



THE LIFE AND CONTRIBUTION OF NANA ASMA'U

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Introduction

In both recent academic scholarship and media reporting, the education of Muslim women is seen to be unequal and inadequate. On average, women living in Muslim-majority countries tend to have fewer years of schooling, lower rates of labor force participation, less representation in politics, and wider gender gaps on these measures compared with women in other countries.¹ The extent to which some of these conclusions are tainted by negative stereotypes forms part of the widespread debate on Muslim women's education. Furthermore, the activities of several non-moderate groups in the last decade have placed the education of Muslim women and girls under the spotlight once more.

The facts demonstrate that, in many communities, Muslim women were the pioneers behind centers of learning for both men and women. One such pioneer was Nana Asma'u who lived in West Africa between 1793 and 1864. This paper will highlight her role as an educator, political and social actor, and contributor to literary and religious life. The legacy of Nana Asma'u can indeed serve as a template and guide for shaping Muslim women's education in the 21st century.

1- McClendon, David & Hackett, Conrad & Potančoková, Michaela & Stonawski, Marcin & Skirbekk, Vegard. (2018). Women's Education in the Muslim World. *Population and Development Review*. 44 (1) at p. 2.

The Context of Asma'u's¹ Family

Any study of Asma'u is incomplete without reference to her family and the context into which she was born. West Africa in the 1800s was part of a long-established network of social and commercial exchange and West African cities were "cosmopolitan centers with their own administrative hierarchies, education systems, and centuries of connection to Mediterranean cultures through trans-Saharan commercial routes."² The village of Degel was situated in the north-western part of what is now known as Nigeria. This region was populated by two major ethnic groupings, the Hausa-speaking Hausa, and the Fulfude-speaking Fulani. Asma'u's ancestors had settled in Degel and their associated name 'Fodio' indicated that the family had long since been associated with Islamic scholarship.

Uthman Dan Fodio (1754 – 1817) was a Fulani Muslim scholar descended from the Toronkawa, pastoralists who lived near the Senegal River and who had converted to Islam as early as the ninth century. They were affiliated with the Qadiriyya Sufi order founded by Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (d. 1166) and migrated eastwards over generations escaping war and seeking better pastures. Uthman would later be known by the reverent title 'the Shehu' and in his book *Kitab 'Ulum al-mu'amala* (The Sciences of Behavior) he made clear his position on Sufism when he wrote, "Every responsible person must learn enough of this science to enable him to acquire

1- Local versions of names have been retained in this article. Shehu dan Fodiyo = Shaykh Uthman Ibn Fudi. Asma'u was and is widely known as Nana Asma'u; Nana is an honorific.

2- Boyd, Jean & Mack, Beverly *Educating Muslim Women: The West African Legacy of Nana Asma'u 1793 – 1864* (Leicestershire: Kube Publishing Ltd, 2013) at p 13.



praiseworthy virtues and to keep him from blameworthy qualities”¹

The Fodio family had, by the nineteenth century, made significant contributions in poetry, treatises, works on grammar and rhetoric as well as prayer in praise of the Prophet. Teaching began within the family and as a young boy, the Shehu was first educated by his mother and grandmother. Shehu Uthman Dan Fodio was described by Shaykh Mukhtar al-Kunti of Timbuktu as “an excellent scholar, a refuge, a mediator, and a lamp in the darkness”, and indeed he “combined the fundamental characteristics of two different kinds of man – on the one hand, the Sufi who strives to be in direct communication with God, and on the other, the lawyer-theologian who derives his authority from his knowledge and understanding of the law.”²

Degel was thus a village mostly inhabited by scholars who corresponded with their counterparts in Mauritania, Timbuktu, Tripoli, and Egypt rather than with the political and financial Hausa and Fulani elite. The religious commitment of the people of the village made Degel a place with no palaces or cavalry squadrons, in fact the settlement itself did not have a wall around it and its inhabitants were not armed. Degel formed part of the Gobir territory and was ruled by Nafata who in 1802 banned the Shehu and his followers from preaching and inviting people to the deen of Islam. Nafata’s successor, Yunfa enacted further restrictions and began a campaign of attacks on the Shehu’s followers living in the Gobir territory.³

1- Ibid. at p. 17.

2- Ibid at p. 19.

3- Ibid. at p. 32.

