A Critical Evaluation of the Arabic and Islamic Historical Scholarship: A Study on Adam Abdullah Al-Iluriyy

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Abstract: Shaykh Adam Abdullah al-Iluriyy is a leading Nigerian Arabic writer who wrote several books on various subjects. Yet he is known more as a historian because his works on history are more than his contribution to any other area. However, there has not been a critical evaluation of his historical scholarship. The purpose of this paper is therefore to evaluate the major works of al-Iluriyy in the area of history. The paper identifies for critical evaluation only five of his numerous works namely al-Islam fi Nayjiriya, Nasim al-Saba, Lamhat al-Bilawr, Mujaz Tarikh Nayjiriya and al-Dirasat al-Adabiyya fi al-Diyari al-Nayjiriyya which represent the entirety of his historical scholarship. The paper employs both the historical and philosophical methods and exposes both the strengths and weaknesses of such works for better appreciation. The paper’s contribution lies in its potential fulfillment of the long-felt need for a critical evaluation of al-Iluriyy’s works on history.

Key words: Historical Scholarship • Arabic Writings • Islamic History • Yoruba Muslim Scholars • Local History • Critical Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

Shaykh Adam Abdullah Al-Iluriyy, a 1989 winner of the Egyptian Medal in Arts and Sciences, was an eminent Yoruba Muslim scholar and writer. Born in the City of Wasa in 1917 to a father of Ilorin origin and a mother from Borgu in Segu, young al-Iluriyy studied the rudiments of the Quran under his father who later returned with him to Yorubaland in 1930 and handed him over to Shaykh Salih Esiniobiwa of Ibadan in 1934, for further Arabic, Islamic education [1]. It is noteworthy that this scholar was the first teacher to whom al-Iluriyy ever pupilled after his father. Having studied several books and subjects, al-Iluriyy decided to leave Ibadan for Lagos in 1937 with kind permission from his teacher, Salih who connected him with another teacher for further education, Shaykh Umar who incidentally was a paternal younger brother to the former. And so did al-Iluriyy pupil to two teachers from the same family. Interestingly, these two scholars were the only notable Yoruba teachers at the feet of whom al-Iluriyy studied Islam and Arabic, for almost ten years.

It is of great value to note from the onset that al-Iluriyy himself attested somewhat to the greatness of the two teachers when he confessed that before meeting the two of them, he passed through many Islamic teachers but could neither study under them nor benefit anything from them [2]. It follows in simple logic that the implication of this is that the earlier teachers could not offer him the kind of enormous knowledge and enlightenment that he benefited from his two later teachers. His claim in this regard becomes credible when considered against the backdrop of the specific subjects and books he studied under the two aforementioned teachers. It is not out of place to enumerate some of those subjects and books, at this juncture.

From 1934 to 1939, al-Iluriyy stood at the feet of Shaykh Salih where he was taught such Arabic books as Khamsuna Farida, al-Mawaiz al-Baligha, al-Mukhtasar al-Akhdhari, Matnu al-Ashmawiyya, Banat Su ad, al-Burda, al-Hamziyyah, Mafatih al-I rab, Zaynabiyya and various aspects of Surat Yasin. He was also taught other books such as Al-Ishriyya, Tuhfat al-Mawdudi, Muqaddima al-Izziyya, Lamiyat al-Af al, Maqsura ibn Durayd and others [3]. All these and other subjects and works of great importance were taught to Shaykh Adam during his studentship in Ibadan. By the time he moved to Lagos for further education under the younger brother of Shaykh Salih, generally known as Alfa Umar, he was.
exposed to and taught such works as *La tarkanan, Majatih al-Af al, Lamiat ibn al-Wardi, Miftah al-Lugat al-Arabiyya* and *al-Ajirumiyya* [2]. He also studied the remainder of *al-Ishriyya, al-Muta allim, Matn al-Risala*, as well as the exegesis of *Surat al-Baqara* [2]. All these constitute the most significant segments of the early education of al-Iluriyy who only met Shaykh Adam Namaji of Kano for further education in 1941 and later visited al-Azhar in Cairo, in 1946 before founding his Markaz in 1952.

