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Ilorin Traditional Markets in the 19th Century

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Abstract

This study on Ilorin traditional markets examines evolution of markets in Ilorin and how the markets later attained international recognition with goods of all kinds. It also discusses the different stages of administration of the markets as well as incomes that accrued to those who administered the markets. The study also analyzes some of the significance of the markets, especially the contribution of the markets to the attainment of the metropolitan status which the city eventually attained by the turn of the 19th century.

Introduction

There has not been extensive documentation on markets in Ilorin generally. The little literature that has been produced on the community gives mainly the account of the evolution of the town and the effects of the contact between Ilorin people and the Hausa/Fulani to the north and the Yoruba to the south on the one hand and the influence of the Europeans on Ilorin community on the other. The issue of market was usually treated peripherally as would be shown shortly. The focus of this study is therefore on the Ilorin traditional markets in the 19th century. It is conceived that the arrangement and nature of Ilorin traditional markets added to the development of the settlement in the 19th century.¹ This is evident from the examination by O'Hear of some of the economic activities in Ilorin in the 19th century, where mention was made of traditional markets such as *Gambari* and *Oja Oba*, where foreign goods were sold to interested buyers.² Equally, Gavin attempted a discussion of some features of pre-colonial Ilorin economy.³ However, a detailed examination of Ilorin traditional markets was not undertaken in the two works cited above. To strengthen his discussion of the nature of Ilorin economy in the 19th century,

Banwo also buttressed the evolution and importance of the Ilorin economy without giving significant details of Ilorin markets in the period under study.⁴ This study will deal with the shortcomings observed in the above works and also provide information on the organization, operation and significance of various markets that existed in Ilorin in the 19th century.

The Evolution of Markets in Ilorin Emirate

So much has been written on the evolution of Ilorin that it will be a waste of space to repeat it here.⁵ It is however important to say that the Muslim revolt of 1817, which ended the Old Oyo Empire, culminated in the enthronement of Mallam Abdul-Salami the first son of Mallam Alimi as the first Emir of the recently-established Ilorin Emirate in 1823.⁶ It signalled equally the establishment of a political structure which took cognizance of the major ethnic groups in Ilorin. Four *Balogun*, that is, war-lords, were appointed, namely: *Balogun Ajikobi*, *Balogun Alanamu*, *Balogun Fulani* and *Balogun Gambari*. *Balogun Ajikobi* and *Balogun Alanamu* represented the Yoruba while *Balogun Fulani* and *Balogun Gambari* represented the Fulani and Hausa respectively. The area within the immediate jurisdiction of the Emir was administratively under the *Magajin Gari*.⁷

The beginning of some Ilorin traditional markets as in other areas were fashioned from intentional human creation while others evolved naturally. For example, the first market in Ilorin was said to have been established by Pasin the father of Afonja in the mid-18th century to satisfy the growing population of the town.⁸ Also as a caravan trade route long before the creation of the town, each of the Ilorin markets initially was a forestalling point, which did not favour construction of elaborate market place. The seats were mainly stones and logs of wood obtained from branches of stem of trees⁹ arranged in rows under the shade where transactions were effected.¹⁰ Activities of forestalling, and the urge to establish an emirate after the enthronement of Abdul-Salami as the first Emir of Ilorin including influx of settlers from all directions into the newly founded "peaceful" Ilorin town quickened the establishment of more traditional markets in Ilorin.¹¹

Ilorin town as indicated above was divided into units along ethnic lines. The necessity, therefore, for markets to serve different ethnic groups that made up the town arose. Markets were established for the Hausa/Fulani groups in the town with the *Gambari* and *Asunnara* Markets forming the principal ones. There were also *Alanamu* and *Ajikobi* Markets as distributive centres for the Yoruba, while the Emir's Market provided the necessary avenue for those living in *Magajin Gari*. However, people from other ethnic groups were not prevented from trading in any market of their choice.

