

DEMISTIFYING THE LEGENDARY FIGURE OF KABI EMPIRE: MUHAMMADU KANTA 1516-1554 A. D.

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Abstract

There are several accounts which are either false, exaggerated, biased or prejudiced on the ancestry of the legendary ruler of Kabi Empire, Muhammadu Kotal Kanta. Each tradition attempted to display knowledge of the origin, status and lifetime of this figure. However, all of these attempts to demystify Kotal Kanta have ended up creating more myths of his origin and ancestry. This paper is yet another attempt at demystifying Muhammadu Kanta, the great ruler of Kabi Empire who ruled between 1516 – 1554 A. D. The paper analyses some of the available historical records to unearth the true picture of Muhammadu Kanta, where he came from and the life he lived before his eventual demise in 1554 A. D. Although there have been attempts by some scholars to discover the origin of Muhammadu Kanta such as the works of Frank Egga (1977), Dirk Lange (2009), and M.B Alkali (1969), the true origin of the first ruler of Kabi Kingdom still remains a mystery. Thus, this study, which is part of an on-going research effort on the pre-history and history of the Kabawa and their rulers, is a continuation of the research effort at finding out, using historical method of enquiry, the true origin of the founder of the Kabi Kingdom which existed between 1516 and 1554 AD. The study argues that at its peak period of rule, the Kabi Kingdom had extended frontiers which by all ramifications became qualified to be referred to as an empire in its own right. The study adopted the use of the term Kabi to refer to the original title of the kingdom before colonial conquest.

Keywords: Kabi, Empire, Muhammadu Kanta

Introduction

The word Kabawa (sing. Bakabe) is a generic term used to describe the conglomeration of people living under the jurisdiction of Kabi Kingdom. According to Hogben and Green, Kabawa are a people formed at the beginning of the 2nd century A.D. from the mixture between Berbers immigrants from the Sahara with a Negro populace of the Savanna (Hogben and Green, 1966). This presupposes that there were people in the Gulbin Kabi area before the arrival of Berbers. Kabawa were rice farmers and fishermen who settled and depended on the Gulbin Kabi area. M.B. Alkali was of the view that Hausawa were the original inhabitants of the Gulbin Kabi area before they were joined by waves of Sorko immigrants (Sarkawa) from the middle of Niger region as early as the 11th century (M.B. Alkali, 1969:44). Over time, however, the Kabawa people sub-divided into four classes, namely, the Galaudawa, Mayolawa, Kundudawa and Lelabawa. Details of other groupings of the Kabawa can be found in the works of Harris, P.G, (1934) and B.A Gado and A. Bako (2016).

The area of Kabi valley covers a stretch of the river Rima from its confluence with River Sokoto (near the present day Wamakko) in the north to where it joins the Niger below the valley of Bande in the south. It is called Kabi River because it passes through the territory of the old Kabi Kingdom (Bello N and Yusuf R, 2017). Little is known of the history of Kabi and its founding fathers prior to the sixteenth (16c). Although, there were some scholarly attempts to address this seeming intractable problem, this attempt has fallen short of the required effort to uncover the true picture of the founder of the Kingdom. Of the existing scholarly attempt to unravel the mystery surrounding the origin of the founding father of Kabi, conflicting accounts abound which seems to beg the question about the true origin of these very important historical figure rather than providing the much needed answers. This study uses an in-depth documentary research method, oral traditions and oral interviews as its sources of data collection. It is a modest contribution to African history to study the origin of the Kabawa and their rulers, the Lekawa especially in demystifying the mystery surrounding this historical epoch in the life time of the emperor of the great empire of western Sudan, Muhammadu Kotal Kanta circa, 1516 -1554 A. D. During its peak period of rule (early 16th century), Muhammadu Kanta's rule was said to have extended over to half of Hausaland, the Nupe land, the country of Ahir in the present Niger Republic and half of Songhai (Hogben and Kirk-Green, 1966:246-247; Bello, Infaq al Maysur; Ahmadu, 1974:10; Annet. E. J.1920:12; M.B. Alkali, 1969:72; Temple, 1965:558). This claim, if well established, qualifies Kabi Kingdom to become an empire.