Al-Iluriyy wrote many books to compete with the sand of the seashore [6, 7]. Yet his works in the area of History seem to have gained more prominence than other works by him. However, until recent efforts by Reichmuth and Razaq Abubakre, [8, 9] no detailed critique, scholarly review or systematic evaluation of any of his works on History, has been attempted. The scholarly appraisal of al-Iluriyy’s reformist ideas by John Hunwick, though of great value, only focuses on al-Iluriyy’s contributions to the promotion of neo-hanbalism and hardly addresses his Islamic historical scholarship [10]. Nonetheless, it cannot be gainsaid that al-Iluriyy contributed immensely to historical scholarship which is why his works in that regard deserve being subjected to critical and illuminating evaluation with a view to identifying their strengths and weaknesses. Such a critique, review or evaluation will probably fulfill the long felt need for a scholarly sequel to al-Iluriyy’s historical scholarship which most of those who have written about him [11, 12, 13] incidentally have failed to provide. Such writers have, instead, assailed their readers with celebrative and grossly uninterrogative works on al-Iluriyy whose works they uncritically present as the best thing that has ever happened to mankind!

The purpose of the present paper therefore is to evaluate the major works of al-Iluriyy on the history of Islam and Islamic scholars and scholarship in Yorubaland. Only five of his numerous works, as noted earlier, are worthy of mention in this regard namely *al-Islam fi Nayjiriya,* [3] *Nasim al-Saba,* [4] *Lamhat al-Billaw,* [6] *Mujaz Tarihk Nayjiriya,* [1] and *al-Dirasat al-Adabiyya fi al-Diyar al-Nayjiriyyah* [5]. These five, alongside his *Asl Qabail Yuruba* [14] and *al-Islam al-yawma wa ghadan fi Nayjiriya,* [7] represent the entirety of al-Iluriyy’s scholarship in the area of history. The five have been selected for evaluation, with a deliberate exception of *Asl Qabail Yuruba* which is merely a petty and insignificant write-up, whose subject is not of direct and immediate relevance to the core of al-Iluriyy’s historical scholarship, as well as of *Al-Islam al-yawma waghadan fi Nayjiriya* which is more of a discourse on various contemporary Islamic issues of national interest, than a work of history. It is pertinent at this juncture to provide an overview of each of the book with a view to evaluating their strengths and weaknesses thereafter.

**Al-Islam Fi Nayjiriya:** This is al-Iluriyy’s first major publication on history. It was first published by Abd al-Hamid Ahmad Hanafi Press in Cairo, Egypt in 1950. The book, which is of medium size, runs into 62 pages and contains a foreword by Shaykh Uthman Umar Al-Fulani. Topics covered in the first edition include the definition of Nigeria, Islam in Africa, Nigeria-Muslim World Relations, Islamic scholars of Nigerian origin, Arabic Literature in Nigeria, ‘Uthman Dan Fodio and his Jihad, Shaykh Alimi and Islam in Yorubaland, Islamic organizations and schools in Nigeria, some of the Islamic scholars of Yorubaland, among others. The second edition, which runs into 186 pages, was published in Cairo, Egypt in 1971, with a significant improvement upon the first. The additional information contained in the second edition includes the history of Islam in various empires of West Africa and the spread of Islam to various parts of Nigeria as well as notable Muslim personalities and others.

**Mujaz Tarihk Nayjiriya:** This is yet another work of history by al-Iluriyy. It runs into 174 pages and was published by Daru Maktabat wa al-Hayat in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1965. The work focuses fully on the cultural history of Nigeria, thereby marking a departure from *Al-Islam fi Nayjiriya* which is a work of Islamic history in Nigeria. Apart from giving a comprehensive historical account on every major city of Nigeria, the work, also discusses trade, education, culture, civilization, politics, literature and demography, all within the framework of history.

**Nasim Al-saba Fi Akhbar Al-islam Wa Ulamai Biladi Yuruba:** This book was first published in 1986, in Cairo. The focus of the work is the history of Islam and Islamic scholars among the Yorubas. The second edition was published in 1987 and contains improved versions of the various issues addressed in the first edition such as the Foundations of History, Sources of History among the Modern Europeans, the Origin of Canibalism and the Future of Islam in Yorubaland. It is noticeable from the
work that it was intended to be a comprehensive historical account on Islam and Muslim personalities especially Islamic scholars in the various cities and townships of Yorubaland. In other words, this work seeks to provide on Yorubaland the same historical information which Al-Islam fi Naijiriya provides on Hausaland and other parts of northern Nigeria.

