

Contributions of SHAYKH MUHAMMAD MUNTAQA COOMASSIE to the development of Islamic scholarship in ZAZZAU Emirate and beyond (1326/1909C.E-1410/1989C.E.)

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Abstract

Shaykh Muhammad Muntaqa Coomassie was one of the prominent scholars of Zazzau in the 20th century 1909-1989C.E. The aim of this paper is to bring to light the contributions made by this scholar for the propagation of Islam in Nigeria and beyond. It has four sections, i.e., introduction and his brief biography, some of his prominent teachers and disciples, some of his writings and conclusion. The methods used in conducting the research included interview with scholarly personalities, relatives of the scholar and the study of library materials such as papers, books, dissertations and thesis. The paper has shown that Shaykh Muntaqa Coomassie devoted his life to the teaching and learning of Islamic knowledge. His school was one of the prominent in Zazzau emirate during his life time. The works he authored were enormous and considered as important legacy not only to his children, but also to the learners of Zazzau. The paper suggested that Shaykh Muntaqa was worthy of emulation by both scholars and students in Zazzau and beyond.

Keywords : Zazzau, Scholar, propagation, Islam

BISMILLAHİ RAHMANİR RAHİM.

WA SALLALLAHU ALA NABIYİL KARİM

Introduction / His biography

Shaykh Muhammad Muntaqa Coomassie *al-Kashnawi* was born in the year 1326/1909 C.E¹, at Kusada town, in Katsina State. His genealogy is Muhammad al-Muntaqa, Son of Muhammad Al-Thani, son of Imam Yakub al-Fallati *al-Kashnawi* (popularly known as Muntaqa Coomassie or simply Malam Muntaqa)². The affiliation of Coomassie was derived from his paternal uncle Malam Sallau who was an Islamic scholar from Kusada town, now the headquarters of the

¹Abubakar, A.M. *Shaykh Muntaqa Coomassie Islamic Reference Library-Zaria Annual Report*, 2008, p. 1.

²Abubakar, A.M. P. 1.

Kusada Local Government in Katsina State. His paternal uncle travelled to as far as Coomassie town in Ghana Republic for scholarly purposes. It was said that Malam Sallau had been considered for Emirship when the then reigning Emir died, but his appointment was seriously challenged and caused revolt from natives of Coomassie town who considered him to be an immigrant. As a result of this, he and some of his followers were sent out of the town. They came back to Nigeria and settled at Agege in Lagos State. Eventually, he returned to Coomassie when Dr. Kwame Nkurma became the president of Ghana having been in good terms with Malam Sallau. He was appointed *Sarkin Hausawan* Coomassie a position he held until his death.³ Considering the historical event, the sons and grandsons of Malam Sallau such as Alhaji Ahmadu Coomassie (the first permanent secretary, Ministry of Education in Northern Nigeria), Shaykh Muntaqa Coomassie and their offspring continued to use the affiliation of “Coomassie” along with their names. Shaykh Muntaqa used the affiliation of *Al-kashnawi*, which is an Arabic denomination indicating his origin from Katsina province.

i. His education

Shaykh Muntaqa Coomassie started his formal education in Qur’anic school (*Makarantar Allo*) under the supervision and care of his father and other learned scholars. He memorized the Glorious Qur’an at the age of eleven and was able to put it into writing from memory before his first marriage at the age of sixteen.⁴ He also attended the famous Katsina Middle School which enabled him to acquire Western Education. In his pursuance of further education in Islamic Sciences Shaykh Muntaqa moved from Katsina to Zaria around 1936 where he settled. Among his teachers include⁵; Wazirin Zazzau Malam Lawal, Shaykh Yahuza Zaria and Malam Abdurrahman Kofar Doka. His colleagues are⁶ Shaykh Musa Na Magajiya, Malam Na’iya and Malam Ma’aji Isiyaku. He used to visit them for intellectual exchange. He was qualified and recommended to go for engineering school for further studies. However, at that time he decided to return to Coomassie and reunite with his father.⁷ At Coomassie, he continued to deepen his Islamic education on its various aspects.⁸

Eventually, he became a distinguished Islamic scholar who dedicated his life to the pursuit and dissemination of Islamic knowledge. His intellectual contribution towards the reformation of Islamic society could be optically observed through his struggle to convey his multi-Islamic education and experiences worldwide to his Muslims as well as other interested audience.⁹

³Interview, Ahmad Muntaqa Coomassie, 61, the son of Muntaqa Coomassie, Zonal Co-coordinator, National Hajj Commission of Nigeria, Kaduna Zone, Retired, 12th September, 2018, 10:00 am, 08062616123.

