

# Arabic Manuscripts Preservation and Conservation In Waziri Junaidu History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto

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Abstract

**Purpose:** The study, Arabic manuscript Preservation and Conservation in Waziri Junaidu History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto was conducted to assess the strategies adopted by the Bureau on how Arabic manuscripts are being preserved and conserved. Much effort is being put forward to improve on the Arabic manuscripts handling in the Bureau.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** Case study method was adopted for the study. The research instrument used to collect data for the study was questionnaire. Since the whole population for the study was 18, all of them were adopted. Data were presented in frequency tables and percentages. Analysis and discussions were made to each table.

**Findings:** The study revealed that regular cleaning and dusting of manuscripts, fumigation and provision of adequate air conditioners are the major strategies used to preserve Arabic manuscripts in the Bureau and that binding, lamination and electro copying are the methods used in the conservation of Arabic manuscripts in the Bureau.

**Implication:** Arabic manuscripts are highly vital for historical and cultural knowledge transmission that should be adequately preserved and conserved for posterity.

**Original Value:** It was recommended that the Bureau should adopt preventive and remedial preservation policy followed by committed substantial investment in keeping pace with modern technology in digitizing the Arabic manuscripts for conversion into cost effective and interoperable digital asset. There is need for the Bureau to liaise with other organizations within and outside Nigeria that have gone far in manuscripts preservation and conservation in order to learn more about methods of manuscripts conservation such as microfilming and De acidification.

**Keywords:** Arabic manuscript, Arabic Language, Preservation, Conservation, Waziri Junaidu History and Cultural Bureau, Sokoto

**Paper type:** Empirical

## Introduction

Arabic is a semantic (language group) and one of the major languages through which African History and Culture have been transmitted from generation to generation. Arabic is the language of the inhabitants of the Arabian peninsula, the Arabs. Historically, the presence of Arabic language in West Africa has been associated with trade and commerce long before the coming of Almoravid movement (Kudus, 2010). There has been Muslim community in large centres of West Africa. With the advent of Islam, the language moved out of the confines of the Arabian Peninsula and spread to all parts of the globe. According to Galadanchi (2007), the presence of the Arabs on the African continent indigenized the Arabic language in Africa. The earliest manuscripts in circulation in Muslim countries were copies of the Glorious Qur'an

and the Al-hadith, the two being the most authentic original sources of Islam. These Arabic manuscripts began to spread all over the Muslim territories.

Furthermore, because of the encouragements given to and the efforts made for seeking and acquiring knowledge and disseminating it, earlier Muslim leaders and Ulama endeavoured to collect and preserve those documents for the benefit of students and the general public at large. The efforts made by some Caliphs like Al-ma'mun to establish a public library for keeping these manuscripts were indeed remarkable (Idris, 2010). Kudus (2010) archaeologically traced the Arabic manuscripts back to the 4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D which indicated that Arabic manuscripts evolved from "NABATEAN", a direct descendent of "ARAMAIC" which is itself an off-spring of a Proto-Semitic alphabet. However, Fazy (2012)

defined manuscript as written information that has been manually created by one or more people such as a handwritten letter as opposed to being printed or reproduced some other way. The word manuscript was derived from the Medieval Latin 'Manuscriptum' meaning a word first recorded in 1594 as a Latinisation of earlier Germanic words used in the middle age.

### **Brief History of Waziri Junaidu History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto**

Waziri Junaidu History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto was established in 1973 through the edict No. 3 of North Western State and charged with the responsibility of collecting, preserving and displaying all aspects of the history and culture of Sokoto State. The bureau, today is one of the most important data banks and research centres in Nigeria with more than 500,000 volumes of records, archival documents, photographs, artifacts, museum objects, Arabic/Ajani manuscripts and other documents of historical and cultural importance. Idris (2014) stated that in 1997, the Sokoto State government decided to merge the former council for Arts and Culture with the Bureau through the Sokoto edict No.7 of 1997 as amended. Thus, some new functions were added to the Bureau to reflect the merger. The Bureau has been placed under the State Ministry of Social Welfare, Sports and Culture as its mother Ministry to supervise its activities. Idris (2015) stated that the management of the Bureau is being headed by the Executive Director who is assisted by two Deputies in charge of two major departments; History and Culture.