**Lamhat Al-Billawr Fi Mashahiri Ulamai Ilurin:**
This is yet another historical work of great value by al-Iluriyy. It is barely 90 pages and was published in 1981. It covers appreciably the history of Islam and Islamic scholars of Ilorin from 1800 to 1980. Topics covered in the work include the advent of Western education in Nigeria, Shaykh Alimi, the Islamic Scholars of Oke Suna and the Classes and Classifications of Islamic Scholars in Ilorin.

**Misbah Al-dirasat Al-adabiyya Fi Al-diyr Al-Nayjiriyya:**
This is a work on intellectual history published locally by al-Iluriyy in 1968. Its primary focus is Arabic Literature in Nigeria. After discussing briefly the three genres of Arabic Literature namely Speaking, Creative Writing and Poetry, the work classifies the literary period in Nigeria into five namely the Borno Period, the Wanghari Period, the Maghili Period, the Fulani Period and the English Period. It contains a wide range of valuable materials on the literature of Nigeria.

**Critical Evaluation:** It must be pointed out for the record that what is probably unique about al-Iluriyy is that he was able to do more than any Nigerian Muslim scholar in documenting in Arabic the history of Islam and Islamic scholarship in Southwestern Nigeria, alongside his other significant contributions to other areas of Arabic scholarship on the country. The present evaluation employs the analytic philosophy method and relies on a large body of literature on Yorubaland (which is the country located in the present Southwestern part of Nigeria) to provide a theoretical framework and checks. Yet the present work relies on al-Iluriyy’s five selected works as evidential illustrations of a handful of history-related accuracies as well as fallacies committed by the great scholar. Such an approach is intended to carefully appreciate, celebrate and promote those works as well as stimulate further study of the historical scholarship of their author. The works in question are critically evaluated in the following section.

As regards Al-Islam fi Najiriyya, it, in both its first and subsequent editions, is more of a history of Islam in northern Nigeria than of it in the entire country. This view is a product of the observation that the historical facts and figures provided by the author on Hausa/Fulani scholars far outweigh what he makes available on their Yoruba or southern Nigerian counterparts. The author, too, may not totally be oblivious of this obvious lopsidedness as he added “wa al-Shaykh Uthman bn Fodiye” meaning “And Shaykh Uthman dan Fodio” to the title, thereby suggesting a focus on the distinguished Fulani scholar and his forebears and offspring as well as others from their world. Notwithstanding, Al-Islam fi Najiriyya is, in many respect, a fulfillment of the hitherto long-felt need for a good Arabic work on Islam in Nigeria and al-Iluriyy should take some credit for that.

Concerning Mujaz Tarikh Nayjiriya, it falls short of being a work of socio-cultural history as it ventures in many cases into Islamic history by repeating some of the information contained in Al-Islam fi Najiriyya. Instances of this include such topics as Islam in Katsina (p. 79), Islam in Kano (p.82), West African empires (p. 150), The Almoravid Movement (p.153), Mali Empire (p. 154), Songhai Empire (p. 156), Kanem Borno Empire (p. 158), Hausa Emirate (p. 159) and the Oyo Empire (p.159) all of which are discussed in both the first and second editions of al-Islam fi Najiriyya and also revisited, though with some addition, in Mujaz Tarikh Nayjiriya. Notwithstanding, Mujaz Tarikh Nayjiriya is in many respect a veritable mine of information on the history of Nigeria for scholars and general readers of Arabic.

Yet, Nasim al-Saba, on its own is in many regards an echo of the information given on Islam in Yorubaland in Mujaz Tarikh Nayjiriya. Such a duplication may not be regarded as a weakness or deficiency given that it is hardly possible to divorce society and culture from religion be it Islam, Christianity or Traditional Religion, especially in the African setting. In other words, this perceived deficiency is invariably another source of strength for this great work by al-Iluriyy.