This paper is divided into four sections. Section one, beginning from the introduction, is an attempt to unravel the history of the Kabawa people and that of their rulers, the Lekawa which have been shrouded in mystery. Using available historical records, this section traces the foundation of the history of people of Kabi. The second section examined the emergence of state-like structures around the Gulbin-Kabi area with those that occurred in other parts of Hausaland in order to assemble the factors conducive to state formation in this particular case and determine whether or not these factors are distinctive or similar to what obtained elsewhere in Hausaland. In section three, a reconstruction of Muhammadu Kanta's early life was undertaken in order to assemble a true picture of who he really was, what led to his movement to the Gulbin Kabi area and how he became the first ruler of Kabi empire. Whereas, section four concludes the paper.

Emergence of Lekawa Ruling Class in Kabi

The term Lekawa denotes the people of Kabi who can trace their pure paternal descent from Muhammadu Kanta, the founder of Kabi kingdom; who settled first at Leka, Gungu and finally Surame (the ruling house). Surame is located about 40 kilometres to the south-west of Sokoto in Silame local Government Area (Augie, A.A, 1988). There are no historical records of any event among the Kabawa people until the rise into power and influence of Muhammadu Kanta of whose origin there are several versions (Arnett, 1920; Hogben and Kirk-Green, 1966; Alkali, 1969). However, out of these versions, three have become very prominent. The first of these versions is the one held by the current descendants of Muhammadu Kanta at Argungu (Argungu Historical Record, 2001). This version traces the origin of Kabawa to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. In accordance with this view, the Kabawa descended from the family of Usman, son of Maza-unu and the keeper of the holy Ka'aba. From amongst these family members, some crossed over to Egypt with their leader Barambaram, son of Usman. After settling in Egypt for a number of years, moved to Fezzan and from Fezzan to Agat and then to Bawo, a district of Kukayanbana in Katsina province in Northern Nigeria, where Makata, son of Gimba gave birth to Muhammadu Kanta, (Harris, 1934); (Argungu Historical Records: 2001); Arnett, 1920); (Alkali, 1969); Temple, 1965). There are three ruling family kinships who are custodians of these historical documents which traced the history

of the Kabi ruling family dynasty to Saudi Arabia, namely: Magajin Beberi; Magajin Kulalo and Magajin Danmusa (Interview, Ismaila Muhammed Mera, 2009). In all of these three historical documents, which can be referred to as the Kabi chronicles, the history of the Lekawa rulers have been traced from the gate keeper of holy Ka'aba in Saudi Arabia, down to the current emir of Argungu (Usman Junaidu History Bureau, Sokoto, 2001).

It is pertinent to note that this version is the view tenaciously held by the ruling family of the Kabawa at Argungu who vehemently, rejected all other versions of their origin. This may be because other versions undermined the importance of the ancestral origin of the Kabawa as a people through the claim that their founding father was a slave of the very people they have been in conflict with for centuries. According to the views expressed by the Kabawa people, this interpretation of their historical origin is a Fulani version which amounts to a misrepresentation of historical facts to suit a particular viewpoint expressed by their adversaries. On the other hand, the claim of the Kabawa that their ancestral origin came from Saudi Arabia, is a more prestigious perception of their historical origin and apparently, more in tandem with their own assessment of who they are culturally, religiously and historically. However, the Kabawa version of their historical origin corresponds to what in history is referred to as hamitic hypothesis in which people ascribe their founding founders to an alien body with superior knowledge and techniques and especially coming from the Eastern part of the world. The claim of the Kabawa had been well documented and preserved for over a century. This, however, corresponds with what Dirk Lange described as the Assyrian factor in the West African state building process in which he ascribed the foundation of Kabi kingdom to the result of a conquest by Assyrian immigrants towards 600B.C (Lange, D. 2009).

The second version states that Kabi was one of the ancient independent Hausa states captured by Sunni Ali, Emperor of Songhai Empire. This story affirms that Muhammadu Kanta was a General of Askia who was then the Emperor of Songhai whose reign extended over to Kabi. The story follows that in an expedition against Agadez (Asben), Muhammadu Kanta being a General within Songhai's army felt unjustly treated in the distribution of the spoils of war after victory. Muhammadu Kanta revolted with his troops and formed an independent kingdom of Kabi which eventually became extremely powerful (Temple, 1965) Augie, 1970). This version of the Kabi history has been corroborated by professional historians and well documented. Evidence of such written records can be found in the works of Harris, P.G, 1934; Arnett, 1920; Hogben and Kirk-Green, 1966; M.B. Alkali, 1969; Dirk Lange, 2009). The strength of written records in history is that it presents results based on research devoid of biased recollection of past events. Written articles are good sources of historical information and provide significant data relevant to the research. This is however, limited by the fact that written records may at times lack critical or authentic data necessary to bring out unbiased information about past events. This version, however, did not state the origin of Muhammadu Kanta and neither did it explain how he rose to become a general within the Songhai's army.

