

# **Transportation and Trade in Pre-colonial Kano**

**BY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the role of traditional means of transport system to the economic growth of Kano in the pre-colonial period. The use of human portage and pack animals such as donkey, camel, hiny, ox and horses facilitated the movement of people, goods and services from one location to another. The traditional means of transport therefore, led to the development of both local and international trade. Thus, from the 14th and 15th centuries, traveling on land using footpaths and pack animals became prominent linking Hausaland with Borno, Nupe and the Benue valley as well as Yoruba land and Benin. One of the most important routes which advanced Trans-Saharan trade was from Kano to North Africa, the most important of these were as follows: Ghana to Moghador and Fez via Awdaghost; Timbuktu to Moghador and Fez via Taghaza; Timbuktu to Tunis and Tripoli via Wargla, Ghadames and Ghat; Kano to Tunis and Tripoli via Agades, Ghat and Ghadames; and Borno to Tripoli via Bilma and Murzuk. Cloths, leather goods, slaves and kola nut were exported. Weapons, gowns, salt and manufactured goods were imported. Another route was to Adamawa, which took clothes and leather goods in return for slaves and ivory. Also worth mentioning was the kola nut trade from Gonja and the Akan forest (Ghana). By the use of pack animals, caravan trade routes were developed across the Sahara between North and West Africa, and for a long period these routes were the only ways that linked West Africa and the outside world. Based on this background, this study intends to uncover and analyze how the use of pre-colonial means of transport had stimulated increased commercial contact between Kano and other regions before the British conquest of the area in 1903, and the subsequent introduction of modern means of transport such as rail, road and air.

## **Introduction**

The history of transportation and trade in Kano dates back to the pre-colonial era, when modern transportation facilities such as roads, railways, air transport facilities etc. were virtually non-existing. Emphasis then was on bush paths. The most widely used modes of transportation in the pre-colonial period are the human portage, donkeys, camels, horses and ox. They contributed immensely to the economic growth as well as security to Kano. Thus, the movement of people, goods and services in the pre-colonial period was possible because of two means of transportation. These were human portage and pack animals. Geographically Kano lies on the western margin of the Chad Basin, it occupies the area from latitudes 10<sup>0</sup>N and 13<sup>0</sup>N and longitude 7<sup>0</sup> 40<sup>0</sup>E and 10<sup>0</sup>35. It was bordered by the kingdom of Katsina in the west, in the South-West by Zazzau (Zaria). In the Southeast, was bordered by Bauchi Emirate, as far as the North, Kano, was bounded by kingdom of Daura.<sup>1</sup>

### **Pre-colonial Transport Systems and the Development of Trading Activities**

#### **Human Portage**

Human portage is the oldest and most wide spread form of transport in pre-colonial Kano. It involved carriage of goods by man at the same time as he transported himself, walking. The earliest means of transport is man himself. Man walks on foot, from place to place to distant lands. He used his own hands or arms or his own head, shoulder or back as carriage for his load.<sup>2</sup> Because of the eminence importance of human portage as a veritable tool for land transport in the pre-colonial economy of Northern Nigeria for many centuries, Ogunremi stated that;

with the notable exception of Guari (*sic*) around Kontagora and Kaduna who carried load on their shoulders, the majority of the people used their heads or back to carry loads which they could not carry by hand. In the north,

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<sup>1</sup> R.K Udo (1970) *Geographical Regions of Nigeria*, Heinemann, London P. 181-183

<sup>2</sup> W.H Boulton (1667) *The Peageant of Transport Through the Ages*, Benjamin Bloom, New York, USA, p. 20, As quoted by A.D Ali (2012) *Trade and Transport in the Lower Niger 1830-2011* Adenuga Concept Publishers, Lagos

where pack animals were used smaller packages weighing about twenty to thirty pounds were headloaded. Many people got used to headloading that even when the pack was so small and light that it could be carried by hand, preference was often given to its being borne on the head.<sup>3</sup>

The bush tracks provided the major links between town and villages in the interior and exterior of Kano emirate. They became increasingly important to the local traders, who were becoming enthusiastic about exchanging local produce for both domestic and foreign manufactures.<sup>4</sup> By this system a trader would engage some strong men, the number varying with the volume of the loads to be carried and the carrying capacity of each man.<sup>5</sup> The average weight carried by a porter ranged from 50 lbs to 90 lbs depending on the carrying capacity of individuals. In the absence of measuring scales, a porter estimated what he could carry for the length of the journey by lifting it up to feel its weight. If the load is too heavy for him to lift off the ground, he knew that it will be too heavy for him to carry.<sup>6</sup> There were short and long distance journeys and a day's journey usually reckoned to be of the order of 15 to 20 miles. A return journey to a distance of about 10 miles could be done in a day, and it can be regarded as a short journey. Short journeys were made to farmlands, market-places, villages or towns. However, long distance journeys could take a week or more to the traveler's destinations. The Hausa caravan traders (*fatake*) relied to a great extent on their porters for carrying their personal belongings and trade goods from one place to another.<sup>7</sup> Women and children were also employed as carriers, but were made to operate along shorter routes.<sup>8</sup>

Dan Asabe argues that, "human portage (*Yan alaro*) was one of the most important methods of transportation in the nineteenth century Kano. The methods became more popular

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<sup>3</sup> G.O Ogunremi, (1982), *Counting the Camels: Economics of Transportation in Preindustrial Nigeria*, New York publishers international, USA, p. 12

<sup>4</sup> G.O Ogunremi, (1982)...p. 12-13

<sup>5</sup> R.O. Ekundare (1973), *An Economic History of Nigeria 1860-1960* London, Methuen p.71

