

THE RESCUE ROLE OF ARAB HISTORIOGRAPHY ON NATIONALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

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Abstract

This paper borders on the role of Arab historiography in promoting Nationalist historiography. Its objective is to debunk imperial postulations on African history and represent Arab historiography as a significant contributor to nationalist historiography. The paper thoroughly examines Arab historiography with respect to the Science of Isnad (Chain of Transmission) and its objectivity, thereby analysing the authenticity of narrations and their classification as either 'sound' or 'weak'. The works of some Arab historians, the chief of whom were Al-Mas'udi, Ibn Haukal, Al-Bakri, Al-Idrisi, Yaqut, Ibn Batuta and Ibn Khaldun, their sources, faults and prospects are critically analysed. Its findings include the level of accuracy in their works; links between Arab historiography and Oral Tradition; relevance of Arab historiography to the birth and development of modern historiography. The paper appraises Nationalist historiography, its challenges and recommends possible ways for its advancement and sustenance. The paper's adopted methodology is an analytical reinterpretation of existing documents. It concludes that Arab historiography plays a pivotal role in the genuine reconstruction of the African past.

Keywords: Historiography, Arab-Historiography, Nationalism, Imperialism, Isnad,

Introduction:

No discipline is better able to illustrate the African academy than history. Even before the emergence of academic institutions, the African intelligentsia devoted generous space to history. Nationalists and politicians gave history a prominent role in thinking and writing. When academics joined in the writing about Africa, historians occupied the forefront in presenting the past as a valuable tool to build nationalism and create a strong nation-state. All the errors and

misconceptions about Africa by Europeans became points of attack for African historians. (Funsho Afolayan, 2006)

The spirit of reconstructing an African past free of Eurocentric views is spirited in Nationalist historiography. Nationalism aside, historiography is the study of how history is written at different periods and places. Bentley (1999) illustrates that historiography in the mid-eighteenth century used to simply refer to the writing of history, and a historiographer was the one who wrote about the past. But in modern times, historiography refers to the history of historical writing, not only focusing on what historians have written but also examining how and why historians have thought about the past. Historiography leads historians to think in new ways about what they do, to consider their literary styles, their positions in society, and the nature of their task as researchers, authors and teachers. It is a constructive outlook on the past. It is studied to know how history has developed to its present stage. It is referred to as training in the art of historical writing or process.

Arthur (1976) in his writing said, however, that so pedantic a word (historiography) is better reserved for a more precise task, not the writing of history but the study of the writing of history. Historiography is thus a narrower and much less interesting study than history itself; it is a part of historical study in rudimentary and perhaps unconscious form, a preliminary to any important historical endeavour. Historiography concerns itself with four major aspects of documentation, as mentioned by Afigbo (1973). The first is the discovery of critical analysis of historical sources, the second is the reconstruction and description of the past based on facts queried from discovered sources, the third is the reconstruction based on the ascertained facts on some general theory which gives meaning and inner logic to the known past... and the fourth is the reflection on the trends and patterns of historical writing. For retrieving the facts about the African past against the prejudiced documents of the Europeans, African historiography was built. The formulation of African historiography was to rescue the blacks' history, painting it the right picture, hence the journey into the works of Arab historians, the custodians of the true African past. As stated by Bovil (1968), the earliest knowledge about African history is traced to the works of Arab Authors. However, this germane role of Arab historiography in preserving nationalist historiography is losing its popularity and is being neglected in contemporary times, especially by upcoming historians. It is based on filling the above gaps that this paper intends to

reintroduce the description of the Arab historiography as a major contributor to the development of Nationalist historiography.

Conceptualizations:

Arab Historiography

Arab historiography and Muslim historiography are often used interchangeably. In relation to Arab historiography, Oluwatoki (2012), in his lecture note classified it into three eras: the Sabaeo–Himyarite period, the Jahiliyyah period, and the Islamic period. He pointed out that the *Al- Asabiya* (loyalty to the tribe) was another characteristic of the period in question. The *Nisbah* (tracing ancestry) gives a symbol of greatness, while the one who cannot boast of a great ancestor would be of little social standing. In fact, the *Hasab* (deeds of the ancestors) determines the level of prestige an Arab enjoys in the *Jahiliyyah* (pre-Islamic) settings. The greater the *Hasab*, the greater the prestige enjoyed by the descendants.