The third version stated that Muhammadu Kanta was born a native Hausa and was one of the Fulani slaves who broke away from his master and became a boxer, gathered followers and assumed leadership of the group. He later overthrew the Magajin Leka and became its leader (Temple, 1965). Closely related with this version of history was the story narrated by the people of Garin Mali in the present Silame district of Sokoto state who stated that Muhammadu Kanta's father came to Leka (the present Mali town in Silame district) and met the Magajin Leka whose origin was from Timbuktu in Mali (North Africa). Apparently, seeing Makata (Muhammadu Kanta's father) dressed in a regalia resembling a Mallam (Muslim cleric), the Magajin Leka requested

Makata to lead them in prayers. Makata politely refused claiming that where he came from, unmarried men do not lead prayers. Upon this assertion, the Magajin Leka entered his house and brought out young maidens and requested Makata to choose any maiden of his choice for him to be married to her. After the marriage, Makata settled for a short period and decided to leave to an uncertain destination. (Interview, Mallam Abubakar, Magajin Garin Mali, 2016). His wife whom he left behind gave birth to a male child who was named Muhammadu Kanta by Makata before he left. Apparently, he had named his child before he was born with a foreknowledge that it was going to be a male child. (Interview, Mallam Abubakar, Magajin Garin Mali, 2016).

However, in accordance with the story narrated by the Magajin Garin Mali who claimed that Muhammadu Kanta's father married the daughter of Magajin Leka, the young Kanta was grazing his grandfather's cattle, and therefore, not a slave. Equally, his grandfather could not have drove him away from his house for hiding information about the calving of the cow. But in accordance with the position maintained by the Fulani including Muhammadu Bello in his *Infaq-al-Maysur*, Muhammadu Kanta was a slave of the Fulani, a position hotly denied by the descendants of Muhammadu Kanta who are the current rulers of Argungu Emirate. This story corresponds with the Fulani version of Kabi History some of which have been documented as can be found in the works of Bello's *Infaq -al Maysur* as well as in PG Harris, 1934. The weakness of this oral source is that it appears to be subjective and in want of evidence and full of ambiguity. Keeping in mind that most of the subjects that were interviewed were elderly, illiterate and lacking in cognitive skills, keeping track of historical data became a major hurdle. The researcher for instance requested for information concerning the origin of Makata (Kanta's Father) or reasons behind his sudden departure from Leka or to where he headed to which no answer was offered.

Thus, in order to unearth the true picture about the ancestry of the founder of Kabi kingdom, a more rigorous search for evidence using available data has to be undertaken. Consequently, therefore, this paper attempt to use historical method of enquiry to re-discover the past using available primary and secondary sources of data. The paper takes an incursion into history in order to ascertain the actual events that took place around the area of Gulbin-Kabi in the 15th century leading to the establishment of a state in the area.

The Foundation of Kabi Kingdom

Oral traditions relating to the foundation of a state in the area around Kabi prior to the 15th century period fails to distinguish between the peopling of the area of Gulbin-Kabi and the actual emergence of a state structure around that region. Thus, the Lekawa who are the Kabawa ruling dynasty, are conceived as arriving in the area with a large following to develop a state where none ever existed. (Harris, 1934; Alkali 1969:43). It is however, a fact that the peopling of an area or any region does not necessarily happen at the same time with the emergence of a state within that region. In the majority of case, there is a time lag of many centuries between one and the other (Smith, 1969; Alkali 1969:43). This can be exemplified by the emergence of a state in Hausaland. Even though, Hausaland has been peopled as far back as after the desiccation of the Sahara, the emergence of dynasties in this land did not take place until after the 10th century (Smith,1969).

