SHAYKH ADAM
ABDULLAHI AL-ILORY

in the

Tableau of Immortality

Volume II

Edited by:
Razaq 'D. Abubakre
The Nigerian Center for Arabic Research
Riyadh Office

SHAYKH ADAM ABDULLAHI AL-"ILORY
IN THE
TABLEAU OF IMMORTALITY

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Volume II
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A REVIEW OF AL-ILORY'S NEO-IJTIHAD ON THE OBSERVANCE OF RAMADAN FAST AS CONTAINED IN AS-SAWM WAL FITR

Kazeem Adekunle Adegoke

Introduction

Ramadān fasting and issues surrounding it is a paramount annual event in Islam. Various religious issues surrounding the Ramadān fasting are sighting of the new crescent, the doubtful day, the possibility of sighting new moon in the day time, collective acceptance of the moon sighting, use of calendar and mathematical calculation in commencing and terminating the Ramadān fasting and the sighting of the new crescent of the month of Shawwal for the celebration of ‘Idu’l-Fitr.1 These previous-mentioned Ramadān fasting-related issues have been causing a lot of confusion and controversy among the Nigerian Muslims for some years. The annual event of Ramadān fasting which should have been a joyous moment for the universal Muslims is now marked with high emotion and sentiment arising from the unnecessary legal conflict and controversy from the different verdicts of both indigenous and foreign Islamic scholars. In response to this unwanted situation, Shaykh Adam rose up to this challenges by writing a material titled “As-Sawm Wa’l – Fiṭr” in which he exercised his own neo-Ijthād so as to serve as an end to the controversy surrounding the commencement and termination of the Ramadān fasting in Nigeria.3 It is a result of this, that the paper aims at examining the neo-Ijtihād of Shaykh Adam Al-Ilory on the commencement and termination of Ramadān fasting among Nigerian Muslims.

Definition of Terms

The term “neo- Ijtihād” is coined out of the two words Neo and Ijtihād. The prefix “Neo” according to Hornby means “new” or “in a later form”4 while the word Ijtihād according to Al-Alwani means the interpretation of the source materials inference of rules from them, or giving a legal verdict or decision on any issue on which there is no specific guidance in the Qur’ān and Sunnah.5 The term “Neo- Ijtihād” according to Doi quoting Muhammad Abduh of Egypt, is an intellectual interpretation of various issues.6

To Ajetunmobi, neo- Ijtihād is an offshoot of an early Ijtihād of the earlier generation of Muslims which is now re-interpreted so as to bring out new legal ruling according to the culture and custom of a particular society.7 The term “Ramadān” is the ninth month of Islamic lunar calendar in which the Muslims used to observe their obligatory fasting.8 Al-Ilory is an
arabicised name signified that such person belong or relate to Ilorin, a town in Nigeria. This is what is known as Nisbah in Arabic grammar (Nahw).

Life Sketch of Shaykh Adam Al-Ilory

Shaykh Adam Ibn ‘Abdul-Baqi Ibn Habibullah, Ibn ‘Abdullah Al-Ilory was born in the Republic of Benin (formally Dahomey) in the year 1917/1337 A.H. At the age of five, Shaykh Al-Ilory started his educational carrier with his father, Abdul-Baqi (1879-1956) who taught him the Holy Qur’an and some fundamental aspects of Islam. On getting to Ibadan along with his father in 1934, his father directed him to go to a famous Muslim Scholar in the person of Shaykh Salihu Ibn Muhammad Awwal (1900-1985). This man hailed from Agbaji area of Ilorin and was widely known as (Esin ni o biwa) from whom Al-Ilory learned Nahw (Syntax), Hamziyyah (Lyrics), Sarf (Etymology) and Methodology of Da‘wah (Islamic Propagation) before he graduated from him. On getting to Lagos in 1935, Al-Ilory took to his second teacher, Shaykh Salihu’s advice who had directed him before he left Ibadan for Imam Umar of Agbaji who resided in Lagos by then. He did so by continuing from him some Arabic and Islamic sciences.