However, as barbaric as the Arabs' way of life was in the pre- Islamic period, the level of their historiography skill was not insignificant. Several poets were charged with the responsibility of writing praise poems for their tribes during and after wars. The extent of the *al- Mu'allaqat* (hanging pieces of written documents on the walls of the Ka'abah and other structures) impact on the pre- Islamic era Arabs could not be overemphasised. The act of writing, though, was not too common in the Northern part of Arabia, but was highly significant in the South. The Arabs during the Jahiliyyah period also had orators of high quality whose lines of words contained historical developments in their communities. But the works on historiography were not wearing the type of garment it later wore since the birth of Islam.

In support of the above lines, David (1997) argues that Arab historiography is that type of historical documentation that holds its origin to the prophethood and messengership of Muhammad. His life history, as well as those of his immediate successors, called for more attention from the public, thus making its documentation a compulsion upon them. For the Arab historians, the methods of critiquing *Hadith* (prophetic traditions) which the Muslim community scholars had developed were adequate for the exposure of any forged documentation. In an effort towards purposeful documentation of significant events, Muslim historians are involved in local

and international history writings. The study of their relevant participations in preservation of human legacies through the use of pen and thorough examination of sources with *Isnad* (Chain of Transmitters) is referred to by this paper as Arab historiography.

Modern / Nationalist Historiography

Modern historiographical statements might attempt an enquiry which former generations would have been happier to call philosophy of history in an applied form. Modern analytical historiography has produced instances of deep structural enquiry that have brought to the surface important aspects of a particular writer or school of historical writing. Such works of modern historiography have left no historian or student of history in the nineteenth or early twentieth century as they were twenty years ago. Richard (2020) equally stated that modern historiography is the new dimension of history writing. It focuses on critical examination of sources, the selection of particular details from the authentic materials in those sources, and the synthesis of those details into a narrative that stands the test of critical examination.

Bentley (1999) also stated that modern historiography is the essential introduction to the history of historical writing. It explains the broad philosophical background to the different historians and historical schools. The African modern historiography, otherwise referred to as Nationalist historiography, is the ability of an African intelligentsia to assert itself, to generate knowledge about Africa and Africans, to expose the right and wrong in others' statements about her past, attacking hostile and racist views about the people, thus justifying the existence of the historical past for Africa. Afolayan (2006) stated that Nationalist historiography created a counter discourse, a rejoinder to what is commonly called the Eurocentric perception of Africa. The reconstruction of the African past by passionate Africans, using African sources with pro-African views, is by this paper referred to as Nationalist historiography.

The Arab Historiography: Features and Scope

Arab historiography is the study of the processes in the Arab ways of historical documentation and their stages of development. According to Margoliouth (1930), the pre-Islamic Arab history owes nothing to Greek history and little, if anything, to Persian history, which seems clear, but it also appears to be independent of pre-Islamic Arabian chronicles. Contrary to this, Rosenthal

(1968) claimed that the Arab historical traditions first began developing from the earlier seventeenth century with the reconstruction of Muhammad's life following his death. Because narratives regarding Muhammad and his successors came from various sources, it was necessary to verify which sources were more reliable. In order to evaluate these sources, methodologies such as the *Ilm rijal* (science of biography) were developed to examine documented traditions. This was later applied to other historical figures in Muslim communities. The Science of Hadith served a major purpose in checking the level of objectivity in historiography since the period of its evolution.