<sup>6</sup> G.O Ogunremi, (1982)...p. 12

<sup>7</sup> G.O Ogunremi, (1982)...p. 11-12

<sup>8</sup> R.O. Ekundare (1973)...p. 71

and more important with the expansion of long distance trade especially after the establishment of the Sokoto caliphate with headquarters at Sokoto at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century when movement of goods and services throughout the caliphate and beyond became more possible and safe”.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, human portage was used side by side with pack animals which were involved in the production and distribution of foodstuff, natron, leather works, manure, pots, cotton, textiles, salt, and ivory.<sup>10</sup>

One important defect of portage was its small carrying capacity. A porter normally carries about 65 lbs of load. By modern standard, this was a very low pack. As a result, many carriers were required for small amount of product. Many writers have criticized this as an economic waste. They argued that the labour employed in transporting goods might have been economically employed in production and other economic activities.

### **Pack Animals**

The second most wordy and widely used mode of transportation in pre-colonial Kano, and only next to human portage, was pack animals. Pack animal, used for transportation included donkeys, pack oxen and bullock, mules, hinny’s camels and horses.

### **The Camel and the Trans-Saharan Trade**

The first regular foreign contact with Hausaland was with North Africa. By the use of pack animals, caravan trade routes were developed across the Sahara between North and West Africa, and for a long period these routes were the only ways to and from West Africa and the outside world.<sup>11</sup> Hopkins posited that, “trans-Saharan trade between West and North Africa began as early as 1000 B.C., when the desert crossing was made possible by oxen and by chariots or carts drawn by horses. The trade was developed by the Carthaginians from about

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<sup>9</sup> A.U Dan Asabe (1996) “Kano Labour and the Kano Poor”, PhD Thesis BUK, p. 220, for details on Sokoto caliphate see also M Last (1967) *The Sokoto Caliphate*, Longman Greens and co Ltd

<sup>10</sup>D.O. Iweze, (2004), “A History of Transport System between Asaba in Delta State and Onitsha in Anambra State From 1954-1996”, Unpublished M.A thesis BUK p. 60-61

<sup>11</sup> R.O. Ekundare (1973)...p. 21

the fifth century B.C., and was given further impetus by Romans three centuries later following their expansion into North Africa and the subsequent introduction of the camel. With the collapse of the Roman rule in the fourth century A.D., the trade diminished and may even have ceased altogether. It was not revive until after the Byzantine re-conquest of North Africa in 533-35. The rise of Arab power from the seventh century onwards, though at first a destabilizing influence on North African politics, eventually contributed substantially to the growth of trans-Saharan commerce. Arab merchants and missionaries were present in the Western Sudan from about the second half of the eighth century, and their influence grew after the Almoravid invasion of the Negro empire of Ghana in 1077. The period which corresponds to the middle ages in European history was a flourishing time for trade on the Saharan routes, particularly from the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> and to the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. This period saw upswing in demand for West African products in Europe and the Middle East, and at the same time a substantial increase in supply, which was greatly assisted by an era of settled government in North Africa and the Western Sudan”.<sup>12</sup>

The trans-Saharan trade is the best-known of the various trades in which Kano was involved.<sup>13</sup> Hopkins argued that “the expansion of trade, following the introduction of the camel and the subsequent spread of Islam, led to the development of complex networks of routes across the desert. Moving from west to east, the most important of these were as follows: Ghana to Moghador and Fez via Awdaghost; Timbuktu to Moghador and Fez via Taghaza; Timbuktu to Tunis and Tripoli via Wargla, Ghadames and Ghat; Kano to Tunis and Tripoli via Agades, Ghat and Ghadames; and Borno to Tripoli via Bilma and Murzuk”.<sup>14</sup> On each of these routes, which were interconnected, were long waterless stages which heavily laden camel caravans had to pass at great peril. The journey across the Sahara used to take between two to

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<sup>12</sup> A.G Hopkins (1973) *An Economic History of West Africa*, Longman, London, p. 79-80

<sup>13</sup> M Johnson (1983) “Pheriphery and the Center: the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Trade of Kano ” in Bawuro M. Barkindoed Studies in the History of Kano Heimann Educational books Ltd, Ibadan, p. 131

<sup>14</sup> A.G Hopkins (1973)...p. 84-85

twelve months depending on the distance to be covered, the incidence of animal diseases, reliable cases of water supply and favorable weather conditions, such as the absence of sandstorms.<sup>15</sup>

The camel dominated these trans-Saharan routes owing chiefly to its special suitability for desert conditions, especially its ability to do without water for about ten to fifteen days.<sup>16</sup> When sufficient water was available, the humped camel could take in over fifteen gallons of water at a time. It could also withstand abnormal heat and store up reserves of energy in its hump. As rightly pointed by Bulliet, “most important, however, for camels living in very hot climates is their capacity to absorb heat by allowing their blood temperature to rise, without ill effect, over six degrees Fahrenheit in the course of a hot day before beginning to perspire. In this way water loss through perspiration is greatly minimized. During the chilly desert night the camel’s body temperature falls to its base level ready to begin a new rise the next day”.<sup>17</sup> Besides, camel feet are well adapted for desert travel as they certainly not sink in the sand. During sand-storms it could close its nostrils and eyes to prevent sand from entering them. Perhaps next in importance to its power of doing without water for a long time was its capacity for going without food for more than a week.