The strength of Lamhat al-billawr which is barely 90 pages lies in the fact that the author provides some excerpts from the works of the various Islamic scholars whose life stories he discussed in the work. Such excerpts are mostly poems which speak volumes about the intellectual prowess of their composers. Again, it is not out of place to describe the work as having fulfilled on the history of Ilorin the same role as that fulfilled by Nasim al-
Saba on the history of Yorubaland. However, an obvious weakness of the work is its failure to cover some of the major historical events of the 1970s, concerning notable Islamic scholars of Ilorin origin. Prominent among such experiences as having been eluded by the work are the exploits of Shaykh Arazim Ali Alaya in Da‘wa, the adventures of Shaykh Murtadha Yahya in teaching and preaching and the accomplishments of Dr. Ali Ajetunmobi in Islamic scholarship. Each of these notable ulama of Ilorin origin had already attained eminence in the 1970s and had even reached the zenith of his glory in his chosen area of operation during the early years of 1980s that the book was published. Accordingly, it is not out of place for one to expect that a mention would be made or some information would be provided in an Arabic work of history which focused on Ilorin and was published in the 1980s.

It is interesting to note that Misbah al-Dirasat al-Adabiyya, on its own, marks a total departure from other historical works by al-Illuriyy in that it is a historical account of the literary works by those historical personalities whose life stories are studied in the other works by him. However, though of great importance, the work is merely a highlight of names and works without much analysis of their implications, relevance or significance. A panoramic look at the historical scholarship of al-Illuriyy is pertinent at this juncture in order to give specific details of its worth and value.

Like Shaykh Ahmad Ikokoro in his Akhbar al-Qurun, as noted by Danmole and Falola [15], al-Illuriyy stated his reasons for writing his works of history. Such reasons as stated by him save his readers the rigour of wandering and meandering in a bid to imagine what could have stimulated his interest in history. One of those reasons was that his father had special interest in history from which he was accustomed to drawing lessons and illustrations during conflict resolution or dispute settlement: young al-Illuriyy witnessed all that and consequently developed interest in history. Another reason given by him was that his reference to stories of the prophets and the righteous during public lectures and Ramadan programmes stimulated his wander-lust for history. Yet another reason given by him was that when he went on Hajj in 1946 most of the scholars he met from Egypt, Sudan and other parts of the Arab World asked him questions concerning the population of Nigeria, the percentage of Muslims in the country, as well as information about Muslim scholars, their schools and ideological persuasions. Accordingly, he took it upon himself to write the history of Islam in Nigeria in 1948 and had it published in 1950. His fourth reason was the influence of his historian teacher, Adam Namaji from whose works on history he gained much inspiration [4].

However, it behoves a critical mind to ask why al-Illuriyy failed to state these reasons in his al-Islam fi Nayjiriya which, according to him was a product of the four factors especially his encounter with those inquisitive Arab scholars whom he met on his way to Hajj. It is in fact of great importance to ask why the learned Shaykh waited for exactly four decades before stating in his Nasim al-Saba which he only published in 1986, the factors, especially his hajj experience of 1946, which prompted him to write al-Islam fi Nayjiriya in 1948 and publish it in 1950. More interesting than all that was that al-Illuriyy in his al-Islam fi Nayjiriya in 1950 only attributed his venture into the study of history to the dearth of reliable works of history by West African Muslim scholars as well as to the subjective nature of the available English sources [3]. His first ever mention of the hajj-related reason in connection with the book published in 1950 was not earlier than 1965 when he disclosed it in the preface to his Mujaz Tarikh Nayjiriya. Ironically that important reason was again eluded in the second edition of Al-Islam fi Nayjiriya which appeared in 1979. Similarly was it somewhat eluded in the first edition of Nasim al-Saba in 1987 as al-Illuriyy stated it for the second time and the other three reasons for the first time only in the second edition of Nasim al-Saba in 1988.

In a similar token, al-Illuriyy stated that he derived historical facts from six sources namely works by Shaykh Uthman Dan Fodio and some of his children, works by Shaykh Adam Namaji, works on Modern Geography by Arab travellers, works on ancient World History, English works on West African History and personal interviews with elders and Muslim scholars in every township [4]. There indeed are clear indications that al-Illuriyy truly consulted many of the written sources mentioned by him in this connection. However there is no indication whatsoever to the effect that he gathered substantial or reliable information from credible informants. For instance, there is no clear-cut reference by him in any of the five works under review, to any informant from whom he collected oral data from those towns studied by him. This infant is uncharacteristic of historical documentation among traditional historians of al-Illuriyy’s time. For instance, Danmole and Falola observe that Samuel Ojo
Bada, in his *Documentation of Ilorin*, “did some work before embarking on his study of Ilorin” [15]. Collecting oral data from as many towns as possible, Ojo provided the list of his informants with details. Yet his critics suspect that “he probably collected oral materials from a much wider spectrum of people than he listed, as he occasionally refers to what some nameless people told him” [15]. It is paradoxical that while Ojo acknowledges his informants and only “occasionally refers to some nameless people” [15], al-Iluriyy does not acknowledge any traceable informant as his sources of oral data are characteristically nameless in all the five works.

