

## TRADE IN BORNO GUM ARABIC: 1902-1960

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### ABSTRACT

Trade in Gum Arabic predates colonial era. Gum Arabic was exported through Tran-Sahara Trade. The people of Borno collected the Gum in the forest and brought it to market, sometimes by women and it was in small quantities. The colonial Government in the 20<sup>th</sup> century came to Borno and encouraged Kanuris through their Shehu (Emir) to take to Gum Arabic trade. This was done through the involvement of the European companies who purchased the commodities in tonnaged and export it to England and other European countries. This paper intends to trace the organization of Gum Arabic trade in Borno between 1902 and 1960. The pricing and emergence as well as the roles of the indigenous Gum Arabic traders. The significance of this Gum Arabic trade led to the provision of employment for about 6000 people from different districts within colonial Borno. It is also significances for it led to the protection of Gum Arabic trees from destructions by both people and animals. Hence, the creation of forest reserve circle in Borno for the development of Gum Arabic trade.

**Keywords:** Gum Arabic, Trade, Colonial Borno

### INTRODUCTION

Trade in Gum Arabic started as far back as the days of the Christian era.<sup>1</sup> The trade had also a long history in the Western Sahel, later in 1448, the trade in Gum Arabic passed through a trading centre established by the Portuguese on the Island of Arguin to the South of Cape Blanco. According to Curtain, West Africa Gum trade started to replace Eastern Gum trade in the 16<sup>th</sup>

century, with Senegambia becoming the main supplier to Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, during the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Gum was the major export of Senegal Valley and the Mauritanian Coast.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the Gum Arabic trade via Atlantic Ocean from the Western Sahel, were also references to Trans Sahara export of Gum. Various attempts were made to stimulate on interest in the Borno Gum by the Colonial Government. The trade in Gum Arabic in Borno could be said to have started when Temple, the colonial Secretary, wrote to Hewby, the resident in Borno 1912, to purchase on ton of Kolkol Gum which were in forty cases were sent to Imperial Institute<sup>5</sup> in July 1913 for sale in London with a view to ascertaining the market value of the selected consignment. The Gum Arabic trade began to show steady increase as a result of the opening up of the Ringim to Nguru section of the railway on October, 1, 1930.<sup>6</sup> Thus, all major exports from both North and West Borno were carried out through Nguru. European companies were actively involved as a result of the request of the Colonial Government.

### **The Emergence of European Companies In Borno**

As far as the history of European companies in Borno is concerned, one can easily recall to mind when in 1891 Shehu Umar attempted to establish trade contacts between Borno and the Royal Niger Company.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, when Rabeh Ibn Fadle-Allah was faced with hostility from Borno's former trade partners, he turned to the Royal Niger Company in order to acquire fire arms.<sup>8</sup> However, it was the Niger Company that succeeded Royal Niger Company in 1900 that started to trade with Borno. The stations of this Company was located in Nafada on the upper Benue. Here Borno's traders were seeing frequently carrying their goods such as groundnuts, cotton, hide and skins on donkeys, horses and camels to the Company's station for sale. Following the extension of railway lines to Nguru in October 1, 1930, the number of European companies grew. Some of these companies were established at Nguru, Geidam, Damaturu, Potiskum, Dikwa, Maiduguri and Monguno to mention but a few. For instance, at Nguru alone, the following companies were established:

United African Company. John Holt. Rowntree and Company, G.B. Olivant Compaigne Francaise de l'Afrigue occidentals (C.F.A.O.), Societe Commercials de l'Africain (SCDA), Patterson Zachonics (PZ). Ambrossini, London and Kano Trading Company, Anthony Karkar, Abdu J. Jaoudi, Fermo Bonomi, Ahmed Ali El-Baff, Alhasan Dan Tata. Paul Aonad Couri, George Calil Maroun, Peter Khoury, Elalif Elmsillati, Mohammed Shour, Severo Bonorni, Antonio Matatab and John Menguissoglou.<sup>9</sup> According to Alhaji Usman Jallaba, the major companies in Maiduguri which dealt in Gum Arabic after the Second World War in 1945, were Patterson Zochonis (PZ), Amrosini and John Holt.<sup>10</sup> Yet another Gum Arabic Merchant, Bukar Bakki, further asserted the C.G.B. Ollivant, Leventis. United African Company and John Holt were the major companies which dealt in Gum Arabic trade before Nigeria's Independence in 1960. Besides, there as Government Co-operative which also dealt in Gum Arabic trade. This was run by Gujbawu and Bashir Mustapha.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it was the Sole responsibilities of these companies to send their agents to purchase for them the Gum product among other things. Equally responsible by the Company was fixing of prices, transportation, as well as sorting out the Gum grade by grade before exporting it.

