



THE CHALLENGES OF SMITHING INDUSTRY IN BAUCHI TOWN UNDER COLONIAL RULE

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Abstract

This paper examines the British conquest of Bauchi and its concomitant consequences as it relates to the smithing crafts in Bauchi. Iron working, especially iron smelting, which was the basis of the smithing industry, was affected seriously. The principal measures related to the smithing industry among other things, were the ban on the production of weapons, a series of mineral ordinances and the monetization of the economy, which broke the harmony and interdependence of smiths and other craftsmen and the society at large. This forced the craftsmen to work out of their traditional field in order to earn money in a colonial currency with which to pay taxes. More so, the market for smithing products was curtailed by the importation of products by European firms. The problem of the smiths was compounded by the various policies articulated by the colonial state, which included the monetization of the economy, the forest reservation proclamation, the mineral ordinances proclamations of 1913, 1916, 1927, 1948 and 1958, and the scrap metal policy, as well as the provision of the railway, which ironically led to the transformation of the industry. From the production of traditional tools to the imitation of imported metal wares, especially during the Second World War period, led to the emergence of a new branch of the smithing industry called cold smithing. This new branch of the industry came to dominate the smithing trade. By the 1960s, traditional blacksmithing and whitemithing declined drastically. Goldsmithing, however, continued to expand to meet up with the changing demand.

Keywords: Bauchi, Smithing industry, Blacksmithing, Colonial Policies, Challenges

Introduction

The blacksmithing industry is one of the earliest occupations in Bauchi for many centuries. It has supplied mankind with household and farm implements, in addition to providing him with livelihood. A blacksmith is a person who manufactures iron tools of different varieties, using the indigenous technology of the craft such as anvils, tongs, skin bellows and a variety of hammers, including fire and charcoal. The blacksmith has been plying his trade for centuries, forging essentially the same products and using the same technical process.¹

The blacksmiths produced a variety of objects that people used in their daily lives. Iron was valuable because it was strong and durable. It could be forged, or heated and hammered into many shapes,

¹T.M. Mukhtar, (2008), A Study Of Blacksmithing Industry in Yabo Area up to 1960, (Sokoto: Usman Dan Fodiyo University) p1



from cutting tools to kitchen utensils. Hunters, barbers, farmers and other occupational groups relied on blacksmiths for their implements.²

With the conquest of Bauchi town in 1902,³ the blacksmithing industry of Bauchi was faced with some challenges, especially with the introduction of European goods, which affected the monopoly of blacksmiths as the sole producers of domestic and agricultural implements. The introduction of rail lines and the penetration of European scrap metals resulted in the decline of the traditional smelting forcing many of the smelters to switch to new occupations thereby forcing some to move to more remote places in order to continue with their craft. This paper looks at the challenges of the blacksmithing industry in Bauchi town under colonial rule.

The Blacksmithing Industry in the Pre-colonial Period

Iron technology of the Nok culture area of Jos, Bauchi, Daima, Kano and Zaria had been dated to 500BC. Archaeologists have excavated iron spears and axes at Nok and iron smelting furnaces have been found in Taruga in the same area. In the region now flooded by the Kainji Dam, iron evidence was established about the 2nd century BC. In Daima, it dates to about the 5th century, while smelting furnaces in Kano were built in the 7th century AD.⁴

The origin of the smithing industry in Bauchi is attributed to Abubakar Saddiq, the first *Saraki* of Bauchi, who was recommended to Yakubu, the founder of Bauchi by Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio to help in the production of weaponry for the Jihadist in Bauchi. With the establishment of Bauchi town in 1809, Abubakar Saddiq was appointed as the first *Saraki*, the leader of the blacksmiths and also a member of the emirate council. Since blacksmiths were not discriminated against in Bauchi, they could marry from every strata of the society. To this end, Saraki married Yakubu's daughter, Khadija. He was also among the senior officials of the state. Abubakar Saddiq and his deputy constructed the Bauchi gates.⁵

The traditional craft of blacksmithing in Bauchi was basically hereditary, with a son inheriting the occupation from his father, although, the profession was open to newcomers, or those who were not blacksmiths, as children from non-smith background could take up as apprentices under a particular Blacksmith. It should be noted that the population of non-blacksmiths who joined the trade were insignificant in number. The industry was dominated by people from different places such as Borno, Gobir, Zamfara, Katsina, Sokoto, Kano, Nupe and Takai.⁶

The blacksmithing industry in Bauchi town has produced tools and implements needed for domestic, agricultural and military use. The industry produced household tools and kitchen utensils for the palace and the general populace. The blacksmiths also provided medical care for those who suffered from burns. It has sufficiently continued to cater for the needs of the society. The industry was responsible for the manufacture of all the gates of Bauchi town, including the prison and palace

²Aliyu. W. (1982), *The Development Of Bauchi Town*, (Kano: Bayero University) p.59

³Government of Bauchi State, (1982), *This Is Bauchi, In The Series "Periscoping Of Our Major Towns"*. (Bauchi: government printer) p.1

⁴A. Jala, (1987/88), "Nigeria's Traditional Technologies in the Modern World" pp.168-169.