⁴Interview, Ahmad Muntaqa Coomassie.

⁵Interview, Abdulkham Muntaqa Coomassie, the son of Shaykh Muntaqa, 73, Retired, High Court Judge, Abuja, in his residence (part of the house of Muntaqa Coomassie) at Zaria on Wednesday 4th April, 2018, 5:00pm.

⁶Interview, Abdulkham Muntaqa Coomassie.

⁷Interview, Abdulkham Muntaqa Coomassie, the son of Shaykh Muntaqa, 73, Retired, High Court Judge, Abuja, in his residence (part of the house of Muntaqa Coomassie) at Zaria on Wednesday 4th April, 2018, 5:00pm.

⁸Interview, Ahmad Muntaqa Coomassie.

⁹Interview, Ahmad Muntaqa Coomassie.

After the death of his father, he decided to go for an educational touring in Nigeria and abroad, searching for Arabic and Islamic knowledge. He visited Birnin Kebbi during the reign of Malam Yahaya, Sokoto, Gwandu, Kano, Jos and Zaria. Then outside Nigeria he visited Timbuktu, Morocco, Senegal, Saudi Arabia, Upper Volta (Burkina Faso), Niger, Mali, Sudan, Ghana, Mauritius, India, Spain, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Algeria and Egypt (Cairo).¹⁰ Shaykh Muntaqa studied under many authoritative Shaykhs inside and outside Nigeria. Some of them are:¹¹

His father Shaykh Muhammad al-Thani, Shaykh Kwasau Birnin Kebbi, Shaykh Yahuza-Zaria, Shaykh Abdurrahman Kofar Doka-Zaria, Shaykh Shu'aibu Yako-Kano and Wazirin Zazzau Shaykh Muhammad Lawal Zaria. Others are; Shaykh Muhammad Nasiruddin Albani, Shaykh Shu'aibu al-Adnani, Shaykh Abdulmuhsin Iyad, the former Vice-Chancellor of Islamic University, Madinah, Shaykh Amin al-A'ma, a celebrated Islamic scholar in Saudi Arabia in those days¹².

As a result of his struggle in quest of knowledge, Shaykh Muntaqa becomes versed in all branches of Arabic and Islamic knowledge. This can be justified by a typical example of his writings as well as his students' remark. For instance¹³, the late Ambassador Nuhu Muhammad confirmed that he learned *Usu al-Fiqh* (the basis of Islamic jurisprudence), the *Hadith* (Prophetic tradition) and the Qur'an sciences from him.

Similarly, the late Ustaz Adam has learned the Subjects of *Usu'al-fiqh* (the Islamic jurisprudence), *Tawhid* (theology) and *Mantiq* (Logic) from him; he also confirmed that Shaykh Muntaqa was authoritative on the subject of *Balaghah* (Rhetoric), *Nahw* (Arabic grammar), *Sarf* (Morphology), *Lughah* (Arabic language), *Tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis), *Arudi* (prosody) and other branches of Islamic education¹⁴. One of his students, the late Shaykh Nuhu Ladan Dan Shuraihu Mutawallen Zazzau has also remarked that Shaykh Muntaqa used to display his logic and rhetoric knowledge in his methodology of teaching¹⁵.

Shaykh Muntaqa was self reliant; he merged scholarship with workmanship to earn his livelihood. While at Zaria, Shaykh learned how to make local soap (*soda*). He learned how to make modern poultry feeds which are locally manufactured and sold in the Institute of Agriculture, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. He adhered to moral quality of *Amr bi al-Ma'ruf wa Nahyi anil Munkar*. This was testified by Muhammad Bello Dangaladiman Wazirin Sokoto when he said that "there was no time when Shaykh Muntaqa would meet with a person without admonishing him with important issues in Islam before they depart."¹⁶

¹⁰Interview, Abdulhakam Muntaqa Coomassie.

¹¹Abubakar, A.M. p. 3.

¹²Interview, Ahmad Muntaqa Coomassie.

¹³Abubakar, A.M. *Shaykh Muntaqa Coomassie Islamic Reference Library-Zaria Annual Report*, 2008, p. 3.

¹⁴Interview, Ahmad Muntaqa Coomassie.

¹⁵Interview, Abdulhakam Muntaqa Coomassie.