Moreover, locations of markets were usually at the front of the residences of the *Balogun* for effective supervision and maintenance of law and order.¹² For example, *Asunnara* Market had to be moved from its former place to an open space in front of *Balogun Fulani* quarter.¹³ Equally, the Emir's Market was located at the front of the palace for security purposes.¹⁴ As will be shown later, other markets in Ilorin were equally located in a similar manner. The markets at the city gates of the town were fortified by armed security men to provide the necessary conducive atmosphere.¹⁵

Consideration was placed on neatness and sanitation of the markets. Markets in Ilorin were thus located in well-drained areas to make maintenance easy. The structure of each traditional market was in the form of an open space as indicated above. However, market sites were later transformed.¹⁶ Trees were grown to provide shades as they were during forestalling periods. The town continued to grow in size and population due to the influx of settlers, slaves and diversion of surplus farm produce from neighbouring villages and these resulted in increase in the market attendance which called for more markets and for the erection of stalls.¹⁷ The stalls built initially were temporary as a result of location and relocation of markets (as in *Asuunara*) but later, thatched roof made of palm- fronds were held in place with wooden poles and mats which were held in place with wooden poles and mats which were used in some cases to provide a more permanent structure. The means of sitting in the markets also improved from stones and logs of woods as in forestalling period to four-legged local seats (*apoti*) with wooden legs.¹⁸

Articles of trade in Ilorin traditional markets were stocked in large hollow calabashes, some placed on the ground in front of the stall, while others were placed on chopped logs of woods in the stalls. Most stall owners gathered and piled stones into ridges a little high in the stalls to serve as tables. This was intended to raise the calabash above the ground levels for proper notification by intending buyers and preventing sheep and goats from their wares or eating their edible articles. Clothing materials and leather works were usually exhibited on hangers that were made of wooden poles, horizontally supported at both ends with poles positioned horizontally and vertically.¹⁹

Organization and Operation of Traditional Markets in Ilorin

It has been discussed above that markets in Ilorin were established in the various units into which the city was divided. The division was informed by the types of commodities available in each market.²⁰ The volume and variety of articles of trade led to the creation of sections in the markets with

each section housing homogenous and related articles of trade, thereby making each of the sections distinctive. Still in terms of organization, the Emir was regarded as the administrative head of all the markets in Ilorin Emirate.²¹ He was assisted by the war-lords or *Balogun* under whose jurisdiction most of the markets were sited. The *Balogun* could not be at different markets at the same time, they therefore appointed a head of the market *Olori Oja* to run the daily administrative affairs of each market. He attended the market daily as the authority who took charge of both control and peaceful transaction. He also saw to the allocation of sites for shops, prevented breach of contract, and ensured the effective maintenance and cleaning of market sites.²² An *Oba-Oja* appointed by the Emir performed similar functions at the Emir's Market but in addition he was naturally regarded as the head of *Olori-Oja* appointed by the war-lords and stationed in other markets in the emirate.²³ An *Oba-Oja* and *Olori-Oja* in the emirs or ward markets served as judge of market micro-customary court on issues affecting traders. However, *Olori-Oja* referred some serious issues to the *Balogun* who might also refer such matters to the Emir for adjudication. The *Oba-Oja* and *Olori-Oja* received as income gifts such as tubers of yam and other commodities from the sellers. The *Balogun* might also reward *Olori-Oja* from the gifts sent to him by the market traders.²⁴

In Ilorin traditional markets, as in other places, traders were price dictators, while the buyers were price takers and moderators. To commence bargaining, a seller would receive the traditional courtesy of greetings that served as indication to purchase goods at a particular price. Each price quotation could be inflated but the buyers would negotiate to normalize the price. Bargaining continued till such a time it was concluded or stopped.²⁵ The traditional division of labour in Ilorin, as in most African towns, made women to be predominant in the traditional markets. The women attended markets with their husbands' products.²⁶ Equally women often went to the neighbouring village markets to purchase wares to be resold in Ilorin markets.²⁷ The middlemen or *Alarobo* or *Alajapa* as they were often referred to, also approached owners at the markets situated at the city gate or neighbouring village markets to buy in bulk, broke it down to retail in their respective ward markets to final consumers, or might even get it sold in bulk as they had bought it but at a higher price.²⁸

When goods got to the market, proper transaction differed. Goods might be handled by the traders themselves with the assistance of an agent-cum-interpreter called *Dilali* (Broker) who lured on a percentage given to him for effecting transaction from both the trader and the buyer.²⁹ In the two principal markets discussed below, goods might be bought by the agents

themselves directly from the caravan traders, and later sold at the market, while at the same time pretending to be interpreting prices for the real owner. In this manner, goods bought at fifty or sixty per cent could be sold for hundred percent and, at the same time demanding the cost of interpretation made from the buyer.³⁰ The *Dilali* was offered a percentage called *Lahada* regarded as a form of insurance for both sellers and buyers. It was obtained as a condition in case another person might claim ownership after transaction.³¹ The *Dilali* who had been given *Lahada* would stand before any jury to clarify the issue by showing the *Lahada* which he had collected.³²

