

Research Article

History and Significance of Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo Mosque (Masallacin Shehu) in Sokoto, 1815 – 2015

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INTRODUCTION

One other tradition the Shehu established was building a mosque wherever he and his *jama'a* settled. Beginning from their settlement at Gudu during the migratory journeys to Gwandu, Sifawa and Sokoto, he had a Mosque built wherever they camped.¹ The first of such Mosque was built at Tabkin Kwatto shortly after his followers had submitted to his leadership as the *Amir-ul-mumin* of the Muslim community. But remarkably, Shehu never became the *Imam* of these Mosques. Rather he appointed Imams to lead the *Jama'a* in prayers.²

The observance of congregational prayer in a mosque led by an *Imam* is one of the greatest avenues for achieving unity and a common purpose of inspiring the worshippers. It is through this process that the Muslim stands shoulder to shoulder behind the *Imam* regardless of their status in the society. It also serves as an avenue of resolving religious issues as done in 2015 on conflicted vexed of Shiite sect.

The mosque originally is a sacred place for prayer. This has been the presumption; that the sole responsibility of any mosque is to provide, maintain and reserve a place for the faithful to observe the five daily prayers as well as the *Jumu'at*. This view might be misleading. The research takes a look at the other views about the true position of the mosque. Many of the opinions favoured

the traditional place of the mosque as a sole place for prayer and that. Other activities in the mosque are not permissible. There are others who pointed to the contrary. For instance, it is assured that the prophet's Mosque at Madina which served many purposes other than just praying. What is the true position of the Mosque in the Muslim's life and activities? What is its Impact and significance in the developments at the society. The next section looks at the developments leading to the establishment of Sheikh Usmanu Fodiyo mosque in Sokoto.

The Establishment and Restructuring of Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo Mosque (Masalacin Shehu)

Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo mosque in Sokoto is very important and venerated religious institution, and the mosque was established in 1815 when Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo finally dwelled in Sokoto in the new suburb of *Sabon Birni*. The mosque was built in 1815 by Muhammad Bello, Shehu's fourth son.³ An oral report narrated that a building committee was set up and charged with the responsibility to build a house and a mosque for the Sheikh just as was done while the *Jama'a* was at *Gudu*.⁴ The Mosque at Gudu was built shortly after the Muslim *Ummah* selected Shehu to be their *Sarkin Musulumi* and had sworn an oath of allegiance to him. The building committee at Sokoto was headed by AliyuJedo. It was to this committee that

the Shehu's mosque in the *Sabon Birni* area owed its magnificent architectural design and structure.⁵

However, another source claimed that the Shehu's mosque as well as his house was built by Muhammad Bello following the father's relocation to Sokoto accompanied by his followers from Sifawa.⁶ The mosque which is almost two hundred years and located along Sultan Abubakar Road, Sokoto is still popularly referred to as *Masalachin Shehu* (The Shehu's Mosque). It must be remarked that before Shehu's Mosque was built, Bello's Mosque was already standing on the same neighbourhood. Bello must have thought that his father needed his own separate mosque dedicated to his name as a mark of deference to the great man. More so, the Shehu would need the Mosque for studying, teaching and writing his scholarly treatises.⁷

Shehu's mosque was built initially of mud and in the traditional fashion facing the *Ka'aba*. But over the years ~~the mosque has undergone~~ series of renovations and changes not only in its architectural decoration but also in the mosque's leadership. For example, before colonial rule in 1903, management and preservation of the Shehu's mosque were undertaken by the Sultanate Council under the Sultan of Sokoto. The Council carried out all necessary cleaning and renovations needed in the Mosque. Then whenever it was time to clean the Mosque, announcement passed round and all young men and able-bodied adults came out *en masse* to do the cleaning.⁸ This slackened especially after the British conquest and imposition of a new Sultan in 1903.⁹ It was not only the mosque, there was a general lethargy owing to British intervention. The introduction of regions government in 1947 further reduced the powers of the Sultanate. It would take the Premier of Northern Nigeria, Sir Ahmadu Bello, who was also the Sardauna of Sokoto to carry out series of restructuring that transformed the Mosque into a befitting ultra-modern building in 1962.¹⁰ From then onwards, successive governments whether military government or civilian administration have contributed in no small measure to further uplift the image and status of the mosque.

At its inception the leadership of the mosque and its administration was reposed on Liman Abubakar Malam who was popularly known as Liman Malam.¹¹ He was the first Chief Imam of the Mosque in Sokoto. As was his responsibility, he led congregational *Juma'at* prayers and the five daily prayers at the Mosque.

