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A Study of the Influence of slaves in tax-gathering in
Kano Emirate

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This paper will discuss the influence of slaves in tax-gathering in Kano Emirate using Mr. A.G. Hasting's report about the activity of Aliyu Jakada in Madaki district. The status of jakada system in Kano political history is closely associated with the evolution and maintenance of trusted slaves within the administrative structure of the emirate at the same time jakada system has suffered severe criticism especially from perspectives of the colonial officials. Hastings's narration provides a useful source for understanding the influence of jakada in the tax administration and exposes some the deep-rooted corrupt practices that were said to have symbolic acceptance among the Hausa.¹

Slaves have prominently featured in political and social structure of the Hausa society.² Their roles are clearly

¹ M. G. Smith, "Historical and Cultural Conditions of Political Corruption among the Hausa," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 6, no. 2 (1964): 164-94.

² Douglas E. Ferguson, "Nineteenth Century Hausaland: Being a Description by Imam Imoru of the Land, Economy, and Society of His People" (Ph.D., University of California Los Angeles, 1973), J.S. Hogendorn and Paul E. Lovejoy, "Keeping Slaves in Place: The Secret Debate on the Slavery Question in Northern Nigeria, 1900-1904," in *The Atlantic Slave Trade : Effects on Economies, Societies, and Peoples in Africa, the Americas, and Europe*, ed. J. E. Inikori and Stanley L. Engerman (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), Jan Hogendorn and Paul Lovejoy, "The Development and Execution of Frederick Lugard's Policies toward Slavery in Northern Nigeria," *Slavery and Abolition* 10, no. 1 (1989), Jan S. Hogendorn, "The Economics of Slave Use on Two 'Plantations' in the Zaria Emirate of the Sokoto Caliphate," *Journal of International African Historical Studies* 10, no. 3 (1977), Paul E. Lovejoy, "The Characteristics of Plantations in the Nineteenth-Century Sokoto Caliphate (Islamic West Africa)," *The American Historical Review* 84, no. 5 (1979), Paul E. Lovejoy, "Murgu: The Wages of Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate,"

defined along socially accepted norms and are expected to perform given assignments demanded by their masters. In the processes of executing their functions, slaves assume new roles that often contradict their status, for example while enjoying the immunity against prosecution they usually found to have under many conditions exuberated the duties they were expected to carry.

Slaves in Kano are categorised into two classes: bayin gida (domestic slaves) and bayin aiki (farmyard slaves). Bayin gida were also referred to as "trusted" slaves that have earned the trust of their master either through hard work, obedience or bravery at the battlefield. These slaves are mostly found among the royal households as identified by Imam Imoru in the table below:

TITLE	FUNCTIONS
Shamaki	Looks after the king's horses and serves as an overseer of the slaves
Dan Rimi	King's top slave official and looks after all weapons
Sallama	King's pocket and king's bosom friend [usually a eunuch]
Kasheka	Shares the household supplies to king's wives [usually a eunuch]
Turakin Soro	Guardian of the inner room
Abin Fada	Go-between
Kilishi	Prepares sitting place for the king

Source: Ferguson, Douglas E. "Nineteenth Century Hausaland: Being a Description by Imam Imoru of the Land, Economy, and Society of His People." Ph.D., University of California Los Angeles, 1973.

Slavery and Abolition 14, no. 1 (1993), Paul E. Lovejoy, *Slavery on the Frontiers of Islam* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2004), Paul E. Lovejoy and Jan S. Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery: The Course of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897-1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Bayin aiki on the other hand are the slaves that were recently captured and enslaved and have very little or no knowledge of their status in the society. They are mostly being considered first-generation slaves. Their loyalty remained questioned and were therefore not entrusted with any sensitive job or be made responsible for the state or the households to which they have been enslaved.³ Bayin aiki were mostly owned by wealthy merchants attajirai and commoner class.

Despite the above categorisation of slave social strata, the organic relationship between violence and processes of enslavement remained in place as the demand for slaves kept increasing over the years most especially under the Fulani administration.⁴ While Kano was said to have developed a highly centralized system of administration under the Fulani rulers, the effective integration of slaves into its administrative structure was said to have begun in the eighteenth century under Sarki Babba Zaki. According to M.G. Smith slaves attained various positions of authority that gave them an unparallel advantage over the freed persons in the emirate.⁵ It was perhaps during that period the Kano people used the adage "Bawan Sarki maganin bawan Allah (A royal slave is more import than the servant of Allah) to demonstrate the aversive regard to the slave authority.

