



---

## **DALA HILL: OVERVIEW OF ITS IMPACT ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF KANO EMIRATE**

**IFEOLUWA O. FALOLA**

*Department of History, Bayero University Kano*

---

### **Abstract**

*Dala Hill is of paramount significance to history of Kano and Northern Nigeria. It is not just a mere historical site or an antique but, specifically occupies a strategic position in foundation in the root of the origin of the people of Kano emirate which is now modern day Kano state. Gaya, a small village about 60 kilometers from present Kano seemed to have played an important role in the establishment of Kano after migration to the place now called Kano. Data was collected using written sources through library research. This paper examines the socio-economic impact of the Dala Hill on the development of Kano emirate through socio-economic activities such as migration, commerce, smelting of iron ore smelting, recreation and tourism, mining, agriculture, religious festivals.*

---

**Keywords:** *Dala Hill, Kano, commerce, migration, agriculture, recreation, tourism, iron-ore smelting, festival*

---

### **Introduction**

Dala Hill is a site of great historical significance. It is the first settlement in Kano City. It formed the nucleus for the peopling of Kano City and it was the foundation of its economic and political development (Kano Annals, 1988). At the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Kano was

originally known as Dala, so named after the hill. There is no gainsaying the fact that Dala Hill is of immense historical significance as it was where the people of Kano settled. The Hill was the epitome of pre-Islamic traditional and cultural practices that characterized the centuries before the advent of Islam to Kano in the 15<sup>th</sup> century (The Nation, 2014).

The Hill is an archeological site of an ancient settlement dating back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. It is the source of the evolution of Kano city and a vital reference point in the development of Hausa Kingdoms. Societies and cultures which greatly influenced the early indigenous civilisations in the savannah zone of the West African sub-region (Broadus, N:D). The Hill plays an important role in the early development of economic activities, trade and exchanges between various groups of people including those from beyond the Kano city to the hinterland.

The first people to establish Kano community were iron smelters from *Gaya*, now the headquarters of *Gaya* Local Government Area in the present Kano State, around 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century. These people were in search of iron ore (*tama*) which they used to manufacture farm implements, and they found it in large quantity at the laterite cap of the Dala hill. The name of the leader of these people was Kano from whom the area got its name (Kano State History and Culture Bureau, N:D).

The Hill serves as a foundation of one of the most resilient cities in African history and a testimony of the technological excellence of the classical past which could be used to improve and develop contemporary society. This residual hill is located at the heart of the old city of Kano. It was the centre of spirituality, power and authority of the original settlers of Kano. This hill offered maximum security to early people who were terrorised by human and animal foes. Dala and its environs were the chief source of mineral iron, which was used in iron works. Other sister hills that are believed to have hosted early Kano settlers along with Dala include Goron Dutse that is about two kilometres from Dala Hill. Others are Magwan located at Nassarawa and Panisau (Adamu, 2010).

### **Origin, Migration and Early Settlement**

Kano city has a continuous history of over 1,500 years. Though it is an ancient city, it is not the oldest in Kano region. For example, historical evidence indicates that communities existed in the Challawa Area by 2,600 B.C. in Kazaure, Wawan Rafi C. 2,400 B.C. and Gaya which oral tradition was a source of the earliest migration into Kano. There were other settlements at Fanisau, Santolo and Fangwai that also predate Dala (Kano State History and Culture Bureau, N:D).

Archeological evidences have placed the Santolo-Fangwai hill systems (as centre) of the late Stone Age settlement within the Challawa Bend, as occupying the only major rock sites in the area. While the Kano Chronicle states that “Dala an unknown race came and built houses on Dala hill in the first millennium (999 AD), And that his sons spread to other hills: Gunzago built a house at the foot of Goron Dutse one mile to the west; Jandamisa or Rumu at magwan three miles east: Jigirya (present Yankaba), four miles further east: Gambarjado lived at Fanisau five miles north: and Hambaro at Tanagar – a rock cluster of thirteen miles east. By extension the authority of the spirit of Dala Hill and the Jankara groove expanded over a large area including the countries of “*Gazargawa, Zadawa, Fangon-Zaura, Dudunzawu, Shiriya, Sheme, Gande, Gija* and *Tokawara* (Bello Gambo, 2014).

Gaya, a small village about 60 kilometres from present Kano seemed to have played an important role in the establishment of Kano. In the first instance it would appear that Gaya served as an important terminus of a migratory corridor through which there was an influx of migrating peoples especially from Eastern Sudan, the Maghrib and Middle East. These included a large segment of Eastern Sudanic elements running away from the wars of the region (Hogben, Greene, 1966). The earliest inhabitants of Kano, it is said, were the descendants of a Gaya blacksmith named Kano who had come to the Dala Hill in search of Iron stone. To this day, there are people in Kano, generally blacksmiths who call themselves Abagayawa and are supposed to be the descendants of the original inhabitant (The Nation, 2014).

Gaya seemed to provide Kano with a name; in the person of a group of people who came to Kano from the village in search of iron-ore (*tama*) since 7<sup>th</sup> century which they used for manufacturing farming implements. They continued their search till they reached Dala hill in present day Kano where they found the iron-ore they needed and returned to Gaya (The Nation, 2014).

Subsequently, whenever the need for iron-ore arose they would go to Dala to obtain it until they finally decided to migrate and settled there permanently. People from other places were attracted by these blacksmiths, and this led to other settlement patterns. It would appear that this community mainly produced hunting implements for the more warrior settlers who constituted a hunting group. From this humble beginning, a smallish cottage industry seemed to have been established with users obtaining products and services based on their specifications and the manufacturers busily yielding to the demands. Since all the migrants came along with their own skills in other areas of craftsmanship, this resulted in new industries such as weaving, dying, tanning and others being established (Tanko, Momale, 2014).