According to Vansina (2014) and in line with Rosenthal's claim, one of the major aspects in Science of Hadith in the Islamic historiography is the science of biography. The *Ilm ar-Rijal* was first applied to the life of Muhammad, and then his four major successors, who expanded Islamic dominance rapidly. It has indeed enhanced the possible trace of the sources of historical accounts of the early Islamic period. Francisco (1988) claimed that Arabic historiography is essentially the historiography of Islamic civilisation and is coeval with the Islamic faith. The vicissitudes of the Arabs and Arabia before Islam can be reconstructed fragmentarily from documents in other languages (Assyrian annals and classical history and geography) and also from the many epigraphic documents that the South-Arabian civilisation has left behind. This civilisation flourished in Yemen between the first millennium B.C. and the first century A.D. But of this part in particular of the South-Arabia civilisation itself, in which the character of the pre-Islamic Arabs is most clearly revealed, the Arabs possessed a vague and confused record. The few historical records are mixed up with legendary materials, and they are changed and manipulated by arbitrary additions from the historians of antiquity. For the whole Islamic period, the most reliable sources are the South-Arabian inscriptions and the Greco-Roman, Byzantine and Syriac authors, to which the ancient Arabic poetry and the popular and ancient traditions furnish only in the background. It was argued that it was with the prophethood of Muhammad that the Arabs received the revelation of their own position in history and of the mission which their people were called upon to carry out. It was through the inspired message that the prophet absorbed the idea of human history as a realisation of a divine plan on earth. It found an echo in his sacred book, the Qur'an, and this provided a term of reference and an orientation for his followers in consequent events. Kareem (2017), in his lecture, equally wrote that the advent of Islam paved

the way for the growth of historiography, especially in Arabia. The abundance of historical data in the Holy Qur'an provided the followers of Islam with the incentive to study history. The learned discourses of the Holy Prophet of Islam were always punctuated with historical references to the past, which awakened an interest hitherto unknown for historiography among the adherents of the new faith. He also pointed out that, unlike the Western conception of history, which denies the existence of divine beings in the construction of history, the Muslim conception of history is directly connected with their faith in the existence of a Supreme Being, God. This understanding of the world phenomena is given with the message of the Qur'an, wherein the faithful are enjoined to reflect on the people of antiquity. Verses such as:

"Have they not travelled in the land to see the nature of the consequence for those who disbelieved before them? They were mightier than thee in power and in the traces (which they) left behind them in the earth. Yet Allah seized them for their sins, and they had no protector from Allah". (Quran 40: 21), are indications of the significance of history and historiography in Islam, recognising the role of God.

Contrary to Kareem's position on the role of God in historical development, Alexander (2018), in his writings, challenged the intervention of God in history. He claims that if God actually plays any role in history, and indeed loves His creatures, where was He during the holocaust? Why was He absent from the slaughter at the Somme in 1916? Where was He during the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia? He, however, concluded that if at all God has any role played in the suffering of human, it is actually beyond human understanding.

Muslim Arab historians were of different epochs and categories. Margoliouth (1930) posited that the historians of the first and second centuries of Islam were more concerned about the use of poetry as a vehicle of history. They included writers such as Awanah bn Al-Hakam, Mada'ini, Ali bn Muhamad, Hisham bn Muhammad bn Al-Sayyib Al- Kalbi, Omar Al- Waqidi, Al-Haytham bn Hadi, Al- Zubair bn Bakkar, Ibrahim bn Said Al-Hilal, to mention a few. Those of the third century, amongst others, included Muhammad bn Jarir Abu Jafar, Yaqut, Abdullahi bn Muslim bn Khutaibah, Al-Tabari, Al-Mas'udi, etc.

Hitti (1983) described the works of Al- Mas'udi (d. 956 C.E), who was the most important figure in historiography after al-Tabari. According to him, he was a geographer, philosopher and

historian. He wrote *Kitab Akhbaru Zaman* in 30 volumes of an extensive history work. His other books were *Kitab al- Awsat*, which was a chronological sketch on history, and *Muruj- udh- Dhahab wa- Ma adin al- Jawhir* that was on the history of the universe from creation to 97C.E. He was referred to as Muslim Herodotus for his wide interest in a humanistic attitude. According to Al-Mas'udi, history is the all-embracing science, the medicine of the soul. Al- Mas'udi listed some five factors through which the climate influences history. They are: the season, the rising and setting of the stars, the winds, the position of the land and the position of the seas. He actually made it known that the environment plays a major role in the history of the people. "As the land, so are the people" is a symbol for Al- Mas'udi's philosophy on social influence on history making and its writing.