¹⁶Interview, Abdulhakam Muntaqa Coomassie.

ii. His family

Shaykh Muntaqa Coomassie married four wives during his lifetime. Their names were Halimatu, Himda from Borno, Hafsatu (Kilo) from Sokoto and Sa'adatu from Birnin Kebbi. He died in the year 1989 and was survived by thirty three children, seven males and sixteen females. Among the males are; Saifullahi Muntaqa, (d. 2017), Abdulhakam Muntaqa, Ahmad Muntaqa, Abdallah, Yakubu Muntaqa and Suhaib Muntaqa. While the females include; Tayyaba, the oldest among his children (died in 1994), Nafisatu, Khalisatu, Zulfa'u and Hauwa'u¹⁷.

iii. The school of SHAYKH MUNTAQA COOMASSIE

Shaykh Muntaqa Coomassie combined teaching in his house and institutions. His school was established around 1943 C.E¹⁸. In his house, he taught various subjects of Islamic knowledge, such as *Tafsir*, *Hadith*, *Fiqh*, *Usu al-Fiqh*, *Lughah*, *Nahw*, *Balaghah*, *Sarf*, among others. He used to start teaching immediately after *subh* prayer and close at seven thirty, and then he moved to the institution. The school would continue after *Asr* prayer to *Maghrib*, except Thursdays and Fridays. While on Saturdays and Sundays have full days to teach at home. Some of the books include; *Qawa'id Tawhid*, *Akhdari*, *Ashmawi*, *Qurtubi*, *Iziyyah*, *Risalah*, *Aqrabu*, *Mukhtasar*, etc. In *Tafsir*: *Tafsir al-Jalalain*, *Sawi*, *Ibn Kathir*, among others. In *Hadith*: *Sahih al-Bukhari*, *Muwatta* and *Sahih Muslim*. In *Lughah*: *Badamasi*, *Kitab Zuhd*, *Al-Burda*, *Muqamat al-hariri*, etc. In *Nahw*: *Ajrumi*, *Mulhat al-Irab*, *Tuhfatul wardi*, etc. In *Sarf*: *Hisnu*, *Lamiyat al-Af'al*, etc. In *Balaghah*: *Ukudu*, *Kaukabu*, among others.¹⁹

iv. Some prominent disciples of SHAYKH MUNTAQA COOMASSIE

Shaykh Muhammad Muntaqa Coomassie had many Students both in Nigeria and abroad. Some of them are²⁰:

- i. Shaykh Adam al-Fallati-Kofar Doka Zaria (an Islamic scholar in Zaria died).
- ii. Ambassador Nuhu Muhammad Lawal (one time Nigerian Ambassador, died).
- iii. Shaykh Usman Mai Alfiyyah Anguwan Alkali-Zaria (an Islamic scholar in Zaria died).
- iv. Shaykh Nuhu Ladan Shuraihu- Mutawallen Zazzau (died).
- v. Justice Saifullahi Muntaqa Coomassie (his son, retired Supreme Court Judge died).
- vi. Justice Abdulhakam Muntaqa Coomassie (his son, retired Judge Court of Appeal Abuja).

¹⁷Interview, Ahmad Muntaqa Coomassie, 61, the son of Muntaqa Coomassie, Zonal Co-coordinator, National Hajj Commission of Nigeria, Kaduna Zone, Retired, 12th September, 2018, 10:00 am, 08062616123.

¹⁸Interview, Abdulhakam Muntaqa Coomassie.

¹⁹Interview, Abdulhakam Muntaqa Coomassie, the son of Shaykh Muntaqa, 73, Retired, High Court Judge, Abuja, in his residence (part of the house of Muntaqa Coomassie) at Zaria on Wednesday 4th April, 2018, 5:00pm.

²⁰Interview, Suhaib Muntaqa Coomassie, 41, the son of Muntaqa Coomassie, Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto, at Shaykh Muntaqa House, Zaria, 12th September, 2018, 11:30 am, 08064114717.

- vii. Alhaji Ahmad Muntaqa Coomassie (his son, Zonal Coordinator, National *Hajj* Commission of Nigeria, Kaduna Zone, retired).
- viii. Malam Sulaiman Ango (an Islamic scholar in Zaria died).
- ix. Malam Sani Hafizi Tudun Wada Zaria (died), among others.
- v. Successors of the School of Shaykh Muntaqa Coomassie