Because of the generally accepted view that the character of slaves is devoid of kirki (kindness), the general public expect them to be masu ladabi (obedient). In the course of being obedient slaves gain the trust masu sarauta (aristocrats) who in turn reward them generously with various appointments in the state either as overseers of farm estates or by becoming jakadu tax collectors. The latter is said to be the most coveted post slaves aspire to attain. Despite the relative immunity against various

³ Polly Hill, "From Slavery to Freedom: The Case of Farm-Slavery in Nigerian Hausaland," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 18, no. 3 (1976).

⁴ A.M. Yakubu Violence and the acquisition of slaves...

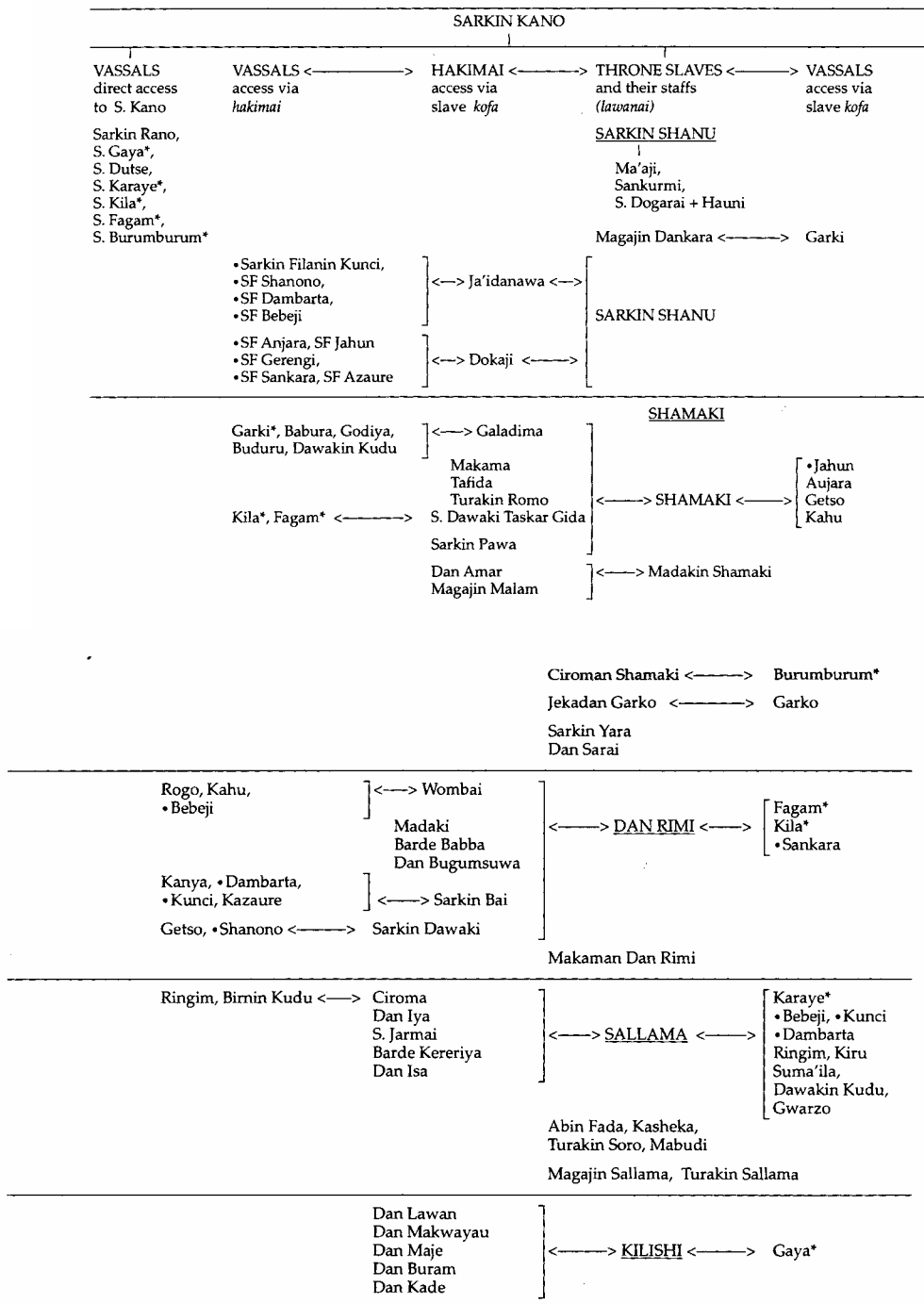
⁵ "Until Babba Zaki solved the problem of centralizing control over hakimai and major rural chiefs by superimposing a new communication network on older chain of command, to strengthen themselves against their entrenched and powerful officialdoms..." M. G. Smith, *Government in Kano, 1350 -1950, African States and Societies in History* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), p.