The five works under searchlight have somewhat confirmed, as will be demonstrated in this evaluation, that the history of Islam and Islamic scholarship in Yorubaland as written by al-Iluriyy, like the history of Africa as presented by numerous prejudiced and highly insensitive chroniclers, is characterized by unreliable information, incredible claims and inconsistent positions.

For instance, al-Iluriyy asserts in *Nasim al-Saba* that Harun of Ibadan was “the greatest Shaykh of Yorubaland” [4] and also maintains in the same work that Shaykh Ahmad Shaki was “the greatest Shaykh of Yorubaland” [4]. Similarly, he describes Shaykh Ahmad Rufai of Ibadan, in the same work as “the greatest Shaykh of his time in Arabic and Islamic scholarship” [4], all to turn round again and describe Shaykh Ahmad of Shaki as “the greatest in scholarship” [4], notwithstanding that the two of them were contemporaries and even friends. Now the question: who really was the greatest Shaykh of Yorubaland, in the first instance and who really was the greatest in scholarship among the scholars of his time in the second instance?

This is a case of historical exactitude and is just one of the numerous examples of historians’ fallacies contained in al-Iluriyy’s works. There indeed are several cases of fallacies in his works. For instance, the above stated example from al-Iluriyy’s works belongs to the family of fallacies of generalization and is known as the fallacy of the lonely fact. The heart of the matter in this regard is that al-Iluriyy sees as “the greatest scholar of his time” each of the aforementioned scholars who all lived in the same period. Two salient questions deserve attention at this juncture. One, how does every man in a group of three become the best thereby “the greatest scholar” alongside “two other greatest scholars? Two, how does a writer’s knowledge of a single scholar or a group of three scholars put him in a good stead to see him or them as “the best” of all scholars in a particular time, some or most of whom he may not know and most of whose scholarship he may not be familiar with?

This fallacy of the lonely fact is a careless generalization from a single case. In his “Historians’ fallacies” Fischer [18], tells, in this connection, of “a scientist who published an astonishing and improbable generalization about the behaviour of rats. An incredulous colleague came to his laboratory and politely asked to see the records of the experiments on which the generalization was based. “Here they are,” said the scientist, dragging a notebook from a pile of papers on his desk. And pointing to a cage in the corner, he added, “There’s the rat.”

Fischer observes that there are many astonishing and importable generalizations in historical scholarship in which the critical reader will smell a singular rat. al-Iluriyy’s case in this regard obviously is one of casting all his findings on Yoruba scholars of a particular time, in one single narrative, thereby seeing all the scholars through the lenses which he zoomed at times unto Shaykh Ahmad Shaki and on Shaykh Ahmad Rufai at other times. There infact is an urgent need for a new generation of Arabic writers with interest in historical scholarship to revisit for critical examination such practice of generalizing upon Yoruba Islamic scholars, from just one or two cases, as characteristic of al-Iluriyy who sees Ahmad Rufai as greater than Ahmad Shaki and later turns round to insist that Ahmad Shaki is greater than Ahmad Rufai, without necessarily availing himself of the use of the rigorous critical approach of the analytic philosophy which is available to historical scholarship. However, it should be pointed out that it may not be in fairness to al-Iluriyy to expect of him a sophisticated performance in this regard to the application of modern historical research methods. The reason for such a consideration is that al-Iluriyy is of traditional orientation in his scholarship while the methods in question are of modern scholarship to which al-Iluriyy is alien. This may constitute a good rationale to exonerate him of most of the charges and criticisms stated against his historical scholarship in the present work, especially those contained in the following section.

**An Assessment of Al-Iluriyy’s Degree of Consistency:**
Closely related to the case instanced in the foregoing is al-Iluriyy’s inconsistency in his views on Shaykh Alimi. For instance, he writes in his *Al-Islam fi Nayjiriya* what may be rendered into English, as follows:
Among the associates of Shaykh Uthman Dan Fodio was a righteous Fulani man from Sokoto, named Salih, Muhammad bn Junta but generally known as “Alimi” a title by which Shaykh Dan Fodio was accustomed to calling him. The Shaykh later counseled him to travel south of the Niger where lay his success in Islamic work...[3].