As discussed elsewhere in this paper, appointment to positions in the Sokoto Caliphate became hereditary after the death of the Shehu. When Liman Abubakar died, he was succeeded by Usman from Ladan Rami family as the new *Imam* of the Mosque.¹² Ladan Rami was from a different family of first *Imam*. On his death he was succeeded by Liman Aliyu from the same family

of the second *Imam*. Since then, the responsibility of producing the next *Imam* for the Shehu's Mosque has rotated between the same Ladan's family.¹³

Religious Importance of the Shehu Danfodiyo Mosque

The contributions of a mosque to Islam in the development of Muslims and Islam are enormous and very significant. To begin with the Mosque of shehu Usmanu is built with its *qibla* facing the *Kaaba* just like the one in Mecca. Besides it is thought to be the oldest mosque of Shehu Usmanu in the ancient city of Sokoto, so it is held with so much reverence. Over time the mosque became an architectural model; a reference point for new and future Mosques to be built in Sokoto town and beyond.

In 1983 while making arrangement to build the Sultan Abubakar III Mosque, the officials of the Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo Mosque were invited to determine the direction of the *Kaaba* so that the *qibla* of the new mosque would be set to face the direction of the *Kaaba* as did the Shehu's. Considering the role the Shehu's mosque played as a model and a standard bearer in the spread and proliferation of mosques throughout Hausaland and beyond.

It is apparent that building a mosque is the starting point of stretching the religion through *da'awa*. So more than anything the Shehu's mosque did set the pace for the spread of Islam and consolidation of the gains of the Jihad.¹⁴

The Shehu's mosque also worked out the timing for prayer which has been adopted by other mosques in the state. In many mosques within Sokoto metropolis and within close proximity of the Shehu's mosque, the *subhi* prayer is not called until they have heard it until after it is called in the Shehu's Mosque. Likewise during the *Ramadan*, the others looked up to the Mosque for their *Sahur* or to break their fast at *Magrib*. Both occasions signified the beginning and ending of the daily fast during *Ramadan*. The reason for this is not far-fetched. It is a general consensus that the founder of the mosque, the great Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo himself and all the *Imams* of the mosque that came after him were men of knowledgeable and vast learning in jurisprudence and astrology.¹⁵ As an example, it is told that the late *muezzin* of the Shehu mosque rarely consult the clock to know when it was time for prayers. He said he did not need to look at the sun but knew from long experience; and from a vast knowledge in astrology.¹⁶

Many of the founding *Imams* and *muezzin* used to be Shehu's former students. It was there at the mosque that the Shehu preached, taught and wrote most of his treatises. In fact Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo ran his school within the Mosque. The Shehu's school is reputed to be the earliest school for the growing number

of Muslims in Sokoto.¹⁷ Even after the death of Shehu, those who succeeded him continued with the school.¹⁸

Students at the school were taught the basics of *Tawheed* and *aqeedah* (Creed), the acts of worship and the Sharia'ah in all its ramifications - politics, economic, social and judicial. The education policy was based on Qur'an and the Sunna, and aimed at educating and molding personalities on Islamic ideals. For this purpose, study circles were opened in different wards. Despite the reading or study circles, Shehu's students flocked to him day and night at the mosque for additional lessons and clarifications.

Before the advent of colonialism, *Imams* of the Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo Mosque supplied the education need of their society. Schools flourished in mosques. Walking in the shadow of the Shehu other scholars especially *Imams* established their schools in their mosques. With particular attention to the schools in the Shehu's mosque, Liman Abdullahi the son of the fourth Chief *Imam* ran one from which good number of students graduated.

Liman Abdullahi also opened his school in the mosque when he became the Chief *Imam*, but when later he was appointed the *Qadi al qudat*, that is, the Chief Judge he had the school transferred to his house. Liman Shehu Na Liman on his appointment as Chief *Imam* opened his own school and reintroduced the *tafsir* session during the month of *Ramadan*. He based his lessons on the *Liya-ul Tawili fima'antanzili* of Sheikh Abdullahi Fodiyo¹⁹

It was not only Liman Abdullahi that ran the *Ilm* school from his house. Most of the schools were run from the *Imams'* homes and were popularly known in Hausa as *makarakar allo* or *makarantar zaure*. Usually, the pupils sat in a circle with the teacher in the middle. It was from the common practice of holding the class sessions just by the entrance room to the teacher's house that the school derived its name. *Zaure* is the entrance room to a compound.