The area of the Gulbin-Kabi was part of the Hausaland but the emergence of state-like political structure in the area did not take place until the 16th century that is several centuries after it has occurred elsewhere in Hausaland. M. B. Alkali writing in the 20th century on this issue stated that reasons for the delayed emergence of state-like structure in the area of Gulbin-Kabi, has to be viewed in light of the cultural and political detachment of the area prior to the 15th century, from development elsewhere in Hausaland, and absence of factors conducive to state formation

(Alkali, 1969:44–45). As early as the 11th century, the area of Gulbin Kabi has been receiving waves of Sorko (or Sarkawa) migrants from the middle Niger region (Rough, in Alkali, 1969:44). The centre of their migration was the area of Tilliberi (Niger Republic). The Movement of this migrant into the Gulbin Kabi appeared to have continued up to the end of 15th century (Rough J, in Alkali, 1969). Giving the fact that it has been reported that the Sarkawa have played a significant role in the foundation of the Songhai Empire in this region, it can be assumed that the size of the Sarkawa population must have been very large to be able to have such an impact (Kati, 1913). Thus, the influence of the Sarkawa migrants is believed to have become mixed with the existing pre-dynastic Hausa population in the area of Gulbin Kabi to give this region its distinctive character from the rest of the Hausaland, a character which appeared to have tended to isolate this particular region.

According to M. B. Alkali, the invasion of the Sarkawa migrants into the Gulbin Kabi area by waves of various sizes and importance appeared to have begun sometimes in the 11th century, and ended by the 15th century (Alkali, 1969:45-47). It may be possible that with the passage of time, some kind of inter-mixture between the two peoples occurred through intermarriage, even though it was clear that they existed in separate geographical locations. There was a distinct occupational pattern between the two groups of people. Whilst the Sarkawa population specialized in fishing, the existing Hausa population specialized in farming. But this division was not water tight. Apparently, it is the threat which Sarkawa posed to the Hausa population in the sphere of farming which resulted in conflict between the two groups (Palmer, 1962:262). Politically, the organisation of the area of Gulbin-Kabi centred around the authority of the clan-head Magaji (successor) (Harris, 1932:266; Bough, 1959:41). The Magaji generally bore the title of some distant ancestors of the family around which the clan developed. By virtue of his position, the Magaji performed both administrative and religious functions. Administratively, he supervises the distribution of clan lands and settles dispute connected with those lands. Religiously, he was not only the custodian of his own family spirit (Iska) but equally performs spiritual functions to any family member that is referred to him for healing in connection with any problem (ailment) associated with spirit (Alkali, 1969:48-50). However, an interesting aspect of the Magaji system was the complete independence of each one of them from one another. Though common interest might appear in the security of the marshes and religious ideas, this was, however, submerged by the independent action of the various Magajis. The simple character of this society, unthreatened as it were by the major challenges either from within or from without, eliminated the entertainment of territorial ambitions of any of the Magaji groupings within the area. It was only when the element of serious economic competition was introduced that some important changes took place, not only in the political authority of the Magaji but also in the territorial locations of the erstwhile scattered clan groups (Harris, 1934: 41; Alkali, 1969:48–49).

Competition around the area of Gulbin-Kabi was introduced by the arrival of waves of Sarkawa migrants from Tilliberi from Niger Republic who appear to have been a huge clan led by a person known in the traditions as Magaji Alfa (Harris, 1934:266; Royal Anthrop, 1942; Alkali, 1969:49). This new group, evidently coming from an area where a definitely superior civilisation had established itself by the 15th century (the Songhai region), entered the area of Gulbin-Kabi with new and efficient techniques relevant to both riverine farming and fishing. The impact of these techniques on the Sarkawa who were already established in the area of the Gulbin-Kabi was to render their territory in the lower Gulbin-Kabi inadequate and necessitated an upward movement of the Sarkawa population upstream (Argungu, N. A. Files, July, 1968). Considerably, the Sarkawa fishermen established a definite technological superiority in fishing over the Hausawa and consequently posed a new threat in the field of agriculture. Politically, the Sarkawa in the upper

Gulbin-Kabi refused to recognise the authority of the Magajis in whose territorial waters they were strictly operating. The Sarkawa, it was reported recognised only the authority of the Magaji Alfa (who became known as Dankanawa) indicating a genesis of the state-like development namely, the exercising of a cross-clan influence by a single clan.

