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EDUCATION AS A FACTOR HELPING THE SPREAD OF ISLAM

A very large proportion of the Quran is made of Educational instructions. This needs an elaborate presentation which cannot fit our short survey. The same is true of Islamic traditions. Suffice us to say that the main purpose of divine religions, according to the Quran, is educational purpose.¹ This is why due provision was made for educating and instructing the new converts. They had to learn at least some of the Quran, Islamic creed and ritual. The appointment of teachers and instructors started during the life time of the prophet and developed rapidly. Umar appointed teachers in every country into which Islam penetrated. The importance of education and religious instruction was so great that soon it became clear that it must be regarded as an independent responsibility. thus Education worked as an important factor in the spread of Islam.

Ruppell believes that in Abyssinia every Muhamadan had his sons taught to read and write, whereas Christian children were only educated when they intered for priesthood.²

Islam in Africa did not strengthen its roots until adopted education as an essential means of communication amongst the tribes. This was not an easy job in a continent with hardly any written language. But the hard efforts of Islam to educate Africans and make them contribute to civilization can be witnessed in the history of Islam in Africa. The oldest Islamic missionary activity in Africa, that of Qadiriyyah, initiated its work in educational activities. This can be noticed in the address made by a Shiekh of Qadiriyyah to the first organized missionatry groups in Africa soon after 1492.³ The religious centers in Islam have always been turned

into educational centers. Mosque, and Madrasa were usually used alternatively for religious or educational purpose. This is so even in Modern time.

Soon after Islam found a footing for itself in a country, usually the first thing the Muslims would do for it was to establish schools for the children of the new converts. This took place even in the areas where literacy and education was without any precedent. The establishment of schools was usually at the the same time as a mosque was built for the aboriginal tribes. This could be clearly traced in the history of the spread of Islam among the Chuvash tribes and villages in Russia and in various regions of Africa.⁴ The importance of Education in Islam is one of the main points that Emperor Shah Rukh Bahador from Taymur dynasty brought up in his letter of invitation to Islam sent to Emperor of China.⁵ This has been again emphasized in a different way; it was affirmed in an official Chinese document published by the Emperor Yun Chen in 1771.⁶

The first thing the Muslims did after conquering North Africa was to set centers for learning and appoint teachers to teach the natives.⁷ When Umar B. Abd Al-Aziz in Ahlan appointed Ismail b. Abdollah as governor of North Africa, ten learned theologians were sent with him to educate the natives and to teach them.⁸

Muslims set up educational centers even among the non-Muslim communities in Africa such as those in Kanka, Timbo and Musardu.⁹ Muslim missionaries usually formed educational duties and worked as public scribes, legists, writers of amulets and school-masters. Some of the oldest universities were established by Muslims in Africa such as Universities of Fez, Al-Azhar, Zaitona and such as centers of higher learning of Quraviyah or Tripoli. It has been stated that the influence of teacher over his pupils and educated over the laymen has been one of the factors contributing to the spread of Islam.¹⁰ Up to the middle of the nineteenth century most of the schools in the Sudan were founded and conducted by Muslims.¹¹ It is said that Tijaniya educational approach helped the spread of Islam in Africa.¹² Even the Muslim militant missionaries who have been associated with foreign interventions such as the followers of

Ahmado Samadu, who fought vigorously against French and was captured by them, never stopped using educational methods for the purpose of spreading Islam. They opened schools in the conquered towns and promoted education. 13 This is why the colonial powers found only Muslims educated, and suitable for administrative purposes. 14

It was the Muslims' entheosiastic attitude for education that made them the only educated community in Africa in the nineteenth century. 15 Muslim missionaries opened schools and carried educational schemes wherever they could in Africa. 16 Explaining the role of education in the spread of Islam on the whole, particularly in Africa we would suggest a comparioson between a Muslim African community and a non-Muslim one. It is better to quote here the observation made by a European modern traveller; in speaking of the degraded conditions of the tribes of the Lower Niger he says "In steaming up the river (i.e. the Niger), I saw little in the first 200miles to alter my views, for there luxuriated in congenial union fetishism, cannibalism, and the gin trade. But as I left behind me the low lying coast region, and found myself near the southern boundary of what is called the Central Sudan, I observed an ever-increasing improvement in the apprearance of the character of the natives. Cannibalism disappeared, fetishism followed in its wake, the gin trade largely disappeared, while on the other hand clothes became more voluminous and decent, cleanliness the rule, while their outward more dignified, bearing still further betokened a moral regeneration. Evrything indicated a leavening of some higher element, an element that was clearly taking a deep hold on the negro nature and making him a new man. That element you will perhaps be surprised to learn is Muhammadanism. 17 On passing Lokija the confluence to the Benue with the Niger, I left behind me the missionary outposts of Islam, and entering the Central Sudan, I found myself in a comparatively well-governed empire, teeming with a busy populace of keen traders and export manufacturers of cloths brass work and leather; a people, in fact, who have made enormous advances towards civilization. 18 The importance of education both in Muslim life and as a means