The pupils sat according to time of arrival, and their lessons consisted mainly of fiqh (jurisprudence). They studied *usuludeen* written by Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo and other books such as *Ahdari*, *Ashmawi*, and *Idhiya*.²⁰

Many of the schools established by the *Imams* of Shehu's mosque are still in existence and, run by reputable scholars. These schools have produced hundreds of reputable Islamic scholars some of the best in *Fiqh* (jurisprudence), *Tafsir* (exegesis), *Fugah* and *Nahwu* (grammar), *Balaga* (rhetorics), *Tarihi* (history), *Tafeez* (Quranic memorization), *Aqeedah* (creed), and *Hadith* (traditions of the Prophet). Evidently the schools have contributed greatly in changing the lives of the youth according to the injunctions of Allah²¹

The mosque in addition to providing avenue to educate the Muslim Ummah in keeping with the tradition of Islamic literacy, also serves as a place to cleanse and purge one's mind of sin and iniquities. Preachers are at hand to cater for the spiritual needs of the followers; warning them against sin, admonishing them to fear Allah and inviting them to worship Allah. These preachers who are reputed Islamic scholars contribute in no small measures to bring enlightenment to worshippers. The mosque is the link, the bridge between teacher and student.²²

Other religious contributions of the mosque include the performance of Islamic activities by the worshippers. These activities range from saying the five daily prayers as well as the *jumu'at* prayer on Friday congregational prayer, glorification of the Almighty Allah, recitation of the holy Quran, its memorization and the recitation of the litanies of brotherhoods such as the Qadiriyya and the Tijjaniyya.

In the month of Ramadan, the Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo Mosque is filled with people and bustled with spiritual activities as *Tafsir* of the Holy Quran by the Chief Imam or his representative; *Tarawih* prayer led by the Chief *Imam*; *Itikaf*, the special prayers observed in the last ten days of the *Ramadan*; preaching and admonition.²³

The Mosque is also used as a meeting place. Different brotherhoods organise and hold meetings in the Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo mosque from time to time.²⁴ One reason adduced for holding meetings in the vicinity of the mosque is that the atmosphere surrounding the mosque is often serene and offers a conducive place to exchange knowledge and share ideas. The Shehu Mosque is also a centre of conflict resolution. It is often used as court where judgments are taken and sentences passed. The Mosque, as we have noted, was used actively as a court during the Imamship of Abdullahi Aliyu who was later appointed the *Qadialqudat* or the Chief Judge.

Over the years the Shehu's mosque has played more active roles in conflict resolution; prayers are held frequently for peace and harmonious coexistence of all Nigerians. It is noteworthy that since the coup of 1966 that eventually culminated into a civil war (1967 – 1970) special prayer sessions have been held in this great mosque for peace to prevail in Nigeria. It became the tradition of the mosque to observe a special *subhir* prayer (*Du'a*) every morning here at the Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo Mosque Sokoto.²⁵

Within the Sokoto metropolis the great Shehu mosque has contributed generously to the growth of other mosques like Sultan Bello mosque whom his *Imam* was nurtured from and Sultan Maccido mosque.

For example, the Sultan Abubakar mosque located in Mabera and which is popularly known as *Masalaci Na Uku* appointed Malam Shehu Na Liman as its Chief Imam; For the Sultan Hassan Dan Mu'azu Mosque Usman Bakale was appointed as the Chief Imam. From the mosque that used to be known as Yalwagaldin but now Sultan Maccido Mosque to Usman Dangwago, also Isah Maikware and Malam Umaru Mailitafai mosques all are products of the great Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo Mosque schools. In essence the Shehu's mosque has helped in training most of the Imams for these other mosques. They were established as a result of expanding city residential areas to reduce the long distances between the worshippers (in those locations where the new mosques are sited) and the mother-body, that is, the Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo Mosque.²⁶

As magnificent as the Shehu's Mosque is in size and splendour, so also is its magnanimity. The great mosque has guest rooms, toilets and bathrooms for the way farers and other worshippers who may be in need of accommodation on short notice. The spare rooms are let out free of charge. This has always been the tradition of the mosque. It was reported that on arrival to Sokoto from Sifawa, Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo was accompanied by over three thousand people. This number was took shelter with him, for months, inside mosques in Sabon Birni until they could build their own homes.

From taking care of the religious as well as the spiritual needs of its guests, the Mosque provided worshippers within its hall or walls activities to cleanse and purify their minds and deeds. Thus the mosque played the role of a motivator and a cheerleader urging the worshippers onward forward.

To take interest in learning; in studying and understanding Allah's creation; and to take interest in their environment.²⁷ It encourages believers to take interest in hygiene; to clean their surroundings, places of worship and business. What more. The mosque builds bridges and mends fences. It fosters a sense of unity. By standing together believers learn cohesion, emotional attachment, and moral support.