Another process of income was through the manipulation of the bargaining process, *Tepatepa*, that could be translated as an over-due profit. The broker would agree on a price with prospective buyer but tell the seller that the buyer agreed to a certain price. If the seller agreed, the broker would then pronounce a new price to the buyer that has taken care of his profit margin without the knowledge of the seller. In other words, he would add to the part pretending that the addition has been done by the buyer.³³ To retain the absolute confidence of his clients at both ends depended on his ability. Hence, having been careful if he succeeded he kept the balance and if not he was left with just the *Lahada* which was his legitimate due.

The means of exchange in Ilorin traditional markets included exchange of goods by trade by barter. Later slaves, cowry shells and copper pieces were introduced as means of exchange.³⁴ The barter system was a carry-over from the ancestors. It was later replaced with the use of cowry shells along with the barter system, as in the case of slaves, which were in use together as medium of exchange.³⁵ The introduction of slaves was important in the sense that man's wealth and affluence were recognized by the number of slaves in his care. Slaves could therefore be disposed of either to settle debts or borrow money to acquire some other forms of wealth.³⁶ Slaves were therefore a means of capital accumulation.

Classification of Traditional Markets in Ilorin

Traditional markets in Ilorin can be divided into three categories. They were the pre-entry (forestalling) markets, the ward markets and the principal markets.

Pre-Entry Markets: The pre-entry markets were occasional markets often situated at the gate of the city.³⁷ Traders and agents from different wards and the two principal markets flocked the pre-entry markets as early as possible to buy commodities from traders coming from the villages that bounded the city or from some far away places. Hence, these traders terminated their journey at the city gate markets, or by-passed the

main city markets for onward journey to other towns, having been satisfied with what they had sold at the pre-entry markets.³⁸ The goods bought at the pre-entry markets were cheaper than when the traders themselves brought their commodities to the city markets.

The Ward Markets: These were markets established along ethnic lines. Each ward therefore had markets that served its immediate people. The markets were established by the ward heads to facilitate the necessity for marketing system for the need of their people.³⁹ Within *Magajin-Gari* Ward, there were *Oja Iya*, *Ita-Kure*, *Oni Tanganran*, *Alapata*, *Eruda* and *Oja-Oba* Markets. Other wards also had similar markets situated in their areas as indicated in Table I below. It should be noted that the precise date of the establishment of these markets could not be ascertained. We have been able, however, to establish the emir who was on the throne when the markets began. Most of these markets are still functioning, while some have given way to modern development. At the pre-entry and ward markets, items such as yams, tomatoes, legumes, cassava, pots, woven cloth, oranges, household materials and other edible foods were offered for sale.

Table I: Traditional Markets in Ilorin

WARDS	MARKETS	REGNANT EMIRS WHEN MARKETS WERE ESTABLISHED	
Ajikobi	Oloje	Aliyu	1869 - 1891
	Omoda	Aliyu	1869 - 1891
	Oju Ekun	Moma	1881 - 1885
Alanamu	Adeta	Aliyu	1869 - 1891
	Bode	Aliyu	1895 - 1915
	Pakata	Sulaiman	1823 - 1836
Fulani	Asunnara	Aliyu	1869 - 1891
	Gada	Aliyu	Date Unknown
Gambari	Idiape	Pasin	1800 - 1823
	Awodi	Abdulsalam	1823 - 1836
	Gambari	Aliyu	1869 - 1891
	Ondoko	Aliyu	1869 - 1891
	Sango (Pake)	Moma	1891 - 1895
	Kankatu	Abdulsalam	1823 - 1836
	Oja-Gboro	Abdulsalam	1823 - 1836
Magajin-Gari	Alapa	Aliyu	1869 - 1891
	Eruda	Moma	1891 - 1895
	Ita-Kure	Abdulsalam	1823 - 1836

Ita-Onitanganran	Aliyu	1865 - 1891
Oja-Iya	Sulaiman	1895 - 1915
Oja-Oba	Abdulsalam	1823 - 1836

