

From Kingdom to Emirate: A Political History of Yawuri since the 15th Century**Yasin Abubakar, PhD^{1*} & Abubakar Samaila¹**¹Department of History, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto***Corresponding Author**YASIN ABUBAKAR, PHD

ABSTRACT

The various political entities that made up the historical and geographical region known as Hausaland have had a long and checkered history of political transformation. Most of those entities evolved as autonomous geo-political units before the 19th Century. The establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in the 19th Century, however, led to the assemblage of most of these polities into emirates under the authority of the Caliphate. Nonetheless, there were other entities that retained their pre-jihad political structures and only paid tribute to the Caliphate. These entities were only transformed into emirates after colonial conquest in the early 20th Century. The British colonial masters transformed these kingdoms into emirates mainly for administrative convenience. Yawuri is one of these kingdoms. This paper explores the history of the political transformation of Yawuri from its emergence as a kingdom down to the period of its transformation into an emirate. It locates the socio-historical and political peculiarities of Yawuri and explained why Yawuri, unlike many Hausa kingdoms, did not transform into an emirate following the establishment of the Caliphate.

Keywords: *Yawuri, Hausa, Kingdom, Emirate, Political History, Transformation*

INTRODUCTION

Yawuri Emirate is one of the four emirates that form the modern Kebbi State of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It is made up of three Local Government Areas of Kebbi State, namely Yawuri, Ngaski and Shanga. The emirate originated from the defunct Yawuri Kingdom, which ceased to exist following the British conquest of the area at the turn of the 20th century. The kingdom, which spread across the Upper Middle Niger, was among the most powerful polities in the neighbouring Hausaland prior to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in the 19th century [1]. However, the size of the kingdom has over the years shrunk from a territory that stretched from the end of Kebbi Kingdom in the north to as far as Nupeland in the south making it far less in size from over 27,200 square kilometers before the British conquest to only 2,377.6 square kilometers at the moment. What now remains of it, spans within the latitudes of 9° 45' and 11°N and 4° and 5° East of the equator. The dominant topography of the area is the River Niger and its numerous tributaries, which transverse most parts of the Yawuri area making the river channel studded with innumerable islands. The river follows in a north-south direction from Yelwa (the headquarters of Yawuri Emirate established in the last decade of the 19th century by Sarkin Yawuri Abdullahi Abarshi (1890-1904), to Jebba (in the present day Kwara State) [2].

The indigenous people of the area can be grouped into five (5) categories: Gungawa, Kambari, Dukkawa, Shangawa and Lopawa. Each one of these ethnic groups had before the establishment of the Hausa rule in the area during the 15th century, its traditional system of administration, economic activities, religious belief and entire way of life.

Origin of the Emirate

The origin of what we now know as Yawuri emirate can be traced back to the 15th century when according to Adamu [3], a small group of Hausa traders from the former Kingdom of Kasina settled in the River Niger valley and gradually established their political rule over the Gungawa island dwellers. A century later, the fifth Hausa king, Yawuri by name, used cavalry force to bring the adjacent Kambarawa chiefdoms of Ibelu and Maginga on the mainland under his rule thereby creating a state called *Kasar Yawuri* (Yawuri Kingdom) [3]. After a brief interregnum in Yawuri during the first half of the 16th Century, Jerabana, another Katsina immigrant of mixed Hausa and Arab ancestry, established a new line of Hausa Kings. This dynasty still provides the Emirs of Yawuri.

As stated above, prior to the establishment of the kingdom by the Hausa rulers in the 15th century, the area was inhabited by various communities; the most prominent of whom were the Gungawa (who inhabited mainly the islands in the River Niger), the Kambarawa, the Dukkawa and Shangawa [4,5,6]. Some of them were able to establish petty chiefdoms, such as the Gungawa state of Gungun kafa (the Island of Kafa) and the Kambarawa Chiefdoms of Ibelu and Mginga [7]. That was the situation when Yawuri Kingdom was established by the Hausa rulers in the area.

