

TOBACCO MERCHANTS IN NORTHERN KATSINA EMIRATE IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

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Abstract

Studies have been conducted on the various aspects of the history of Katsina Emirate. The place of Katsina in the intellectual and economic landscapes of Hausaland and West Africa has been examined. However, tobacco's role in the Katsina emirate economy has received little attention from the writers of the economic history of Katsina. Moreover, writers and readers tend to pay attention to European-imported tobacco in a few discussions on tobacco marketing. This paper has examined the rise of local tobacco merchants in Katsina emirate in the 19th and 20th centuries. The paper has shown that, in the Katsina Emirate, there were centres for producing local chewed tobacco known as Taba Gari. Apart from production, some individuals engaged in tobacco marketing inside and outside Katsina Emirate and obtained considerable wealth. The paper also demonstrated that importing tobacco from overseas during colonial domination affected local tobacco production and marketing. Written and oral sources were used in the course of data collection.

Introduction

By the end of the 18th century, Birnin Katsina developed rapidly with a dense population and a heterogeneous configuration reflecting mingling through commerce and consistent migration. Consequent to this development, Katsina became home to migrant communities who were, in one way, recognized as scholars or merchants who came to Katsina primarily to trade and, to some extent, to spread the religion of Islam. Katsina was an entrepot for the Saharan commerce and a centre of commercial activities in Hausaland, where various commodities were exchanged. It became a terminus where merchants from North Africa, the Volta region, Azbin, and Borno met

for business transactions. This resulted in the cosmopolitan configuration in the Birnin Katsina's established wards.

¹ One of the trade items in Katsina, and from across the Sahara, was locally produced tobacco. From Katsina, the trade routes enabled tobacco merchants to travel to the kingdom of air (Azbin) and some parts of North Africa, where they exchanged tobacco with other available commodities and were of great value to Katsina and Hausaland. As a result of this tobacco trade, some prominent merchants emerged and obtained considerable wealth. This paper, therefore, discusses the rise of some tobacco merchants in Katsina in the 19th and 20th centuries. The merchants identified and discussed include Dan Garko (1868-1934) Lawal A'kulkula (1891-1953), Gwadabe Jikan Goshi (1891-1976), Alhaji Abu Modibbo, Alhaji Salihu Dayyabu Kabukawa, Adamu Abdussalam (1959-2019), and Alhaji Abu Tela Kandawa (1893-1991).

Dan Garko (1868-1934)

Dan Garko, whose real name was Abdullahi, was a prominent merchant of chewed tobacco (*Taba gari* in Hausa language). He specialized in processing tobacco leaves to produce chewed tobacco. He was among the people who started processing tobacco in the Yan Taba ward of Katsina town. He hailed from Garko in present-day Kano and migrated to Katsina around 1891, during the reign of Sarkin Katsina Abubakar (1887-1905).² According to his grandson, Alhaji Sada, Dan Garko came to Katsina with his skills in processing local tobacco leaves. Tradition has it that *Taba gari*, prepared by Dan Garko, was preferred by people in Katsina and beyond because of its good quality and taste. Dan Garko established a famous and big tobacco processing cottage industry in his compound, where he organized his servants and other household members to process tobacco for

¹. A.B Sani. "Trade Diplomacy, Banking and Finance in the Trans-Saharan Trade." Pyla-mak Publishers, N. M. S Lokoja Road, Kaduna-Nigeria. (2012) p.8

² I. L Abdullahi. "Emergence and Evolution of Unguwanni (wards) in Birnin Katsina. C 1495-1949." Unpublished PhD Thesis in History BUK, (2009) p. 148

his customers in Katsina, Maradi, and beyond.³ He always obtained his supplies from Kandawa, Dankar and Kurmiyal in Ruma District.

The production of local chewed tobacco made Abdullahi Dan Garko a prominent and wealthy merchant. He possessed a lot of livestock, which symbolized wealth in those days. It was also believed that during his lifetime, Dan Garko was the only tobacco processor patronized by royalists and other members of the Katsina aristocracy.⁴ Dan Garko's cottage's local tobacco production business continued after his death. Thus, his children continued with the business. Those under his cottage were contracted on clientage and established their cottage-based processing factory after graduation.