The Shehu responded with a declaration in 1803 warning Muslims not to rebel against a ruler until they had enough power to do so. If, however, they could no longer practice their religion or their lives were in danger, they should migrate to a place where they could find safety. When news of this declaration reached Yunafa, the chief instructed the Shehu to leave Gobir with his family but to leave his followers behind. To this, the Shehu replied, "I will not forsake my community, but I will leave your country for God's earth is wide"¹ referring to the verse from the Qur'an: "Was Allah's earth not wide enough for you to have made hijra elsewhere in it?"²

Thus, like the first Muslims who made the hijra from Mecca to Medina, the Shehu and his followers migrated to a barren region called Gudu. The warfare that followed the hijra would come to be known as the Sokoto Jihad (named after the caliphate the Shehu later established in Sokoto) and began in 1804. Despite initial losses, the Shehu captured the Gobir capital in 1808 marking the end of the war.³ The challenges, however, were far from over. Historian, Jean Boyd remarks:

"The main task facing the rulers of the new caliphate in 1808 was how to implement the theory of Islamic government of which they had so much theoretical knowledge. The trouble was that many of the newcomers to the region of Sokoto, the newly built caliphate capital, were captives who brought with them their own non-

1- Ibid. at p. 33.

2- Qur'an, Surah An-Nisa (4) verse 97.

3- Boyd, Jean "Distance Learning from Purdah in Nineteenth-Century Northern Nigeria: The Work of Asma'u Fodiyo" in *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 2001, Vol. 14, No. 1, Islamic Religious Poetry in Africa (Jun., 2001), pp. 7-22 at p. 9.



Sunnah beliefs and customs, as well as their feelings of resentment and dissatisfaction... The whole point of the Shehu's teaching as to win over people's hearts and minds and persuade them to be good Muslims.”¹

For the Shehu, a key component in reforming the society he now ruled over was to educate women and it is here that the contribution of his daughter Asma'u was crucial.

Birth, Education and Early Life of Asma'u

On 11 November 1793, Asma'u bint Uthman bin Muhammad Fodio and her twin brother were born. The Shehu had given his newborn son the name Hassan but instead of naming his newborn daughter Hussaina, he chose for her the name Asma'u after Asma bint Abi Bakr. That Asma was heroic in aiding the Prophet and her father as they prepared to escape persecution in Mecca and Muslims associate her with kindness, honor, braveness, and devotion.

Asma'u's name would come to carry deep significance for her community, as it was “an indication from the Shehu that she would be actively involved in the struggle to secure and serve Islam in her time and place.”²

As per the custom for young children in Degel, Asma'u began attending the village school around the age of five. The school was situated in a large compound belonging to her father and the girls and boys made use of wooden boards and ink to write out verses

1- Ibid.

2- Boyd & Mack, op cit note 5 at p. 27.

from the Qur'an, which they would memorize. Once memorized, the board would be carefully washed, and the water used to rinse the ink would be kept and later used as it had been infused with the words of God. Asma'u's first teacher was her eldest sister Hadija (d. 1856) who instructed both the boys and girls. The women of the Fodio family were well educated; the Shehu's grandmother Rukkaya was a notable teacher and poet as was his mother, Hauwa. Of the Shehu's four wives three – Maimuna, Aisha, and Hauwa – were poets and scholars. Of his daughters the most notable were Fadima (d. 1838), Maryam (d. 1880), Hadija and Asma'u – the latter two had also memorized the Qur'an.¹

Shehu Uthman dan Fodio was critical of societies that did not have educational opportunities for women and wrote,

“Most of our... educated men leave their wives, their daughters and their captives morally abandoned, like beasts, without teaching them what God prescribes should be taught to them and without instructing them in the articles of the Law which concerns them. Thus, they leave them ignorant of the rules regarding ablutions, prayer, fasting, business dealings and other duties which they must fulfill, and which God commands that they should be taught.

Men treat these beings like household implements which become broken after long use and which are then thrown out on the rubbish-heap. This is an abominable crime! Alas! How can they thus shut up their wives, their daughters, and their captives, in the darkness of

1- Azuonye, Chukwuma “Feminist or Simply Feminine? Reflections on the Works of Nana Asmā'u, a Nineteenth Century West African Woman Poet, Intellectual, and Social Activist” in *Meridians*, 2006, Vol. 6, No. 2 pp. 54-77 at p. 55.



ignorance, while daily they impart knowledge to their students? In truth they act out of egoism, and if they devote themselves to their pupils, that is nothing but hypocrisy and vain ostentation on their part.

