistance from *Alimi* who was known to be a pious and dedicated Muslim. He used to pray very fervently for people at their request with the combination of *Sholagberu's* army and *Alimi's* followers, *Afonja* was able to sustain the threat to his person and the territory (23).

Thus the success of *Afonja's* rebellion could be attributed to this trio friendship which later buffered disintegration, as would be seen later, due to the religion- culture differences among them. *Ta'lif* related to us that *Afonja* invited *Alimi*, one day to pay him a visit which the later decided until the former removed all the idols from his (*Afonja's*) premises which *Afonja* agreed to do and, in fact, did when the invitation was honored, *Afonja* was said to have advice "*Alimi* to send for his children. He was reluctant to accept the suggestion but was later prevailed upon by *Afonja* and he, according sent for the children. The reason for *Afonja's* request might be due to his need for more solders or, probably, to provide a "better" and understanding leader for the Fulani.

With the arrival of *Alimi's* children, his already high-reputation stated to give him an edge over *Afonja*. This was clear through an unprecedented respect which the inhabitants of Ilorin accorded himself, as a brave warrior, to be worthy of the respect than anybody. It was too late when he discovered his mistake in encouraging the influx of Hausa and Fulani into Ilorin. He attempted to dislodge them and he was killed in a duel that ensued thereafter (24).

#### SHOLAGBERU

This Yoruba Muslim who had been a Muslim before the arrival of *Alimi* in Ilorin. He was said to have founded a place in Ilorin called *Okesuna*. But some authors seemed to disagree with this view since the foundation of the place is dated back to 1700A.D. The time of his conversation to Islam is not known. He was said to be a well to do Muslim trade. *Sholagberu* was said to have migrated from *Kuwo* to Ilorin. But whether his migration was in company of some other Muslim or not was not stated. All that could not be disputed about him is that on his arrival at Ilorin he gartered himself at a place called *Okesuna*.

*Sholagberu* gave an unflinching support to the struggle of *Afonja* to "emancipate himself from the *Alafin* of Oyo. Nobody knows why his support was so strong. However it could be speculated that probably the Muslims in Oyo empire capital did not find it esu under the leadership of ruling *Alafin*. Consequently *Sholagberu* considered *Afonja's* request for help as a timely opportunity. But this spirit of comradeship between *Afonja* and *Sholagberu* did not live long as *Sholagberu* gave *Afonja* his greatest shock by not supporting

him when fight for supremacy broke out between *Afonja* and the first emir of Ilorin, '*Abdul-Salami*. Although *Sholagberu* was not in league with '*Abdul Salami*, nonetheless he refused to fight for or against *Afonja* during the war of supremacy between him and '*Abdul-Salami* (25).

After the fall of *Afonja* in Ilorin the mantle of leadership fell within the hands of '*Abd-Salam* and things were going on between him and *Sholagberu* until, when it was all of a sudden, fight broke out between the two Muslim leaders, *Sholegberu* and *Abd-Salam*. The cause of the fight was not clearly stated in *Ta'Lif*. The author only said that it was when *Sholagberu* refused to pay a reciprocal visit to '*Abd-salami* after the Ilorin Muslim victory at a war in *Ikirun* that the fight broke out. This refusal of *Sholagberu* was not taken lightheartedly by '*Abd-salami*. It was regarded as a display of arrogance which should attract a commensurate punishment. The emir then matched against *Sholagberu* via his at *Okesuna* and in the year 1824 *Sholagberu* was killed.

After the death of *Sholagberu* Ilorin then assumed fully the status of an Islamic state. This led to some efforts made by some scholars and members of the ruling family to put an end to the worship of idols which was very rampant in certain area in the town. These efforts, however, did not materialized as expected because the idol worshippers who brought their various gods such as "*Ogun* the god of iron, *Shango* and the god of thunder etc. from the Yoruba land had already been absorbed completely into the practice and this led to the existence of some of them even up till now.(26)

*Sholagberu* helped *Afonja* greatly to see to the survival of the independence of Ilorin by erupting the enemies, the *Alafin* why *Sholagberu* did not extend similar help to *Afonja* when the fight ensued between him and '*Abdu-salami* was probably due to the fact that the two of them i.e *Abdu-salami* and *Sholagberu* were Muslim. So when *Sholagberu* was indifferent to the fight between *Afonja* and '*Abdu-salami*, the latter was able to subjugate the former with minimum efforts with this mind, one could say that *Sholagberu* was a fore runner of an Islamic state in Ilorin even though fate did not allow him to witness its emergence.

#### ALIMI

This is third principle figure who partook very actively in the event, the rebellion of *Afonja* that led to the evolution of Ilorin emirate. His other name is as *Salih* and he was said to have been sent by Sheikh *Uthman bn fodio* (1754-1817) as a flag bearer, to preach and propagate Islam to the people of southern Nigeria.

However, this assertion is untenable judging from *ta'lif* a narration that *Alimi* had visited places like *Ogbomosho* where he spent three months before he moved to *ikoyi* where he stayed one year. He was equally said to have spent three years in *kuwo* from where *Afonja* consequently sent from him. On *Alimi's* arrival at Ilorin, he was first accommodated at a place where the percent place of the emir is, by that time there was nothing like place there.