### **Trading and Pricing of Gum Arabic**

In Borno Gum was bought in the open market by agents of various European trading companies.<sup>12</sup> Most of the Gum brought to the markets especially in Kanema and Bukarti were brought by Fulani women.<sup>13</sup> According to Bakki, Gum markets were located at Gudumbali. Other markets were located at Zumakumon, Maine Soroa, Gubio, Gazabure, Kalala, Jimbam, Gajiram, and Gubio. Other markets were found in the Chad Republic.<sup>14</sup> In all the markets some which were held weekly, Gum was brought not in weight but by measuring out in metal cash bowls - this unit of measure, and to take Kanema market as an example,  $\frac{1}{2}$ d was paid for each bowl of gum. The weight of this quality is supposed to be 1.25 ltr. (0.568 kilos). But it has been proved by experiment that the actual weight may vary from just under 1 ltr. (0.454 kilos) to 1 Ib. 9025. (.908 kilos) depending on

the site and moisture content of the tear, and on whether the Gum was heaped up or leveled off in bowl. In spite of this development, there appeared to be misunderstanding as the pricing policy by the peasant farmers. Hence the advocate on all Gum should be weighed and priced on the scale. In this respect, all companies in the trade quoted their official buying price as  $1\frac{1}{2}$  per hr. (0.454 kilos) at Nguru, down to 1d per 1 ltr. (0.454 kilos) at the more outlying centres. Some companies even paid more. For instance, Messrs Chattalas in Geidam were reputed to have paid to 24 per lb. (0.454 kilos). Despite the price agreement reached by Messrs Rowntres and company and United African Company Limited (U.A.C.), the agent of the latter paid more than the agreed price.<sup>15</sup> Normally, the price were based on the rail-head figure of 24 per lb. (0.454 kilos) and varied according to the distance from the Gum Arabic markets. Price control was virtually impossible. Generally speaking, sorting and grading of Gum were normally done by the principal buyers before expecting and it was usually performed by women. Adulteration was uncommon, and if they did appear, bite of bark and very occasionally, tears of another species of Gum (usually *Acacia Nilotica*), were removed by the buyers before the price of 'a lot' was fixed.

The price paid for mixed Gum in Maiduguri was  $1\frac{1}{4}$  to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  per lb (0.454 kilos) which competes more than favorably with the price of  $1\frac{1}{2}$  d paid for the much superior Kolkol at Nguru. The value of the former at Jos (rail-head) was somewhere in the region of 2d per lb. The difference in value between the two varieties of Gum on the London market was approximately 10 per cwt (50 kilos) or a fraction over one penny per lb. (C.kilos). Therefore, it was after this pricing of the Gum Arabic that agents and touts went to various markets and sometimes to the gum farms to procure the products for their principal buying companies who later export to London market for sale.

### **Gum Arabic Export from Borno, 1902-1960**

Initially the exports of Gum Arabic rested solely on the shoulders of the colonial Government and later on various companies took the lead with some Africans acting as mere agents. Prior to the rise of legitimate commerce in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the main export from Africa, apart from slaves, were gold, Ivory, Timber, dye-wood, Gum Arabic etc. Gum Arabic was the major export from the Senegal Valley and the Mauritanian Coast in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>16</sup> The export of Gum Arabic in Borno commenced in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when in 1913. 40 cases of Kolkol Gum were sent to London for sale as to ascertain its market value.<sup>17</sup> After the market value of Borno's Gum in the world market was ascertained, it took the colonial Government some years before they could engaged the Kanuri peasant farmers to embrace the exploitation of Gum Arabic. At first, the ethnic groups were engaged in the cultivation of groundnuts and cotton. Secondly, they were very reluctant in the exploitation of the Gum Arabic because of its difficulties and very low price paid.