Shaykh Muntaqa worked under Saudi Arabian Government at Jedda, judging for the Nigerian expatriates²¹. After working for some years, he voluntarily retired from the government service. He also left Jeddah and stayed at a certain village between Jeddah and Makkah. He built his private library and filled it with different types of Islamic books. According to Shaykh Adam al-Fallati,²² General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida the former Nigerian Head of State, requested Shaykh Muntaqa to return to his country, but he declined the offer and decided to remain at Saudi Arabia. Then he requested him to transfer his library collection to Nigeria so that the Muslims in Nigeria could benefit from it. The Shaykh consented to this solicitation and endowed all his library holdings to his Muslims brothers in Nigeria. When the Saudi Arabian government was consulted about the President Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida's appeal, they similarly agreed²³. Consequently, after the death of Shaykh Muntaqa Coomassie (may Allah have mercy on him). The Nigerian government sent to the Saudi Arabian government to release the library collection to Nigeria. They consented and the library collection was evacuated to Zaria City, where a fine building was constructed in front of the Shaykh house and the entire library holding were housed there²⁴.

Similarly, when Shaykh Muntaqa travelled to Jeddah the school transferred there because his sons are still learning. However, people within Zaria metropolis and outside have access with the library collection and benefit from it including the researcher, it was estimated that he left about one hundred thousand books²⁵.

iv. Work experience

His experience towards government and teaching in institution include: Katsina Native Authority (N.A) where he subsequently worked in the Provincial Office and as Arabic teacher in 1938. He served in the Federal Department of Antiquities (Jos) from 1960-1964 as an Adviser and Officer in-charge of Arabic manuscripts. He was appointed Instructor to Native Court Judges at the Faculty of Law, Institute of Administration, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, in the year (1960-1961). He was appointed Special Adviser to the Emir of Zazzau Court by the Regional Government. He was also appointed Regional Inspector of Native Courts and Head

²¹Interview, Abdulhakam Muntaqa Coomassie.

²²Interview, Ahmad Muntaqa Coomassie, 61, the son of Muntaqa Coomassie, Zonal Co-coordinator, National *Hajj* Commission of Nigeria, Kaduna Zone, Retired, 12th September, 2018, 10:00 am, 08062616123.

²³Interview, Muhammad Abubakar, 76, Retired Civil Servant, No. 65 Dikko Road, Tudun Wada Zaria, 31st -01-2018, 11:00am, 08131211575.

²⁴Interview, Ahmad Muntaqa Coomassie.

²⁵Abubakar, A.M. *Shaykh Muntaqa Coomassie Islamic Reference Library-Zaria Annual Report*, 2008, p. 5.

of Training Division in the Kaduna Judicial Department (1964-1968). In 1968, he was promoted to Senior Native Court Judge.²⁶

He solicited for transfer to the Ministry of Education, North Central States as an inspector of Education in-charge of Qur'an Schools and it was approved. He voluntarily retired from the service of the Ministry of Education, North Central States and joined the Embassy of Nigeria, Jeddah Saudi Arabia, as Arabic Translator and for Consular matters destitute cases and civil matters, in which the Jeddah Shari'ah Tribunals adjudicate for Nigerians²⁷.

v. Some writings of SHAYKH MUNTAQA COOMASSIE

As earlier stated, Shaykh Muntaqa was so interested in learning; he read thousand of books and wrote a good number of works in Arabic and Hausa. He also translated some books from Arabic to Hausa. Some of the works written by Shaykh Muntaqa include:²⁸

- i. *Kitab Ifsha'al-Salam min Tamam al-Islam*.
- ii. *Miftah al-Qari: Sharh Siraj al-Bukhari lil Shaykh Abdullahi bn fodiyo, bi Tahqiq wa Ta'liq*, Shaykh Muhammad Muntaqa Coomassie.
- iii. *Misbahu al-Zujajah fi Zawa'id ibn Majah* (vol. 1-4), *Tahqiq wa Ta'liq*, Al- Shaykh Muhammad Muntaqa Coomassie al-Kashnawi, *Ta'lif al-Busairi*.
- iv. *Al-Kawakib al-Wahhajah: Sharh Sunan al-Imam al-Hafiz Abi Abdullahi Ibn Majah al-Qazwini: Ta'lif Shaykh Muhammad Muntaqa Coomassie al-Kashnawi*, (vol. 1-2).
- v. *Tarjamah Kitab al-Akhdari*.
- vi. *Mardat Allah fi Qawl Insha Allah*.
- vii. *Tarjamah Ma'ani Ihda Asharat Surah Ila Lughhati Hausa* (Hausa Ajami).
- viii. *Qabli da Ba'di* (Hausan Boko).
- ix. *Littafin Mamaki* (Hausan Boko).
- x. *Tambayoyi da Amsoshi Akan al-Amarin Musulunci* (Hausan Boko 1-2).