In line with the writings of Hitti, Hughes-Warrington (2015) pointed out that next to Al-Mas'udi in the development of the Islamic historiography is Ibn Khaldun. He described him as the greatest philosopher ever produced by Islam and one of the greatest of all times, and his work, the *Muqaddimah*, is undoubtedly the greatest work of its kind that has ever been produced by any mind in any time or clime. *Muqaddimah*, is a major contribution to the survival and development of several fields of knowledge, including historiography and history. The work is divided into books that included: General Sociology, Sociology of Politics, Sociology of Urban life, Sociology of Economics, Sociology of Knowledge. Oluwatoki (2012) in his note mentioned the seven sources of error in historical writings according to Ibn Khaldun; the partisanship, over confidence on the source, failure to understand what is intended, a mistaken belief in truth of one's source, inability to place an event in its real context, desire to gain the favor of the powers and ignorance of the laws governing the transformation of human society. This observation of Ibn Khaldun is one of the indications to his being a strategic founder of historical thoughts. The Muslim historians have indeed kept the flag flying.

Jamal Al-Din (2020) mentioned that there are several other Muslim historians of so much contribution to historiography in general and Islamic history in particular. One of them, according to him, was Ibn Miskawayh. Ibn Miskawayh was a Persian, born in 932 C. E. He doubled as historian and philosopher. His influence on Islamic philosophy was primarily in the area of ethics. He authored the first major work on Islamic philosophical ethics titled *Tahdhib al- Akhlaq* (Refinement of Morals). Focusing on practical ethics, conducts and refinement of

character, he separated personal ethics from the public realm and contrasted the liberating nature of reason with the deceptive temptation of nature. Other works of Ibn Miskawayah was *Kitab Tajarub al-Umam* (Experience of Nations). He was one of the first major Muslim historians to write a chronicle of contemporary events as an eyewitness. The chronicle must be mentioned as a universal history from the beginning of Islam. He declared his displeasure and dissatisfaction with the way history was presented by earlier historians. Upon subjecting ancient historical sources to scrutiny, he found that those reports are full of information that contains entertaining stories and idle talk. So, he had no option but to seek and work towards transformation. It is sacrosanct to state here that the Arab historiography has its objectivity weighed with the Science of *Isnad*.

The Isnad: What is it?

Historical literature in Arabic is characterised by three major things: Independence, Non-official Authority and Accuracy Insurances. Ensuring accuracy is a significant characteristic of Arab historical literature. Actualising that raises the question of accurate dating. The dating system in Islamic and or Arabic documentation could be referred back to the efforts of Umar, the second Caliph of the Prophet, who established the counting to be on the Muslims Migration from Makkah to Madina in September 622 C.E. The Islamic calendar recognises 29 or 30 days for the month, based on the appearance of the moon. This assures the accurate calculation and dating of events in collaboration with the Gregorian calendar. However, the Lunar calendar (i.e Hijrah), is either calculated as 29 days or 30 at most, with an approximation that six are the latter, the Hijrah calendar would be adjudged to be of 354 days in a year. Contrary to the Gregorian calendar of 365 or 366 days in a year, the Hijrah calendar is 11 or 12 days lesser than the Gregorian one. This becomes a point of attention to the historian who is reading from the Arabic or Islamic-based calendar (A.H), written history and converting the same to the common era (C. E.) Calendar-based written history. In all, the point is that Arab historians have developed a dating system that brings about accuracy in their works. It was also in the process of realising and ensuring accuracy in historical works that the science of *Isnad* was introduced.

Isnad is the chain of authorities whereby narratives can be traced back to the original eyewitness who narrated it. This is usually used in relation to the compilation of Hadith. Since validating

the saying of the Prophet is a major study, the Isnad that provides accurate information on narrators' biographies has always been of great interest. According to Brown (2020), a very useful weapon in the hands of the Arab historians is the massive 'biographical works' produced by them and other traditional scholars. The Isnad served the purpose of an objectivity check in the works of Muslim / Arab historians.

African History in the Ink of Arab Historians: Rescued or Laboured?

The African past and the works of Muslim Arab historians

That African history has its original manuscripts in the ink of the Arabs is not news. This did not happen accidentally; it was as a result of the Arabs' journey and sojourn in the Bilad al- Sudan. George (2020) mentioned that there are various sources of history which every student and researcher in the field of history falls back on. These sources are of two kinds: the primary and the secondary ones. The museums and archives are filled with primary sources rather than secondary sources. The primary sources, considered to be natural as we can access them in the archives, include: manuscripts, legal cases and reports, treatises and diplomatic dispatches, chronicles, memoirs, diaries, radio and television tapes, artefacts, paintings, sculptures, architecture and tape recordings of oral history. It is then the responsibility of the historian to put the evidences realized through the materials to reconstruct the past into a secondary form, the source on which the layman and other ahistorical individuals rely. But as it is, the primary sources are the actual souls with which historiography survives.