Growing in enthusiasm and in quest for continuous Arabic and Islamic education, Shaykh Al-Ilory joined the Zawiyyah group of a Kano-born Islamic leader, Shaykh Adam Namaji (1320-1364/1900-1944) who was residing in Lagos by then in 1941. From him, Al-Ilory learnt Sufism (Islamic Mysticism) according to the Qadiriyyah order. Al-Ilori did not only learn from Shaykh Adam Namaji the Qadiriyyah sufistic order but equally continued with his educational career with him. He learnt from him, Arabic Rhetoric’s (‘ilmu’l-balaghah), Prosody (‘Arūd), Rhyme (Qafiyah), elementary logics (Mabādi’u’l ‘ilmī’l Mantiq), Philosophy (Falsafah): Astronomy (‘ilmu’l-Falak), and mysticism (Tasawwu’f).

In 1946, Al-Ilory embarked on self-education and assessment through his journey to Al-Azhar Islamic University, Cairo, Egypt where eight eminent lecturers examined him and they subsequently accorded him recognition and distinction. It was realized that, he was worth more than what was known to him. He earned the merit certificate and distinction and thus became one of the African Scholars to be found worthy in learning to receive such a certificate at al-Azhar University and this feast was completed within six months of intensive interaction, learning and vigor instead of the requirement number of years.

Having lived quite in accordance with the Qur’an and Sunnah, Shaykh Al-Ilory died on Sunday, May 3, 1992/1412, at a London hospital after a brief illness and buried according to the Muslim rites in his Markzu’ut-Ta’limi’l-cArabī Al-Islāmī (Centre for Arabic and Islamic Academy), Agege, Lagos, Nigeria, on Tuesday, May 5, 1992/1412.
Al-Ilory’s View on the Source of Legal Ruling in Islam (Masādiru’l-Ahkām)

According to Al-Ilory the obligatory nature of Ramadan fast is quite uncontestable among the Islamic scholars. Due to this, Al-Ilory deals extensively with the source of legal ruling in Islamic law (Shari’ah) popularly known as Masādiru’l-Ahkām, with the aim of attempting a seemingly final solution to those problems confronting the Muslim community (Ummah) in Nigeria on the unnecessary controversy surrounding Ramadān fasting. Al-Ilory asserted that all the Islamic legal rulings are categorically sourced from the Qur’ān and Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah, Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W.). These Islamic legal rulings, in terms of their significances could be divided into two divisions namely Dilālatun Qaf’iyyah (Absolute Ruling) Dilālatun Zaniyyah (Presumptive Ruling).

Dilālatun Qaf’iyyah is the absolute legal ruling which is sourced out from the Qur’ān and Sunnah of the Prophet (S.A.W.) in which neither Ijtīhād nor neo-Ijtīhād is entertained while the Dilālatun Zaniyyah is the presumptive legal ruling from the legal assumption or presumption of the renowned Islamic legal expert such as Usūlī and Faqīh.

Dilālatun Qaf’iyyah and its Divisions

Al-Ilory further sub-divided Dilālatun Qaf’iyyah into two sub-divisions namely Qaf’iyyatu’t-th - Thubūt and Qaf’iyyatu’d-Dilālah. According to him, Qaf’iyyatu’t-th - Thubūt is the absolute guidance meant for the Muslims from the Qur’ān only. It can also emanate from the Sunnah. But, whenever it comes up from the Sunnah, it could be featured in either absolute or presumptive ruling. As for the Qaf’iyyatu’d-Dilālah, it is the type of guidance which does not contain any other instruction rather than guidance. The best sample of this is the order on the performance of obligatory Salāt (canonical prayers in Islam), Siyām (fasting), Zakāt (obligatory charity) and Hajj (pilgrimage) in the Qur’ān.