Their conduct is blameworthy, for to instruct one's wives, daughters and captives is a positive duty, while to impart knowledge to students is only a work of supererogation, and there is no doubt but that one takes precedence over the other.

A man of learning is not strictly obliged to instruct pupils unless he is the only person in the country competent to fulfill this office; in any case he owes in the first place his care to the members of his family, because they have priority over everyone else.

Muslim women! Do not listen to the speech of those who are misguided and who sow the seed of error in the heart of another; they deceive you when they stress obedience to your husbands without telling you of obedience to God and His Messenger, and when they say that the women find her happiness in obedience to her husband.

They seek only their own satisfaction, and that is why they impose upon you tasks which the Law of God and His Prophet never especially assigned to you. Such are – the preparation of foodstuffs, the washing of clothes, and other duties which they like to impose upon you, while they neglect to teach you what God and the Prophet have prescribed for you.”¹

1- Uthman Dan Fodio, *Islam and Women in Thomas Hodgkin, Nigerian Perspectives: An Historical Anthology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 194 – 5; translated from *Nour el-albab de Cheikh Otmane ben Mohammed ben Otmane dit Ibn-Foudiou in Revue Africaine*, 41 (Algiers 1897-8), pp. 227- 8.

Thus, the environment Asma'u grew up in was one where women were accepted as intellectual peers and not relegated to the sidelines in ignorance. She was highly educated and was fluent in Fulfulde, Hausa, Arabic and had proficiency in Tamajek – the language of the western desert.¹

Asma'u was around eleven years old when the hijra began and thus she developed a political awareness in her formative years. In fact, her eyewitness accounts of battles and events add depth to the historical accounts. For example, she recounts the moment, when other Fulani community leaders, declared allegiance to her father. While the Shehu was a religious leader, the people needed a single political leader who could unify them against the Gobir establishment. Asma'u's uncle, Abdullahi, was the first to swear allegiance to Uthman, followed by her twenty-four-year-old brother, Muhammad Bello. She recalls in a poem:

*“... At Gudu, God gave him lodging, he and his people.
There was a faru tree there, it was his meeting place
Beneath it fealty was sworn to him,
The Shehu, by all including his relatives.
Everyone resolved to support him.
Our Shehu appointed his chief officers
Making Dan Jedo the army commander,
He also appointed a chief judge and a law enforcer...”²*

1- Boyd, op cit note 11 at p. 9.

2- Boyd, Jean & Mack, Beverley The Collected Works of Nan Asma'u, Daughter of Usman dan Fodiyo 1793 – 1864 (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1997) pp. 137 -8. (Hereafter referred to as the Collected Works)



In addition to witnessing the emergence of her father as a political leader, Asma'u was also exposed to valuable lessons. In the battle where the Shehu's eldest brother was killed and over two thousand men (including over two hundred who were hufaath) martyred; the community grew closer, "They depended on one another and the fortitude of each man and woman was equally valued, each person's suffering was viewed with compassion."¹ These lessons proved invaluable to Asma'u for the development and shaping of her character.

Around a year before the end of the war, at the age of 15, Asma'u married Gidado dan Laima, a close friend and aide to her brother, Muhammad Bello. Gidado himself was also a scholar who encouraged his wife's intellectual endeavors.

When Sokoto was established, the Shehu began appointing emirs and giving them instructions like the letter the Emire of Bauci received:

"From Imam Uthman dan Fodio to his brother in Islam, the Emir of Bauci, Yakub.

I greet you, and all who are together with you.

This letter is sent to inform you that I have made you Emir of your people. There are seven things I recommend you to do.

Be consistent; agree in objectives, never quarrelling.

Repair the mosques.

Pray in them.

Study the Qur'an and its teaching.

Study all aspects of religious learning.

1- Boyd & Mack op cit note 5 at p. 43.

Maintain the markets and prevent wrongdoing in them.