The Arabic language has been a recognised and spoken language of many African states before the advent of Islam. This was a result of the movement of man and his nature of social relations. According to Bovil (1968), the coming of the Arabs conferred immense intellectual benefits on the Maghrib. They brought with themselves a learning and a broad outlook they had absorbed from the Hellenistic culture of the late Roman Empire, which later blossomed into the rich Muslim culture of Spain. Lugard, as cited by Bovil, stated that there is no more striking example of the extraordinary breadth of the Muslim horizon than an incident in the life of a great traveller, Ibn Batuta. While he was staying in Sijilmasa, in Morocco, he discovered that his host was actually the brother of a man he had earlier met some years ago in Western China.

One of the factors responsible for Arabs' presence in Africa, according to Al-Iluriy (1950), was the holy pilgrimage carried out by the Muslims all over the globe at Makkah. The rites of the annual Hajj make it easy for Muslims of different origins to have shared ideas and scholarship. Equally, their gathering makes it easy for them to talk about their nations of origin. Arab historians who were equally qualified as geographers seized the opportunity of the information they heard about Africa to visit the land. Oyeweso (1988) mentioned that before the coming of the Arabs, little or nothing was known of Africa South of the Maghrib. The primary purpose of the Arab documentation was not initially historiography. It was for political, economic and social relations between the Arab world and others. Arab rulers concerned themselves with knowing who and what was at a particular settlement within and outside their territories. This was to identify better ways of relations politically, economically and socially. The work of Al-Bakri, *Masalik wal Mamalik* (Routes and Kingdoms), became very important to the ruling classes as it served the geographical awareness for the state under the Umayyad. It was such works on Africa that later served the purpose of primary sources on African historiography. The periods such as the 8th to 15th centuries of African historiography had to rely solely on the works of Muslim Arab historians. The primary sources on African historiography could be divided into two: the internal and external. The external works are mainly the works of outsiders, the Arab historians, geographers, and philosophers, mainly covering periods from the 8th to the 15th centuries. While the internal works were those of African historians, which are, in most cases, chronicles. The chronicles were mostly on the 16th to 20th-century African historiography.

Sirajudeen and Shittu (2012) pointed out that the documents of the Arab historians have indeed enabled in reconstructing the image of Africa that would have been assumed based on the wrong conclusions of the West on the African past. Having knowledge about the originality, antiquity, authenticity and reliability of historical traditions of African states is embedded in the Arabic writings of the scholars up to the 19th and 20th centuries. The lack of basic understanding of the Arabic sources at times would make some students of history have some levels of distrustful attitude towards the sources. But the fact remains that the Arabic scripts were the preservatives for the African past. Abdullah Smith, as discussed by Adam Adebayo and Sulayman Adeniran as cited by Sirajudeen et al (2012), disagreed with the position of late Sir Richmond Palmer on the origin of the Sayfawa. While doing that, Smith relied solely on the information about Sayfawa descendants on the popular hero, Sayf bn Dhi Yazan, which he referenced to Arab traveller and

geographer's accounts such as Al-Bakri's writings in the mid 11th century. Others cited by Abdullah Smith were Ibn Sai'd Al-Maghribi, who wrote records in the 13th century, Abul Fida, who wrote in the 14th century, and Al –Maqrizi who wrote in the 15th century.

Bovil (1968) posited that most of the earliest knowledge about African history is traced to the works of Arabic authors, the chief of whom were Al- Mas'udi, Ibn Haukal, Al-Bakri, Al-Idrisi, Yaqut, Ibn Batuta and Ibn Khaldun. He stated that subsequent writers were influenced by studying Al-Mas'udi. He lived in the 10th century and died precisely in C. E. 956. Al-Mas'udi spent twenty years wandering in the Arab world and visited as far as Madagascar and China.

