SIERRA LEONE

by

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INTRODUCTION

Not all parts of Sierra Leone could be properly surveyed, for reasons of insecurity. In some parts of the Southern and Eastern provinces there is a fierce war going on between the Sierra Leonean Armed Forces and rebels who control most of the region. In areas like Koidu, Pendembu and Nyannehun, many people have lost their belongings to the invading rebels or have had to flee from the scene of fighting. This contributed in no small measure to the difficulty in obtaining information about local collections.

This large-scale migration has led to the probable movement of collections. The rebels, who are anti-Islamic, according to the refugees from the troubled areas, destroy anything Islamic when they force their way into private homes. The threat of destruction which now lies over Islamic manuscripts as a result of the continent’s insecurity problems cannot be over-emphasized.

In Sierra Leone, Islamic manuscripts are dispersed, uncatalogued and unlisted, often in the hands of uninformed owners and exposed to a whole range of climatic and biological damage. The collections need arranging, classifying, cataloguing, microfilming and preservation. However, some owners do attach great importance and spiritual value to MSS forming part of the family heritage, to such an extent that they frequently refuse access to them, or deny having collections in their possession.

INDIVIDUAL COLLECTIONS

FADUGU

Abubakar Tafsir

c/o Yusuf Tafsir
PO Box 215, Fadugu
Date of establishment: 1926
Status: Private
Conditions of access: By permission of the late owner’s heirs.
Total number of Islamic MSS: 121 (Arabic; Hausa).
Description of collection: This collection was probably established when
the late owner, Malam Abubakar Tafsiir, arrived in Fadugu from Ghana, via Grand Bassa, Liberia. Malam Tafsiir is said to have brought these MSS with him, thus making it impossible to know their places of origin.

Given the fact that the majority are works of the Sokoto Jihâd leaders, it is probable that most are from Nigerian sources. The collection was bequeathed to the children of the late owner, following his death some years ago. No effort has been made to add to it. Some MSS were sold to a foreign researcher, who visited the town some years ago. There exist 5 old MSS in this collection, dating back to the 15th century, but most are undated. Those with dates were either copied or written between the 18th and 19th centuries. There are MSS with beautiful Islamic calligraphy and excellent bindings, including a fine Qur'âan.

The subjects covered by the collection are as follows: tafsîr (4), fiqh (18), Qur'âan (1), Qur'anic sciences (1), Hadîth (17), ta'wîd (20), medicine (9), mathematics (13), logic (8), methodology (3), usûl (3), jihâd (18), sermons (4), fiqh (2).

The MSS are kept in a wooden box in the late owner’s house in a spacious room. They are well preserved, and with a few exceptions, appear to be in perfect condition. However, constant dusting is required, and occasional exposure is needed to protect them from damp and bookworm. The collection has some rarities, which include: (i) Um'm al-barâ'în, dated 1486, by Mu'âmmad Yûnis; (ii) Al-Mansûma al-Jâzi'iyâ fi 'l-ta'wîd, dated 1497, by 'Abd Allâh al-Jâzi'îri; (iii) Tâbîth dha'wî 'l-himam by 'Abd Allâh ibn Ahmad, dated 1493.

There is no information on whether the collection is catalogued or not.

FALABA

Alhaji Abdullahi Kamara

PO Box 171, Falaba
Date of establishment: 1960
Status: Private
Conditions of access: By permission of the owner.
Total number of Islamic MSS: 87 (Arabic).
Description of collection: This collection is from Sierra Leonean,

Senegalese and Guinean sources, purchased by the owner during his missionary trips. Some he copied himself. The collection covers a variety of purely Islamic subjects: fiqh (17), Hadîth (22), usûl (9), Qur'âan (6), theology (10), fiqh (15), sermons (7), politics (1).

Most of the MSS were copied in the 20th century, the rest in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. There are two manuscripts of artistic significance. The MSS are housed in a room which serves as the prayer and study room of the owner, and most are well preserved, but a few have had their bindings and some pages destroyed by damp and termites.

They are kept on a wooden reading table and look very dusty.

There are two significant MSS in this collection: (i) Sharî'ah al-sagîda al-barâ'în by Ahmad Bâbâ, dated 1601; (ii) Usûl al-siyâsâ by Muhammad Bello, dated 1810.