And thirdly, the inability on the part of peasant farmers have correct method of Gum tapping. It was after the report of Mr. Veir was occupied in 1929 that the Colonial Government embarked upon enlightenment campaign and propaganda in which experimental Gum farms were established and Forestry Officers were posted to train the ethnic groups in the act of Gum Arabic exploitation and some were made to practiced "Taungiya" farming" with the view to increasing production of Gum in Borno where it occurred in a vast area. Similarly, private companies were asked by the colonial Government to shows enterprise in the Gum Arabic in Borno. The first companies to heed this call were: Messrs, Rowntree and Company, United African Company (U.A.C.). Messrs. Chattalas, Messrs, Paterson Zochonis (PZ) and the French Companies. Most of these companies tended to grade the Gum product before exporting to abroad. Thus Gum Arabic was exported as graded, cleaned, shifted, beached and in the natural state. These companies who

dealt in the Gum Arabic export acquired their products not only in Borno, but also in the French territories of Chad and Niger. This was made during the gum Arabic conference at Maiduguri on January, 26<sup>th</sup> 1929.<sup>19</sup> It was agreed that of the gum brought in Borno, at least 80 percent came from French Territories. All Gum purchased by the companies were then exported abroad via railway lines. Thus providing an avenue for taking the statistics of the tonnages even though many of the commodities lacked wagon to be loaded and many were taken to places other than Nguru. However, the statistics of gum taken from Nguru each year since 1931 and subsequent years is illustrated on table 1 below.

**Table I: Nguru Railway Station Statistics of Goods, Gum Arabic Rail 1931-1950**

YEAR	TONNAGE	YEAR	TONNAGE
1931	174	1932	447+
1933	459+	1934	2,343
1935	537	1936	1,201
1937	306	1938	238
1939	571	1940	607
1941	584	1942	247
1943	977	1944	900
1945	2,204	1946	1,789
1947	1,091	1948	1,052
1949	690	1950	264

Source: 1931-1933 are from S.N.P. 17/21325, NAK; and 1934-1944 are from Mai Prof 2161, NAK; and 1945-1950 are from Adeyeju, K.S. Forestry and the Nigerian Economy: U.P. Ibadan, 1975.

Apparently, gum Arabic had emerged as a strong export commodity since the early 1920's, but with the introduction of modern means of transport, like motor vehicle and railway, that led to the increase of production for export. This specifically was recorded from a railway station alone is shown in the table above. This growth in Gum Arabic production and purchase for export was the result of intensified propaganda campaign by the provincial colonial

authorities. They pressurized the people, so as to popularize them for the tapping of Gum Arabic in the best possible way for exports. This was early indicated in the 1935 to 1936 provincial report on the Gum Arabic Industry, when attempts were made to establish colonial production bases in the main area of production,<sup>20</sup> such as Nguru, Borsari, Damaturu, Auno, Kaga and Badde in Northern Borno. In one such action place, a demonstration was conducted with "Lawans" (ward heads) and their "Talakawa" (Peasants) totaling 5-6,000 people present and 3,000 trees were tapped under the supervision of the gum staff and the provincial Officer who reported.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, it was reported that, the next season some 20,000 to 30,000 trees were tapped", this explains the distinctive record of production for export of Gum Arabic for the year 1936. Again therefore, there was an increase of the number of foreign companies involved in the Gum Arabic trade for export from three to six and extension in their area of purchase to Southern Borno. This is shown in Table II below:

**Table II : Purchase by Foreign Companies of Gum Arabic Product for Export in Northern and Borno Province**

<b>Northern Borno Area</b>									
	1935-1936		1936-1937		Increase		Decrease		
Companies	Ton	Cwt	Ton	Cwt	Ton	Cwt	Ton	Cwt	
Messer Rowntrees	188	19	14	1	-	-	47	17	
U.A.C.	204	-	138	16	-	-	65	4	
P.Z.	5	-	11	-	6	09	-	-	
The French Companies	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
<b>Southern Borno Area</b>									
	1935-1936		1936-1937		Increase		Decrease		
Companies	Ton	Cwt	Ton	Cwt	Ton	Cwt	Ton	Cwt	
Messer U.A.C.	43	5	67	4	23	19	5	-	
P.Z.	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Cressmith	-	-	8	-	8	-	-	-	
Provisional Total	525	4	391	14	18	8	371	17	