### **History and Culture**

According to Idris (2015), the departments of History and Culture are sub divided into seven units for easy management and administration. The seven (7) units and their contents are described as follows:

1. **Museum and Monument Units:** This unit harbours historical materials that were used by the Sokoto Jihadists such as weapons, farming tools and influents, house utensils, flags among others are kept and displayed for visiting researchers to see and examine.
2. **Archives and Library Unit:** This unit contains government records, published works such as textbooks, research works (projects, thesis and dissertations), Newspapers, magazines etc. These materials

are sorted, arranged, classified and preserved for easy access.

3. **Arabic Ajami Manuscripts and Translation Unit:** This unit consists of Arabic, Islamic and Ajami manuscripts including all writings of Jihadi scholars. These resources are being translated into Hausa, Fulfulde and English. Some Arabic manuscripts to tallying 1,206 and Ajami manuscripts to tallying 112 are already preserved in this unit. Thus, staff members are busy sorting and working on newly collected manuscripts numbering over 500 manuscripts.
4. **Research and Documentation Unit:** Here records are microfilmed, manuscripts are photographed and the units keep historical photographs right from the era of Colonial masters to first republic. It contains records of past presidents and Heads of State, past state governors and many more. Other important records that are found in this unit include; seminar, conference papers, video, CD-ROM, DVD, Audio and VHS cassettes among others are kept here for consultation.
5. **Repair and Bindery Unit:** This unit ensures that the records and archival documents withstand the test of time. Major and minor repairs are being carried out for conversion. They also check and repair the excesses of climate condition and dampness of documents as well as those that have suffered from repeated usage.
6. **Extension, Craft and Visual Arts Unit:** This unit takes care of all their branches which are near and far away such as:
  - i. Waziri os Sokoto Private Library at Gwandu
  - ii. Dallatu Museum at Dallatun Sokoto House
  - iii. Gobir Museum Sabon Birnin Gobir
  - iv. All Cultural Centres at Zonal Offices in Sokoto
  - v. Crafts such as Weaving, Knitting, Pottery, Arts, Smiting and Souvenir shops are all under this unit.
7. **Performing Arts and Cultural Research Unit:** This unit is in charge of the following:
  - i. Physical Cultural Performing Troup of Sokoto State;
  - ii. Cultural Festivals (International, National and Local);
  - iii. Artist Camp where they Practice actions;

- iv. Maigero Open Art Theatre and
- v. Botanical Garden and Traditional Medicine as well as Cultural Documentation.

### Statement of the Problem

Muslims scholars of previous centuries made serious efforts to collect and record all relevant information about their religion, and in so doing they were able to produce voluminous manuscripts mainly in Arabic texts which were later transmitted to a number of Islamic territories. Galadanci (2007) stated that at the moment, these Arabic manuscripts in the north are scattered all over the public libraries, private libraries and research centres in Nigeria and even outside especially in Africa, Asia, America and European countries. Hence, there is urgent need to explore the various ways and means for conserving and preserving this heritage by making use of the modern technological methods of ICT, as previous methods of conserving and preserving could not withstand the test of the time. The constraints on Libraries, Archives or Repository Centres in Africa and the developing countries are many; unsatisfactory equipment and facilities for bindery and repairs of books and journals, poor building architecture, inadequate storage facilities, security and air conditioning problems.

### Objectives

This research was particularly conducted to assess the strategies adopted for preserving and conserving Arabic manuscripts in Waziri Junaidu History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto. It also had the following objectives:

- i. To identify different types of strategies available for the preservation of Arabic manuscripts in Waziri Junaidu History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto.
- ii. To find out different type of methods used for the conservation of Arabic manuscripts in Waziri Junaidu History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto.

### Research Design

The research methodology used was a survey research method. The population for the study comprised of three units in the Bureau namely: Arabic/Ajami manuscripts and translation unit, Research and Documentation unit and Repair and Bindery unit. Total population sampling technique was adopted for this study. Charturvedi (2005) defined total population sampling as a type of sampling technique that

involves examining the entire population that have a particular set of characteristics. The researcher chooses this type of sampling technique based on who he thinks has an expertise in the area been studied.