Dilālatun Zaniyyah and its Divisions

Al-Ilory again further sub-divided Dilālatun Zaniyyah into two sub-divisions namely Zaniyyat-th- Thubūt and Zaniyyat’d-Dilālah. Zaniyyat-th Thubūt is a presumptive legal guidance, the methods of transmission of which unto the Muslims, is never broken such as Akhbārul-Ahādi which is the hadith narrated by very few people. Zaniyyat’d-Dilālah is also a legal guidance which indicates various interpretations and meanings. However, there is no discrepancy among the Muslims with regards to the compulsory nature of any of its decisive legal guidance. In Zaniyyat’d-Dilālah, its legal ruling and the indication of their interpretations and meanings are extremely decisive in nature. Therefore, any discretion is not permitted in it and its denial or rejection is quite untenable.
Al-Ilory’s Neo-Ijtihad on Some Issues Surrounding the Ramadān Fasting

Al-Ilory in his work “As-Sawm Wal-Fitr” exercised some neo-Ijtihad on the various issues surrounding the observance of Ramadan fasting which are as follows:

Al-Ilory’s Neo-Ijtihad on the Sighting of a New Crescent

Al-Ilory in his neo-Ijtihad, put up the argument that the new crescent can never be universally sighted at a single period of time as a result of natural differences in the rising and setting of the sun which have great effect upon the season and climate of a particular environment. As a result of this unavoidable circumstance, there is high tendency of discrepancy concerning the commencement and termination of the Ramadān fasting in Nigerian environment. In support of this view, Al-Ilory claimed that Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) was not in the habit of sending any message in respect of the sighting of the new crescent to another town or land nor did he command the people of the environment to observe or break the fasting. To be precise, the legal argument of Al-Ilory in this juncture is that the new crescent sighted in one environment may not be sufficient for the other environment where the new crescent is never sighted.

Al-Ilory further goes on to geographically buttress his legal argument by pointing out that there are sharp differences in the time of the rising and setting of the sun in various geographical locations in the world as a result of which the season and climate in the northern hemisphere of the world are poles apart literally from those of the southern hemisphere and which has in turn made it almost impossible to pinpoint a single minutes in a whole year that is equal and same throughout the whole world.

On the limitation of the sighting of the new crescent Al-Ilory opines that limitation in the implementation of the sighted new crescent can be technically limited to the nearby environment alone and not to the distant environment. According to him, this is due to the three following reasons; (i) the confined distance (ii) the difference in the geographical region both in the height and declines (iii) and difference in the places of sunrise through the longitudes that extend from the north (pole) to the south (pole). Al-Ilory further argued that this limitation is based on the hadith of the two Bedouins who solemnly bore witness in the presence of the messenger of Allah (S.A.W) that the new crescent was sighted in their local environment on the previous night and the Prophet (S.A.W) therefore, instructed people to terminate their fasting and go enmass to the ‘Id praying ground for ‘Id prayer.

Consequently, the sighting of the new crescent by the people of Sham could not reach the people of Madinah because of the distance between the two environments, their geographical difference and their difference in the places of their sunrise. Due to these natural reasons, it is legitimate for
each local environment to determine her sighting of the new crescent. Al-Illory was of the legal opinion that the crescent could be sighted at noon in a local environment, though; it may not be visible by the people of such an environment. As a result of this development, such a crescent sighting can not be relied upon and consequently, the Ramadān fasting of that day is not made compulsory on the people of such an environment.

