

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Islam in Africa Throughout History

Reviewed by Abu al-Hasan Malik al-Akhdar

Islam in Africa Throughout History by the esteemed scholar, *al-Allamah*, Muhammad Aman al-Jami—may Allah grant him mercy—is a short treatise that covers three distinct phases of Islam’s spread across the African continent, “the first continent privileged and illuminated with the light of Islam after the Arabian Peninsula” (21).

The *Shaykh* begins by detailing the first phase, which occurred when several of the Prophet’s (ﷺ) companions left Makkah and emigrated to Abyssinia to flee religious persecution by the pagans of Makkah. In Abyssinia, they found a just king, al-Najashi, who the Prophet (ﷺ) described as one who “did not oppress anyone in his vicinity” (21). In this section, the *Shaykh* clarifies that not only did their journey to Abyssinia help them escape oppression at home; it also “became a journey of Islamic *dawah* to the pristine continent of Africa” (22). The highlight of this section is the story of what occurred when a delegation sent by Quraysh came to al-Najashi bearing gifts, in hopes of him turning the Muslims over to them. But after hearing a debate between the delegation and the Muslims, in which Ja’far b. Abu Talib (رضي الله عنه) recited verses from the Quran, moving the king to tears, he said to the Muslims, “Go; you are free in my land. Whoever insults you or harms you will pay a penalty” (29). With that, the delegation of Quraysh “departed defeated” (29). And this, the *Shaykh* explains, “is how Islam entered the continent of Africa” (30).

In the second stage, the *Shaykh* says that “like other continents, this continent was not fortunate to have a comprehensive, organized Islamic propagation after the brief period that we called ‘the first phase’” (35). At the time, two groups were responsible for propagating the religion: Muslim merchants in East Africa and the Sufis in East, West, and North Africa, who the *Shaykh* said “called to everything *except* the correct understanding of Islam” (37). This section is vitally important, as it clarifies how so many innovated practices spread across Africa. Here, the *Shaykh* exposes the Sufis’ plot to exploit the common Muslims and turn them away from the scholars of Islam, calling the people to heretical beliefs, like the concept of “absolute freedom,” which set out “to destroy all religious responsibilities” and to establish “the religion of pantheism” (39). Therefore, the *Shaykh* explains, no one should call the Sufis “callers to Islam,” for they merely “removed the people from blatant paganism and entered them into a camouflaged paganism” (39). He ends this section by describing the long-term effects of the Sufi call, and how they facilitated the spread of communism throughout the continent.

Next, in the third phase, the *Shaykh* discusses the Muslims’ need of rectification and the role of the Islamic University of al-Madinah in that rectification, as students came from all over the world to study in an Islamic environment before returning home to teach the correct understanding of the religion and seeking to root out paganism, innovations, and heresies. He then names several prominent African scholars, including: [1] the *sultan*, the *mujahid*, the *Salafi*, *Shaykh* ‘Uthman b. Muhammad, known as Ibn Fudi al-Fulani; [2] *Shaykh* Muhammad ‘Abd Allah from al-Madinah by way of Mali; and [3] *Shaykh* Tahir of Algeria. He concludes by saying,

This clarifies, O noble reader, that studying African history and the stages of Islamic *dawah* and its history invalidates the well-known slogan “the unknowns of Africa” [...] I believe I have given the noble reader a clear picture about the Islamic *dawah* in Africa throughout history, or at least stirred something in the soul for the reader to study the history of Africa, the stages of the Islamic *dawah*, and the position of those who carried

Islam to the continent, and they are the companions of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) (48).

In the final section, the *Shaykh* lists the necessary conditions for the spread of Islam in Africa, including the attributes the caller must possess:

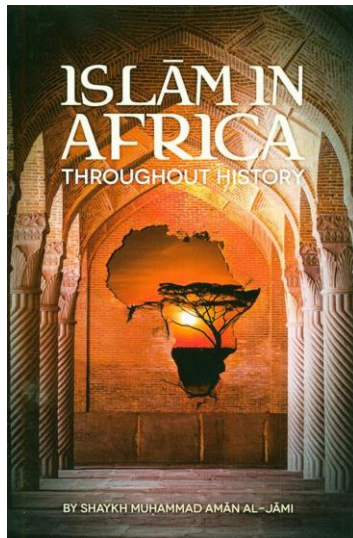
- The caller must be a person of firm, truthful *aqidah*.
- The caller must have understanding in the religion and insight into the methodology of *dawah*.
- The caller must have wisdom and poise and not be reckless.
- The caller must avoid flattery.
- The caller must have patience and endurance.

And without question, the caller in any land must possess such attributes.

Shaykh Muhammad Aman al-Jami then briefly chronicles some of his travels to different places in Africa, including Chad, Nigeria, Togo, Niger, Mali, Ghana, etc., where he discovered “what delights the hearts concerning the Islamic *dawah* in those countries” (52).

Finally, the *Shaykh* addresses the students of knowledge from various Islamic universities, particularly students in the Islamic University of al-Madinah, who “give us optimism about the future of Africa” (55). “These students,” he writes, “give their Muslim brothers the best anyone could receive: they give them sound Islamic creed and beliefs, deep faith, and Islamic direction, which affects every facet of our lives” (56).

Thus, this treatise *Islam in Africa Throughout History*, rendered into English with a clear, comprehensible prose style, is indispensable for anyone seeking to learn the history of Islam in Africa, beginning with the companions of Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ). It is a singular work, penned by one of the preeminent scholars of our time, himself a native of the African continent. May Allah reward him abundantly and grant him mercy.



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By *al-Allamah* Muhammad Aman al-Jami

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Publication Date: Rabi’ Al-Thani 1438 AH/January 2017 CE

ISBN: 978-1-5323-3086-5

Publisher: Authentic Statements (80 pp.)