Establishment of the Hausa Government in Yawuri

Mention has just been made of the establishment of three chieftaincies by the indigenous people of Yawuri before the establishment of Hausa government in the area during the 15th century. The discussion here is to Show how the three chieftaincies were brought together to form Yawuri Kingdom under the leadership of people of Hausa origin. According to Adamu [7], the limitation of the powers of Gago (the leader of the Gungawa chieftaincy of Gungun kafa) and his lack of effective control over his domain was what prompted the electors of Gago in Gungun Kafa to request a certain wealthy Hausa trader of Katsina origin named Tafirilu, who was staying with them to accept the leadership of the political organization and rule them, not in the limited way as the Gago did but as a ruler with wide powers and whose authority would be felt and accepted in all his domain. Not long after his appointment as *Sarki* (king) in Gungun Kafa, Tafirilu used his wealth generously to influence the village elders on many islands to make his appointment recognized and his authority accepted. On his retirement, he recommended his son to be appointed *Sarki* to succeed him [7]. By the time the fifth *Sarki* of the Gungawa, Yawuri by name, ascended the throne at the beginning of the 16th century, the Hausa rule was well established in the area. Not long after his appointment as *Sarki* he felt that the island chieftaincy was too small for him and he began to look across the river to the West Kambarawa land. The occasion for him to move out the island came when a serious famine hit the islands but left the mainland untouched, Yawuri suddenly occupied a mainland settlement which was eventually named after him- 'Birnin Yawuri', and built a palace there making himself the first to come out of the river. He then made arrangement for the supply of food to the islands, and to set the peace, Yawuri established large farm on which he grew different types of food crops. He then started a war of conquest against the Kambarawa east of his new capital, and as one town after the other, the towns gradually fell to his warriors. He stationed his representative in them to ensure regular supply of food stuffs to the new capital and the islands [3]. In the case of Kambarawa chieftaincy of Maginga, when *Sarki* Yawuri began his wars against the Kambarawa, he had no occasion to extend his operations in Maginga, which was already a province under him [7].

It is clear from the foregoing that, it was *Sarki* Yawuri (1505-1531) who created Yawuri Kingdom by brining for the first time, the Kambarawa of the mainland and the Gungawa of the islands under one government. It was he, who also began the system of stationing government representatives in the Kambarawa towns, a system that was later developed into indirect system of government. During his life time, his fame reached many places beyond his domain. It was from *Sarki* Yawuri, that both the emirate under study (Yawuri) and its old capital (Birnin Yawuri), derived their names [7]. This, perhaps explain why his reign is always remembered as one of the most important reigns in the history of the emirate. His capital, Birnin Yawuri, eventually developed into an important centre of commerce, the position it held up to the second half of the 19th century [8].

Sarkin Yawuri was said to have been succeeded by Kisagari, who according to Yawuri king list, reigned for five years (from 1531 to 1536) (See appendix). After him, interregnum followed during which the seventh *Sarki*, Jerabana, was born and brought up in Birnin Yawuri. He was not a member of the Tafirilu dynasty. His father was said to be a rich merchant either of Hausa or Arab origin. This means that there are two versions that attempt to trace the origin of Jerabana. The first version claims that the father of Jerabana was an Arab and he was on his way to Gwanja (in present day Ghana), in a large caravan of Arab and Hausa merchants. The caravan was said to have stayed in Birnin Yawuri for the observance of Ramadan fasting and it was during this sojourn that one young man among them, was given a girl in marriage. Before the caravan resumed its journey to Gwanja, the girl conceived and was left with her parents to deliver. When he called on her during his return journey, the child who was a boy, was too young to be carried away. He was therefore left to grow up in Birnin Yawuri [7].