Ibn Haukal was almost a contemporary of Al- Mas'udi. He was equally born in Baghdad. His work and that of Ibn Batuta were the first among other medieval writers' works to have survived to reach Africa. His account is the earliest that was on Western Sudan, where he was the foremost explorer. He visited Audoghast and Kumbi, the capital of Ghana. He saw the Niger River flowing eastward, and he believed it was actually the river Nile. According to Oyeweso (1988), the traditional contempt of Muslims for Negroes was first used by Al-Mas'udi. He was quoted to have said: "I have not described the country of the African blacks and the other people of the Torrid Zone because, naturally loving wisdom, ingenuity, religion, justice and regular government, how could I notice such people as these, or magnify them by inserting an account of their countries".

As Margoliouth (1930) put it, deposited for every student of the history of North Africa was the work of Abu Ubaid Al- Bakri. Al- Bakri was an eleventh century Muslim geographer and historian. He was born and spent his whole life in Spain. His work, which ran into many volumes, had a distinct description of the North African geography. His accounts on the Sudan call for attention because of their discussion of the general survey of the country. With the fact that his works so much impressed later writers, it is obvious that Al- Bakri's work was of high intellectual importance to African past generations. In the twelfth century, another Muslim Arab historian of high integrity, Al- Idrisi emerged. He was of Spanish origin. He was at service in the court of Roger II, the Norman king of Sicily. Though he was faced with a high level of criticism when he entered into the service of an infidel prince that did not share the same religious ideology with him. At the time, Roger was striving to gather his work on geography, he discovered that there was no better source of information than the Arabs, and then he had the

option of working with Al-Idrisi. The fourteenth century witnessed the presence of Al-Umari. Al-Umari, as Margoliouth described him, was the author of *Masalik al-Absar*, which had details of the Mansa Kanka Musa's pilgrimage to Makkah. Living same time with Al-Umari were the ornaments of the Arab civilisation; Ibn Batuta and Ibn Khaldun, who provided more to the knowledge of the students of history, especially on early Berbers and Arabs.

Nationalist Historiography as Rescued by Arab Historians

The notion that Africans have no past has been discarded both locally and internationally. Writing on African history, Ihiffe (1992) had the following lines to say: the discovery of the African past has been the most important advance in historical study since the Second World War. It has flourished when scholars have seen Africans as the creators of their own history and have relied on sources which Africans have produced. Their material remains, languages, traditions, institutions and written documents, whenever the subject has deserted those principles, its vitality has waned". As he put it, the discovery of archaeological sites and the testing of the artefacts have made it glaring that Africa does have a past like Europe and other human settlements do. Not only that, in respect to the Leakeys' work (Leakey Discovers the Missing Link), which was referenced to the "Darwin's theory of evolution from ape to man, and thereafter, no scholar has seriously doubted that Africa was the origin of man. Some other factors have equally made it uneasy to debunk that Africans have a past civilisation.

Karugire (1971) stated that historiography in Africa had developed a whole series of new scientific tools and techniques that enabled her to be able to answer the questions some historians ask about her dating system. The relative chronology of archaeological layers and geological time spans was strengthened by the development of absolute dating through physics and chemistry. The radiocarbon dating, too, has been refined so that errors of measurement created by sunspot activity or other influences could be discounted and calibrated; dates could be given with higher degrees of probable accuracy. As he put it, the study of language in Africa has equally served the purpose of attributing a significant past to Africans. The study of language in Africa is associated with the study of materials and social culture involved the development of yet further historical skills, this time in the fields of statistics. The history of agriculture, too, has been a tangible point for the historiography of Africa. Cattle have been a determinant of wealth

by their ownership in the African setting. The history of kingdoms and empires has not been free of herdsmen settlements and clashes, especially among the Bantus.

As mentioned by Vansina (1985), oral tradition is more known to the earliest African historiography than written documents. According to Birmingham, as cited by Michael (1999), the first historian to have collected oral evidence from Africa was Herodotus, who gained knowledge of the interior of Africa from the Greek colonies of modern Libya. The Carthaginians had oral account epic voyages down the African coast and perhaps even heard of a circumnavigation of the continent of Africa. The historiographical dialogue between the custodians of oral information and literate visitors from across the seas to the West began much later in the 15th century, and some societies did not meet literate observers until later in the 20th century colonial rule. This was not the case in North and East Africa, where Arab historians have visited and documented historical facts about them. Most of the collected and printed oral evidence in Africa was on political systems. This was indeed the reason most African historians have been accused of being excessively preoccupied with the history of states and empires, kingdoms and chiefdoms. History of power, rise and fall, military occupations, strength and weakness of states and individuals, with lesser attention on the life history of the common men.