⁵Interview, Rabi Muhammad, Makera ward, 28th June, 2014

⁶Interview, Abdullahi Abba, Unguwar Dutse, 25th June, 2014



gates. They were also charged with repairs and maintenance of the gates. The *Saraki*, leader of blacksmiths organised the production of weapons, chainmails and war implements for the defence of the emirate. He also fought alongside the Emir and other officials like *Ubandoma* and *Hardo*. He had fought about 22 wars out of the 25 wars Yakubu fought.⁷

The blacksmiths of Bauchi procured their raw material, iron ore from other areas through long-distance traders and also locally through the mining of iron ore (*tama*) which was smelted in an open hearth constructed of mud. This was followed by smithing which is done through firing by consistent lowering and raising of bellow made of goat skin. The iron ore was beaten continuously until the impurities were considerably reduced, and used for making implements.⁸

The blacksmithing industry continued to flourish until towards the end of the 19th century. The industry was faced with the challenge of a shortage of raw materials due to a decrease in smelting activities which resulted from continued exploitation of readily accessible iron ore deposits over the centuries and deforestation caused by cutting hardwood (*kirya* tree) used for making charcoal. The climatical change that started from the Iron Age witnessed the set in of a drier phase and gradual desertification and irregular drop in rainfall over the centuries affected the natural growth and replacement of the exploited forest species leading to the loss of soil fertility and erosion.⁹

On the eve of the British conquest, iron smelting sites were confined to few places where the primary raw materials such as workable iron ore deposits, hardwood for charcoal and enough water supplies for dry season smelting and clay for building furnaces were relatively close. The last places where a concentration of local ironworking industry was found include areas around Azare, old Missau and Dambam emirates.¹⁰

The Blacksmithing Industry of Bauchi Town in the Colonial Era

On 16th February 1902, Bauchi was conquered without a serious fight. The army of occupation was stationed outside the city wall, (at the present site of the police headquarters) following the establishment of British rule, Bauchi Town became the administrative headquarters of the province. In less than ten years, the whole areas under the Sokoto Caliphate were brought under British control.¹¹ The establishment of colonial rule had damaging impacts on the indigenous industries, most especially the blacksmithing industry. The colonial authority banned the production of weapons which made blacksmiths lose a very important source of income. Though the effect of such a ban was minimal, as those that engaged in weapon production were not many, it deprived such blacksmiths of their income and forced them to switch to other crafts.¹²

There was the issue of restriction of indigenous access to mining outside areas held under mining leases in the first two decades of colonial rule. Local smelters were also faced with competition from

⁷Interview, Awwal Tahir, unguwar Tura, 17th Dec, 2015

⁸G. Ibrahim, (1984), Bauchi Town 1809-1975: A Socio-Economic History, (Maiduguri: University of Maiduguri) p6

⁹P.A.Rogers() Hausa Blacksmiths and the Great Train Robbery: Iron, Theft and the Moral Economy of Technological Change in Northern Nigeria, 1910-1935. University of Wisconsin-Madison. P7

¹⁰P.A.Rogers() Hausa Blacksmiths and the Great Train Robbery...p6

¹¹Interview, Abdullahi Ladan, Yakubu Wanka street, 12th Dec, 2015

¹²Interview, Abdullahi Galadima, Yakubu Wanka street, 19th Dec, 2015



European sources of iron. This restriction and commercial constraints reduced the prevalence of iron smelting in many areas¹³. Also, the blacksmiths were made to pay taxes separately from the general tax. It was not until 1908, that blacksmith tax was added to the general taxation in Bauchi.¹⁴ With the establishment of the colonial administration, the maintenance of the emir's palace gate, and the nearby prison gates which previously were under the jurisdiction of *Sarki* and his officials were transferred to the established technical department of the Native Authority. The colonial rule rendered the blacksmiths especially *Sarki* and his group useless by introducing new or alien technical services to take over their work. The colonial rule also abolished the voluntary work (*aikin gayya*) that blacksmiths carried out on *Saraki's* farm, the products from the farm were often given to those smiths who were in need.¹⁵

The opening of the railway line from Lagos to Kano in 1912, which was followed by the Bauchi light rail way in 1915, the extension of the Port Harcourt section in 1926, and in 1929, the Zaria-Kauran Namoda line ushered in an era of unprecedented growth and prosperity. The railway also reduced the distance and time taken to reach other regions. It also made it easier for the migration of southerners to Bauchi and other parts of the north.¹⁶ In the 1920s, the first set of Igbo arrived in Bauchi in search of government jobs. They settled in the western part of the city wall, between Wunti, Mallam Goje and Bakin Kura, and the place became known as Igbo quarters. Later arrivals like the Yoruba, Igala and Urhobo also settled in the Igbo quarters.¹⁷ The railway also facilitated the diffusion of scrap metal into local markets, leading to its eventual displacement of the local iron as the basic raw material of the blacksmiths. The penetration of scrap metal came at a time when there was a shortage of raw materials (such as iron ore deposits, hardwood, water and clay) for smelting activities. It was in this declining condition that European metal provided alternative raw material to the smiths. This displacement of the local iron and the associated decline in demand for smelted iron forced many smelters to abandon the trade and switch to farming or some form of unskilled labour. Some smelters from Bauchi Province joined the labour work on the Plateau tin fields. Some of the smelters that continued to smelt especially in northern Bauchi moved to remote locations, beyond the newly established roads and railway. There was an increase in the number of people involved in the marketing of scrap metal. The blacksmiths of Bauchi sent some of their members to Kano, Lokoja and surrounding areas to get scrap metals for use in the industry.¹⁸