Source: Author's survey and findings in 1985 and 2003

The Principal Markets: Both the pre-entry and ward markets served as tributaries to the principal markets in the town. They were the *Oja-Oba* and *Gambari* Markets. The Emir's Market or *Oja-Oba* Market was conducted initially at night, and became operative also in the day period by middle of the twentieth century.⁴⁰ The origin and founder of this market are obscure. It was said to have emanated by itself in recognition of importance attached to the ruler of the community as the case in other towns. The other principal market was the *Gambari* Market situated at the Hausa quarters of the town. It later became an international market with peculiar operation. This market housed both local and foreign traders and dealt in a variety of goods such as cloths, lanterns, cows and beads.⁴¹ All caravan traders coming into Ilorin had landlords or *Maigida* who provided the merchants with accommodation, food and recreational facilities.⁴² This was possible as a result of frequency and mutual trust built over the years. The landlord, (*Maigida*) would appoint an agent to take care of the sale of his clients' goods while the landlord himself saw to the other need of the traders.⁴³ The landlord also had in his service *Yaro* or Boy whom he usually sent to the outskirts of the town to welcome the caravan traders at the forestalling points. Clarke said of the *Gambari* Market in Ilorin that it was:

Where all goods such as saddles, silk-sash, raw silk trona and many other articles brought by interior traders are deposited.⁴⁴ The Southern traders also visited the market with their wares. In addition, goods not meant to be discharged in Ilorin often found their ways to *Gambari* market either to rebound them for onward journey to the south or to the north.⁴⁵ The hospitality accorded traders at the two principal markets in Ilorin made some traders to stay permanently in Ilorin especially *Gambari* ward of the town.⁴⁶

The Significance of Ilorin Traditional Markets

The prime factor that facilitated the establishment of markets in Ilorin as in other places was the desire to enjoy and consume a variety of services and commodities which the people did not produce. Besides, markets in Ilorin served other purposes which included religious and social interaction. The markets drew together individuals of every local social group primarily for

economic reasons and also for social interaction.

Ilorin comprised people with different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Their interaction and discussions during market sessions, no doubt, fostered mutual understanding and acculturation among them. Also, traditional markets in Ilorin served as assembly points where major issues of serious significance were discussed before being presented to the ward heads and other titleholders in the town⁴⁷. Matters affecting the welfare of the people and considered crucial and important, and for which the head might even be involved, were first deliberated upon in neutral places. The most neutral ground, and of which the ownership and maintenance was communal, was the market.

Social organizations for women and men used markets as meeting places for the perpetuation of lineage rights and obligations.⁴⁸ Dating and the search for marriage partners sometimes started and got cemented in these markets, although Islamic injunction prohibits visits and closeness between boys and girls.⁴⁹ In African context, this might not be totally adhered to especially under market situations. They therefore seized the opportunity of going to the markets at distant places from their immediate homes to see one another. Most night markets functioned on this principle.⁵⁰ Most women did ignore nearby markets and attended distant markets because of social obligations and the woman's view that relationships with men were a necessity.⁵¹

It was also very common for wealth to be exhibited at the markets. Whenever marriage was conducted, the bride would dance from her home, well dressed and accompanied by drummers and well wishers, entertaining and thanking all those who attended the wedding ceremony.⁵² The bride also usually danced round the market(s) nearest to her house for people to see how successful and flamboyant the wedding had been. Relations and others at the market usually welcomed the bride by joining in the dancing briefly and finally giving the bride money and other token gifts.⁵³

Traditional markets in Ilorin also served as information centres for the people in which they were located. Royal messages were delivered by the ward town criers. At these markets also, days of marriages and naming ceremonies were relayed to well wishers. In addition, other messages or information were collected on market days from traders who had been so sent to witness the events. Thus, account of incidences which occurred in the ward market(s) were carried to the principal markets and neighbouring villages on village market days.⁵⁵ Since most markets in Ilorin were located in front of traditional title holder's houses in the town where mosques were equally located traders trooped to mosques at every prayer time for daily

prayers.⁵⁶ Therefore, economic activities were not allowed to affect religious obligations.

Another religious significance of traditional markets was to be noticed during Muslim festivals. The two prominent Islamic Festivals, *Id el-Kabir* and *Id el-Fitr*, were celebrated with pomp and gaiety in the town.⁵⁷ The young and the old, after attending the traditional prayers at the praying ground would first gather at the ward markets and later converge at the Emir's Market to pay homage to the Emir. People from surrounding villages, especially the Fulani also paid traditional *Sallah* visit and used market centres as their assembly grounds. This often lasted for a week after each festival. The Fulani also exchanged pleasantries and entertained people with a traditional fight called *Dase*, surrounded by large crowds.⁵⁸