state-sanctioned responsibilities, royal slaves and jakadu experience similar misfortunes that affect the royal households. For example during the period of the Fulani jihad in Kano, according to Stilwell "...royal slaves would have otherwise been isolated from the power and wealth to which they had become accustomed. They had two options: remain outside the palace and risk being reduced to poverty, or show the new rulers how badly they were needed and how closely they could be trusted."⁶

Principal Hausa taxes

- Zakka- Tithe religiously sanctioned on every free-born person
- Kurdin kasa- land tax originally imposed of conquered people mostly non-muslims
- Plantation tax-levied on all crops
- Jangali-Cattle tax
- Gaisuwa- fixed payment in slaves or money

⁶ Sean A. Stilwell, "The Kano Mamluks: Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate, 1807-1903" (Ph.D., York University, Toronto, 1999), p.88.



- * Direct access to Sarkin Kano as well as via *kofa*.
- Responsible to S. Shanu for administration of pastoral Fulani.

Babba Zaki's Communication Structure, c. 1770

Source: M.G. Smith, *Government in Kano*, pp. 82-83

A Tax-Gatherer in Northern Nigeria

By

A.C.G. Hastings⁷

He rode the sandy track, sitting hunched up in the saddle, both hands on the pommel, and the single throng of rein resting across two fingers. The end of his turban swathed both chin and mouth; his eyes were half closed against the mid-day glare.

Thus he had ridden since the dawn, and thus would ride until evening, since the town for which he was making was a long day's journey distant. It was nothing for him. He had done many a sixty-mile stretch in his time, and on the one horse, moving at the curious triple which covered the road so fast and steadily. There was no sense in dwindling. His goal was a thriving place where he would find leisure and fat living. For he was the chief *Jekada* - the tax-gatherer - of the Madaiki, sent to collect for his fief-holder the just dues - and something over. It was a good life. The moment that he was seen ambling in at sunset the townsfolk would be lively showing him hospitality. There would be little gifts of food and money. It was sound policy to be on the right side of the *Jekada*! Who would not be one if he could? A pleasant job with all the pickings.

At the *dohur* - the first prayer time of afternoon - Ali Kano drew rein in a small hamlet, and dismounted. He washed his hands and stepped into a local mosque, a bare, earth plot enclosed by grass mats. He was a devout Moslem and, besides, it was right for one in authority to show example. Thereafter, he accepted water for himself and his horse, together with a ball of *fourra* to stay his hunger, and then mounting, rode away with a careless nod.

The hot afternoon hours found him pegging away without further halt. His horse - more honest than its master - maintained the tireless pace with great heart which all good horses have. It was one of the Madaiki's, who had the best horses in the country, next to the Emir, and Ali was always careful to be well mounted. One was not a head *Jekada* for nothing, a man's importance is judged by the animal he rides.

At the sunset he came to his journey's end. As he followed the dusty lanes twisting in and out among the

⁷ Elders Review of West African Affairs, October 1930, pp. 206-208

compounds, the smoke from evening fires was mounting into the still air and setting to a flat layer over the roofs.

From inside the compounds women glanced at his head and shoulders passing along the grass mat fencing and muttered "*Ali Jekada* has come again." The corners of their mouths dropped, for his coming meant days - perhaps weeks - of annoyance. One did not get rid of *Ali* and his demands in haste. They would hear grumbling soon enough from husbands and sons at his extortion. Even when their tithe had been paid there would be extra contributions levied. Lucky the household which paid no more than the legal due; lucky the town if it saw his back before the next new moon. *Ali Jekada* cared nothing for their thoughts. Unconscious of them, or perhaps disdainful, he rode on to the centre of the town. The headman greeted him with teeth gleaming in forced smile. "Maraba!" he murmured, clapping his hands gently together, "Welcome to you, *Ali*."