The speed at which camel travel is crucial to the transport cost. Unlike porters in the forest zone, its speed was not much constrained by physical obstacle. For example, it was not likely to be detained by downpours or tornadoes, although sand storms might be encountered. The absence of physical constraints on their journey was an advantage to their speed. They could therefore, do a non-stop journey of ten to twelve hours a day, and they would cover twenty miles a day. They could at the very maximum cover thirty miles a day, doing two and the half miles per hour for twelve hours. One of the relative advantages of the camel over other

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<sup>15</sup> R.O. Ekundare (1973)...p. 22

<sup>16</sup>See G.O Ogunremi, (1982)...p. 98-99

<sup>17</sup> R.W Bulliet (1975) *The Camel and the Wheel*, Harvard University press, p.31

pack animals and human portage was its suitability for long distance journeys. This was due not only to its ability to cover many miles for days or even weeks without breaking down but also to its ability to carry heavy loads for long distances. No other beast of burden, man or animal could do so long a journey in a short possible time.<sup>18</sup> The camel could carry even on long journeys a load of 2 to 5 cwt. In comparison, it would take over five donkeys, each carrying about 112 pounds, to carry a camel a full load of 5 cwt. As a man's load is hardly more than half a donkey's pack, over ten men would be required to carry a Camel's load at a time. Some long distance traders bought the camels that they employed for transportation. It could give as much as thirty years' service to the trader, who would still sell it for about 60,000 to 100,000 cowries at the southern termini of the route. Another factor for its long distance journeys was cheap maintenance on the route. It did not have to carry its food while in the desert. Their best fodder was the true desert vegetation.

Along these caravan routes to the North Africa were carried items such as gold, dyed cloths, leather goods and slave, which were exchanged for salt, Arab dresses, cowries and a number of European goods such as Manchester cotton, French silk, glass beads from Venice and Trieste, pepper, mirrors, needle and guns. Another essential commodity which the camel carried to Kano was Bilma salt. Bilma was reputed to have the finest salt deposit in Africa which was free from sand or impurities and often preferred to European salt. Besides, it was easily produced in big loaves and could be properly wrapped in mats for camel to carry. On return journeys, they carried natron, corn, hides and leather goods-saddles, water skins- and sandals, ostrich feathers, ivory, kola nuts. The slaves brought from the south also followed the caravan. A popular Hausa Kano made cloth known as *Turkudi* was also carried northwards. They were in large demand especially by the desert people in the north. At his lowest estimate, Barth rates the estimate of Hausa fine cotton to Timbuktu at three hundred camel-loads

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<sup>18</sup>See G.O Ogunremi, (1982)...p. 103-105

annually.<sup>19</sup> By having full camel-loads on both southward and northward journeys, the transportation cost was lowered. If enough loads were not available for camel to carry on both trips, the transport cost would have been so high as to render the trade unattractive and probably impossible. The Arab merchants acted as middlemen in the exchange of the West African products for European manufactures.<sup>20</sup>

Johnson posited that “no very good estimates exist for the numbers of slaves exported from Kano, such North African figures as exist include those coming from Borno and elsewhere. Barth, in the mid-century, reckoned that the total export from Kano was not more than 5000 a year of whom one third will go to Ghat, one third to Egypt and the remaining would be sold in Tripolitania. The price was about 12-16 dollars each in Kano in mid-century, rising to around 20 dollars by the 1860s”.<sup>21</sup>

During the 18th and the 19th centuries, the persistent war around Morocco brought a steady decline to the western caravan routes and increased the traffic on the central and eastern routes thus enhancing the commercial importance of Kano, which developed into a commercial metropolis. The population of Kano which was estimated by Clapperton in 1824 at between 30,000 and 40,000 included a large foreign element of rich Tripolian Arabs, and Salage merchants from Ghana trading in Kola nut. The opening of the caravan trade routes during the dry season always brought an influx of traders to Kano.<sup>22</sup>

The significance of the camel lay in promoting trans-Saharan trade. According to Ogunremi, this role is comparable to the ship which was used for the trans-Atlantic trade with the coastal areas of West Africa. Indeed, the camel has been rightly named “*Markoub el Sahara or ship of the desert*”.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>See G.O Ogunremi, (1982)...p. 102-103