Lawal A'kulkula (1891-1953)

Akulkula was a prominent tobacco processor specialising in making excellent local tobacco blends. The name A'kulkula was derived from his speciality in sapping tobacco leaves. He was among the immediate and most loyal servants who graduated in the cottage of Dan Garko. A'kulkula established his factory after the death of his master. He continued with the trade, which earned him the fame and name. A'kulkula real name was Lawal. He made his fortune from tobacco processing but did not acquire as much wealth as his master because, by the time he became famous, the use of locally produced tobacco was diminishing among the people of Katsina, especially with the introduction of imported cigarettes from Europe.⁵

³ Interview with Alhaji Sada, Grandson of Dan Garko, in his House at Yan Taba Quarters Katsina.

⁴ Interview with Alhaji Sada, Grandson of Dan Garko, in his House at Yan Taba Quarters Katsina. Sept. 2016

⁵ I.L. Abdullahi. 'Emergence and Evolution of Unguwanni (wards) in Birnin Katsina. C 1495-1949.' Unpublished PhD Thesis in History BUK, (2009) p.149

Alhaji Abu Modibbo

Abu Modibbo was a tobacco merchant in the Northern Katsina Emirate. He combined the export of local tobacco with the importation of European cigarettes into Kano. His real name is Abubakar Mustafa. The name Modibbo was a result of his outstanding capabilities in the pursuit of Islamic knowledge. His teacher appreciated his effort and named him Modibbo, meaning the learned one in Fulfulde. He was from Gambarawa quarters in Katsina. Modibbo's ancestors were part of the migrant communities in the area and were of Tuareg origin, who came from the areas of the desert.⁶ He started trading tobacco when he was less than thirty years old. Modibbo learned the trade from the people who usually came to Katsina to work as farm laborers during the rainy season. He stressed that one Inusa from Kanambakashe told him about the lucrative nature of the tobacco trade in Katsina and the desert areas, particularly Agadez, Tasawa, Murya, Damagaran, and Azbin. On some occasions, tobacco was exported to areas such as Algiers and Libya, with a substantial population of Tuaregs.

Alhaji Abu Modibbo, for the first time, visited Kandawa and discovered precisely the nature of production and commercial activities involved in local tobacco. He began arranging for the exportation of tobacco products to desert areas. For over sixty years, Abu Modibbo had engaged in the tobacco trade, buying, selling and exchanging local tobacco with other materials like natron, livestock, women's ornamental wears and 'Zugu'(a black and white coloured robe), which the Tuaregs used to decorate their turbans. They also carry animal skin, used to manufacture bags, shoes, and other materials. These materials were traded to increase profit and supplement the tobacco trade.

⁶ Interview with Alhaji Abu Modibbo at his Residence in Katsina. 86 years old. Sep, 2017

Alhaji Abu Modibbo became prominent in the tobacco trade because local producers in the two major areas of Kabawa and Kandawa waited for him to purchase their products. Sometimes, they collect cash advances from him to finance the production, which they pay back in tobacco or cash.⁷ In the 1950s, Modibbo became the leading merchant in the local tobacco business, specializing in storing and exporting local tobacco. Storage began when farmers started cultivating up to the end of the season, and then he would begin the exportation process. The tobacco trade made Abu Modibbo become well-established and wealthy, enabling him to engage in various businesses along the desert.

According to Abu Modibbo, tobacco prices during the entry period of production per bundle cost about four kobo. The labour and other expenses before it reaches the final destination cost about kobo. This was the nature of the exports between 1900 and around the 1950s. This means that a bundle (H.Sanka) amounted to five kobo. However, in Agades, Maradi and Azbin, the bundle cost about 120 CFA, and the exchange rate of CFA to Naira was around 30 CFA for one Naira. The profit gained is about ten Naira, out of the capital of five kobo. The peak price of a bundle of tobacco was 200 CFA in the desert side.⁸In exchange, a big ram in Murya cost about 20-26 CFA, but on its arrival in the areas of Jibia and Mai'adua, the price amounted to 5-6 naira. The profit gained usually doubled by about 100 per cent as a bundle of tobacco.

Modibbo further revealed that, with the introduction of lorries, the tobacco merchants organized the livestock they bought and exported to the Ilorin and Bida areas. They exchanged their products with various kinds of materials, such as women's ornamental wear made from glass and other

⁷ Interview with Alhaji Abu Modibbo at his Residence in Katsina. 86 years old. Sep, 2017

⁸ Interview with Alhaji Abu Modibbo at his Residence in Katsina. 86 years old. Sep, 2017

beads in Bidda areas, Kola nuts from Gonja, and many other products that were marketable in Katsina in exchange for what they bought.