Source: Waziri I .M., *The Colonial Economy of British Borno: A Case Study of the Impact of tile production, marketing and report of sonic selected commodities the Emergence and*

Growth of cash economy 1902-1945. (Ph.D Thesis)  
University of Maiduguri 1996.

In the 1930s, the three companies. Messrs Rownirees and Company Limited, United African Company Limited and Chattalas were the largest buyers of Gum Arabic for export from Borno province. All the gum they bought were exported direct to England, while the French Companies exported their own Arabic to France.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the campaigns for increase in the production of gum Arabic for export was not relented. This was particularly so, with the arrival of Mr. Keysey Adams of the Chikle Development Company of New York in the early 1940s who was interested in Gum Arabic. In addition, the Borno Native Authority established the Gum staff, made up of initially Baba Geidam, Kachalla Tijani. Dogari Bukar (as forest guard) and Alamin Baba Geidam as a (member of the Shehu's outer council) in 1936.<sup>23</sup> This effort paid off, when production continued at an appreciable rate from both within the province and from the French territory. See Tables III and IV below for a cooperative analysis of the figures of the distinct areas of Gum Arabic production for export from Borno province from 1934-1935 to 1938-1939 seasons.



**Table III: Buying Stations and Gum Arabic Bought in 1935-1936 and 1936-1937 Seasons**

Buying Station	Buying Seasons				Increase Decrease			
	Tons	Cwt	Tons	Cwt	Tons	Cwt	Tons	Wct
Nguru	140	2	110	8	-	-	29	13
Karasawa	-	13	-	1	-	-	-	1
Bukarti & Kanema	105	19	55	15	-	-	50	4
Ginda & Zari	37	16	30	-	-	-	7	16
Geidam	75	13	19	2	-	-	50	10
Gorounda	18	15	27	8	5	-	-	-
Abadam	8	-	-	-	-	-	8	-
French Territories	90	1	74	2	-	-	15	18
Damaturu	13	6	10	16	-	-	2	10
Maiduguri	13	14	39	9	25	15	-	-
Dikwa	-	18	2	3	1	5	-	-
Pana	20	7	22	16	2	9	-	-
Total	525	4	391	14	37	14	17	3

Source: Waziri I.M., "The Colonial Economy of British Borno. A cash Study of the impact of the Production, marketing and export of some selected commodities in the Emergence and growth of case economy 1902-1945'. (Ph.D. Thesis) University of Maiduguri 1996.

Net decrease was 133 tons 9cwt due to the decision of the French authorities to prevent the overland trade of Gum Arabic for export to Borno Province from their territory.<sup>24</sup>

**Table IV: Gum Arabic Production from Northern and Southern Borno**

SEASON	NORTHERN BORNO	SOUTHERN BORNO	TOTAL
1934-35	557 Tons Kolkol	30 Tons mixed gum	
1935-36	523 " "	48 " " "	587 Tons
1936-37	299 " "	375 " " "	571 "
1937-38	218 " "	98 " " "	76 "
1938-39	539 to date		316 "

Source: Waziri, I. M. "The Colonial Economy of British Borno. A case Study of the impact of the Production, marketing and

export of some selected commodities in the Emergence and growth of case economy 1902-1945'. (Ph.D. Thesis) University of Maiduguri 1996.

The fact that the French restriction was one reason which explains the net decrease, there were other reasons such as the result of the locust invasion of 1937 to 1938, which resulted, particularly in the East, in the complete defoliation of Acacia tree.<sup>25</sup> The other factors was frequent lapses of the both forest services and the traditional authorities. That notwithstanding, in 1945, the production of Gum Arabic for export stood at 2,204 almost doubled that of the 1936. Reasons for this Sudan rise in the price of Gum Arabic as you can see in Table V below:

**Table V: Prices Paid in Nigerian Production Centres, by the Annual Gum Arabic, Ranged From: -**

YEAR	PER TON
1928/1939	£18 to £25 - Naked
1940/1942	£20 to 30 - "
1942/1944	£35 to 35 - "
1945/1946	£40 to £45 - "

SOURCE: Managing Director. John Menguiseglew Limited Kano (Nigeria) B.W.A. April, 26<sup>th</sup> 1948.