The second version has it that Jarabana's father was a certain Hausa trader of Katsina origin who came to Birnin Yawuri with his son. They came from Katsina via Kuyambana of Zazzau vicinity. Both the two versions have, however, agreed that Jerabana grew up in Birnin Yawuri and that; he was the best wrestler not only in Birnin Yawuri, but also in all villages near the town. According to Adamu [7], it was due to his wider reputation in wrestling that he was given the nickname of Jerabanawa (line up the youth), and when he grew up as a man his popularity in the town won him the Yawuri throne. He was the seventh *Sarki* of Yawuri. The length of his reign according to Yawuri king list, is given as 13 years (from 1560 to 1572). The present Emir of Yawuri, Dr. Muhammad Zayyanu Abdullahi (1999- present), is a descendant of *Sarkin* Yawuri Jerabana.

Of the above two versions, the Katsina origin appeared more credible and practically tenable as history of early Hausaland cum Hausa states is replete with substantive cases and events of inter Kingdom/States relationships on the basis of war, over lordship and friendly relationship.

On the relationship between Yawuri and Sokoto Caliphate, Abubakar [9] explain that the influence and authority of the Caliph of Sokoto extended over Yawuri, which was under *Amana* (trust). Caliph Muhammadu Bello, has also describe Yawuri as a tributary of Sokoto Caliphate to Hugh Clapperton when the latter visited the former in Sokoto in

1824 [10]. Balogun [11], has also explained that following the peace agreement reached between the Caliphate and authorities of Yawuri, Yawuri recognised the authority of the Caliphate and agreed to pay tribute as manifestation of its acceptance of the Caliphate's authority. He added that the agreement was made before the death of Amir al-Muminin, Shaykh Uthman Danfodiyo and that initially the tribute was paid to Sokoto, but later to Gwandu after the Caliphate was divided into the spheres of Muhammadu Bello and Abdullahi Fodiyo respectively. This was the situation in Yawuri until the last decade of the 19th century when British took over the administration of the area.

Table 1: King List (Sarakunan Yawuri) Since 15th Century

S/No.	Name	From	To	Period
1.	Tafirilu	1411	1433	22 years
2.	Kamuwa	1433	1456	23 years
3.	Bunyagu	1456	1480	24 years
4.	Sakazu	1480	1505	25 years
5.	Yawuri	1505	1531	26 years
6.	Kisagari	1531	1536	5 Years
7.	Jerabana I	1560	1572	12 years
8.	Gimba I	1572	1600	28 years
9.	Gimba II	1600	1601	1 year
10.	Kasafaugi	1601	1620	19 years
11.	Jerabana II	1620	1663	43 years
12.	Gimba III	1663	1663	6 months
13.	Kasagurbi	1663	1665	2 years
14.	Kana	1665	1666	1 year
15.	Janrina	1666	1670	4 years
16.	Dutsi	1670	1674	4 years
17.	Lafiya	1674	1675	1 year
18.	Kada	1675	1689	14 years
19.	Gandi	1689	1709	19 years
20.	Dan Ibrahim	1709	1714	6 years
21.	Muhammadu	1714	1723	9 years
22.	Lafiya II	1723	1745	22 years
23.	Yanzu	1745	1745	2 months
24.	Umaru Gandi	1745	1748	3 years
25.	Suleiman Jarabana	1748	1770	22 years
26.	Aliyu Lafiya	1770	1773	3 years
27.	Amadu Jarabana	1773	1790	17 years
28.	Shu'aibu Madara	1790	1790	2 months
29.	Mustafa Gazari	1790	1793	3 years
30.	Muhammadu Albishir Dan A'i	1793	1838	45 years
31.	Ibrahim Dogon Sarki	1838	1844	6 years
32.	Jibrin Gajeren Sarki	1844	1853	9 years
33.	Abubakar Jatau	1853	1858	5 years
34.	Suleiman Dan Ado	1858	1878	20 years
35.	Yakubu Dan Gajere	1878	1880	2 years
36.	Abdullahi Gallo	1880	1890	10 years
37.	Abdullahi Abarshi	1890	1904	14 years
38.	Jibrin Abarshi	1904	1915	11 years
39.	Aliyu of Jabo	1915	1923	8 years
40.	Abdullahi Jibrin	1923	1955	32 years
41.	Muhammadu Tukur	1955	1981	26 years
42.	Shu'aibu Yakubu Abarshi	1981	1999	18 years
43.	Dr. Muhammad Zayyanu Abdullahi	1999	Date	

Source: Adopted from H.A. Harris (Senior Residence), "History of Yawuri Kingdom", p.34. The list is also available at Council Chamber, Palace of the Emir of Yawuri, in Yelwa.