<sup>20</sup> See R.O. Ekundare (1973)...p. 23

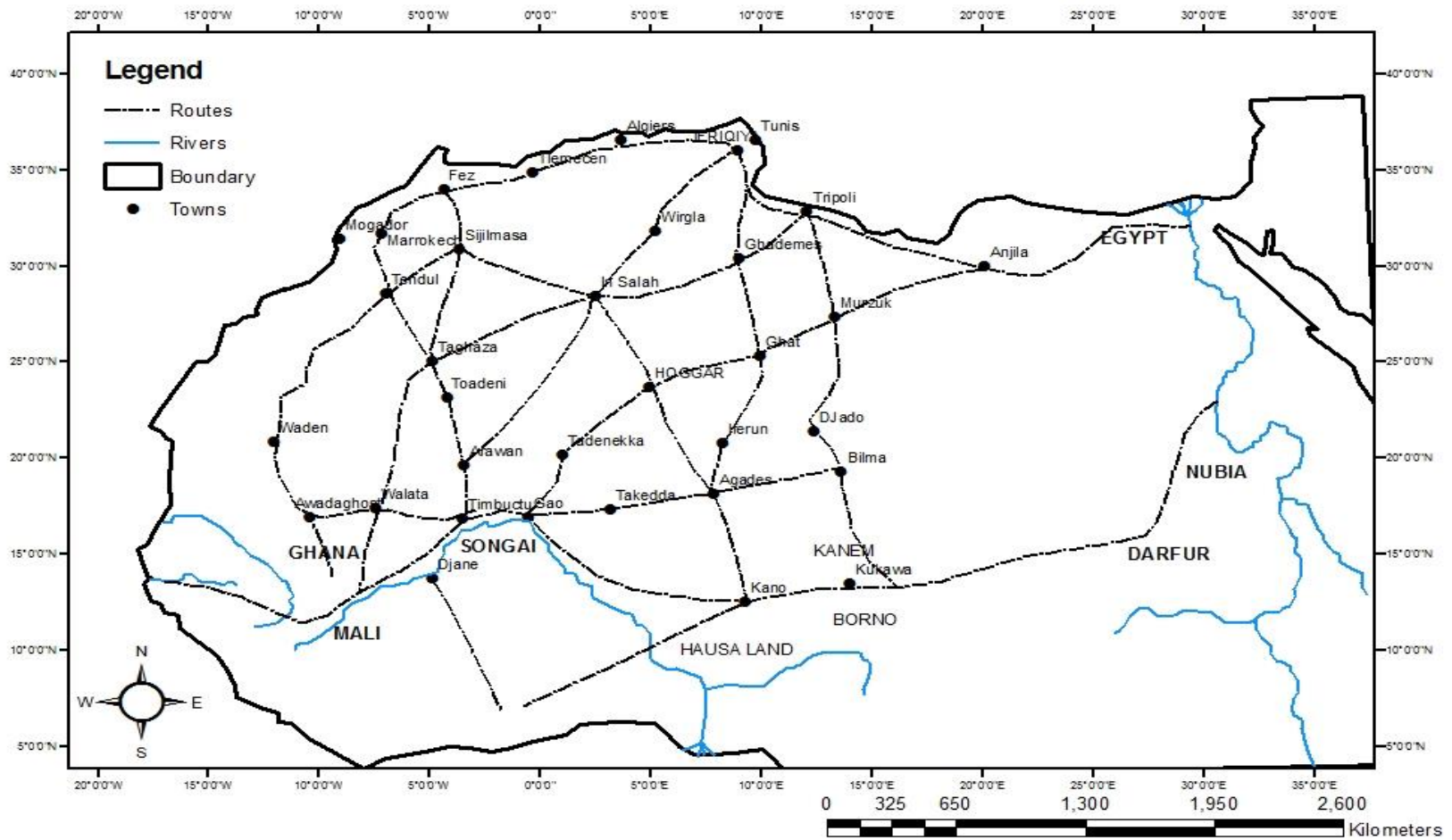
<sup>21</sup> M Johnson (1983)...p. 134-135

<sup>22</sup> See R.O. Ekundare (1973)...p. 23

<sup>23</sup>See G.O Ogunremi, (1982)...p. 98



**MAP II: Saharan Trade Routes in the Pre-Colonial Period**



## The Donkey and the Southern Trade

Of all the above listed modes of movement of persons and goods, the donkey is the oldest, the commonest and the most reliable because of easy breeding, easy maintenance and strength.<sup>24</sup> This idea was itself supported by Ogunremi, who contends that;

undoubtedly, the most important transportation system employed in distributing goods and services throughout the Sahel region is animal transportation. Of these, the donkey was, and still is, the most important. This is due to at least three reasons: first easy breeding, leading to the great number that was available for use, secondly, cheap maintenance, and thirdly, its hardiness.<sup>25</sup>

The donkey could be used to carry almost everything and could also be mounted. They could travel and in effect did travel as far south-west as Gwanja (Ghana) by the kola nut traders, an important kola nut market of the Ashanti. Donkeys were used to cross the Sahara desert before the introduction of camels in the North African area by the Romans in the third century A.D.<sup>26</sup> Whereas the camel was not usually employed beyond the termini of the trans-Saharan routes, the donkey not only crossed the Sahara but went beyond the termini further south to Borguland, Nupeland and even as far south as Ilorin. One donkey has the carrying capacity of 51kg of load depending on the size and type. Its ability to travel for about five days without water and to cover about twenty miles a day fitted it favorably for the desert journey and only next to the camel. If not for its lower carrying capacity, the donkey would have been almost as good as a camel in the desert.<sup>27</sup> Donkeys were cheap to maintain. This was mainly because they fend for themselves on the march, feeding on the stalks of the sorghum. This was possibly the reason why Campbell concluded that “they will eat paper or anything except hard

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<sup>24</sup> See A.U Dan Asabe (1996)...p. 224

<sup>25</sup>G.O Ogunremi (1980) “The Pre-colonial Economy and Transportation in Northern Nigeria” in I.A Akinjogbin& S.O Osoba ed *Topics on the Nigerian Economic and Social History*, University of Ife Nigeria

<sup>26</sup> See A.U Dan Asabe (1996)...p. 224

<sup>27</sup> See G.O Ogunremi, (1982)...p. 110

wood or iron”.<sup>28</sup> Hence, traders did not have to carry load in form of food which could substantially increase their speed.<sup>29</sup>

The importance of donkey to the Hausa caravan traders was highlighted by Barth in 1851, when he witnessed a caravan of two to three hundred donkeys carrying natron from Kano to Nupe.<sup>30</sup> Also Robinson noted in 1895, that he and his party got mixed up with a caravan consisting of some hundreds of donkeys.<sup>31</sup> In 1900, when Richardson was on a Christian missionary tour of the North he saw a caravan which consisted of 677 donkeys traveling towards Kano.<sup>32</sup> Even though what they were carrying was not clearly stated, there must have been many of these large caravans. But there were also numerous small groups, numbering 10-15, and many farmers using one or two to carry their produce to market places.