Apart from high price paid which encourage double production of Gum Arabic in Borno, there were many forestry officers trained and posted to the production centres to reinforce the earlier campaign mounted.<sup>26</sup> And there were more and more companies showing interest in the gum business. As against the six companies which were mentioned earlier, these were John Holt & Company Limited, Abrosini, others were indigenes companies such as Dantata, and a host of Lebanese companies.<sup>27</sup> Consequent, as this high price for Gum affects the production level coupled with increased number of companies taking part, the statistics of gum exported through Nguru railway became unreliable. This was because many goods, gum

Arabic, were taken to other places such as Jos. Kano and Lagos for onward export.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, in spite of the large exports trade of the product, there was no effort to restock the trees in Borno up to the period of Independence in 1960.

### **The Organization of Gum Arabic Trade In Borno**

The organization of Gum Arabic trade stood from the very nature of the protecting the Acacia trees and the encouragement and propaganda as well as the involvement of foreign companies. When the existence of Acacia trees in Borno were identified couple with their markets value, the colonial Government called for their protection from fire and other related problems. To that effect, representatives from eleven districts received general forestry training and instructions in Gum work in Maiduguri. And some times, the Forestry Officers together with the Shehu's representative toured districts heads and Gum bearing districts to give instructions on the problems of fire risk. cutting over of Kolkol trees, removal of roots for well lining and grazing by animals.

In 1936 however, it was decided to create a Borno Forest circle and to post an officer permanently.<sup>29</sup> It then became apparent that this officer could no longer devote his whole time to Gum Propaganda alone but initiate new interest, in the resuscitation of the Niger Gutter trade. Furthermore, in a bid to organize the Gum trade, conference was held at Maiduguri, January, 26<sup>th</sup> 1939.<sup>30</sup> The object of the conference was to discuss existing difficulties in the Gum Arabic industry, and to suggest remedies. Representatives of all Gum buying organizations were in attendance. The following problems were identified; poor development of the industry due to animals and/or rainfall; peculiarities of trees; lack of interest on the part of the people of the province: due to poor price, long period between tapping and collection. Danger of Gum removed by other persons, the nature of work was foreign to the peasants, pride of sex where men and women each thought it an occupation only fit for the other etc. To remedy the problems associated with the Gum

Arabic Industry, the conference proposed the following steps to be taken; plantations of *Acacia Verrek* be established by Native Administrations and interested companies in convenient centre of the Gum areas of Borno, the control of the plantation should be directed by the District heads, so that it would be less foreign for the peasantry, forest official, not necessarily a European, be employed from Sudan to inspect the Gum areas of Borno and give instruction on its exploitation Companies with agents specializing in Gum-buying be sent to the Forestry Headquarters for instructions on tapping; standard prices should be established by the companies throughout the buying areas, so that all collectors would receive the same as was done for groundnuts on the railway or on the Benue. The existing companies dealing in the gum trade were responsible or quoting their official price and the employment of agents whom they gave some amount to purchase gum in the open market for them. They were also responsible for the employing female ethnic groups whose job was picking up barks, sand, leaves and fire damage. Finally, most of the Gum bought were cleaned graded and bleached before export. Therefore, the organization of Gum Arabic trade in Borno was as a result of the collective efforts of the Colonial government, traditional rulers, European companies and the local gum Merchants.