Over the years, the challenges posed by the Sarkawa fishermen to the Hausa population in the Gulbin-Kabi region in the agricultural sphere appeared to have become great. Thus, it seems likely, the development of birane (Cities) in the upper Gulbin-Kabi came as a response to these challenges as there were a number of Birane located within the area such as Tumuri, Toso, Soro, Gettarana, Leka and Kulalo (Argungu Emirate Notes: 1968). Birane are common feature in Hausaland and their emergence generally represents a step forward towards political unification. The concentration of many Magajis into a few birane seems to suggest a more efficient way of facing the Sarkawa threat as opposed to their previous position when they occupied dispersed homesteads. Religiously, the Birane permitted the emergence of group-worshipping by Magaji clans belonging to some Iskoki belief system indicating another contradicting factor provided by religion.

By the end of the 14th century and the middle of the the 15th century (approximate dates) there was an intensive competition on the Gulbin Kabi region between the Hausawa and the Sarkawa. The reasons are not far-fetched. Occupationally, each of the groups practise farming and fishing but culturally both are different and each refusing to be assimilated by the other. This was the position of the two warring groups which seem to have continued for a very long period up to the time of intervention of a strong power - the Songhai Empire - which ended the skirmishes through subjugation of one of the groups (GDA, Argungu, July, 1968). Although there is no strong evidence to suggest the interest of Songhai over the area of Gulbin-Kabi, however, two considerations could warrant reasons behind the subjugation. Firstly, the existence of what appears to be a sizeable Songhai population in the area of Gulbin-Kabi could be a sufficient motive for imperial expansion of as to establish the authority of the Sarkawa in the region. Secondly, Songhai interest in the areas North of the Gulbin-Kabi (Ahir) might not be unconnected with securing access to the North in view of the channel of contact with the WADI-ASA- WAK (situated in the North of the region) had been rendered difficult through constant Tuareg attacks (Bovil, 1958:105–7).

Whatever the motive of Songhai occupation, it was evident that the occupation of Kabi took place without a battle. The Songhai authorities merely established what appeared to have been military outposts at Sauwa and Augie where their representative known as Dangara was stationed (G. D. A.) Argungu, July, 1968; Harris, 1934:267-268). The Songhai representative collected tributes from the people under his authority in addition to military services demanded by Gao (Songhai Headquarters). It is noteworthy to state that the Songhai influence in the area of Gulbin Kabi no matter its impacts and duration did not decisively put an end to the persistent conflict between the Sarkawa and Hausawa in the region. Indeed, hostility between the two warring groups seemed to have increased in view of the extortionist nature of the government headed by Dangara. Thus, it was reported that local uprisings against the authority of the Dangara were common features during the period (Harris, 1934:226). It is, therefore, against this background of conflict and discontent that we have to examine the emergence of Muhammadu Kanta, the founder of Kabi State within the Gulbin Kabi region.

Origin of the Kabawa.

The foundation of Kabi kingdom is ascribed to Muhammadu Kanta who ruled the kingdom and later empire between the period 1516 and 1554 (Harris, 1934, pp. 25–32; Augie, 1980:1-2; Alkali, 1969:52–54). Historically, however, the formation of a state structure cannot be attributed to the

work of a single life time or an individual. State formation involves the interaction of a variety of complex factors and hardly do all factors operate at the same period of time. This fact is all too clear. This issue can be buttressed by examining the general pattern of state development in Hausa land.

States normally emerge as a result of the interplay of a variety of factors closely related together. These factors themselves were as a result of years of social and economic changes within the area in which a state is to emerge. More often than not, the post economic and social history of any given area and its role in the emergence of a state in that region is either overlooked, glossed over or even under-estimated. In many respects, therefore, it is the end product of a chain of processes which is emphasized at the expense of the important and determining factors of state formation. Generally speaking, state formation in Hausaland has in the past been thought to have received its impetus from the arrival of some alien group in what is historically referred to as hamitic hypothesis. In most cases, these alien groups are said to have possessed the advantage of a superior culture to that of the indigenous population and this would allow them to dominate the indigenous group (Smith, 1964:340). The emergence of dynasties in Kano, Katsina, Daura, Birnin Gbiri, Rano and Zazzau were thought to have their origins in this respect. The founder of Yawuri dynasty, the Jarabanawa was said to have originated from Saudi Arabia. Historical evidence at our disposal does not support these claims based on hamitic hypothesis.