Alhaji Salihu Dayyabu Kabukawa

Alhaji Salihu Kabukawa was among the prominent merchants and producers of local tobacco in the Kabukawa village of Katsina emirate in the 20th century. He hailed from the family of Dayyabu, the former village head of Kabukawa. Dayyabu, the first child of the family, subsequently became the village head after his father's death. The family's oral tradition stressed that Alhaji Salihu Kabukawa's grandparents came from the desert areas, probably Abzin, and established Kabukawa. They claimed that Kabukawa village was as old as Birnin Katsina.⁹ Kabukawa was a renowned tobacco-producing area for many years, as Henry Barth, a European explorer who visited the area in the 19th century, observed.¹⁰ Polly Hill also observed that the people of Kabukawa, Kaukai, and Morawa in the Mallamawa district attach great importance to the production and trade of local tobacco.¹¹ She stressed that many people in Kabukawa were tobacco producers and Merchants. They specialized in the production and trade of local tobacco, and this kind of trade made the area well-known among economic historians and traders.

Alhaji Salihu was a tobacco farmer-trader who produced a lot of tobacco and exported it to desert areas of Murya, Azbin, etc., in exchange for other commodities available. In return, he would import livestock, natron and other goods from the desert side to Katsina and subsequently to the areas of Yorubaland and sometimes would extend his trade journey to Gonja areas to purchase

⁹ Interview with Alhaji Salihu Dayyabu Kabakawa Village Head. 89 years, at his Residence In Kabakawa. Sept 2016

¹⁰ Barth, H. "Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa 1849-1855." Vols.2.p.472

¹¹ Poly Hill. "The History of Northern Katsina Tobacco Trade. A Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria." vol.4.no.3,

kola nuts and other goods in great demand in Hausaland and beyond. Kolanut was very precious to the Hausa, Azbin and Agadasawa peoples. The tobacco trade opened up many other economic activities in Katsina. Katsina became a very prominent city where various merchants from Borno, Volta region, and North African areas visited to transact businesses, including tobacco.¹²

Gwadabe Jikan Goshi (1891-1976)

Another prominent tobacco merchant specialising in manufacturing chewed tobacco (*taba gari*) and snuff tobacco (H. *taba hanci*) was Gwadabe, who was popularly called *Jikan Goshi mai dakan taba gari*. (a grandson to Goshi who specialized in the processing of snuff tobacco). His house was located around the areas of the old Katsina market behind Damale's house, called *lung yan guga* in Katsina. Gwadabe came to Katsina from Kano with his sister Abu, who married in Katsina around 1890s. He learnt how to manufacture and trade local tobacco in the Yan Taba quarters in the Katsina area long before the arrival of the British. Gwadabe used donkeys to go to Kandawa or Kabukawa to purchase tobacco. The famous place he visited at Kabukawa was Alhaji Abdu Kabukawa's residence.¹³ Gwadabe became very popular in making local tobacco, which earned him patronage from customers far and near the Birnin Katsina. He was not fortunate like Dan Garko and Lawal A'kulkula in acquiring a lot of wealth from preparing local tobacco, and he needed a child to continue or expand the business. Therefore, he was always busy spending his money on marriage arrangements. Iliya Bajaj further relates that his master Gwadabe spent much of his wealth looking for a cure for his infertility and marrying different wives in search of a child. He was 85 years old before his death.¹⁴

¹² Interview with Alhaji Salihu Dayyabu Kabakawa Village Head. 89 years old at his Residence In Kabakawa. Sept

¹³ Interview with Malam Iliya Bajaj, Gwadabe Servant 87years old. At his Residence in Katsina Sept. 2017

¹⁴ Interview with Malam Iliya Bajaj, Gwadabe Servant 87years old. At his Residence in Katsina Sept. 2017

Adamu Abdussalam (1959-2019)