### **The Emergence and Role of the Indigenous Gum Traders**

The emergence of the indigenous gum traders in Borno, according to one indigenous gum trader, Alhaji Bukar Bakki, started in 1945. Prior to this period, cost of the indigenous traders were engaged in the sales of groundnuts, hides and skins to mention but a few. Some of these traders switched over to Gum Arabic while others combined the two. Zannah Bukar Dipcharima (A colonial officer in Maiduguri) and Ibrahim Imam (A staff of John Holt Co.) through their propaganda and enlightenment, the indigenes showed enterprise in Gum Arabic trade. Sequel to this, Bakki mentioned some names in respect of Gum Arabic trade whom he described as the pioneers. These were: Alhaji Garba Baba Nguru, Yunusa Mai Hajja Nguru, Alhaji Albishir Nguru, Alhaji Wasili Maiduguri,

Shettima. Mustapha Kuntami Maiduguri, Aihaji Yemani Maiduguri, Bukar Jallaba Damaturu, Mallam Nuhu Lantaiwa. Others were, Alhaji Mallam Gaji Gajiram and Alhaji Shaibu Musa Maiduguri. Having known the emergence of these indigenous Gum traders, one will be curious enough to know the role they had played in the Gum Arabic business. Acting as agents, the indigenous Gum traders went to various markets and purchased Gum Arabic which they latter sold to various Europeans companies. Some of the markets they frequented were Gubio market, Gazabure market, Kanema and Bukarti market, Kalala and Jimbam markets, Gajiram and Gudumbali. Others were Zuma Kumon, Gune and Maina Soroa and some markets in the Chad Republic. The above mentioned markets were frequented on different occasions by the traders due to their different market days. Bakki maintained that, on reaching, they stayed in Zongo for a number of days, weeks or months within which they would have enough time to make their purchases. At the Zuma Kumon market which holds every Fridays, Bakki observed that, Gum Arabic was brought into the market in Zuwo, Calabash and Flai (tray) by the peasants.

The buying of Gum Arabic in all of these markets appeared to be dissimilar and this was as a result of the differences in the distance. According to Bakki, a ton of Gum cost them £30 to purchase and sold to various companies at the rate of £200 per ton subject to market condition. After purchase had been made which as usually done through haggling's, the Gum were then packed into sack and loaded to camels and donkeys to be transported to Maiduguri where it would be sold to the European companies. Other traders who made their purchase in the markets adjacent Nguru, such as Kalala, Jimbam, Gune and Maine Soroa, transported their purchase to companies situated in Nguru and Kano. It is important to note that the traders from markets in Northern Borno spent two days before they could arrive at Maiduguri.

## **CONCLUSION**

The trade in Gum Arabic in Borno assumed an international standard both in growth and development as a result of the involvement of the colonial Government whose interest led to so many activities ranging from rail transport, presence of European companies in Borno to the involvement of the native authority as it affects the production and trade in Gum Arabic. The trade in Gum Arabic was so developed that more than 6000 people from Borno were engaged in the trade. Many were trained as foresters who protect the tree from animals or from the people who cut the tree to clear the land for cultivation or for using it as fire woods. The colonial Government did not stop at protecting the Gum Arabic trees but also protect other economic trees such as: *Acacia Complylacantha* (Gwologi, Kanuri) (Kumbar shafo Hausa); *Acacia Senegal* (Kolko;, kanuri) (Dakwora, Hausa); *Boragsus Arthiopica* (Warga, Kanuri) (Ginginya, Hausa); *Diospyros Meepliforms* (Birgum, Kanuri) (kanya, Hausa); *Butyrospermum Parkii* (Toso, Kanuri) (Kadanya, Hausa); *Farkia Filicoidea* (Dadowa, Kanuri) (Dorowa, Hausa) *Khaya Senegalensis* (Kagum, Kanuri) (Madaci, Hausa); *Mitragyne Africana* (Kawi, Kanuri) (Giyaiya, Hausa); *Vitex Cienkowshi* (Ngarbi, Kanuri) (Dunya, Hausa) however, Marke is the only tree that was not protected due to its plentiful and was used by the locals to obtain wood ash for dyeing purposes. The Shehu and his councils were of the opinion that Market tree should not be protected as yet. In 1936, therefore, it was decided by the native authority to create a Borno forest reserve circle and to post an officer permanently. It then became apparent that this officer could no longer devote his whole time to Gum Arabic propaganda alone. Propaganda with a view to bringing about a greater degree of forest protection was initiated and new interest such as the resuscitation of the Niger Gutta trade, were taken up.

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