Brief reviews of the contents are as follows. In the book *Ifsha'ul Salam min Tamam al-Islam* (The spreading of *Salam*; is among the completion of Islam) is an Arabic book in which the writer identified the significance of saying *Salam* by Muslims while greeting each other. Shaykh Muntaqa however, highlighted how and when to say *Salam* to people, to whom it should be said and to whom it should not be said. He quoted a number of Qur'anic verses and a *hadith* on *Salam* as well as the views of renowned Islamic scholars on it.

In the book *Miftah al-Qari: Sharh Siraj al-Bukhari lil Shaykh Abdullah bn Fodiyo* is a commentary of *Sahih al-Bukhari* which Abdullah bn Fodiyo has made it. Shaykh Muhammad Muntaqa edited the book and made some commentaries where necessary, the book is in two volumes. *Misbah al-Zujaja fi Zawa'id Ibn Majah* (A shining light in a glass bottle as additions on the book of Ibn Majah) and *Kawakibul Wahhajah* (The glittering stars) are commentaries on

²⁶Abubakar, A.M. *Shaykh Muntaqa Coomassie Islamic Reference Library-Zaria Annual Report*, 2008, p. 4.

²⁷Interview, Suhaib Muntaqa Coomassie.

²⁸Abubakar, A.M. *Shaykh Muntaqa Coomassie Islamic Reference Library-Zaria Annual Report*, 2008, p. 7.

the *Sunan* collections of *ahadith* Ibn Majah, one of the six authentic books of *Hadith* literature, written in Arabic. All efforts to find copies of these two books proved abortive²⁹.

Tarjama kitab Akhdari, Shaykh Muhammad Muntaqa was the first person to translate this book into Hausa from Arabic. Later, other scholars followed suit. *Mardatullah fi Qawl in shaa Allah* (Seeking for the pleasure of Allah by the saying of in shaa Allah). Shaykh discussed the saying of in sha Allah when a believer intends to do any action. He quoted the verse in the Glorious Qur'an in *surah al-Kahfi* as the basis for doing so. He also cited some *ahadith* which made more emphasis on sayings in sha Allah. *Tarjama Ma'ani Ihda Asharah Suwar ila lughati* Hausa, is an Ajami (Hausa in Arabic letters) translations and commentaries of the last ten chapters of the Glorious Qur'an. It was based upon the commentaries of the renowned Islamic scholars of *tafsir*, like *tafsir al-Jalalain*, *Sawi* and Ibn Kathir³⁰.

In the book *Qabli da Ba'di* (prostration before and after prayer). Shaykh tried to educate Muslims on how to correct their prayers on instances of forgetfulness. He stressed the need to highlight on these issues to Muslims, especially those who cannot read Arabic. *Littafin Mamaki* (The book of wonders). The book contained some wonderful stories concerning different kind of wisdom which were bestowed by Allah (SWT) to some people. These stories as he indicated were extracted and translated into Hausa language from Arabic book title '*Al-Mustadrafu*'³¹. *Tambayoyi da Amsoshi akan Al-Amuran Musulunci Masu Rikitarwa* (Questions and Answers on Islam upon which people are confused) which was written in Hausa language. Shaykh provided both questions and answers on various issues in Islam such as purity, ablution, ritual bath, menstruation and confinement blood, among others.

Conclusion and recommendations

Finally, it could be seen that the entire life of Shaykh Muhammad Muntaqa Coomassie was fully devoted to the propagation of Islam. The number of books he wrote and published and the services he offered in Nigeria and abroad are evidences for his pure intention in this direction. His moral qualities like self reliance, humility and dedication in the pursuit of knowledge and imparting it to others are worthy of emulation by contemporary Muslim in Nigeria and beyond. Shaykh Muhammad Muntaqa died on the 6/10/1989 in Madina Saudi Arabia, at the age of eighty (80) years. He was buried at Baqi'a. May Allah have mercy on him, amin.

²⁹Interview, Suhaib Muntaqa Coomassie, 41, the son of Muntaqa Coomassie, Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto, at Shaykh Muntaqa House, Zaria, 12th September, 2018, 11:30 am, 08064114717.

³⁰Interview, Muhammad Abubakar, 76, Retired Civil Servant, No. 65 Dikko Road, Tudun Wada Zaria, 31st -01-2018, 11:00am, 08131211575.

³¹Interview, Muhammad Abubakar.

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8. *Interview*, Suhaib Muntaqa Coomassie, 41, the son of Muntaqa Coomassie, Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto, at Shaykh Muntaqa House, Zaria, 12th September, 2018, 11:30 am, 08064114717.