Al-Illory’s Neo-Ijīthād on the Varied Commencement of Ramadān Fasting

Al-Illory clarified the confusion about the commencement of Ramadān fasting that it may vary from one environment to another as a result of sighting of the new crescent in different environments on different day. He put up another legal opinion that since there is no controversy in the matter that the Muslims from different continents are not observing the obligatory daily prayers (Salātu'l-Maktūbah) at the same period of time. For instance, Muslims from the eastern part of the world do observe salātu's-Subuh (Dawn prayer), Zuhr (Noon prayer), Āṣr (Evening prayer), Magrib (Sunset prayer) and Ishā' (Night prayer) ahead of the Muslims from the western part of the world. The same case should be applied to the issue of the commencement of Ramadān fasting among the Muslims. By this, there should be no unnecessary confusion if the eastern Muslims precede the western Muslims on the issue of the commencement and termination of the Ramadān fasting. This is the practice of the Muslims ever since the dawn of Islam during the time of the Prophet (S.A.W) and his companions. In support of his legal argument, Al-Illory cited one of the materials written by Imam As-Sabkīy titled “Al-'Ilmu'l-Manshūr Fī Iḥbāti'sh-Shuhūr” that the statement which decreed the legal ruling that sighting of a new crescent in one local environment makes Ramadān fasting compulsory for the rest of environment is weak because there is no legal evidence from the orthodox caliphs (Khulafā’u'r-Rāshidūn) that when they sighted the new crescent, they sent an information or write a letter to the other Muslims in other environment to abide by it.

Al-Illory’s Neo-Ijīthād on the Hastening of the Acceptance of the Sighting of New Crescent

Al-Illory was of the legal opinion that hastiness in the acceptance of the sighting of the new crescent without proper verification, confirmation and refusal to refute the claim of the person who sees it if the result is proven otherwise, is a great erroneous attitude on the part of Muslims. Due to the sensitivity of this issue, Al-Illory expatiating further on the essential pre-requisites for a valid sighting of a new crescent by arguing that it is evident
in the Maliki School of Thought that the sighting of the new crescent is hinged on the following three conditions:

(i) The crescent should be physically sighted by the just men who vigorously fulfill the basic conditions of justice.

(ii) It should be seen by a group of people whose information will be based on the sound knowledge and which would be impossible for them to co-opt on error.

(iii) It should be seen by a single person, but the sighting by a single individual lack certainty and could be a proof for him only for fasting and for those who trust him.

Al-Ilory’s Neo-Ijtihad on the use of Mathematical Calculation and Calendar

Al-Ilory was of the legal opinion that the uses of mathematical calculation (Al-Hisāb), calendar calculation, astronomical calculation (Ilm al-Falak), astrological science (Ilm At-Tanjim) and technological gadgets or machine and meteorological devices could be utilised to determine the actual position of stars and moon and their motions and phenomena for weather forecast so as to identify the actual time of appearance of the new crescent. He stands by this, that the use of the (Ilm al-Falak) is not frowned at by puritanic jurists. Shaykh al-Ilory did not follow those who utilized it for soothsaying and for telling the future which he treated as unlawful in Shariah.

According to Al-Ilory, the positive use of mathematical calculation, calendar calculation, astronomical calculation and astrological science for the purpose of the commencement and termination of the Ramadān fasting when the weather is not clear because of the cloud or due to the geographical location of an environment. These methods need rigorous training and can be used to achieve either positive or negative ends. He stressed that the acquisition of certain knowledge is not unlawful if it is not harmful or injurious to the possessor of that knowledge. If these methods are used for the reckoning of time, determination of the Qiblah for the prayer and guiding the travelers during the course of their journey, they are permissible in Shariah as it is pointed out in the following Qur’anic verses.

It is He who made the sun a shining thing and the moon as a light and measured out for it stages that you might know the number of years and the reckoning …… (Qur’ān 10:5).

“And landmarks and by the stars, they (men) guide themselves” (Qur’ān 16:16).

To him, the knowledge of mathematical calculation, calendar calculation, astronomical calculation and astrological science is blame
worthy if they are employed to determine the movement of stars and orbital on the future incident for the sake of fortune telling and soothsaying.

Al-Ilory’s Neo-Ijtihād on the Doubtful Day (Yawmu’-Sakk)

Al-Ilory defines the doubtful day (Yawmu’-Sakk) as a day which cannot be categorically declared as first day in month of Ramadan or last day of the month of Sha’ban in the Islamic lunar calendar. He argues that to eradicate the controversy and confusion connected with the commencement of Ramadān, Muslims should take note of hadīth reported by Ā’ishah that: “The Messenger of Allah (S.A.W) used to be much cautious of the new crescent of Sha’bān more than how he used to be cautious of others.”