Wage the jihad, which is a duty.”¹

Meanwhile, Muhammad Bello established a ribat and was joined by pioneer settlers with their wives and families around 1809. When the Shehu died in 1817, there was no doubt that Muhammad Bello would be his successor. Asma’u’s husband, Gidado continued to be Bello’s advisor and was appointed as Waziri. Bello knew his sister’s competence and began mentoring her. Further evidence of her emerging knowledge and wisdom was found in Asma’u’s treatise entitled *The Way of the Pious* which she wrote in 1820 and the age of twenty-nine. Asma’u wrote:

“Affection for the Muslim community [is] shown by working for its best interests and defending it against injuries or losses; [and] asceticism in worldly affairs. ... Other signs [of love of the Prophet] are humility towards fellow believers and the avoidance of discrimination between them; and keeping good relations with one’s relatives, servants, and comrades. This is shown by being cheerful with them, doing good things for them, serving them, never acting as if superior to them, consulting them in many matters, helping them financially and physically, not coveting their possessions, not covering up any of their blameworthy affairs that one may discover, and not excusing them for such things, nor boasting to them of wealth, position, or nobility, visiting the sick ones and offering them advice without any pretense or excessive conceit. ... Moderation – the avoidance of ostentation or extravagance – is necessary in food,

1- Ibid. at p. 48.



drink and dress.”¹

It was these virtues that Asma'u would devote the rest of her life to, being a living exemplar of these virtues and transmitting this teaching to her students.

Life in Sokoto Under the Leadership of Muhammad Bello

By the mid 1820s, Sokoto was thriving and prosperous under the leadership of Muhammad Bello. Describing her brother, Asma'u wrote that he “had his affairs in order and had an excellent intelligence service... He was a very pleasant companion to friends and acquaintances: he was intelligent, with a lively mind”.²

Every morning before dawn, Asma'u performed her ablutions and morning prayer before engaging in dhikr and litanies of praise. She would then recite Qur'an until the sun came up and would open her door. Women and children would enter and after drinking fura (a yoghurt drink), she would begin checking the Qur'an boards of the children and would call them to recite to her one by one. She would then enter the schoolroom where girls and women would be engaged in other studies.³

After a mid-morning breakfast, Asma'u would receive petitioners and see women who sought out her counsel and advice. In one of his law books, her uncle Abdullahi had written “there is no calamity worse than a ruler keeping aloof from the peasantry”.⁴ This daily interaction together with her teaching, established Asma'u firmly as

1- Collected Works op cit note 17 at pp. 26-7.

2- Ibid. at p. 30.

3- Boyd & Mack op cit note 5 at p. 67.

4- Ibid. at p. 68.

an intermediary for women and key figure in the social, political, and religious life of Sokoto. “Asma’u, undoubtedly the leader of women, made listening to the complaints of ordinary women part of her daily routine. They said of her, ‘she benefited the aged and indeed anyone who came could depend on Nana because she was generous and was a peacemaker’”.¹

Asma’u’s world was therefore not the 19th century image of the “harem” which has persisted in contemporary imagination. The harem or women’s quarters are closer to Leila Ahmed’s description of “an arrangement that enabled women to have frequent and easy access to other women in their community, a place where women could exchange experience and information, and critically analyse the world of men”.²

Despite the high level of education, she offered to women and children, it must be remembered that Asma’u herself was a mother to six sons – meaning that a great part of her life was devoted to motherhood. While the Shehu had correctly put women’s education once more into the agenda, there was never any reason to believe that family life and the home would be neglected. Boyd and Mack observe that “Most importantly, the domestic context is not to be dismissed, for it was the basis of social life, and provided the foundation for any political or battle engagements in which men were involved, providing the food, clothing, and medical care, without which such engagements could not be sustained”.³

1- Ibid.

2- See Ahmed, Leila ‘Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem’, *Feminist Studies*, 8/3 (1982) pp. 521 – 534.

3- Boyd & Mack op cit note 5 at pp. 71 -72.



Asma'u particularly had special duties as the senior wife, the uwargida of Gidado. As the Wazir, Gidado had to engage in diplomacy in distant regions and take part in military campaigns, meaning that Asma'u had to oversee management of the household. Therefore, much of her role as a social reformer began in her immediate surroundings where she had to engage and deal effectively with women of varying ethnicities, social statuses, traditions, and languages. This initial ability to train and organize the women who were part of her household and those who sought to learn or take counsel from her, would prove crucial for Asma'u's later political and educational activities.

Her own poetry writing and translating also flourished during her brother's rule. When Qamar al-Din, a prominent Egyptian shaykh visited Sokoto in 1835, he brought with him two books: one about Sufi women and the other about medicine. Presented with these gifts, Bello requested Asma'u to translate *Safwa al-Safwa* written by 'Abd al-Rahman Ibn al-Jawzi from Arabic into Fulfulde and Hausa – the two languages used by the common people of Sokoto.