Ilorin traditional markets also played the role of intermediary in the area of religion. It could be recorded that the town served as a centre for the spread of Islam into areas it conquered such as Ibolo, Igbomina and other areas in the southern part of Ilorin Emirate.⁵⁹ Constant contact with Islamic learning was enhanced with Quranic Schools most of which were located near the market sites to afford the children of traders the opportunity to acquire Islamic knowledge. The spread of Islam was considered to be very important, more so since northern traders and people of Ilorin were renowned Muslims, whose priorities in evangelism did not include property acquisition.⁶⁰

In the same manner, the entrepot character of Ilorin placed it in a vantage position as a middleman between traders from the North and the South.⁶¹ The Northern traders came into the town with materials such as clothes, gowns, ivory, natron, potash, leather and cattle among others. From the South were spirits, cowries, kolanuts and later, European items.⁶² As such, buying and selling at various markets in Ilorin resulted in the diffusion of ideas among traders of different cultural and historical backgrounds. New trading patterns and crafts were learnt and Ilorin culture and ideas were exported beyond the borders of the emirate.⁶³

Above all, the marketing activities of Ilorin in the nineteenth century contributed in no small way to the growth of the town due to population converging there. The Gambari Market earlier mentioned above, for example, housed settlers from the North and Ilorin suburbs. There, they found the lodging, house-keepers, brokers, dealers and Islamic scholars who saw to their needs and directed them to buyers.⁶⁴ This hospitality made some traders to make Ilorin first their semi-permanent and later permanent homes.⁶⁵ The boost in the population of Ilorin in the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries can therefore be attributed partly to its ever busy traditional markets.

Conclusions

The above study gives us a clear evidence of the importance of the traditional markets in Ilorin. The traditional markets were strategically located in the different quarters into which Ilorin was ethnically divided. Though the markets were under the supervision of each ward head, however, overseers were appointed for the day-to-day administration of the markets. It has equally been observed that Ilorin, through its two most important markets (*Gambari* and *Oja-Oba*) played host to prominent traders, not only from the neighbouring villages and towns that surrounded the city but also from far distances in the North and the South. The socio-cultural and political importance of these markets had also been stressed. Perhaps the most significant contribution of traditional markets in Ilorin was in the area of an influx of people to the town, which today has made it to accomplish the metropolitan status it has achieved. The Gambari Market stood out as an international market where permanent houses were erected for traders who made Ilorin their second home. Certainly, therefore, Ilorin traditional markets assisted the city to accomplish the metropolitan status it achieved in the twentieth century and beyond.

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53. Oral evidence of Alhaji Kawu Agaka, *Dan Iya Ilorin*, 11/11/2000.
54. Oral evidence of Alhaji Ola Sulayman, *Daudu Fagba Ilorin*, 11/11/2000.
55. Oral evidence of Mallam Sanusi Aremu, *Alangua Okelele*, Ilorin 10/09/85.
55. Oral evidence of Alfa Salih Balogun, Balogun Fulani Quarters, 01/11/99.
56. Oral evidence of Alhaji Muhammed Bashir, Chief Imam of Ilorin, 10/11/99 and 12/12/2003.
57. Oral evidence of Alfa Salih Balogun, Balogun Fulani Quarters 01/11/99.
58. Oral evidence of Mallam Audu Bakabe, *Sarkin Jodio*, 03/10/99.
59. For more information on this see Danmole, H. O. "The Growth of Islamic Learning in Ilorin in the Nineteenth Century", Vols. 6 and 7, December, 1982, pp.14-35. See also Danmole, H.O. "Religion and Politics in Colonial Northern Nigeria. The Case of Ilorin Emirate." *Journal of Religious History*, University of Sydney, Australia, Vol. 16, No. 3, December 1990, pp.140-153. This was also asserted by Alhaji Muhammed Bashir, Chief Imam of Ilorin, 10/11/99.
60. Such Islamic scholars include Shaykh Adam Al-Ilori and Muhammed Kamal Deen.
61. Gavin, R. J. "The Impact...", p.16.
62. O'Hear, A. *Power Relations ...*, pp.14-19. See also *NNAK IlorProf* 2365 Ilorin Trade Development Board and Banwo, A. O. "Ilorin Economy...", pp.133-136.
63. Clarke, W.H. *Travels and Explorations*, p.183.
64. *Ibid.*
65. Oral evidence of Alhaji Abdul-Rahman Temim, Okesuna Quarters, Ilorin, 10/10/2003.