By this, Al-Ilory argues that the Muslims should inculcate the culture of monitoring the crescent of the Islamic lunar months, most especially the month of Sha’bān so that there would be no unnecessary controversy about the actual day for the commencement of the month of Ramadān. In the legal opinion of Al-Ilory, Ramadān fasting is an obligatory devotional duty in Islam and it can not become a reality until the new crescent of Ramadān is sighted because what makes the obligatory devotional duty a reality is also compulsory. On the issue of observing fasting on doubtful day, Al-Ilory was of the legal opinion that observance of fasting on doubtful day is permissible, especially during the cloudy time, because it is highly preferable to observe fasting in the last day of Sha’bān rather than missing a single day of fasting in the first day of Ramadān.

Conclusion

The paper attempted at examining the neo-Ijtihād exercises of Al-Ilory on the observance of Ramadān fasting and legal and scholarly views arising from these Ilūrī’s neo-Ijtihād exercises on the issues surrounding the sighting of a new crescent as the major factor for the commencement and termination of Ramadān fasting among Nigerian Muslims. The various neo-Ijtihād exercises of Al-Ilory on the different areas of controversy related to the commencement and termination of Ramadān fasting among the Muslims were thoroughly examined. At this juncture, the paper makes the following findings:

i. Shaykh Adam Ibn Abdullah Al-Ilory, without an iota of doubt, was not only Arabic lexicographer but also an Islamic legal expert (Usulī) and Islamic Jurist (Faqīh)

ii. Shaykh Adam Ibn Abdullah Al-Ilory and majority of his pairs in Africa can stand in tandem with the scholars from any part of Arab world.

iii. The controversy surrounding the observance of Ramadān fasting in a particular environment could be best solved by
the Islamic scholar hailed from such an environment rather than consulting the general materials from foreign scholars, who may be unaware of the situation peculiar to the environment.

iv. Al-Ilory’s neo-Ijtihād, to some extent, solves the problem of controversy surrounding the commencement and termination of Ramadān fasting among Northern and Southern Nigerian Muslims.

v. Neo-Ijtihād, as an offshoot of an early Ijtihād of the earlier generation of Muslims is still viable in this contemporary period to meet the demand of the time so as to bring out new legal ruling according to the culture and custom of a particular society.

Based on these findings, the paper recommends that Muslim community in Nigeria should:

i. make use of the academic outputs of their scholars in procuring a solution to some of their encountered problems in the religious obligation.

ii. respect the neo-Ijtihād exercises of the local scholars as they would have considered several options before they arrive at such a neo-Ijtihād.

iii. explore and make use of some of the unpublished manuscripts of the traditional scholars hiding inside their selves to the mercy of the rats and cockroaches.

iv. imbibe the culture of immortalization of the local scholars by establishing a school, archive or library in their names where their academic writings could be made available for the public consultation.

v. embark on the project of publishing some of the unpublished manuscripts of these traditional scholars and render them into English language for public consumption.
Notes and References

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
9. Cross-check any material on Arabic grammar on An-Nisbah on the creation of noun
12. Ibid, p.14
13. Ibid, p.14
16. Sambo, Shaykh Adam Abdullah Al-Ilori …… 15
19. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
Shaykh Adam Abdullah Al-Ilory in the Tableau of Immortality

23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid, 14
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid
28. Ibid, 15
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid, 14
31. Ibid
32. Ibid, 18
33. Ibid, 14
34. Ibid, 19
35. Ibid, 20
36. Ibid, 21
37. As cited by Shaykh Al-Ilory in his treatise “As-Siyam Wa’l – Fiṭr”, 22.
38. Al-Ilory, As-Siyam Wa’l – Fiṭr........... 22
39. Ibid