Saidu Maliki

c/o PO Box 171, Falaba
Date of establishment: 1948
Status: Private
Conditions of access: By permission of the owner.
Total number of Islamic MSS: 76 (Arabic).
Description of collection: Malam Saidu Maliki, a prominent Islamic scholar and teacher, initiated this collection. According to him, 15 MSS were bequeathed to him by his late teacher, and he made some efforts to enrich the collection in 1949, buying about 20 MSS in the process. The rest were copied by his students.

There are some old MSS in this collection, the oldest dating back to the 13th century. The majority are, however, recently copied. The MSS are well preserved, and kept in a wooden box in a dilapidated room. The collection covers the following subjects: 'usûl (7), history (14), fiqh (9), Qur'âan and related studies (12), Hadîth (15), usûl (6), education (8), philosophy (2), medicine (3).

The rarities in this collection are: (i) Fath al-shukrî fi murî'dat a'yân 'ulamâ' al-Tahrîr by Muhammâd 'Abd Allâh ibn Bakr, dated 1799; (ii) 'Ullâm al-Hadîth by Ibn 'Abâl, dated 1624; and (iii) Mustâh al-'Ullâm by Yûsuf ibn Bakr 'Sakkârî, dated 1229.
FREETOWN

Institute of African Studies, Fourah Bay University College

Status: Academic library
Conditions of access: Open to students of the Institute and researchers.
Description of collection: Following the meeting of experts on the utilisation of written sources for the history of Africa, held at Timbuktu in 1967, this Institute initiated a programme to assemble Islamic manuscripts in its library to serve as source material for researchers and scholars. No information about the number of MSS collected or microfilmed and the success of this programme was available, but detailed information about this collection can be obtained from the Director or the Chief Librarian of the Institute of African studies.

Sierra Leone Government Archives

c/o Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, Wallace Johnson Street, Freetown
Status: Public archives
Conditions of access: Open to bona fide researchers and scholars.
Description of collection: The archives possess Islamic manuscripts and documents. For details, contact the address above.

KABALA

Shaykh Muhammad Baba

House No. K.27, Kabala
Status: Private
Conditions of access: By permission of the late owner’s landlord.
Total number of Islamic MSS: 106 (Arabic).
Description of collection: According to Malam Yassin, the landlord of the late Shaykh Muhammad Baba, the owner of this collection was an itinerant scholar, who had settled in Kabala some three decades ago. His nationality could not be established. He died some 23 years ago, and this collection together with other belongings was bequeathed to his landlord, since the late Shaykh Muhammad Baba had no immediate relations.
The collection is kept in a large wooden bookcase. Though dusty and poorly kept, the MSS are in good condition, only a few having torn covers. The uniqueness of this collection lies in the beautiful calligraphy of most of the MSS.
The subjects covered by this collection are: fiqh (26), tasawwuf (15), wazil (7), Hadith (9), Qur‘an (4), Qur‘anic sciences (3), history (13), medicine (10), mathematics (6), education (13).
The collection has MSS which date between the 17th and 20th centuries, but others are undated and anonymous. The rarities are: Hadisiat Al-Mudhkarin ‘ida kasyfyyat al-khalas min ḥaqq Allāh by ‘Umar ibn Sa‘id al-Fūrī, undated; and (ii) Qasida fi ‘ilm al-ta‘īqa by Al-Muhittāb Kūnti, undated.
The collection is uncatalogued.

Alfa Qassim Watara

c/o Kabala Central Mosque
Status: Private
Conditions of access: By permission of the owner.
Total number of Islamic MSS: 90 (Arabic).
Description of collection: The owner, an elderly Sufi Shaykh, was motivated by the high cost of printed Islamic books to embark upon the collection of Islamic MSS some decades ago. He personally copied some with the help of his two brothers, and purchased others from itinerant booksellers. Some 30 MSS belonging to a Gambian scholar were transferred to this collection after his death. The MSS are kept in a metal bookcase. Some have lost their bindings and most have had pages partially destroyed by damp. They are all very dusty. The collection contains purely Islamic works by famous Islamic scholars and jihād leaders in West Africa. The subjects are as follows: jihād (19), Qur‘an (3), sufī (2), Hadith (16), Qur‘anic sciences (9), fiqh (22), tasawwuf (13), history (6).
Most of the MSS appear to be of 19th- and 20th-century origin, but there are three from the 17th century. Most of the works are anonymous. Two works have fine calligraphy. The rarities in this collection include: ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn ‘Abd Allāh’s Tārīkh al-Sūdān, dated 1656; and Bayān wa‘īd al-hijra by ‘Uthmān ibn Fūdī, undated.
The collection is uncatalogued.
KAMAKWIE

Shaykh Mahmoud Lamine
Shaykh Mahmoud residence
c/o Central Mosque, Kamakwie
Date of establishment: 1969
Status: Private
Conditions of access: By permission of the owner.
Total number of Islamic MSS: 145 (Arabic).
Description of collection: The owner of this collection returned to Freetown from Medina in Kaolack, Senegal, where he spent two decades studying Islamic religious knowledge with various sheikhs. About 70% of the MSS were copied by the owner himself, and the rest were either purchased by him or donated by friends. Almost all the MSS are from Senegal.