Despite the contention that Bawo was the founder of Kano, historical evidence has proved that a certain priest at Dalla, Barbushe, was exercising control similar to that of the king even before the arrival of Bawo and his men to whom legend ascribed as the founder of Kano State (Palmer, 1928:77–78). The Kano chronicle has made it abundantly clear that there were Sixteen Sarkis (Emirs) who reigned before the time of Bawo (Palmer, 1928:77–79). In Daura, there had been a dynasty of queens even before Bayajidda and in Yawuri it has been proved that a Hausa government existed before the arrival of Jarabanawa (Adamu, 1968:57–59). In the Gulbin-Kabi area, no dynasty existed before the 16th century. Thus, it was only in this century that a dynasty came into being, though, in this case a stranger element was involved not in the sense of a hamitic hypothesis but in a movement of Hausa speaking groups into a multi-racial area which was already occupied by a pre-dynastic society to assist in the foundation of a state. Thus, as mentioned previously, by the time Muhammadu Kanta arrived in the area of Gubin Kabi, the society he met were already moving in the direction favouring the emergence of a central authority presumably leading towards the emergence of a state.

State formation in Kabi environment as elsewhere in other parts of Hausa land, has to be viewed in the light of changing conditions which transformed segmented societies into centralized organisations. The rapidity in transforming one society to the other would entirely depend upon the factors indigenous as well as extraneous to those particular societies. In the Gulbin Kabi area and within the body of its segmented society, a major politico-military crisis took place (which can be referred to as a revolution). This was a popular protest which the military leaders of the area of Gulbin Kabi lunched against the might and power of Songhai Empire. (ES-Sadi, *Tarikh es Sudan*, 1900:129; Harris, 1934:29–30; Temple, 1965:558; Alkali, 1969:5–59). Superficially, the protest was reported to be in connection with the division of booty arising from the war against Agadez but in the abstract sense, it represented the condemnation of the extortionist Songhai administration in the area. Thus, for the very first time, the segmented population found itself acting as one single unit recognising one leader which became effective against its demand. This proved that the existing Magaji Sarauta system had become incapable of handling the crisis which had developed and engulfed the area of Gulbin Kabi and therefore had to be replaced. To this

extent, therefore, the foundation of Kabi kingdom had to be viewed in the light of the above development. Thus, the establishment of a state in Kabi was a gradual process and the rise of Muhammadu Kanta only represented its end product.

Emergence of Muhammadu Kanta in Kabi

Very little is known about the early life of Muhammadu Kanta prior to his arrival at the Gulbin Kabi area. Different versions ascribe different origins and life-style of this legendary ruler. However, historical records available to us, have converged to the fact that Muhammadu Kanta migrated into the area of Gulbin Kabi from Katsina Laka (Kuyambana district of Katsina emirate) where his parents held some position of eminence (Harris, 1934:25; Hogben and Kirk Green, 1966:240; Alkali, 1969:53-55; Augie, et al, 1970:6; Muhammadu Bello Infaq-al Maysur). Muhammadu Kanta's flight from his father's abode in Kuyambana district of Katsina was as a result of his disappointment over his succession to his father's title of Magajin Kuyanbana (Johnston, 1967:13-14; Alkali, 1969:53-54; Augie, 1970:6; Ahmadu, 1974:36-37). The motives behind the decision of Muhammadu Kanta to move to the Gulbin Kabi area remain unclear but it appears that he spent a number of years wandering along the fringes of upper Gulbin-Kabi before finally establishing himself near Leka. It is equally not clear whether Muhammadu Kanta went to Leka area out of his own volition or was invited by the Hausa population of the Gulbin Kabi area to assist them against Sarkawa ascendancy in the region. Oral traditions stated that Muhammadu Kanta arrived in the area of Gulbin Kabi with large following and have attested to the fact that he was a boxer moving from one village to the other and each time emerging victorious. This may seem to suggest that he may have been invited to the area due to his fame as a boxer as has been attested by the ruling family of Lekawa at Argungu (Interview: Magajin Baberi, Argungu, 2001). Additionally, the ceremony of enthroning a new Sarkin Kabi which is accompanied by a boxing ceremony before ascending the throne is a testimony to the boxing feat of Muhammadu Kanta which is exemplified in the ceremony of enthroning a new Sarkin Kabi at Argungu.