At this juncture, it is important to argue that the branches of trade discussed so far with respect to trans-Saharan trade were at least partly in non-*Kanawa* (people of Kano) hands. By contrast, the trade to the south, whether in ivory and slaves for the Saharan trade, or in kola for local use (and some transit trade) was carried on almost entirely by Kano merchants, and to a very large extent paid with products of the Kano area, cloth in particular.<sup>33</sup> Barth posited that “but we must bear in mind that the greater part of the persons employed in this trade are *Kanawa*, (southern trade) and that therefore, they and their families subsist upon this branch of trade”.<sup>34</sup> Shea wrote that;

The claim that the trans-Saharan trade was the basis for Kano’s wealth and expansion is difficult to maintain. The trans-Saharan trade was, for the most part, both financially and transportation-wise, in the hands of non-Kano people, and only accounted for about twenty percent of all Kano’s trade in the late nineteenth

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<sup>28</sup> D Campbell (1928) *On the Trail of the Veiled Tuareg*, London. As quoted by G.O Ogunremi, (1980)...p. 104

<sup>29</sup> See D Campbell (1928)...p. 104

<sup>30</sup> H Barth (1965) *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa 1894-1855*, Vol 1-3, London, p. 503. As quoted by G.O Ogunremi, (1982)...p. 110

<sup>31</sup> C.H Robinson (1897) *Hausaland or Fifteenth Hundred Miles through the Central Sudan*, Marton & co, London, p. 243

<sup>32</sup> C.M.S Archive, Journal of A.E Richardson G.3 A9/0, March 25 1900: The Church Missionary “Gleaner” (Rev E.A Richardson) p. 139. As quoted by G.O Ogunremi, (1982)...p. 110

<sup>33</sup> M Johnson (1983)...p. 138

<sup>34</sup> H Barth (1857)...p. 131

century. Trade within the savannah itself, however, and trade to the south were to a much larger extent in the hands of Kano people. While transportation across the desert was a monopoly of the Tuareg, Kano people seem to have had control of much of the transport to the south. It is known that Kano owned donkeys played a very important role in the kola trade.<sup>35</sup>

Kola from Gonja (ultimately from Ashanti) was an important import into Hausaland, both for local consumption and for re-export. Barth estimated the quantity at 500 donkey-loads of a year, amounting to 80 to 100 million carriers worth (some 32,000 dollars), about half of which, he reckoned; was profit.<sup>36</sup> Most of the people employed in the trade were Kano people, though, as Lovejoy has shown, many of them were long standing immigrants.<sup>37</sup> Lovejoy claimed that, “the Hausa kola trade develops in response to the expansion of the Hausa economy in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Hausa cities were centers of continental trade before 1700, but the 18<sup>th</sup> century witnessed an unprecedented boom. The main characteristics of this economic growth were the entrance of the Hausa region into the cowrie zone, the related expansion of trade with Oyo and indirectly with the Guinea coast, the expansion of Fulani livestock production and the foundation of rural market-places for the exchanged of grain, textiles, and dairy products, the regularized use of direct Hausa-North African links via Agades, the extension of Borno-Hausa trade in potash, livestock, and manufactures, and the consolidation of an active grain-livestock-salt exchange with the Tuareg. This stimulated the agricultural and industrial sectors of Hausa economy and attracted immigrants to the Hausa country. The kola trade was related to this economic expansion through its links with established commercial patterns”.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> P.J Shea (1975) “The Development of an Export Oriented Dyed Cloth Industry in Kano Emirate in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century”, PhD Thesis, Wisconsin-Madison, p. 21

<sup>36</sup> See H Barth, Travels, I , p. 513

<sup>37</sup> See P.E Lovejoy (1973)...p. 113, as quoted by M Johnson (1983)...p. 139

<sup>38</sup> P.E Lovejoy (1973)...p. 87

Both Monteil<sup>39</sup> and Robinson<sup>40</sup> claimed that the commercial power of Kano in the 19<sup>th</sup> century lay in the kola nut trade. Shea concludes that even if one agrees that Kano's wealth at the time was based on the kola nut trade, one is still obliged to look for exports from Kano which enables her to import millions of kola nuts from Gonja, and the most important single export from Kano was cotton cloth.<sup>41</sup>

Ivory, slaves and kola, and also the Bilma salt, were largely paid for with cloth.<sup>42</sup> In Barth's view;

Kano's cloth, and particularly the dyed and beaten cloth, was famous throughout a very large region, extending north to the Mediterranean, throughout the Central and Eastern Sahara, east to Borno, Baghirmi and Wadai, west to Timbuktu and beyond, south-west to Gonja and Kong, south east to Adamawa limited only by the nakedness of the pagan *sans-culottes* who do not wear clothing.<sup>43</sup>

In the later part of the century, Kano's cloth was also to be found in Lagos and elsewhere on the coast. Johnson wrote that in the Hodh it replaced the French Guinee as a currency; in Borno it was acceptable as the Maria Theresa dollar.<sup>44</sup> As late as 1890s Kano's cloth two thirds of the Sudan and almost all the central and eastern Sahara according to Monteil.<sup>45</sup> While Robinson, a little more modestly argued that Kano clothed more than half the population of the central Sudan and that any European traveler who took the trouble to ask for it would find no difficulty in purchasing Kano made cloth at Alexandria, Tripoli, Tunis or Lagos.<sup>46</sup> This further illustrates the importance of transportation to trade in pre-colonial Kano.