The researcher used 18 questionnaires of which 7 were administered to 7 staff from Arabic/Ajami manuscripts and translation unit, 6 from Research and Documentation unit and 5 from Repair and Bindery unit. Akuezuilo (1993) remarked that one of the advantages of using questionnaire by a researcher is to enables respondents to express their opinion freely. The questionnaire contained seven (7) items and was given to two senior lecturers to scrutinize and evaluate its validity. Their criticism and suggestions were carefully noted and necessary corrections and amendments were incorporated into the instrument. All questionnaire 18(100%) were completed and returned and were found useful for the study.

### Literature Review

#### *Strategies for Preservation of Arabic Manuscripts*

Preservation encompasses all those actions that are capable of preventing deterioration of manuscripts from the moment they are added to a library collection. Jimoh (2007) described preservation as good housekeeping practices, security, measures to protect collections against fire and water damage complete the range of environmental concerns. El-Miskin (2009) identified two types of methods of preserving Arabic/Ajami manuscripts in West Africa and Northern Nigeria in Particular. They are:

- A – Traditional methods of manuscript preservation
- B – Modern methods of manuscripts preservation

**A – Traditional methods of manuscript preservation:** Before the coming of colonial administration Ulama have used a number of methods to preserve their Arabic, Islam and Ajami manuscripts. The following were some of the methods:

- i. Gafaka: Small bag or sachet made with leather.
- ii. Tadarishi: Local binding stiff cover for holding manuscripts.
- iii. Rufewa-Rumbu: Room for corn bin.
- iv. Tukunya: Cooking pot made with clay mud.

- v. Lehen Kaba: Basket made from palm fronds.
- vi. Kwando: Large basket.
- vii. Adudu na Kaba: Huge basket with cover.

Other traditional methods used for preserving Arabic/Ajami manuscripts as pointed out by Jabo (2012) include the following:

1. Memorization: People were asked to memorize some books so that in the event of any loss of the document those who had it in their memory can re-write the documents.
2. Insertion: Arabic/Ajami manuscripts were written with ink which has gum Arabic and it sometime makes papers merged together and lead to manuscripts damage. Hence, Ulama usually insert plain paper in between papers to prevent contact and sticking together.
3. Suspension: Arabic/Ajami manuscripts were suspended either on table made of fire wood or Marafayi-Ragaya to avoid contact with water.
4. Copyist: Ulama usually made some copies of books and sent them to their relations or friends and students so that if any one of them get lost, he can easily get another copy out of the one sent.
5. Qualitative Ink: Preservation measures normally started from initial formation or composition of ink. Gum Arabic and cassava powder were added to the usual charcoal of the ink so that the writing can last for a very long period without fading.

The two modern methods are as follow:

1. Control of relative temperature and humidity
2. Digitization of Arabic/Ajami manuscripts

1. **Control of Relative Temperature and Humidity:** Preservation measure is a control of relative temperature, humidity, lightening, dust, pollutants and pests. The enemies of old documents/manuscript are heat, humidity and sunlight. To maintain their fine condition, they should be kept in a stable storage condition free from excess fluctuation of temperature and humidity.

Biddle (2008) remarked that in order to control temperature and relative humidity in non-temperate country such as Nigeria, provision of stable fans and functional air conditioning in the Arabic manuscripts

repository is very essential. Extreme dryness should be avoided. Because it may cause Arabic manuscripts to become brownish at the edge and under extreme severe condition they become brittle and even crumble to powder.

**Control of Lightening:** Most paper items, which Arabic manuscripts are susceptible to damage from ultra violet (UV) and visible light. Ultra violet radiation which emanated from the sun and fluorescent bulbs is damaging to manuscripts. Arabic manuscripts should be stored away from the light, sun and heat to avoid fading and or yellowish.

**Pollution, Dust and Pest Control:** Pollution such as car exhaust and heating system can cause damage to Arabic manuscripts. They should be protected from dust and dirt. In West Africa and in Nigeria in particular, Arabic manuscripts are vulnerable to destruction by certain creatures such as rats, cockroaches, beetles, termites etc. To control the menace of these insects, there is need for a routine fumigation of rooms where manuscripts were kept in order to create conducive environmental condition that greatly reduce the threat of these pests.

2. **Digitization of Arabic Manuscripts:** Digitization can be defined as the process of converting data to digital format for processing by electronic machine. Reitz (2005) stated that digitization involves the conversion of printed text or images into binary signals using scanning devices that can enable the result to be displayed on a computer screen. Digital preservation is part of modern techniques of preserving manuscripts. In this method manuscripts are preserved with their natural condition (appearance).