Above all this, the Mosque has been able to bestir man to a high sense of love, justice and equality. Its significance lies in its continued uplifting of religious standard as a way of life rich in education, worship, unity, peace, *Shari'a* and *Da'awa*.²⁸

The Political Importance of the Shehu Mosque Sokoto

As the centre of gravity in an Islamic state, the mosque plays a vital role on matters of state administration. From when it was instituted as one of the organs of leadership system in the Sokoto Caliphate, Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo has served as one of the administrative headquarters of the Sokoto Caliphate.

The great Shehu himself had used the mosque as shelter for his followers, and as their leader, had used the mosque as an assemblage, a rendezvous to meet and discuss matters and issues relating to Islam and their general welfare.²⁹ Thus for the leader and his followers the mosque became a centre, a parliament or State assembly where decisions on government policies and strategic plans are assessed, reviewed, and passed. The Mosque is an instrument for management or a tool for political administration. When receiving envoys from other countries, signing an agreement, mediating arbitrating or simply sitting in judgment the great Shehu preferred his mosque.

The Shehu had imitated Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on this. Likewise on his death, leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate took the step of their father and leader, Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo. As a test of how much influence and significance the Shehu's Mosque wields, a glimpse could be seen when the Caliph Abubakar Atiku died. The community was summoned into the Shehu's Mosque to decide who would be their next *Amir-al-mumin* between Khalil son of Abdullahi Fodiyo and Aliyu son of Muhammad Bello.³⁰ Although there were disagreements, allegations and counter allegation, in the end Aliyu was chosen and the matter was put to rest. Whatever acrimony might have been felt did not leave the precinct of the Mosque.

In line with above, the leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate sought recourse to the Mosque anytime and whenever there was some urgent or important communication to pass across or to share. In a word, the Shehu mosque is a place for political, cultural and ritual life for the Muslim Ummah. All vital issues are announced after prayers. So it also became the tradition that whenever any piece of general information was to be passed across, it was done in the Mosque so that it could reach a wide audience as possible.³¹ The meeting need not involve sharing information. Occasionally, the Sultan as the *Amir-al-mumin* uses the nexus provided by the mosque to meet the scholars, the worshippers, and the rest of the masses. They partake in spiritual exercises; the king and his subjects. Then it will time for the subjects to reaffirm their loyalty to the Sultan and the State.

Political leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate, without exception, regard the Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo Mosque as point of foremost authority. They therefore solicit support for their own authority from it.

As a prove to this it is on record that the Governors of the State (Past and present) must go to the Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo Mosque to perform his Jumu'at prayer at least once a year.³² And from time to time the Governor sends requests to the Chief Imam to pray for him to receive Allah's guidance, courage and divine protection. Politicians canvas for the support of the Imam and other prominent leaders of the mosque for

their parties. And as further evidence of the extent of the power and influence of the Shehu's mosque, even the Federal Government solicit the blessing and support of its Imam.³³

Also as a part of its political responsibility, the Shehu Usmanu Mosque is often used as a forum by the political actors and leaders including the Caliphate to educate the mass of people on any pressing administrative issues of State affairs or of the Caliphate. The Mosque is equally very useful in times of adverse calamity, pestilence, famine, draught. The leaders acting through the Imam could appeal to people to take proactive measures, or educate them on what to do. In a word the mosque is a good damage control mechanism. It needs not be a calamitous event; government could employ the services of the mosque leaders sell beneficial programmes like the getting people to register for National identity card, participate in census, immunize children against polio, and take part in environmental sanitation and so many others.³⁴

The Importance of Shehu's Mosque to Economic Development of Sokoto Caliphate

The contribution of Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo Mosque toward the economic development in the Caliphate cannot be overemphasized. As way of life Islam transcends culture and politics. So one of the first things the founders of the Sokoto Caliphate did after the conquest of the Hausa kingdoms was opening up trade routes and ensuring that market routes were secured.³⁵ Of course no society can survive without some means of selling what it has and buying what it does not have. But Islam has its own ideas about business ethics governed by rules about what are legal business (*halal*) and those qualified as immoral or prohibited businesses (*haram*).³⁶

Islam forbids exploitation and monopoly in all its forms. Likewise, Islam frowns at usury and its prohibited unearned interest. And just like usury so also is gambling and betting prohibited. Of course no society can survive without some means of selling what it has and buying what it does not have. But Islam has its own ideas about business ethics governed by rules of what are legal business (*halal*) and those qualified as immoral or prohibited businesses (*haram*).³⁷ Islam forbids exploitation and monopoly in all its forms just as it frowns at usury and prohibit its form of unearned interest.