Muhammadu Kanta has also been ascribed to be of Songhai father and Katsina mother (Bello, 1922; Harris, 1934:234; Ahmadu, 1974: 36; Alkali, 1969:53-54). This fact is also testified by the connection between the ruling families of Lekawa dynasty at Argungu with that of the ruling family of Katsina with the traditional exchanges of clothes befitting sons of men and broom befitting sons of daughters between the two ruling families which have survived to date (Interview: Magajin Inname, 2001). If it is established that Muhammadu Kanta's father is indeed of Songhai origin, as claimed by Sultan Muhammadu Bello and others, then his father must have been a Senior Official of Songhai government to warrant marrying the daughter of the king of Katsina and bestowed with the title of Magajin Kuyanbana (one of the most senior titles of the kingdom). In corollary to this, the refusal of Muhammadu Kanta to accept the title of Magaji after successfully defeating the Songhai army in the struggle for booty and his insistence of being crowned a king (Sarki) is indicative of his knowledge of the Sarauta system of kings as opposed to the Magaji system that held sway in the area. Indeed, even Muhammadu Kanta's enlistment into Songhai army and proclaiming himself as a king and adopting the title of 'Kanta' alluded to his connections through his parents with Songhai Empire. The title of Kanta had been the traditional Songhai Chief's title at Gao, the equivalent of Amir Al-Sudan (Last, 1983:1).

At any rate, even before the rebellion that propelled Muhammadu Kanta to become the first ruler of the Kabi Kingdom, a number of the Magajis had accepted him as their superior, perhaps owing to his prowess in boxing matches, his capability to wage war and his knowledge of the processes of state formation (TAJ Argungu, July, 1962). This may also suggest that at the time Muhammadu Kanta entered the Gulbin-Kabi area perhaps with a large following, he was a matured young man,

able-bodied and strong enough to wage wars and hence could not have been a slave of the Fulani as claimed elsewhere. Muhammadu Kanta appeared to have nursed the ambition of succeeding his father right from early age when his father's throne by-passed him. Consequently, as has been argued in this paper, his enlistment into the Songhai army and becoming a commander as well as his decision to crown himself king and assuming the title of Kanta was not by accident. This feat could simply be attributed to the design of an ambitious young man who desires to emulate his father and seized the opportunity when it presented itself. The path he followed after becoming the first Sarkin Kabi and the successes he recorded in empire building are now records of history.

Conclusion

This paper set out to unravel the mystery surrounding the legendary figure of the first ruler of Kabi Kingdom and that of his ancestors (Muhammadu Kanta: 1516–1554 A. D). The paper outlined the various versions of oral traditions which claimed knowledge of the origin of the Kabawa and their rulers—the Lekawa. However, the paper demonstrated the fact that all of these traditions were merely fanciful stories and narrations which are mostly full of bias, exaggerations and prejudices and therefore, suffers from what is, historically, referred to as 'hamitic hypothesis' with each tradition relating its founder to an alien body with superior knowledge and techniques and especially coming from the Eastern part of the world. The paper argued that though Muhammadu Kanta has been variously ascribed to be the founder of Kabi Kingdom, it pointed out that the formation of a state structure could not have been the work of single lifetime or of a single individual. State formation involves the interaction of a variety of complex factors and hardly do all factors operate at the same period of time.

The paper further argued that, by the time Muhammadu Kanta arrived in the area of Gulbin Kabi, he met the existing society, in reaction to the certain factors moving in the direction of state formation of which he played a part representing its end product. Historical records have all converge to the point that Muhammadu Kanta was of Songhai father and Katsina mother and migrated into the area of Gulbin-Kabi area in search of fortune after been disgruntled by the eclipse of his father's throne, the Magajin Kuyambana to one of his family members. The paper demonstrated that the connection by birth of the 'Tobashi' tradition between the ruling families of Katsina and Argungu which has survived to date is a clear indication of the ancestral claim of Muhammadu Kanta from Katsina. In the same token, the paper further argues that the choice of the name of Kanta, and his enlistment into the Songhai's army were not mere accidents of history but an indication of his ancestral connection with Songhai's dominion.

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