### Conservation of Arabic Manuscripts

The conservation and preservation are mostly inseparable concepts that are interdependent of each other. They are methods used to prolong the life span of Arabic manuscripts. They are concepts that attracted many definitions depending on the context in which they appeared. Biddle (2008) sees conservation as the return of the work to its 'original' appearance. Conservators of paper materials are expected to have a strong background in chemistry and art

history in order to interpret, predict and arrest the destruction of paper and applied media.

According to Jabo (2012), conservation involves treatment and preventive methods to improve the appearance and physical condition of art and archival materials like Arabic manuscripts. Conservation entailed several considerations e.g. value of the documents, its future use, its aesthetic importance and how much money to be allotted for conservation treatment. Conservation in a box is neither modern nor traditional way of preserving Arabic manuscripts. However, it could be regarded as a modern method of conserving Arabic manuscripts when necessary

procedures are followed in box making. There are some centres in Nigeria that are currently using box in preserving Arabic/Ajami manuscripts. One of these centres is Waziri Junaidu History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto. It is worthy to note that the best box could be made with “E” flute corrugated board (acid free board). Unfortunately, the corrugated board is not available in Nigeria.

**Data Analysis and Discussions**

Details of the results and analysis of data are presented in percentages using frequency distribution table.

**Demographic Features of the Respondents**

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Demographic Characteristics**

S/No.	Variables	Classification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Gender	Male	18	100
		<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100</b>
2.	Age	25 – 30	11	61.1
		31 – 40	7	38.9
		<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100</b>
3.	Qualification	Diploma	14	77.8
		Degree	4	22.2
		<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100</b>
4.	Years of Experience	11 – 15	8	44.5
		16 & Above	6	33.3
		5 – 10	4	22.2
		<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100</b>

In table 1, the gender compositions of respondents were not proportionately distributed. It was clear that the male population dominated the three units under study numbering (18:100%) This may be due to the fact that Men are usually more knowledgeable and actively involved in the aspects of Arabic manuscripts work than their female counterpart. It was ascertained in the literature review that those that should engage in the collection and preservation of Arabic manuscripts must be able to read and translate Arabic texts which can be commonly found among men in Sokoto State. It was also discovered in this research that members of staff between the ages of 25 – 30 are more (11:61.1%). This is followed by the availability of few numbers of staff within the ages of 31-40 (7:38.9%) respectively. This explains why manuscripts collection and preservation have been fully successful in the Bureau.

Table 1 further showed the staff qualifications. It revealed that staff with Diploma certificate are higher with (14:77.8%) followed by few staff members with degree certificate numbering (4:22.2%). This has demonstrated some degree of professionalism in the handling of

manuscripts collection and preservation. From the distribution (8:44.5%) have spent between 11-15 years in the Bureau, (6:33.3%) had spent over 16 years and (4:22.2%) have spent between 5-10 years. The length of period respondents worked in their various units as presented in the table is a clear indicator that the Bureau is an old organization that have produced experts in manuscripts management activities.

Table 2 shows various strategies being used by the bureau to preserve Arabic manuscripts. Respondents indicated that they indulge in regular cleaning and dusting of manuscripts (17:94.4%), fumigation (16:88.9%), provision and maintenance of cooling systems (13:72.2%) as well as provision of curtain blinds to reduce the penetration of sunlight recorded (12:66.7%). The findings are in line with that of Jimoh (2007) who asserted that measures used in limiting the extremes of temperature and humidity are use of air conditioners, fans and windows, use of dehumidifiers to reduce humidity in badly affected areas of book stack, and use of blinds to keep out direct sunlight.

In addition to the strategies listed, other strategies include proper shelving of manuscripts

always (12:66.7), adequate lightening by providing adequate fluorescent tubes with (11:61.1%) and the use of close shelves as a measure to check excessive use of the manuscripts and had (7:38.9%). This contradicts with that of Jabo (2012) who lamented that considering the rate at which Nigerian Arabic manuscripts are deteriorating as a result of both

natural or manmade disaster and hazardous conditions like relative humidity, temperature, light, pest, pollutants, dust and chemical oxides. It is quite right to employ the use of modern information technology gadgets in order to save these enormous manuscripts that contained a lot of Nigeria’s literary and intellectual heritage from disappearance.