Mugaji (1990) mentioned that, despite the fact that oral tradition is significant in the reconstruction of the African past, it has some limitations. The limitations of oral tradition include the problem of supplying absolute dates as opposed to relative dating. There is also the problem of inaccurate quantitative data supply. This, in most cases, makes total accuracy in economic and political history impossible. There are various ways in which the idea of modern historiography appeared and was observed in different regions and states of the world. In relation to African historiography, modern historiography is that of historical writing that involves the writing of African history in an African way. The idea of reconstructing the African past with a detachment from the Eurocentric view that dominated its history books before and during the colonial era is equally referred to as the nationalist historiography. As against the historiography pivoted by imperialism- the idea of forcefully extending European authority by the establishment of economic and political dominance over Africans, Nationalist historiography was adopted and promoted by concerned intelligentsias. African history writers' responses to such views, such as David Hume's eighteenth century statement as discussed by Harris (1972): "I am apt to suspect

the Negroes to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilised nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent in action or speculation. No indigenous manufacturers amongst them, no artists, no scientists”.

The response to George Hegel’s (1944) 19th-century comment that says: “It is manifest that want of self-control distinguishes the character of the Negroes. This condition is capable of no development or culture, and as we have seen to this day, such have they always been. At this point, we leave Africa, not even to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world: it has no movement or development to exhibit”. And the response to Trevor-Roper’s (1968) claim that says: “perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present, there is none; there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa. The test is darkness, and darkness is not a subject of history”. It should be noted that Eurocentric views, as mentioned earlier, are tools for European imperialism, and in response to those views, amongst other reasons, African historiography took a new form. As far as Africa is concerned, the writings that promote sentiment on the lack of history by Africa and her people are erroneous.

There were several efforts towards the development of Modern African Historiography. Aside from the establishment of the Ibadan School of History (Nigeria), and the Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), where African students were taught with a more African-based syllabus, there were equally several works, most of which relied on the Arabic scripts on the African past. The works of scholars such as Kenneth O. Dike, who wrote on Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta between 1830 and 1885, and their productivity could not be overemphasised. Through them and works of Abdullah Smith who worked rigorously in reconstructing the Northern Nigerian history, J. C Anene, on modern Nigeria, R. E. Bradbury on Benin, J. D. Omer Cooper on the Mfecane in South Africa, A. F. C. Ryder on Benin and C. W. Newbury and V. W. Treadwell on aspects of European expansion in Africa, the works of African historiography in true representation of the African past became accessible by national and international historians. According to Afolayan (2006), the Ibadan School of History materials got new interpretations. For example, Taubman Goldie, who was presented by the Europeans as ‘maker of Nigeria’, became re-presented by Dike and others as maker of only the ‘Royal Niger Company’. Jaja of Opobo, who was presented by the Europeans as ‘a Nigerian chief that stood in the way of free-trade’, was re-presented by

the aforementioned Nationalist historians as ‘a patriot that did not want the British to cheat him in trade and deny him power’.

At this juncture, it is germane to state that with the record of Arab historians as preserved in archives, African historiography got rescued and its past got preserved. The works of the Western historians were basically on the interest of Africans regarding material surplus. It is, however, important to note that, as Abdullah Smith (1983) pointed out, African modern historiography is gradually losing track again and moving towards being independent of its foreign threat for the second term. Aside from the challenges of the Ibadan school in relation to financial and framework constraints, he categorically mentioned that the Arabic sources, which are the backbone of the African historiography, are so much neglected. The letters written by the Emir of Gwandu in 1829, the work of Ahmad bn Bakri – *Talif akhbar al-qurun min Umara Bilad Ilurin* - written in 1912, amongst others, were cited by him as the major sources for the reconstruction of the past of the West and North and their relationship.