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<sup>39</sup> Capt. P.L Monteil (1895) *De Saint Louis a Tripoli par le Lac Tchad*, Paris, p. 291, as quoted by P.J Shea (1975) ...p. 21

<sup>40</sup> C.H Robinson (1897) ...p. 118

<sup>41</sup> H Barth (1857) *Travels II*...p. 126, as quoted by both P.J Shea (1975)...p. 21 and M Johnson (1983)...p. 140

<sup>42</sup> M Johnson (1983)...p. 140

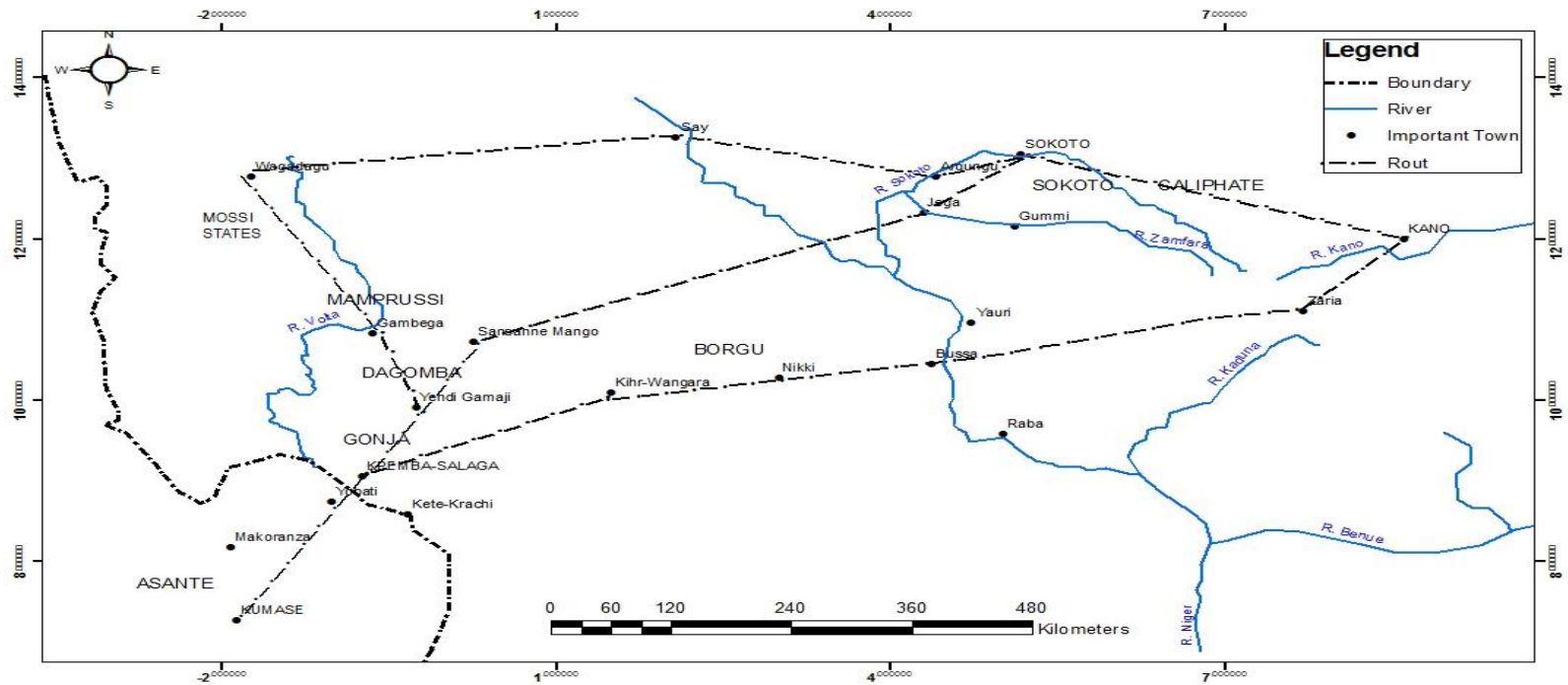
<sup>43</sup> See H Barth, *Travels, I*, p. 510

<sup>44</sup> M Johnson (1983)...p. 140

<sup>45</sup> P.L Monteil (1895)...p. 282

<sup>46</sup> C.H Robinson (1897)...p. 113

## Nineteenth Century Trade Routes Between Kano and Asante



Source: P.E Lovejoy (1973) The Hausa Kola Trade 1700-1900: "A Commercial system in the Continental Exchange of West Africa", PhD thesis Wisconsin, p.180

Some of the beaten turban cloth was made in Kura which were highly regarded on account of the quality of the dying that it placed Kano industry before that of all other towns and naturally it commanded the highest price. Johnson rightly posited that this and much of the other cloth was made and dyed not in Kano city itself, but in the surrounding area, though Kano city was reported to have 2000 dye pits, and no doubt did a considerable amount of dying.<sup>47</sup> Barth estimated the total quantity of Kano cloth exported in mid-century at 300 million cowries worth (120,000 dollars) at the very least, some 1500 camel loads of three to four hundredweight each, two to three thousand tons a year. As Barth remarked there is really something grand in this kind of industry.<sup>48</sup>

Another important factor which made the pre-colonial economy of Kano famous is the decline of Katsina as an important commercial center of Hausaland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the Sokoto jihad which the latter pre-jihad leaders constantly resisted. Lovejoy argued that “the most significant change which the *jihad* produced was the decline of Katsina and the rise of Kano as the commercial metropolis of the caliphate, a change which had an important influence on the development of the kola trade”.<sup>49</sup> Long before Lovejoy’s statement, Barth in his travels and discoveries... stated that “as long as Katsina continued independent and flourishing, the town of Kano appears never to have been an important commercial place and it was not till after Katsina had been occupied by the *Fulbe* and owing to its exposed position on the northern frontier of Hausa had become the great commercial entrepot of central negroland”.<sup>50</sup> The inability of the *jihadist* armies to secure the frontier region north of Katsina was the cause of Katsina commercial collapse. In 1804 an observer noted that Katsina’s houses are mostly in