**Table 2: Strategies Available for the Preservation of Arabic Manuscripts in Waziri Junaidu History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto**

Strategies for the Preservation of Arabic Manuscripts Options	Response Rate							
	AMTU		RDU		RBU		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Regular cleaning and dusting of manuscripts	6	33.3	6	33.3	5	27.8	17	94.4
Fumigation	7	38.9	5	27.8	4	22.2	16	88.9
Provision of air conditioners	5	27.8	5	27.8	3	16.7	13	72.2
Provision of curtain blinds	5	27.8	4	22.2	3	16.7	12	66.7
Proper shelving of manuscripts always	4	22.2	4	22.2	4	22.2	12	66.7
Provision of adequate fluorescent tubes	4	22.2	4	22.2	3	16.7	11	61.1
Close shelves	3	16.7	2	11.1	2	11.1	7	38.9

**KEY:** AMTU = Arabic Manuscripts and Translation Unit; RDU = Research and Development Unit; RBU = Repair and Bindery Unit

**Table 3: Types of Methods Used for the Conservation of Arabic Manuscripts in Waziri Junaidu History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto**

Methods of Conserving Arabic Manuscripts Options	Response Rate							
	AMTU		RDU		RBU		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Binding	7	38.9	6	33.3	5	27.8	18	100
Lamination	6	38.9	6	38.9	5	27.8	17	94.4
Electro copying	5	27.8	5	27.8	3	16.7	13	72.2
Use of insecticides and insect repellent	5	27.8	5	27.8	3	16.7	13	72.2
Mending/Sewing	4	22.2	4	22.2	4	22.2	12	66.7
De acidification	4	22.2	4	22.2	3	16.7	11	61.1
Microfilming	4	22.2	4	22.2	3	16.7	11	61.1

**KEY:** AMTU = Arabic Manuscripts and Translation Unit; RDU = Research and Development Unit; RBU = Repair and Bindery Unit

The analysis as indicated in **table 3** shows that binding(18:100%) of manuscripts, lamination (17:94.4%), electro copying (13:72.2%) and the use of insecticides and insect repellent (13:72.2%) are the prominent methods for the conservation of Arabic manuscripts in the Bureau. Other common methods revealed by the respondents include mending/sewing of the loosed manuscripts recorded (12:66.7%), De acidification is a method of conservation employed by the with (11:61.1%) and microfilming with (11:61.1%) respectively. These methods of conservation are in agreement with Jimoh (2007) who explained that conservation is a field of knowledge concerned with the coordination and planning for the practical application of the techniques of binding, restoration of paper chemistry and other material technology, as well as other knowledge pertinent to the conservation of archival resources. He further confirmed that

conservation can be preventive and remedial. Preventive conservation consists of indirect action to retard deterioration and prevent damage by creating conditions optional for the preservation of materials such as de acidification, use of insecticides and insect repellent while remedial conservation which consists mainly of direct action carried out on documents in order to retard further deterioration such as electro copying, microfilming and lamination.

**Summary of Findings**

The summary of the major findings of the study are as follows:

1. The main strategies for Arabic manuscripts preservation in Waziri Junaidu History and Culture Breaeu, Sokoto include regular cleaning and dusting of manuscripts, fumigation, provision of air conditioners and provision of curtain blinds.

2. The common methods of Arabic manuscripts conservation in Waziri Junaidu History and Culture Breau, Sokoto include binding, lamination and electro copying.

### Conclusion

The study shows that preservation and conservation of Arabic manuscripts in Waziri Junaidu History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto are ongoing activities since the establishment of the Bureau. Practicing of these activities are sometimes hindered by some problems notably inadequate funding, harsh environmental conditions, administrative bottle necks and non-policy on the preservation and conservation of Arabic manuscripts. Arabic manuscripts are highly vital and should be adequately preserved and conserved for posterity. Since the Bureau is charged with the responsibility of collecting, interpreting, preserving and conserving significant manuscripts that are of historical and evidential importance needed to be strategically preserved and conserved.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher found it necessary to make the following recommendations:

1. Waziri Junaidu History and Culture Bureau, Sokoto should be committed to a substantial investment in keeping pace with technology in digitizing the Arabic manuscripts for conversion into cost effective and interoperable digital asset.
2. There is need for the Bureau to adopt other means of conserving Arabic manuscripts such as microfilming, polyester encapsulation, minor repairs, stitches and De acidification.

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