The railway also brought with it petty crimes in the form of theft of railway sleepers and keys which were sold to blacksmiths. This theft of railway sleepers, keys and tracks created a lot of problems for the blacksmiths, especially those located near the railway lines. They were kept under constant surveillance by the Native Authority and the railway police. Many times their furnaces were ransacked. In October 1921, an African employee of the Bauchi Light railway was arrested and convicted for attempting to sell a large number of sleeper keys to a local blacksmith which suggested

¹³P.A.Rogers() Hausa Blacksmiths and the Great Train Robbery....p15

¹⁴NAK961 Bauchi Province Annual Report 1935. P27

¹⁵Interview, Abdullahi Abba, Unguwar Dutse, 15th Dec, 2015

¹⁶S.T. Yusuf (2011), Incidence of theft of railway metals in colonial Northern Nigeria.p5

¹⁷G. Ibrahim, (1984), Bauchi Town 1809-1975: --p83

¹⁸.A.Rogers() Hausa Blacksmiths and the Great Train Robbery...p34



that concerted efforts were at play in the possible supply of external markets.¹⁹ There was also the case of theft of iron pipe which was forwarded by Mr. Knott involving Mamman Daya, a mine worker, who stole iron pipe from the mine camp and sold it to Umaru Makeri, a blacksmith from Mana village. After investigation, both Mamman and Umaru were found guilty by Alkali Ibrahim in Bauchi and were sentenced to six months imprisonment.²⁰

The introduction of European metal wares into the local market challenged the monopoly enjoyed by the blacksmiths as the sole producers of tools and implements used for domestic and occupational works. The introduction of European metal wares which were more refined changed the test of the people. Items such as bolts, headpans, hinges, shovels, spades, domestic utensils, local lamps and work tools such as knives, scissors, axes, matchets, padlocks, hammers, chisels and files etc were all brought to the local market. This forced many blacksmiths to abandon the craft of blacksmithing and move into other sectors.²¹

The economic meltdown of the 1930s brought hardship both for the colonial government and the colonized. There was a shortage of cash in the hands of the colonized, and the colonial government continued with the taxation imposed on the people without taking into consideration the economic depression of the time. There was a reduction in mining activities, this forced craftsmen and other local taxpayers to move too far afield areas to market their products and in search of better earnings. This resulted in partial disorganization of family life due to the prolonged absence of the householder.²² There was also a sudden shortage of foreign hardware due to the economic meltdown. Some blacksmiths used the opportunity of this shortage to their advantage, using their knowledge and experience to fabricate such tools and implements with local tools, thus, providing substitutes for foreign wares. This led to the emergence of a new branch of the industry called *Yan Adaka/Tikka*. Many blacksmiths switched to this branch of the industry and were left with the challenge of fabricating such products in order to meet the continued changing needs of society. The number of traditional blacksmiths reduced drastically and were found in more remote areas of the town. This was evident in the Makera branch of the industry. They predominated the Makera branch of blacksmiths and produced items such as boxes, buckets, pots, knives etc using light metal.²³

Conclusion

The blacksmithing industry in Bauchi town, like in other parts of the northern region experienced some challenges due to colonialism. The introduction of scrap metals in the form of metal railway sleepers, railway keys and iron plating from broken-up river boats resulted in the decline of smelting activities and less demand for iron ore as raw material for blacksmithing. This led to a reduction in the number of people engaged in smelting, and also the displacement of many that continued to smelt. Some moved closer to Azare in response to new commercial challenges, especially around the Gadau district north of Azare. This displacement intensified especially in the late 1930s to more

¹⁹Interview with Baba Ali, Muda Lawan, 18thDec, 2014

²⁰P.A.Rogers() Hausa Blacksmiths and the Great Train Robbery...pp21-22

²¹NAK467/vol.III Complaints from Minefields of Mining Material Stealing

²²Interview with Abdullahi Abba, Unguwar Dutse, 15th December, 2014

²³NAK728/1934 General Tax and Jangali 1935-1936 Correspondance Recollection



remote locations where there was a favourable market for their products. The introduction of European manufactured goods into the local market challenged the demand for locally made goods since they were more refined and beautified, but their durability was less than that of the locally made. It was due to the high quality of the locally manufactured implements especially agricultural implements that the blacksmithing industry was able to compete with some of the foreign goods that were introduced and continued to survive beyond the colonial era.

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