Transition of Yawuri from Kingdom to an Emirate

The last ruler to rule Yawuri as a *Sarki* was Abdullahi Abarshi who ruled between 1890 and 1904. Prior to 1904, all preceding rulers of Yawuri had, following the peace agreement reached between the Caliphate and the authorities of

Yawuri, reigned as semi-independent monarchs recognising only the authority of the Caliphate. However, all the subsequent rulers that ruled after him ruled Yawuri as emirs as they were appointed by the British administrative officers from whom they were compelled to take instruction on administrative matters. Thus, Yawuri also became under the control of colonial administration as part of the conquered Sokoto caliphate.

Therefore, the establishment of what came to be known as Yawuri Emirate can be traced back to the year, 1896 when a detachment of British troops stationed at Jebba arrived in Yelwa and established a military post. The presence of the British garrison was however resented by many people in Yawuri especially the local communities. Nearly all the riverine people in area demonstrated openly against the presence of the British troops in their midst, which they saw as curtailing their freedom. For instance, in Hella Island to the North of Yelwa, the British troops clashed with the people there. This was when lieutenant Keating who was the officer commanding the garrison requested Sarki Abarshi to provide him with boats to go and fight the people of Tillo Island who beat some soldiers while on their way back to the garrison by boat down the River Niger from the British port at Lafagu. When the people of Hella refused to give their boats, Keating went to Hella himself to secure the boats, but on his approach, the Islanders (Gungawa) sounded their war drums and fighting began. In this fighting, not only were the British defeated, but the casualties of Hella island were the highest ever experienced in colonial Northern Nigeria by the British; lieutenant Keating and 13 of the 18 men he took with him to the Islands were killed. Hella Island on its part lost 35 men including the village head [7,12]. All these, were strongly connected with the general feeling of resentment at the time which was passed through in the whole of Northern Nigeria and beyond. This, according to Adamu [7], took place on 10th October 1898, and by the 16th of same month, a combined army drawn from the British garrisons at Illo in the north and Bussa in the south reached Hella Island with an order from Lugard to punish the people in order to forestall the occurrence of similar incidence in the area. The reprisal, Adamu [7] added, was brutal.

Notwithstanding the stiff resistance, the British Government had, by 1903 taken over the administration of Yawuri following the appointment of a political officer (Mr. Fergus Dwyer), in Yelwa to represent the government of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. The liquidation of the old Yawuri Kingdom began earlier in 1901, when the British captured Kontagora and annexed the territory as part of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. The territory in which Kontagora town was established was part of the former Yawuri Kingdom. So, in 1901 when Kontagora was captured by the British, the whole of eastern Yawuri Kingdom was automatically lost by the king of Yawuri to the British. It was therefore, during this time that the division of the new Yawuri and Kontagora territories became formally recognized by the British colonial government. The areas recognized by the British as part of Yawuri extend from Libata in the south to the Gulbin Ka in the north. The Emir of Kontagora on the other hand took over the area from Mariga River to Malando River beyond Ipana which he had dominated before the British Occupation [12]. Similarly under the new arrangement, Auna went to Kontagora Emirate while the Wara and Ngaski Kamarawa remained under Yawuri [13].

The provincial organisation of the newly formed Kontagora Province by the British, under which Yawuri Emirate fell, consisted of four Divisions: Borgu, which made up of the 3rd class Emirates of Bussa and Kaiama; Kontagora, consisting of the 1st class Emirate of Kontagora; Yelwa consisting of the 2nd class Emirate of Yawuri and Dabai (Zuru) consisting of the chieftainship of Dabai under which had been brought together the Dakarkari clans [14]. The emirate was however, later elevated from second class to first class status. The installation and presentation of first class staff of office to the Emir of Yawuri took place during the reign of Alhaji Muhammadu Tukur (1955-1981) in Yelwa on the 4th July, 1971. The event was attended and witnessed by the then Governor of North-western State, Assistant Commissioner of Police, Alhaji Usman Faruk [15].