Malam Adamu Abdussalam was a tobacco merchant who exported local tobacco leaves to desert areas. He learned the trade when he was 15 to 20 years old. He further stressed that his businesses included tobacco marketing and subsistence farming.¹⁵ As discovered, tobacco production is still in practice at Kandawa village in a quantity that is enough to carry to Agades, Murya, Tasawa, Damagaran, and other areas of Azbin. There was a new trend in the local tobacco trade in which the merchant purchased the tobacco leaves from the farmers, stored them for some time, and then began to arrange for export in a modern way as there were road networks. They load tobacco products in the car every Tuesday to Magama Jibia, from there to Maradi in a place called Cantabara (the name of a village in Damagaran). On Fridays, the merchants would follow their consignment and, on Saturdays, distribute the product to small traders who take it to the hinterland markets of the desert areas for sale. After about a week, they would return to pay for what they had taken from their masters.¹⁶ In this new trend in the tobacco trade, merchants usually do not exchange tobacco money for anything, unlike the old-time merchants who purchased livestock, natron, and other goods to make more profit. Modern merchants profit more from the exchange of CFA currency with Naira currency when they return home. This earned them more profit even if they were not lucky in the main commodity (tobacco leaf)

However, the new generation of tobacco growers and merchants do not trade in tobacco directly in the desert. Instead, they produce tobacco and await people like Alhaji Abu Modibbo to buy and store it in Kandawa until it reaches its peak value and then export it to desert areas. Dan Garko and Gwadabe Jikan Goshi, from Birnin Katsinam, used to visit Kandawa to buy tobacco leaves from

¹⁵ Interview with Malam Adamu Abdussalam, 60 years, Tobacco Farmer-Trader at Kandawa. Sept.2017.

¹⁶ Interview with Malam Adamu Abdussalam, 60 year, tobacco farmer-trader in Kandawa. Sept.2017.

the production of snuff tobacco. Some people in Dankar specialized in manufacturing tobacco and patronized Kandawa tobacco leaves because of their excellent taste and quality.

Alhaji Abu Tela Kandawa (1893-1991)

Alhaji Abu Tela Kandawa was among the tobacco growers in Kandawa before he died in 2014. He became a renowned tobacco merchant in the 20th century. Abu Tela was of Rumawa clan. Family tradition claimed that their forefathers established Kandawa village long ago.¹⁷ According to Ibrahim, son of Abu Tela, his father was among the first exporters of local tobacco to the desert side for sale. Initially, merchants from Birnin Katsina came to buy all tobacco leaves produced in the Kandawa areas. People like Alhaji Abu Modibbo were merchants who did not process tobacco leaves to manufacture any tobacco (H. taba) but exported the dried tobacco leaves to Murya, Agades and some parts of North Africa. However, people like Dan Garko, Lawal Akulkula and Gwadabe Jikan Goshi processed the leaves to snuff or smoked tobacco, which they would sell in Birnin Katsina, some parts of Hausaland and exported some to the desert areas where they exchanged with valuable products needed in Katsina areas and beyond.¹⁸

This idea of the exportation of dried and raw tobacco gave them a lot of wealth and prosperity as merchants began to rediscover the importance and value of the tobacco commodity. The family of Abu Tela mentioned that he and his associates used donkeys to load tobacco products and headed to desert areas, where they exchanged the product with livestock, natron and other materials, which they brought back to Katsina and some other parts of Hausaland and beyond. Tobacco merchants acquired a lot of wealth from the trade. Abu Tela was among the leading tobacco merchants in

¹⁷ Interview with Ibrahim, Son of Abu Tela 60yeras at Kandawa, in his Residence in Sept.2017

¹⁸ Interview with Ibrahim, Son of Abu Tela 57yeras at Kandawa, in his Residence in Sept.2017

Kandawa village. He was a tobacco merchant on the Maradi, Tasawa and Zinder routes. The tobacco trade made him a prominent merchant in many other goods, including livestock, which he exchanged with Kola nut in Yoruba country. During the reign of Emir Muhammadu Dikko (1906-1944), who was a tobacco consumer, Abu Tela was one of the merchants allowed to supply the Emir. He would visit the Emir's palace with gifts for royal greetings and seek blessings from the Emir. Abu Tela initiated his son Ibrahim into the tobacco trade.¹⁹

Conclusion

In Katsina emirate, some individuals became prominent in the tobacco business in the period under review. Some of them specialized in processing refined tobacco leaves that were taken out to desert areas. While some became prominent in manufacturing different fine locally blended tobacco (H.Taba Gari, Taba Hanci and Taba Buki), all of them were prominent in the specialization as they proceeded to trade their products to areas in great demand. Tobacco merchants obtained wealth that enabled them to venture into various trades. The trade in tobacco contributed a lot to the development of commercial activities, not only in Katsina but in Hausaland and beyond.

¹⁹ Interview with Ibrahim, Son of Abu Tela, 57 years at Kandawa, in his Residence in Sept.2017

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