In essence, if we must uphold the African historiography and its modernism, it is incumbent to jealously keep the records compiled, some of which were handed over by the foreign and indigenous Arabic writers of African history. The *Muqadimmah* of Ibn Khaldun, The *Wathiqat Al Al-Sudan* (a manifesto), of Dan Fodio, The *Infraq Al-Maisuri* of Sultan Muhammad Ballo, The *Tazyin al-Waraqat* and *Dhoyau-Salatin* of Abdullahi bn Fodio, The *Tarikh al- Sudan* of Abdur Rahman al-Su'di, The *Subh al-A'sha* of Qalqashandi, The *Tatriz al-Dibaj* of Ahmad Baba al-Timbucti, The *Fi Bilad Zanj* of Abdullah Hashimah, The *Nahnu Fi Afrikiya* of Kamil Marwah and more importantly, those of Al-Iluriy amongst other Arabic sources of African history are heritage of our history which must be kept jealously.

Hunwick (1988) wrote that Arabic source documents could be retrieved from the manuscript collection centres in Nigeria at Ibadan, Kaduna, Zaria, Kano, Sokoto and Jos. The University of Ibadan Library collection started in the 1950s by W. E. N. Kensdale. Kensdale produced the first and only catalogue of holdings, which lists approximately 100 items. The collection at Ibadan was later expanded during the 1960s under the supervision of Khalil Mahmud with the assistance of scholars such as D. M. Last, M. A. al- Hajj, F. H. Elmasri and H. F. C. Abdullah (Smith). Also at Ibadan, one could access the Ibadan Centre for Arabic documentation for Arabic sources of History. The Arewa House, Kaduna, was originally established in the early 1970s as a centre for

the documentation and study of the states' history, which comprised the pre-1966 Northern Region of Nigeria and Abdullah Smith was made its first director. With Smith's efforts, a considerable collection of Arabic Documents (especially emirate correspondence) was assembled, and some Arabic manuscripts from the literary tradition were also obtained. Equally in Kaduna, one could access the Nigerian National Archives for more Arabic sources. As of 1987, there were cross-cutting lists on the Arabic documents indicating the Author's index of Arabic Manuscripts, 1957-73, which lists one thousand one hundred and ninety items, giving title, author, location (province/box / item), and number of pages.

The Bayero University Library's collection of Arabic manuscripts also started in the 1970s. Arabic manuscripts, chiefly of literary (as opposed to archival) nature, were assembled in the Department of History. Actually, those manuscripts were borrowed from their owners, photocopied and later returned. In the late 1970s and in the earlier part of 1980s, there were six volume catalog of those Arabic manuscripts with the title, *Ba'd Makhtutat al- Fudiyyin wa Fihrisuha fi Jamiati Bayiru Kano*, prepared by a Sudanese scholar, El- Tayeb A. Mohammed.

The Sokoto State History Board was subsumed under the Sokoto State Ministry of Information, Home Affairs and Culture, and its manuscript collections come under the Ministry of History and Culture Department. Most of those items consist mainly of the writings of authors on Sokoto or the Sokoto region and the caliphate, which are very resourceful. Some of the documents include the works of Shaykh Usman bn Fodio, 'Abdullah bn Fodio, Muhammed Bello and other writers. Translation of the Arabic scripts is to be of paramount interest to publishers and researchers, as the pace was set by Iqah Publishing House, Gusau, Nigeria. Iqah must be mentioned to have embarked on the translation of the writings of the Fodios trio.

Conclusion

This paper has described the development of Arab historiography, its features and scope, and it concludes that it has indeed immensely contributed to the development of Nationalist historiography. It deems it important to identify with another and a major challenge of Nationalist historiography in the post-Cold War era, the effects of insurgency and civil unrest in

Africa, especially in Nigeria. The proliferation of weapons of Mass Destruction and their effects have not been managed properly by most African states. Continuous bombing, mass displacement and stagnation of socio-economic development in the affected areas have both directly and indirectly orchestrated the loss of some primary and secondary sources. The original copies of borrowed Arabic scripts on Borno and other Northern Nigerian settlements are victims of the Boko-Haram insurgency. Although the ‘Operation Beauty from Ashes’ brought a better University of Jos Library, the ‘sacred’ papers lost to the fire that razed the ideal prototype library in October 2016 caused major damage. If the razing fire had happened to any national archive, which could simply be referred to as a road to the loss of generational historical accounts. It’s with this reason that this paper states that it would be of high value to the Nigerian government and other concerned states to manage out-broken upheavals and install peace in the societies. Equally, it’s germane to state that all Arabic and non-Arabic archival documents should be scanned and stored on the internet for proper preservation and utilisation.

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