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<sup>47</sup>M Johnson (1983)...p. 140-141

<sup>48</sup> See H Barth, *Travels, I*, p. 511, as quoted by M Johnson (1983)...p. 141

<sup>49</sup> P.E Lovejoy (1973) *The Hausa Kola Trade 1700-1900: “A Commercial system in the Continental Exchange of West Africa”*, PhD thesis Wisconsin, p. 108-109

<sup>50</sup>H Barth (1857) *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa: Being a Journal of Expedition Undertaken Under the Auspices of H.B.M. ’S Government in the Years 1854-1855 Vol II*, London, Longman, p. 132

ruins, with the principle commerce of the country being carried on at Kano since the *Fellatah* (Fulani) conquest.<sup>51</sup>

Barth argues that, from this time 1804-1807, the town of Katsina declined rapidly, and all the principal foreign merchants migrated to Kano, where they were beyond the reach of this constant struggle and even the Asbenawa transferred their salt market to Kano, which now became the emporium of this part of Hausaland.<sup>52</sup>

As early as 1824 Kano market was proverbial in the Central Savannah and thus, Barth described the city as “African London, Birmingham, and Manchester”.<sup>53</sup> One observer claimed that “there is no market in Africa so well regulated, particular quarters are appropriate to distinct articles like in Kano”.<sup>54</sup>

### **The Horse**

The horse is extremely well adapted to traveling long distances with great efficiency and to surviving on a diet of nutrient-poor, high-fiber grasses. The horse’s influence on human history and civilization make it one of the most important domestic animals. For thousands of years, human beings have used horses for transportation and farming.<sup>55</sup> One major problem associated with the horse is that, whereas the camel last for two weeks without water, the horse can only last for three days. Thus, it can only be used when water holes were not too far away from one another. This explains the reason why the horse cannot perfectly be used for long distance trans-Saharan trade. For this reason, it did not have the same economic value as the donkey and camel. In West Africa, they were of significance more for warfare than for

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<sup>51</sup>P.E Lovejoy (1973)...p. 109

<sup>52</sup> H Barth, *Travels*, I , p. 477

<sup>53</sup> AHM Kirk-Greene (1967) *Barth Travels in Nigeria: Extracts from the Journal of Henry Barth’s Travels in Nigeria 1850-1855*, London, Oxford University press, p. 101

<sup>54</sup>Denham and Clapperton, *Narrative II*, p.121; and Barth, *Travels*, I , p. 477, As quoted by P.E Lovejoy (1973), p.51-53

<sup>55</sup>A.D Mary, (2006): *The World Book Encyclopedia vol. 19* U.S.A Grolier Incorporation, p.383



transportation. Because of the military importance, they played an important role as an item of trade in the north-south traffic of the pre-colonial era.<sup>56</sup>

### **The Ox**

Available information does not emphasize the wide spread use of pack oxen for long distance trade. This was probably because they move at very low speed and hence cannot suitably be employed for long distance trade.<sup>57</sup> However, they were also employed for riding and as pack animals for local trade. They served as the carrier of all the grain and other articles to and from the market, on the market days. Like horses, they were essential items of trade in the north-south traffic. For transportation they were also less important than donkeys. A traveler who employed both noted “again and again I have had occasions to use both, and though I prefer oxen because of their greater strength and patience, the jackers have other obvious advantages”. One advantage of the ox over the donkey was its higher carrying capacity, whereas a donkey could carry up to a 100 to 150 ibs, an ox could carry up to 200 ibs. Yet far more donkeys than ox were employed for transportation.<sup>58</sup>

Ekundare noted that, the exchange of goods locally in various parts of Nigeria has been a long standing. Most early exchanges were the results of surplus production over and above the subsistence level. This idea is opposed to the western colonial imperialist view which claimed that the pre-colonial agricultural mode of production in pre-colonial Nigeria was purely a subsistence one. He further stressed that, the amount of produce a family could offer and the goods it required in exchange were often small in quantity and value. The people could not afford the trouble and expense of sending small parcels of goods very far, nor to travel far either to sell them or to make their small purchases. Hence local market were organized at regular intervals of three, five, to seven days, and occasionally fortnightly, for the exchange of

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<sup>56</sup>See G.O Ogunremi, (1982)...p. 105

<sup>57</sup>The ox is a male or female bovine animal, especially one belonging to a domestic breed sometimes used for pulling heavy loads and plows. It was and still is an important means of transportation in the study area.