to spread Islam can be noticed in a petition for the dissolution of the Sierra Leon Company, ordered to be printed by the House of Common in G.B., on the 25th of May, 1802. There are quite a few points of interest in this petition, but education and civilization is of immediate interest to us. It says "As is the practice of the professors to the religion (of Islam) they formed schools.....Laws founded on the Quran were introduced and in spite of many intestine convulsions, a great comparative degree of civilization, union and security were introduced. Those who have been taught in their schools are succeeding in wealth and power... and carry with them a considerable portion of their religion and Laws. Other chiefs are adopting the names assumed by these Muhammadans, on account of the respect which attends it and Islam....is carrying with it those advantages which seem ever to have attended its victory over Negro superstition. 19

The attention that the Muslims paid to education, civilization and culture made the merchants and the officials and Europeans, who went to Africa for colonial purpose, respect only the Muslims: the negro men who came to the cities saw that although Muslims are not so far removed from him in race, appearance and dress, they are still respected by others. They therefore entered the Islamic Brotherhood which in turn offered them the same respect and privileges. 20 The European administration selected its officials from among Muslims section of the population. The teachers of the state 21 merchants and trademen, usually made up the Muslim population who used their respect and influence to spread Islam.22. The acceptance of Islam in East Africa as elsewhere was looked upon as a sign of an elevation to a higher civilization and social status. Usually the first groups of officials were recruited from among the Muslim population after the establishment of law and order in countries with Muslims population. 23

The Muslim teachers and religious leaders were held in the highest estimation in some parts of Africa as well as other parts of Islamic and semi-Islamic territories: e.g. in some tribes of Western Africa, in Darfur, among the Mandingos they always ranked as the highest people; in some cases only lower than chiefs, kings

and princes. 24 This would naturally make ordinary people envy them and they would therefore be the subject of their spiritual influence. Muslim teachers, schoolmasters and learned men did not enjoy such a great respect only in Muslim countries, but also in the pagan villages and districts where Muslims established schools the people respected them as the instructors of their children, and looked upon them as the people who could help them physically and mentally. 25 In the areas where Muslims and pagans lived together, the schools established by Muslims were attended by both the pagan as well as Muslim children. These children learned the doctrines and the teachings of Islam and grew Muslims. 26

It is true that the first groups of schools established by Muslims in Africa were of primary type and mainly for teaching the Quran and Islamic doctrines, but it should be remembered that even if elementary schools like those discribed by Mungo Park a century ago only taught their scholars to learn The Quran, they were worth something in themselves and were a step to much more. It was this kind of Education that produced great scholars in the history of Islamic education such as Al-Farabi, AVecina, Hr-azi and so on. It was the learning of The Quran which led to the learning of Arabic; the language in which Islamic scriptures are always written. It is an extraordinarily beautiful and copious language. As it has been pointed out, once learned it becomes a lingua franca to the Muslims all over the world, to the tribes of half the African continent and servrs as an introduction to literature, or rather, it is a literature in itself. It substitutes moreover a written code of law. 27 It is a language of trade and commerce, an Islamic international language and used to be the language of science, philosophy, politics, history, civilization, culture and intellectual stand.

Education was not used only for men to make them more educated, sophisticated and more civilized or to prepare them to accept Islam, but also girls and women were educated : the Senu-siyyah who came to work among the Tuba, to the North of Lake Chad, opened schools for girls. 28 It is said that the Tatar women of Kazan were zealous propayandists of Islam because of their high educational background. 29 The educated devotee would never

be debarred from any legal activities on the ground of being a women
Some of the most respected personalities in Islam are women of
education and piety.

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Foot Notes

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4 - Erauslanou, p. 1. 2, 31,13; Islam and Mission, p. 257 (p. 1. p. 254). 5 - Abdo
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p. 154-6 (p. 1. p. 307). 7 - Mazari, vol, 1, p. 253. 8 - Arnold, p. 1. p. 317.
9 - Bonet - Maury. p. 239. 10 - Arnold. p. 1. p. 332. 11 - Ibid., p. 311.
12 - Ibid p. 322. 13 - Ibid., p. 335. 14 - Ibid. p. 336. 15 - Ibid., p. 336.
16 - Ibid., p. 338. 17 - Joseph Thomson(2) p. 185. 18 - Ibid, (2) p. 185.
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24 - Ibid. p. 357. 25 - D. J. East, pp. 112-3; Blyden, p. 202. 26 - Arnold.
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415. 29 - Rdu M. M., IX (1909) p. 252.