Secondly, that fact that he had spent over for year in different places and averted until he was invited to Ilorin is sufficient an evidence that he was not a flag bearer of *Uthman bn fodio* that was sent to Ilorin.

Before the arrival of '*Alimi*' at Ilorin, the town had four quarters namely:

- ✓ Fulani quarter: this was predominantly a Muslim area with *Olufadi* as their leader. This name may sound like a Yoruba names, it might be due to cross-culture influence, and this *Olufadi* was also mention as the leader of Fulani before "*Alimi*" arrival at Ilorin.
- ✓ Hausa quarter: this was also largely dominated and inhabited by Muslims; one *Bako* was the head of the community area.
- ✓ Yoruba Muslim quarter: this is also referred to as *Okesuna*, it was a famous place in Ilorin at that time its unrivalled spiritual progress. This leader of this unit was *Sholagberu*.
- ✓ Yoruba non-Muslim quarter: this accommodated nearly all non-Muslims in the town. Their first leader was said to be *Tella* and *Afonja's* genealogy was traced to him. Probably that was why it was being held in some quarters that *Afonja* was the leader of Ilorin or that the *Alafin* had made *Afonja* the governor of Ilorin before he rebelled against *Alafin*. In point of fact, there was no political head for the town until the first emir *Abdul-Salam* was turbaned.

After the success of *Afonja* and the sentiment of the people of Ilorin. The people wanted "*Alimi*" to ascend the throne as a ruler because of his piety and righteousness but "*Alimi*" declined the offer and preferred to live a sophistic life preaching and teaching Islam to the people of Ilorin. Since his children had been living with him before people of the town whose majority were muslims proclaimed "*Alimi's* elder son, '*Abd-salami* as the "*amir-l-mummin*, meaning the commander of the Islamic faithful."*Alimi* then retired to the mosque which he first built on his arrival at Ilorin at a place called *Ago* behind the emir's palace. These he remained till he died in the year 1823 A.D. The said mosque of "*Alimi*" is still one of the historical movements for Ilorin till today (27).

At very period when "*Abdul-Salami* emerged as the first emir of Ilorin, Sokoto caliphate, an islamically organized state in north western part of Ilorin had gained complete control of its immediate surrounds. Some other town which had been Islamized through Sokoto caliphate and were referred to as emirates with a leader to be called *amir'luminin*. The commander of the Islamic faithful.

'*Abdul-Salam* wrote to the emir of *Gwandu*, the capital of the second division of the *Sokoto* caliphate for recognition which would properly enable Ilorin to be protected by the caliphate army, when the reply came, Muhammad Bello the then emir of *Gwandu* was said to have recognized Ilorin as a protected emirate under the caliphate as Muhammad Bello also did recognize the emirs of *Bauchi* and other emirs.

'*Abdul-Salam* reign was peaceful throughout his twelve years tenure of throne. With the exception of an internal square between him and one *Balogun* Fulani, one *Hinakonu* in which he was victorious an event of remarkable importance took place in his period. Because over three quarter of the population of Ilorin was Muslims as shown in the previous discussion, he had no problem of either internal consolidation or military aggression (28).

After the death of Abdu-Salam, succession to the throne of the emir of Ilorin became hereditary and the following emirs in this under their own share.

1842	1860	Shita, the brother to "Abdul-Salam reigned for eighteen years
1860	1888	Zubairu, the son of Abdul-Salam
1888	1891	Sheu Aliyu
1891	1895	Momo who reigned for four years
1895	1915	Sulayman the son of Aliyu
1915	1919	Shuaibu Bawa, the son of Zubairu
1919	1959	Abdul-qadri, the sone of Shuaib Bawa
1959	1992	Zulukarnain Gambari Muhammadu
1992	1995	Malam Aliyu Abdulkadir
1995		Ibrahim zulukarnain Gambari

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In the prerecording of this paper, which we have shed light on the history of Ilorin, the spread of Islam in the town and how Islam is able to influence culture outlook of the Muslim there. The formation of Ilorin as has been satiated before is not completely accomplished by adherents of indigenous religions alone, for evidence has been adduced to the fact that Islam has been in Ilorin before the arrival of sheikh *Alimi* in the town. It should be recalled that there is handful of Muslim women and men at *Okesuna* even right before the revolt of the *Are Onakankafo* of Oyo Empire, *Afonja*, *Sholagberu* has been leading this Muslim community for a long time and this made it possible for him to mobilize enough army for *Afonja* to assist his war against the *Alafin*.

In addition, it has also been confirmed and this too has been stated above, that prior to the arrival of *Alimi* at Ilorin. A band of Hausa Fulani Muslims were already living there either

as traders or escapees. Very few of them were non-Muslim and they even embraced Islam in the hand of *Alimi* on his arrival at Ilorin. The above facts are significant in two ways. One, they showed that the town of Ilorin has been inebriated by Muslims before the arrival of *Alimi* in the town and, secondly, that it could be speculated that in the areas where we had Muslim communities in the town, Islam reigned supreme amongst them. This could be proved further by the fact that *Sholagberu*, the Muslim community leader for *Okesuna*, was *Tijaniyyah* which means that he, together with the community of which he was the leader, might have been absorbed in to the fold of Islam.

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