In February, 1904, Sarkin Yawuri Abdullahi Abarshi died and was succeeded by his eldest surviving son, Jibrin who was appointed by the British resident (Assistant Resident William Clarke) as first British-installed Emir of Yawuri. This clear departure from the past, as kingmakers came to view it, created constant intrigues and bickering between the Emir Jibrin on the one hand and the kingmakers and powerful stakeholders in ruling the affairs of the domain (Ubandawaki, Muta and Rukubu), on the other hand. Consequently, they continued with the intrigues to depose the new emir coupled with the fact that he was young and inexperienced, which they eventually succeeded on [12,13,16].

An important development in the history of Yawuri Emirate was its division into six Districts by the British in 1911. These Districts included Gungu, Ngaski, Birnin Yawuri, Shanga, Kwanji and Dukku. The town of Yelwa was treated as a separate unit. District headmen were appointed to reside in the various districts and in 1912 they were put on salaries instead of receiving a percentage of the taxes they collected. Thus, by 1912, the establishment of what is now called Yawuri Emirate was completed except for the few boundary changes that occurred later. Earlier on, Basse, a sub-district of Yawuri had been given to Sokoto province by the British High Commission in compensation for land Sokoto lost to the French government in the north [12]. Also in 1912, Yawuri lost Koko to Gwandu [7].

In 1915, the situation worsened in Yawuri so much so that Emir Jibrin had to be deposed by the British for what they called “mental incapacity” [13], and in his place, one Aliyu, a Fulani from Jabo was appointed as Emir of Yawuri thus, completely breaking the ancient ruling dynasty in Yawuri. Aliyu was a son of a woman named Nana who hailed from Jega. His father died while he was a small boy. The mother brought him to Yelwa during the reign of Sarkin Yawuri Abdullahi Abarshi. He was brought up in the royal house and on Sarkin Abarshi’s death, Aliyu continued to live in the royal house during the reign of Jibrin. Aliyu was also holding the rank of Tukura in the palace of Emir of Yawuri, a rank which was equivalent to that of a messenger between the Emir and British Colonial Officers. Later he was appointed Sarkin Yamma in charge of the Gungawa district. When Emir Jibrin was deposed in 1915, he was appointed as Emir of Yawuri [14].

Aliyu’s appointment as Emir of Yawuri met with serious opposition from the very start. The people viewed him as an outsider and usurper and would prefer a member of their hereditary ruling houses to rule them rather than an alien. His position as Emir of Yawuri was therefore maintained with difficulties. Added to his internal difficulties was when Bussa Emirate had to be detached from Yawuri once again by the British though the district of Kwanji and a large piece of uninhabited bush to the west of the Niger in which Yawuri farmers had been encouraged to farm, was left in Yawuri Emirate. Also in 1919, as a result of the continued maladministration of Aliyu, according to Harris, the district of Dukku was taken away from Yawuri and handed over to Kontagora Emirate [13].

When Kontagora province was partitioned in 1924, Yawuri Emirate was given to Sokoto province and was administered by an Assistant District Officer (ADO) from Sokoto [7]. In March, 1923, Aliyu was accused by the British colonial government of embezzlement of tax and general mismanagement of the Emirate. Thereafter, the recall of Jibrin was considered by the colonial officials, but was thought to be a complete reversal of policy having been accused and deposed by the same colonial administration. Consequently, his eldest son, the young Abdullahi, was appointed and he became the ruler (and the 4th Emir) of Yawuri, thereby restoring the old Yawuri dynasty. Harris [13] who was also colonial officer in Yawuri between 1924 and 1933, described Abdullahi in the following words:

Abdullahi was born in 1901 and was educated at the provincial school Kano; he subsequently became a teacher at Birnin Kebbi School and held the office of treasurer in Yawuri Emirate. He is good example of the younger Nigerian Emirs who are now growing up and it may definitely be said that during the last decades the progress of the Yawuri emirate has advanced at least twice as rapidly as it was hitherto rated [13].