The MSS cover the following subjects: Sufism (32), medicine (15), Qur’anic sciences (28), fiqh (28), theology (6), Qur’ān (1), Ḥadīth (3), praises of the holy Prophet (2), usul (11), fatwās (9), philosophy (2), psychology (2), Shari’a law (6), history (4), astronomy (1), correspondence (3).

The MSS are arranged on old wooden bookshelves in the owner’s study. They are well preserved. About 90% of the MSS are in perfect condition, the rest have lost some of their pages and covers.

The MSS in this collection boast high quality paper and ink, but, with the exception of a few, have poor calligraphy. Most are anonymous and undated.

The rarities in this collection are: (i) the undated Tābih al-jamā’a ‘alā al-ahkām al-shafi‘īyya’ by Muhammad Bello; (ii) Zuhūr al-basātīn fi ta‘rīkh Sawādīn by Muḥammad Kamara, dated 1930; (iii) Qisṣā Sālahā wa-wāridh Khānājī, dated 1890, by Māḥmūd ibn ‘Abd al-Latīf Sālahā.

Unpublished catalogue:
A handwritten list describes all the MSS in this collection.

KAMBIA

Alhaji Ibrahim Turay
PO Box 1168, Kambia
Date of establishment: 1972
Status: Private
Conditions of access: By appointment with the owner.
Total number of Islamic MSS: 46 (Arabic).
Description of collection: Most of the MSS in this collection were purchased from the Ivory Coast where the owner had stayed in a town called Bouafle, working as an Islamic teacher. His profession required the collection of Islamic MSS, for his day-to-day teaching activity. His return to Sierra Leone afforded him the time to copy some MSS from printed Islamic texts, which he could not afford to buy.

The MSS in this collection cover the following subjects: Qur’ān (1), taṣāfīr (1), fiqh (7), taqwīd (10), Ḥadīth (7), education (4), Sufism (9), Qur’anic sciences (2), medicine (5).
The MSS are kept on the study mat of the owner in his study room. They are well preserved, although most of them have lost their covers, probably as a result of their constant use by the owner and his students. The collection lacks any artistic significance or rarities. Most of the MSS were copied in the 20th century, and the rest are undated.

Unpublished catalogue:
A sijill (register) describes 38 MSS in this collection without details.

MANO
Jumu‘a Mosque

Status: Trust

Total number of Islamic MSS: 4 (Arabic).
Description of collection: This collection is made up of one Qur‘an, two works in praise of the Holy Prophet (Dal‘al al-Khayr al-Burda) and Imam Malik’s Musawwar.

The collection is kept in a wooden box in the mosque for public reading. The MSS are in perfect condition, and possess excellent bindings. All are undated and anonymous.

It is doubtful if this collection has been catalogued.

Sheriff (Sharif) Sani Muhammad

House No. M. 48, Mano

Status: Private

Total number of Islamic MSS: 7 (Arabic).

Description of collection: This collection possesses a rare manuscript: Kifayat al-‘Azizi by al-Husayn bin Ahmad al-Muhallabi, written in 1067. Three works in this collection are on fiqh, and the rest are on the Qur‘an and Hadith. The collection is well preserved and is in perfect condition. It is kept on the owner’s study mat, in his private room.

YELE
Abdulkarim Yunus Kanu

Main street, House No. 314, Yele

Status: Private

Total number of Islamic MSS: 11 (Arabic).

Description of collection: This collection was purchased in Sierra Leone for the owner’s studies. It has some MSS with calligraphy of artistic value. Two MSS have lost their bindings, but the rest are in perfect condition. The collection is displayed on a small reading-table.

They are on the following subjects: fiqh (3), Qur‘an (1), taṣawwuf (2), Sufism (1), Hadith (2), poetry (1).

This collection has two rarities: Tafsir al-Fusiha, dated 1680, by Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Kūrī; and Abu ʿAbd Allāh al-Bakri’s Kitāb al-masālik wa-t-mamālik, undated.

It is not known whether the collection is catalogued.