The words were as little genuine as his look, for none knew better than the speaker how unpopular the visit would prove to be, but lip service was required and he gave it, enquiring obsequiously after his guest's health, showing him to his quarters, and giving orders for food and firing to be brought.

Ali took it all as his right. He arranged his sleeping mat and blanket in the hut allotted to him, made a hearty meal, and afterwards, putting aside his turban and outer gown, sat at his door gossiping with the village elders. He gave them news of the great city, of the death of his fiefholder, the disgrace of that, and spoke of the state of affairs, lofty, as though he were in the Emir's counsels. The townsfolk were suitably impressed. *Ali Jekada* was an important person - it behoved them to hang upon his words and utter the right exclamations of wonder and interest at the proper time.

When he wearied of entertaining them, *Ali* yawned in token of dismissal and the crowd dispersed. Experience had taught them not to hope for anything from his friendly manner. *Ali Jekada* always began like that. He would take another tone on the following days when business was to be done.

Ali's business was this. Primarily to collect the tenth part of all farming produce. The *zakka* was recognised by all Moslems as just and due. It was sanctioned by the Koran, and destined for charitable purposes. Not a man among them would avoid payment. What became of it after it had left their hands mattered nothing to the farmers. Their consciences were clear - the tithe had been paid and their

chance of paradise was safeguarded. They knew well enough that the grain would stick to many fingers before the balance reached the Emir - the alms giver. Ali *Jekada* would have the first pick at it, but what did they care? Let every man mind his own affairs. Their job was to set aside one in every ten bundles of corn, one measure in every ten of their catch crops, beans, groundnuts, cassava and the rest. Ali *Jekada* would have no more to do than to see them collected and carried to the city.

But Ali will not make such a simple job of it as that. He had to live. His master the Madaiki, was generous to his servants. He gave them food and clothing, cowries to buy extras in the market and treated them well in all ways - "God lengthen the Madaiki's days." But that was hardly enough for such rapacious dogs like Ali. Out there in the country there were chances for extra picking - chances which everyone recognised, and which a man would be a fool to let slip, so thought Ali.

And that was the second and more important part of his job.

He spent a few days nosing round the town, examining the condition of various householders, hearing reports of their resources and generally getting a fair idea of how they were doing. In one compound, he would see a colt which he rather fancied, in another a fat sheep which would become useful for killing at the big fest after Ramadan. Ali was no slouch at the game. He knew most of the people, had known them for years and all about them. He just wanted to be up-to-date in his understanding of their capacity to present him with the gifts which he wanted.

Meanwhile grain poured into the headman's compound. The local scribe kept a rough count of what each man brought in, and the details were given to the *Jekada*. Ali did little more than grunt when the amounts were read out to him but made mental notes of some of the names. All that took some time. Some of the farmers were away trading corn after the harvest; others offered livestock or cloth in place of corn and a valuation had to be made. Others had excuses of crop failure or ravages by locusts to make, and these had to be checked. But Ali was in no hurry to be gone. He was comfortable enough living free, fed like a fighting cock and taking his ease like a fief-holder. Day after day he sat watching the corn accumulate, listening to excuses and graciously taking the presents made to him in order to escape extortion. For extortion was coming later on. Ali *Jekada* sat there like a plague spot waiting the

proper moment and secure in the knowledge that his weapon was too powerful for any to resist.

The day came when it was claimed by the headman that the town's full tithe had been collected. Anxious to be rid of guest, he numbered the bundles of corn and other produce, pointing out that no farmer had failed to pay his due. Then the *Jakada* roused himself from his lethargy and began his joyful task. Many bundles were under size; the rascals had picked out the smallest for the zakka. A lot of them last year's grain, mouldy or with stalks bare of seed. There was short weight in other measures; never before had he come across such fraud and impudence in the town. Make good the loss, he growled, or the Madaiki should hear of it. A word in the Emir's ear, and the whole town would "eat a fine."

He rated them soundly, picking out a score of men by name who, he swore, were the gravest offenders. It was strange that these very ones should be the owners of the livestock or property which he had fancied. Hints were dropped as to the way to avoid trouble. The townsfolk grumbled but they knew well enough that there was no help for it. More grain was brought; the colt was tethered next to Ali's hut and several sheep made their appearance in the compound.