<sup>58</sup>See G.O Ogunremi, (1982)...p. 105-106

products. In fixing the local market days, the distance to be covered by those attending the market from the neighboring villages, and the number of the participating villages in a particular district or chiefdom were taken into account as each village acted as host-village on market days in rotation. In large districts markets were often held simultaneously in two or more villages on a particular day. The organization of such markets according to Ekundare, gave the people the opportunity to sell local products at regular intervals. A sense of specialization soon grew: each village specialized in supplying particular local foodstuffs and industrial products, and thus the people knew which village market to visit for their rare but special purchases. Items of local exchange included foodstuffs and household materials such as mats, pottery and soap.<sup>59</sup>

Johnson posited that, in addition to its extensive long-distance trade, Kano was also a trade center for the very populous-districts now known as the close settle zone, which was already fairly densely populated by the 1850s. It is clear that at that date, and probably as late as the 1890s, the area was a net exporter of grain. There was also a local trade in cloth of cheaper varieties. Foodstuffs were cheap in Kano; a whole family could live at ease, including every expense, including clothing, for 50,000 to 60,000 cowries, 20 to 24 dollars, a year, according to Barth who described it as one of the most fertile spots on earth.<sup>60</sup> Barth in one of his remarks on Kano stressed that the great advantage of Kano is that commerce and manufactures go hand in hand and thus concluded that “we must presume that Kano ought to be one of the happiest countries in the world”.<sup>61</sup>

### **Risk of Traveling in the Pre-colonial Period**

Traveling in short or long distance for internal or external trade in the pre-colonial period was difficult but not impossible. This is because the routes were infested with wild beast

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<sup>59</sup>See R.O. Ekundare (1973)...p. 49-50

<sup>60</sup> See M Johnson (1983)...p. 142

<sup>61</sup>See H Barth, Travels, I, p. 127-128

and armed bandits but the latter constituted the greatest source of insecurity. It was because of the problem of insecurity that professional traders in the pre-colonial period and other long distance traders developed the systems of traveling in convoy and well-armed under the leadership of *Madugu* (Leader of the caravan trade).<sup>62</sup> Thus, the central figure in caravan organization was the *Madugu*, as the administrative and military head of the expedition, he determined all major decisions, from date of departure to division of duties along the way. Often he was compared to an Emir, for his voice was absolute in caravan affairs, despite consultation with important traders and *malams* (religious clerics). The final responsibilities for ventures were on his shoulders. He dealt with local rulers, negotiated payment of *gaisuwa*, *fito* and other taxes, and directed defensive operations. Foremost among his assistants were the *Jagaba*, who led the caravan, scouted the road ahead, and determined the best route to follow, and the *Ubandawaki*, who served as intermediary with local officials, organized rest stops (*zango*), and oversaw the main body of the caravan on the road. Several armed and mounted men accompanied the *Jagaba*, one of whom was in constant touch with the *Madugu*.<sup>63</sup>

A caravan was strung out over several miles, with the *Jagaba* and his advance party a few miles in front. The livestock, loaded with goods, came next. Since most were donkeys, there was approximately one man for every three donkeys in this section. Behind the livestock and attendants came the traders and their families. Important merchants were mounted, and everyone well armed. At the end of the caravan was the *Madugu* with another group of mounted men. The *Madugu* positioned himself at the rear because it was the most vulnerable spot. Hostile villagers and robbers usually lacked advance warning of caravan's approach, and, by the time they organized, the caravan had usually moved on. A *Madugu's* leadership ability depended upon a number of personal characteristics, management and commercial skills, and

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<sup>62</sup> Madugu, Y.U., (2011) *The Impact of Commercial Buses on the Economy of Kano Metropolis 1967-2003*, Published by LAP LAMBERT International Academic Publishing, Germany. p. 26-27

<sup>63</sup> See P.E Lovejoy (1973)...p. 178-179

extra-ordinary knowledge crucial to the protection of expeditions. According to Lovejoy, first, *Madugai* (plural) were successful merchants, a necessary indicator of management ability. Men such as Madugu K'osai and Madugu Mijinyawa Mai Akokari owned 40 -60 donkeys, which placed them among the largest importers. Second, men had to be well respected, confident, but not overly ambitious.<sup>64</sup> When merchants were ready for a caravan journey, they greeted their *Madugu* with gifts (*gaisuwa*), and their presence provided a rough estimate of potential caravan size. If a *Madugu* is confident he could form an expedition, and he consulted Islamic clerics *malams* for the best departure date. They determined the exact moment (*sa'a*) through astrology and prayer, and, when news of the day leaked out, traders for miles around Kano scurried to an agreed meeting place, one of the most important being Rimin Asbenawa, just west of the Kano city walls.<sup>65</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The forgoing shows that human portage and pack animals played a very crucial role in shaping the pre-colonial economic system of Kano. This study illustrates that from the 14th and 15th centuries, traveling on land using footpaths and pack animals became prominent linking Kano with Borno, Nupe, Adamawa, Benue valley, Yoruba land, Benin, Gonja (Ghana) as well as North Africa. Also, Kano was famous because it was the center of rich agricultural district which produced adequate foodstuffs for its population. In addition, Kano owed parts of its prosperity to the industry and skills of its craftsmen, especially the weavers, the leather workers and the dyers, the products of whom attracted many traders from many parts of Africa. Thus, the availability of transport networks, security of Kano within the caliphate, collapse of Katsina as a commercial nerve centre of Hausaland and the resulting industrial and agricultural development provided foreign and domestic merchants alike with a strong incentive for making

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<sup>64</sup>P.E Lovejoy (1973)...p. 180

<sup>65</sup> P.E Lovejoy (1973)...p. 180, see also A.U Dan-Asabe (1987) "Comparative Biographies of Selected Leaders of the Kano Commercial Establishment", M.A Thesis BUK

Kano their headquarters. Following the defeat and subsequent colonization of Africa by European countries, the existing pre-colonial long distance commercial activities were restricted by the new colonial boundaries. The introduction of the caravan tolls by Lugard's administration after 1903, the coming of the Lebanese traders, the importation of cheap European cloth, salt, sugar, soap and so on, further destroyed the existing pre-colonial economic system. It is also important to note that with the exception of camel, all the pre-colonial transport modes had continued to play an important role as a means of transportation in Kano even after the colonial conquest and up to the present time.