When Bello fell ill and died in 1837, Gidado gathered senior advisors to choose a successor. Bello's younger brother, Abubakar Atiku was chosen, and Gidado no longer wished to act as a Wazir to the new caliph. Instead, he and Asma'u began the task of writing down accounts of the lives of the Shehu and Bello.

In reading *Elegy to Bello*, one is given an example of her great gift for poetry, as can be seen in these few lines below:

"I am like a small chicken

Whose mother died, leaving him crying forlornly.

Or like someone abandoned in the wilderness,

*Howling until his ears are closed forever.
 God alone can wipe away my grief.
 I am like an abandoned infant,
 Left piteous and vulnerable,
 Like a mother and father, he cared for me,
 That is how I remember him.
 Only the grace of God can help me.”*

In reference to her poetry, Chukwuma Azuonye highlights how Asma'u sometimes departed from major classical Arabic meters and was a “precursor of T.S. Eliot’s idea of the interplay of traditional and individual talent, Asma’u’s poetry employs frequent and dense allusions to, and at times appropriated, lines verses and longer passages from the Qur’an and other classical Arabic texts that are adroitly woven into the fabric of her personal vision and ideology as a woman writing for both men and other women.”¹ It should also be noted that Asma’u was also a Sufi and that much of her poetry was cultivated as “a vehicle for direct communication with God and toward the ideas of right knowing and right doing in practical social relationships and in the discharge of social responsibilities”²

Asma’u’s poetic works written in Arabic, Hausa and Fulfulde gave her the status as one of the pre-eminent intellectuals on the African continent. This status would be further solidified by the establishment of the Yan Taru.

The Yan Taru

1- Azuonye op cit note 15 at pp. 57 – 58.

2- Ibid. at p. 61.



From the early reign of Muhammad Bello, groups of women began seeking out Asma'u and she soon established an organization for women to operate, known as the Yan Taru. Part of what propelled Asma'u to begin this initiative into being was the growing threat of bori that was spreading in Gobir. Bori was a cult of spirit possession which people were being drawn to, particularly the sick and vulnerable who believed they could find safety in the spirits. As early as 1839, Asma'u had seen the need to respond to bori and had compiled a treatise in Arabic on alleviating pain and distress caused by illness, worry and adverse conditions. She based her treatise on the *tibb-al Nabi* (medicine of the Prophet) which is a deeply spiritual method of healing and believed that it would be a complete substitute for the practices associated with bori.¹ The problem, however, was that the treatise was aimed at the educated elite. To solve this, Asma'u began composing poetry emphasizing the deviation of Bori in Hausa. It was also clear that she needed a more grassroots approach and to do this, Asma'u developed the Yan Taru – often translated as “the associates”, “those who congregate together”, “the sisterhood” or “bands of women students”.²

Asma'u began by becoming knowledgeable about the interests of the women in the Gobir region. She quickly learned that many rural women knew nothing about Islam, so she sought to befriend them and see to their religious education. A keen reader of social and political affairs, Asma'u knew it was not feasible to expect young rural women to leave their husbands and children in order to come

1- Boyd op cit not 11 at p. 11.

2- Azuonye op cit note 15 at p. 63.

to Sokoto to receive instruction. Even women who did not have children were more than likely raising the children of a sister or cousin. Women who were widowed, however, often did not remarry and so they were targeted as potential students, together with girls between the ages of eight and twelve.

Additionally, Asma'u also recognized that the way to run her organization required innovative thinking. Asma'u decided to appoint one woman to head each village group and to take responsibility for the actions of its members. These leaders were given the title of jaji and was given a malfa – a straw hat tied with a red piece of cloth which symbolized the authority the jaji had within the Yan Taru organization.¹

By the 1840s, the Yan Taru had grown as a women's networking and educational organization, but it is difficult to assess the geographical extent of it. What is known is that Asma'u achieved her goal of creating the Yan Taru to “educate and socialize women, unifying them under the banner of reformed Islam, regardless of their ethnicity, age or first language.”²

The political consequences of the Yan Taru were also of great significance. When jajis travelled to see Asma'u, they brought with them news of their localities, their emirs and the socio-political events taking place. Asma'u would assess their reports, verify the facts, and would raise issues directly with the caliph – initially with her brother and then with his successors.

1- Boyd & Mack op cit note 5 at p. 101.

2- Ibid. at p. 104.



Together with concerns of public life, the jajis would also be entrusted to seek Asma'u's counsel on anxieties of home life including marriage and children. Travelling to and from Sokoto was not easy and younger jajis were accompanied by older ones, further cementing the women's' dependence, reliance and trust in each other.