Now, at least, they hoped he would be satisfied but they might have known that was too much to expect. Ali *Jekada* had not done with them yet. Even now, he said, he was not sure he had done right by his master. He had been too easy with them, but there it was he was a man of kind nature.

There was, however, a little matter which they had forgotten - the transport of the zakka to the city. He did not wish to be hard on them and drag them over fifty miles of country at a time when they wished to rest after the harvest and make their well earned leisure. The portorage of the zakka would need so many men - certainly five hundred. He would exempt them from that labour for the payment of a trifling sum per head! This he told them with a benign face - knowing, as they also knew, that the Madaiki would have no need of the grain for many months and that when they did, a curt order would turn the whole town to carry it!

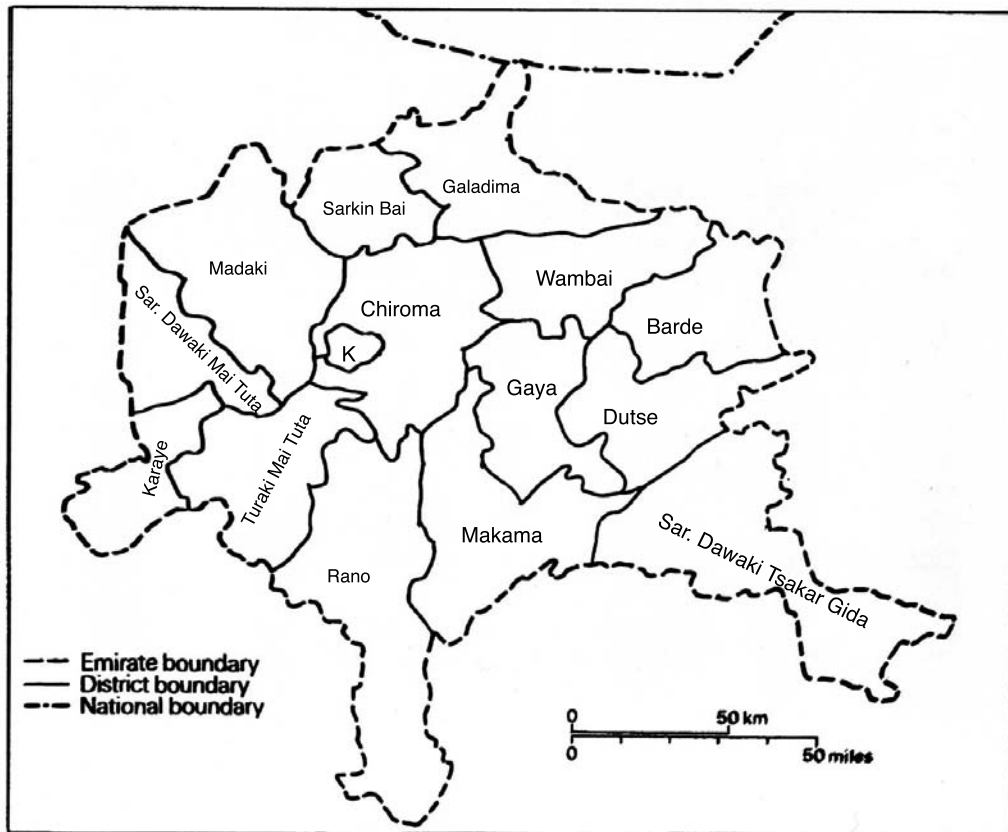
They paid. There was no earthly use in arguing. If Allah were gracious to them.

He rode away at cockcrow, followed by two youths told off to look after the livestock which he had been so kindly given to him. A mile out of the town that good heart of his

misgave him sadly. He had been too lenient; he had let them off more lightly than he might have done. Almost he drew rein to turn back and dally yet a little longer with the townsfolk. There were still other methods of extracting money's-worth from them. But he reflected that he must not be absent any longer from his master's side.

Moreover, it would be unwise to spoil by undue harshness his reputation as a just and temperate man towards the country folk - and one had to think of next year's visit.

Ali *Jekada* spurred his horse forward on the homeward ride, complacent and content.



Kano Districts:
Dr. F.Cargill's re-organisation c.1904-1908

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