However, al-Iluriyy deflated his own view by taking a contrary position in his Nasim al-Saba where he identifies as part of the wrong impression created about Shaykh Alimi the thinking that:

He came from Sokoto on the order of his teacher Shaykh ‘Uthman Dan Fodio or Shaykh Abdullah bn Fodio who asked him to travel down to Yorubaland [4].

It is unfortunate that al-Iluriyy, in the last illustration, could not determine whether it was Uthman Dan Fodio or Abdullah Dan Fodio that was Alimi’s teacher who enjoined him to come down south, whereas infact al-Iluriyy had earlier attributed the idea to Uthman Dan Fodio. It is more unfortunate that al-Iluriyy, again, contradicted these two opposing positions of his when, in the same book (i.e Nasim al-Saba) he writes:

It is inaccurate to say that Shaykh Salih originated from Sokoto, for it is on record that Sokoto which only became known in 1809 was hitherto a jungle. Muhammad Bello was who built Sokoto in 1815 and his father, Uthman, moved there to only in 1817. How can it be logical that Shaykh Alimi originated from Sokoto whereas he arrived Yorubaland before Sokoto was known? [34].

Three contradictory positions! One, “Alimi, an associate of Shaykh Uthman, came from Sokoto”! Two, “Alimi, a student of either Uthman or Abdullah, came from Sokoto”! Three, “it is historically fallacious to say that Alimi came from Sokoto”! It is obvious that factors or reasons for such inconsistency and continued shift of the pendulum of opinions and positions in the historical scholarship of al-Iluriyy, especially in the same work, deserve some attention from new generation of Arabic and historical scholars and researchers. Again, those contradictory views are further contradicted by al-Iluriyy himself when he, again, writes in Nasim al-Saba:

It is historically baseless to say that Shaykh Alimi was among the students of Shaykh Uthman or Abdullah Dan Fodio, for his name is not mentioned in any of their works nor in the works of Muhammad Bello or Wazir Ghattat. Even when Ahmadu Bello, who was a grandchild of Uthman Dan Fodio compiled a list of those who were trained and directed by his grandfather and did not know of Shaykh Salih, he resorted to referring to him as “Abdul-Alim” and has since not been corrected or contradicted by any scholar or writer from Sokoto and Gando. Had Shaykh Alimibeen known among the students of either of them, his name and history would not have been missing in their works, as they normally link their history with the history of Abdus-Salam and his successors... [4].

It behoves a critical mind to ask how Shaykh Alimi suddenly lost his high consideration in the estimation of al-Iluriyy who turns round to posit that Shaykh Alimi was not known to Shaykh Uthman Dan Fodio, after opining that it was Shaykh Uthman himself who nicknamed him Alimi. More interesting than all that was al-Iluriyy’s statement in the Nasim al-Saba that:

….The scholars based in Oke Suna in Ilorin pupilled to Shaykh Alimi and were those who nicknamed him Alimi, for they learnt Fiqh and a half of Tafsir al-Jalalayn, under him. [4].

However, al-Iluriyy states in the same book (i.e. Nasim al-Saba) that Shaykh Alimi was not a teacher of students but merely a Shaykh to sufi novices. He writes:

Shaykh Alimi….never left behind any notable student...What he had were (not students but merely) servants and associates and people were merely submissive to him in view of his status as a sufi saint or as characteristic of novices in relating with their Shaykh [4].

Conversely, al-Iluriyy paints a different picture about Shaykh Alimi when, again, in his Nasim al-Saba he relies on Ahmad Ikokoro’s Akhbar al-Qurun [20] to say that:

...No single scholar has been described in history as a student of Shaykh Alimi. He was merely a preacher who relied on an interpreter, Olufodi in making his
lectures understandable to his audience. If a man had relied on a local interpreter to make himself understood by his audience, in what language, then, was such a man teaching his students, as being claimed today by his grandchildren who see him as responsible for teaching all the people, the Quran and Sunna? What is the basis of such a claim? [4].

It is unfortunate that al-Iluriyy declares that Shaykh Alimi was a teacher and then proceeds to affirm that he was not a teacher. All these are problem areas that should be subjected to searchlight by new generation of Arabic and Islamic scholars and writers.