Asma'u's teaching was typically conveyed to jajis via poetry, and this allowed the work of the Yan Taru to reverberate far and wide and across generations. Asma'u had a keen interest in the girls, as she knew they were the future, and she encouraged the older women to assist with childbirth and give marital and parenting advice to the younger women. Soon the women of the Yan Taru all "taught reading and writing of the Qur'an at a primary level, using the customary wooden board, the *allo*. Many taught women how to say their prayers correctly, a few swept the mosque, and all gave advice and sorted out disagreements. In these ways women play a significant role, their work being part of the war and weft of the fabric of society."¹

Written in *Huasa*, one of Asma'u's greatest poems *The Path of Truth* was neatly organized for teaching purposes with sections on religious duties; resurrection; sinners; salvation and Paradise as can be seen in the lines excerpted below:

"For there is [in Paradise] no illness, no ageing, no poverty,

No death: we remain forever.

Forever in enjoyment, relaxation, and pleasant talk

We walk in Paradise, we have seen Muhammad

...

The houses are made of gold, the clothes of silk

1- Ibid. at p. 106.

*We drink from fragrant rivers of Salsabil with Ahmad.
The bodies of people are as beautiful as rubies or red coral,
Their ornaments are jewels and topaz.
They feel no sadness of heart and do not think sad thoughts
They are forever in Paradise together with Muhammad.”¹*

While the social, religious, political, and educational achievements of the Yan Taru are immense, the personal connection felt between these women should also not be underestimated. An example of the profound sisterhood that existed amongst the women and between Asma'u and her jajis in particular can be found in an elegy written by Asma'u 1858 for a woman named Hauwa:

“[I] remember Hauwa, who loved me, a fact well known to everybody.
During the hot season, the rains, harvest time, when the harmattan blows,

And the beginning of the rains, she was on the road bringing people to me.

She warned them to journey in good faith, for she said intention was important.

As for myself I taught them the religion of God to turn them from Error and instill in them the knowledge of their obligatory duties.
Like ritual ablution, prayer, alms, pilgrimage and the fast, all of which are compulsory for adults.

I taught them what, in the faith of Islam, is permissible and what is forbidden, so they would know how to act.

I said they must distance themselves from sins such as lying,

1- Collected Works op cit note 17 at pp. 95-96 and 98 – 100.



meanness, hatred, and envy, adultery, theft, and self-esteem. I said they should repent because these things lead to perdition.

The women students and their children are well known for their good works and

peaceful behavior in the community.

May God forgive her sins, have mercy upon her

And unite her with the Shehu in Paradise.

O God hear this request.

And reward her for her good works which she performed

With the blessed aid of Shehu, who is known by everyone.

May she receive Divine assistance to answer the questions,

And in her grave may she have light and reassurance.

May she be redeemed and united with others

In Paradise where joy is certain.

And with everyone who, in this life, loved me

And were my helpers.

I give thanks to God.

This poem is ended,

May God receive it for the sake of the Shehu for whom in my heart I yearn.

May the Peace of God be upon the Prophet and his Companions

Who obeyed his instructions.

The date of the Hijra is 1275.”

The Yan Taru was by far the most important instrument for social mobilization and was a success because of Asma’u’s belief that every person was equally deserving of attention, capable of learning and had the responsibility to use their knowledge to better society.

Nana Asma’u’s died at the age of 73 in 1864 and was buried next to

her father Shehu Uthman dan Fodio. However, after her death, the Yan Taru did not disappear, and her example and teaching continues to be of relevance.

Conclusion

The life and legacy of Nana Asma'u is testament to the rich heritage of scholarly Muslim women and their contribution to education in matters of religion. Her example and those of other exceptional women, should be further investigated, as a matter of urgency for too often Muslim women living in the 21st century is denied opportunities to further their learning and to strengthen their belief. Nana Asma'u's methodology and her commitment to very practical means of furthering the education of women is an example of the possibilities of what could be implemented in modern society. Her firm grounding in the Qur'an and Sunnah made it possible to reach the women of her time using local languages and poetry. Her authentic politics made it possible for her to achieve social change and to assist those who were most vulnerable. But the overarching achievement of Nana Asma'u is that she was one of a long line of compassionate and exemplary Muslim scholars who strove to embody in word and deed the example of the Prophet sallallahu alayhi wa sallam.

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