The immediate task before the Caliphate scholars and preachers, therefore, if they must develop an efficient economic system run on the strict application of Islamic business law and ethics, was propagating the Islamic economic education and system to bring sanity to the economic life of the *ummah*. Spiritual development is not taken care of at the cost of neglecting material needs. The principle is based on the fact that Allah has given man the strength, capability, and courage to earn

a living for himself. He must therefore assume full responsibility for his conduct.³⁸

The *Imamship* is at the fore front of not only spiritual but economic life. The *Imamship* as an institution provides guidance by means of education, a fact which explains why the Imams of the Shehu's Mosque were without exception great scholars. The mosque is both their office and school. In fact, in Islam, as we noted earlier, the mosque is a rendezvous for so many overlapping activities.³⁹ Therefore whatever is sold from the mosque attracted large patronage that greatly contributed to the economic development of Sokoto. The *Juma'at* services have also contributed in many ways toward economic extension and integration of Muslims.

The *Jumu'at* is very important to the Muslim worldwide thus Muslim prepares for it and in preparing they generate a lot of business activities. For example, the well to do individuals might give out their clothes to local dry cleaners. Those who could not afford hiring laundry services certainly would buy soaps and other washing detergents to wash their clothes. All in preparation for *Juma'a* prayer. This no doubt enhances the economy of those involved in the sale and services related to personal and environmental hygiene.⁴⁰ A number of traditional barbers are also busy particularly on Fridays and could make as much as N3500 working from morning to evening on Friday in *Masalacin Shehu* (Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo Mosque).⁴¹

In addition, over forty people are employed at the Shehu's Mosque and each earns about five thousand naira monthly to help them to cater for their family. Another eight permanent workers attached to the Mosque are paid twenty thousand naira which helps in alleviating poverty. A popular market for Islamic books was established in 2005 after a fire accident that destroyed Sokoto Central Market.

The market at the Mosque sold all kinds of materials from rosaries, perfumery and herbs; foods, groundnut cake, books and others. There is also a large number of beggars sitting by the entrance to the Mosque begging for alms from the worshippers.

Another source of income for Shehu Usmanu Mosque is from provision of vehicle security while their owners prayed inside the Mosque. Young boys and men are employed to look after the vehicles for a token of N20. The same thing goes for cobblers within the mosque premises as well as water vendors who gave worshippers water for ablution also at a token. One of them confirmed to the researcher that the money he made from his petty was enough to pay for his breakfast and bus fare to school every day.⁴²

Furthermore, after the services, worshippers dispersed to various stands within and outside the mosque

premises to cater for their needs. Because of the proximity of the Mosque to the Sokoto old market, traders of the market also benefit from the population of the worshippers. More so, worshippers bought foot wears from roadside vendors just outside the Mosque. They bought also foodstuff and a host of other materials for their children apart from edible things like fried fish, sugar cane, carrot, mango, cassava cake and the likes. It is also gathered that various intra city transport providers made more money on Fridays. The users of tricycle known as “*Agwagwa da buje*”, the motorcycles called *Yan kabo-kabo*, buses for the visitors from other states, made more than their delivery monies conveniently on Fridays.

As usual in Shehu Usmanu mosque, *Juma'at* prayer starts earlier than at other mosques within the hours of 12noon and 1pm, worshippers were picked from various nooks and crannies of Sokoto town and environs to Shehu Usmanu mosque and between the hours of 2 up to 5pm, they would have been returning to their destination from the mosque.

However, immediately after *Juma'at* prayer, *muazzem* will announce to pray, while praying worshippers are transferring alms to them, a huge amount of money are accumulating there, above all a reasonable number of people have totally depended on the mosque to earn their living from the alms they are getting from worshippers they include scholars who are disseminating knowledge inside the mosque premises and other worshippers who are sometime busy reading their treatise.

CONCLUSION

The Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo Mosque is an important sacred place that has played very vital roles in uniting the Muslims. This can be backed up by the fact that the mosque has always brought the muslim ummah from different areas together. This coming together affords people the opportunity to interact, exchange ideas, knowledge, materials, and cultivate lasting relationship. The opportunity to meet has often created lasting friendship not just between scholars but among the Muslim general society. Friends and relations who live at considerable distance from one another often schedule to meet in mosques after they had prayed to discuss important business issues. This and many more are among the significant contributions of the Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo Mosque to the political religious and economic development of Islam and the Muslim Ummah in the Sokoto Caliphate. More so despite the fact that government neglect to collect revenue as the shehu's mosque offer business ground for hundred number of people especially on Friday and visitors period of the Fulani.

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