It should be noted that it is not the gross inconsistency that characterizes al-Iluriyy’s works in this connection that should be of greatest concern to a meticulous reader or critical researcher; it is rather al-Iluriyy’s failure to disclose the sources on which he relies in such contradictory positions. Such a failure infect gives out his views as essentially whimsical and grossly unfounded. That explains why it is pertinent to discuss at this juncture his treatment of his sources.

Al-iluriyy’s Treatment of His Sources: Of great interest is the fact that by the time al-Iluriyy returned from hajj where he was purportedly asked the questions which propelled him to write the history of his people, Samuel Johnson’s The History of the Yorubas [21] had been three decades old having been published in Lagos for the first time in 1921. Yet al-Iluriyy’s first ever reference to that highly authoritative work of History was in his Mujaz Tarikh Nayjiriya which was only published in Beirut in 1965. Even at that, his reference to the work is merely allusive and totally bereft of any critical illustration. Again, one wonders why such an important reference is eluded in both the first and the second editions of al-Iluriyy’s al-Islam fi Nayjiriya published in 1950 and 1971 respectively. The heart of the matter in this regard is that, that important source of Yoruba History is missing even where al-Iluriyy discusses Yoruba history and is expected to derive significant data from such a work.

Similarly, al-Iluriyy also fails to make any reference whatsoever to Elphinstone’s The Gazetters of Ilorin Province [19] which like Johnson’s History was published in 1921 and is a major source of information on several aspects of the subject addressed by al-Iluriyy. However, he does not fail to mention an equally important work on Ilorin which is Hermon Hodge’s The Gazetters of Ilorin Province [19] published in 1929. The only unfortunate aspect of his reference to this work is that he erroneously identifies its year of publication as 1922 whereas it was 1929. This is evident in al-Iluriyy’s Nasim al-Saba [4] in which he, for the first time in his historical writing career, relies heavily on Johnson’s History the date of whose publication he, again incorrectly states as 1897 instead of 1921 [4].

A clear evidence that Johnson’s History was not published in 1897, as claimed by al-Iluriyy, is provided by Danmole and Fashola who write:

In 1918, when Ojo began to collect his materials, the two gazetters of Ilorin had not been compiled. Even Johnson’s History was probably still with the publishers [15].

If Johnson’s History was still with the publishers as at 1918, it is simply illogical to claim that it had been published more than two decades earlier as suggested by al-Iluriyy? This obviously is a case of historical inexactitude.

It is not out of place to ask why even Ojo’s Short History of Ilorin [22] is not mentioned among al-Iluriyy’s sources on Ilorin. Unlike al-Iluriyy, Ojo, whose work on Ilorin appeared almost three decades before a fellow traditional historian, al-Iluriyy began to contribute significantly on the history of Ilorin, relies appreciably on written sources alongside personal contacts for oral data. “His efforts in this direction took him to the Residents of Ilorin, H.B Hermon Hodge and F. de F. Daimels, who assisted him with books. It is not surprising then to find in Ojo’s History references to Hermon-Hodge, Clapperton, Lander and Alhister Macmillan’s Red Book of West Africa” [15]. There is no gainsaying that the use of relevant and authoritative sources by a historical researcher enriches the outcome of his historical narrative just in the same manner that his failure to use sources that matter expectedly affects the quality of his historical narrative. The various works by al-Iluriyy that are currently under review bear a clear testimony to this opinion.

However, al-Iluriyy subscribes to Hermon-Hodges’ position on the relationship between Ojo Isekuse and Ela [4] who were among the earliest residents of Ilorin, even though he neither attributes the idea to Hermon-Hodge, its originator, nor to Ojo Bada who subsequently popularized it in his work on Ilorin. Nonetheless, Ahmad
Ikokoro’s *Talif Akhbar al-qurun* [20] and Samuel Johnson’s *History* [21] are two of al-Iluriyy’s sources that received their deserved attention in his later works on History. That explains why there is hardly a significant or critical departure in al-Iluriyy’s works from the two sources, although there are several unsuccessful attempts by him at casting an evaluative look at some of the positions taken differently by the two authors. However, while he acknowledges Johnson by citing him albeit inaccurately, he attributes to what he calls “an ancient local source in Ilorin” pieces of historical information of which Ojo is the author having stated or disclosed them before any writer or historian. Instances of this are numerous in his *Nasim al-Saba* [4].