In 1927, the Rofiya hinterland was handed back to Bussa. In 1930, following the death of Emir Ibrahim of Kontagora, Emir Abdullahi of Yawuri demanded the return of the old Yawuri district of Dukku. Approval was first given by the colonial administration for the return of the district to Yawuri but was subsequently withdrawn due to Kontagora’s protest to the colonial authorities. Dukku district therefore, remain in Kontagora Emirate to this day [16].

In 1931, Yawuri Emirate was detached from Sokoto division and with Dabai (present Zuru Emirate) was made a southern division of Sokoto province. Still, as a part of continued colonial administrative restructuring the newly created southern division was dissolved in May 1933. Yawuri Emirate was return to Gwandu division though entirely independent of the Emir of Gwandu, while Dabai went to Sokoto [3].

Although the Emir Abdullahi’s reign (1923-55) enjoyed good official reports, and was commended for his remarkable flair for and competence in administration, such as for instance, running his Emirate first without a supervision of a District Officer and finally when he was left with few councilors following their eventual death and resignation. Emir Abdullahi later suffered from a devastating illness, which eventually claimed his life. He was much remembered and revered in Yawuri for his outstanding services [16] and is popularly known as “Mai Yawuri Bangon Duniya” meaning “The ruler of Yawuri, pillar of the world”. He was equally well respected among Emirs in Northern Nigeria (YESA).

Emir Abdullahi died in 1955 Yawuri and was succeeded by his then 34 years old son, Muhammad Tukur, who before his appointment was educated at the Kaduna College after which he worked at the Marketing Board before proceeding to the University of London. On his assumption to the throne, Yawuri witnessed a stable path of administrative progress as started by his father Emir Abdullahi. Emir Muhammadu Tukur had added luster to the name of Yawuri by his numerous appointments: – he was Chairman of the Local Government Reforms Commission in Adamawa and Borno; Chairman Northern Nigeria Radio and Television Corporation among others. He died in 1981 and was succeeded by yet another member of the Abarshi family in person of Alhaji Shu’aibu Yakubu Abarshi. Emir Shu’aibu Yakubu Abarshi was a grandson of late Emir Abdullahi Abarshi through his father Yakubu who, though did not rule Yawuri as an Emir, he was a District Head of Birnin Yawuri. Alhaji Sh’aibu Abarshi ruled Yawuri for about 18 years from 1981 to 1999, and he died at the age of 63 years. Before his appointment as Emir, he was a teacher at Yelwa senior primary school, educational administrator and later, Principal Government Secondary School, Zuru [17].

Yawuri Emirate was lucky again to have for the first time in its history, few of its kind in the whole of Northern Nigeria, a PhD holder, scientist, a seasoned university administrator and lecturer, in person of Dr. Muhammadu Zayyanu Abdullahi, son of late Emir Abdullahi, and a younger brother of late Emir Muhammadu Tukur, to have ascend the mantle of its leadership in 1999. He obtained his Bachelor and Master degrees from Kansas State University (USA) and later his PhD from Edinburgh University, Scotland (UK) in Bacteriology. He was a lecturer with Microbiology Unit, Department of Biological sciences, Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto. In fact, he was even associated with being one of the founding fathers of the Microbiology Unit in the University. He was also the Deputy Vice Chancellor Administration and later, Vice Chancellor of the University. It was after all that, he became the Emir of Yawuri in 1999 following the death of his uncle Emir Shu'aibu Yakubu Abarshi, and since then he has been on the throne.

CONCLUSION

This paper is on the transformation of Yawuri from kingdom to an emirate. It among other things explored the origin of Yawuri Kingdom, establishment of Hausa rule over the indigenous people of Yawuri as well as transformation of kingdom into an emirate. It is palpable from the foregoing discussion that Yawuri has been in existence initially as a kingdom and then later as emirate for over six hundred years now.

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