Al-Iluriyy’s works on History have a common denominator that is worthy of mention. He is accustomed to mentioning the phrase “the correct history is” without necessarily showing his line of historical analysis. An instance of this is contained in his view on the title of Aare Ona Kakanfo [4]. At another time, al-Iluriyy will claim to have taken a position based on divine inspiration or esoteric knowledge and one wonders whether such could be regarded as sources of historical data. Although, he also identifies oral (though undisclosed) sources and deductive inferences as his bases, the unsystematic nature of his approach to them gives away his claim as lacking creditability [4]. Yet, it is noteworthy that al-Iluriyy has such a claim to divine inspiration in historical research, scholarship, or data, in common with the author of *Talif* who, according to Danmole believed that his achievement in historical scholarship is a blessing from God and even writes:

> And you the reader should know that as to the factual evidence in this compilation, I have not followed anyone’s example (in writing it), nor have I heard of anyone before me (composing) anything resembling this compilation in this town or ours [16].

As heavily as al-Iluriyy relies on *Talif Akhbar al-Qurun* in providing information about the notable events recorded under various emirs, he has to his credit provision of useful information on the wars that were fought under them, though he owes this a debt to Johnson whose *History* he often quotes verbatim with no meaningful explanation or reasonable justification. It is on account of such unacknowledged borrowings or quotations that al-Iluriyy’s *Nasim al-Saba* may be described as a partial duplication, Arabization or Arabization of Johnson’s *History* and a better articulation of Ikokoro’s *Talif*. For instance, it is only Johnson’s *History* that is uncritically echoed by al-Iluriyy from page 93 to page 102 of his *Nasim al-Saba* and one wonders why other reliable sources are not used as historical checks thereupon.

Furthermore, since al-Iluriyy dedicated the second edition of his *Nasim al-Saba* to Chief Moshood Abiola in 1987 one might expect him to address the controversy generated by the latter’s conferment with the traditional title of Aare Ona Kakanfo (meaning, Commander-in-Chief of the Oyo empire). The relevance of such discussion lies in the historical significance of the title whose Islamic fashionableness was put to question by Muslim scholars in various parts of Yorubaland [23]. Conversely, al-Iluriyy supported Abiola’s conferment with the controversial title which he said had no fetish coloring whatsoever. He was not apologetic in his unreserved pronouncements in favour of the title which he did not see as running counter to any aspect of Islamic principles and teachings. Al-Iluriyy said he dedicated the book to Abiola in appreciation of his contribution to the spread of Islam, an effort that had earned him the title of Abubakr (Baba Adinni) of Yorubaland [4] and yet did not think it wise to put in writing his position on the Baba Adinni of Yorubaland whose acceptance of the title of Aare Ona Kakanfo of Yorubaland was questioned by many Islamic scholars in Yorubaland. The appropriate avenue for such a discourse is the very book entitled *Nasim al-Saba* and dedicated to the very personality involved. If al-Iluriyy had concluded the work with that or other post-1987 Yoruba historical events of Islamic significance, the reader would have felt some taste of recency or smell of contemporariness therein. Coupled with that is fact that such a discussion would have provided al-Iluriyy’s position on the matter, for subsequent analysis. Unfortunately, al-Iluriyy neglected that and other important aspects of the history of Islam in Yorubaland. Notwithstanding, the work in question, like the other four, is of great value in Islamic historical scholarship among the Yorubas.

**CONCLUSION**

This paper has identified five specific works of history by al-Iluriyy and exposed both their strengths and weaknesses, using credible authorities in the areas as standards. The critical evaluation in the paper revealed
that although there are several lapses, al-Iluriyy’s works on Islamic history in Yorubaland are of great importance to Arabic and Islamic scholars and researchers in that discipline. The evaluation also revealed that although he may actually not be the first to say most of what he said in those books, he is probably the first to say in Arabic substantial parts of what is contained in the books. In this way, the unprecedented nature of his own kind of Arabic scholarship in connection with the works under review deserves much appreciation. But for al-Iluriyy’s contribution in this regard therefore the significant information provided by him would probably have been unknown to Arabic readers, for a longer time. That in fact is the more reason for further research on such works with a view to reconstructing or putting them in better historical perspectives.

REFERENCES