### **Physical/Geographical Features**

Kano is famous as the commercial nerve centre of the North. It also has some features excellent for tourism. Among these is the Dala Hill which stands about 518 metres above sea level and covers a land mass of 289,892 metres. On the peak of the hill is a flat surface and is surrounded by rocky soil which protects the landscape from harsh weather conditions. One gets to the peak of the hill through ascending stall way which was constructed by guides to aid tourists (The Nation, 2014).

Ditches and other features of early settlements like potsherds, iron smelting slags, burial grounds and dye pits are some of the prominent characteristics of the hill's base. Situated in the heart of Kano City, Dala Hill served as a viewing point for ancient Kano warriors who were always mindful of invading enemies. In the 7th Century, Dala Hill was a hunting site and gathering point for the iron-smelting community (The Nation, 2014). There are also lots of green vegetations on the hill i.e. at the base and also at the side which signifies that it

served agricultural purposes as some of the earliest settlers, engaged in farming activities as well as rearing of livestock. The presence of trees served as natural shelter for its inhabitants.

### **Economic indicators**

Historically, the second migrants from Gaya were hunters who later turned to farming because they discovered that Kano had a fertile land around the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, they introduced farming skills, leading to production of surplus food. That coincided with outbreak of famine elsewhere in West Africa. This situation attracted and induced migration of people from famine stricken areas of West African sub-region (Kebbi, Katsina) to Kano. This led to the establishment of a new agricultural community, Madatai community. The Dala and Madatai communities existed side-by-side in the early Kano, consisting of amalgamation of hunters, blacksmiths and other artisans, traders, worshippers, and farmers. The urbanization experienced in this period led to the development of infrastructure (politically, economically and educationally) (Barau, 2010).

According to a lecturer of History at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Dr. Sule Bello, Dala Hill, in those days, used to be attractive to various people for various reasons. Some people came to settle there in order to mine iron ore. Due to the presence of iron ore and the security it provided, craftsmen were fascinated about it. In the circumstance, therefore, the Dala community developed into a haven for mining, smelting and iron works. The miners then combine their businesses with local trade and these boosted economic activities within the community. Owing to this, Dala Hill became an attraction to many people from various parts of the world that migrated to and settled in Kano (The Nation, 2014).

Gradually, Dala Hill became a settlement, market place and an industrial centre. The area became an industrial community as the number of iron ore miners increased. Some of them were mining iron ore, some were mining slat, while some were engaged in production of various kind of craft wood, leather, weaving, and some engaged in agricultural production. The important thing about Kano is its cosmopolitan nature. The inhabitants comprise people from

various professions who engaged in industrial and commercial activities (Kano State History and Public Bureau, N:D). These activities also led to the establishment of ancient commercial and social centres:

### **Kurmi Market**

Kurmi market is an ancient market, where locally made goods and ancient technology are dominant products. The market is located in the old city and it is a centre of tourist attraction. Honey, butter, leather work, embroidery and handicraft materials are also sold in the market. Kurmi market is located at the centre of the city. It has been involved in long distance trade with supra and sub-saharan countries since fifteenth century. It was and is still a rendezvous of merchants from different cultural affiliations. Though modern shops have dominated this mazy market, traditional stalls can still be seen, and down-to-earth trading based on bargaining is still in full operation. One can buy handicrafts like metal leather works, pottery textiles, and other beautiful articles. A road encircles the market, and one can access it from the emir's palace, kofar wambai gate, mazugal city gate through Kori and Goron Dutse hill and the city hospital (Barau, 2010).

Dala Hill was a major source of iron ore in Kano region. Due to the presence of iron ore and the security it provided, skilled craftsmen were attracted to it. Subsequently a community which was well versed in the technique of mining, smelting, and iron working grew and developed. This technical know-how and the waves of migrations of people from different places into Kano formed the basis of its further economic and social development. Other important professions that were developing by this time were agriculture, leather works, building construction, weaving and various types of chemical processing such as dyeing (Kano State History and Public Bureau, N:D). The **Dala hill** is indeed the pride of the Dala people and the whole of Kano. Its historical, social and economical importance cannot be overlooked. The hill along with the **groundnut pyramids** and **dyeing pits** is a major tourist attraction in Kano city. It is preserved and protected under the Kano History and Culture Bureau (Oldnaija, 2017).

### **Kano Groundnut Pyramid**

Groundnut pyramids were pyramid like structures made from groundnut sacks. The pyramids were built in Northern Nigeria in cities such as Kano, where groundnut production was a key part of the economy. Groundnut pyramids were the invention of Alhassan Dantata (1877-1955), a prominent nut trader. Dantata came to Kano in 1919 and within five years was one of the most successful businessmen in Kano, supplying the Royal Niger Company (RNC) with most of their groundnuts. Dantata's company kept their groundnuts at a facility in Kofar Nassarawa and they stacked the bags in shape of a pyramid before they were shipped. The pyramids were built all across Northern Nigeria in places like Kofar Mazugal, Brigade, Bebeji, Malam Madori and Dawakin Kudu (First Post Nigeria, N:D).

### **Embroidery**

Hausa/Fulani are known all over the world for their excellent costumes. Men's wears are decorated with beautiful embroideries, which are stitched upon the neck openings, hand, and fronts of shirts, overcoats (babar riga) and waist coats (*falmaram*). For instance, there is what is called *asake*, *kwado da limzami*, *wundiya*, *sace*, *kufta* etc. caps are diverse too, and they are of variant designs. They include *Zanna Bukar*, *Damanga* etc. These are found in diverse colours. Visitors to Kano can see many fashions worn by people on the streets. They would be glad to behold how experts brandish and manipulated thread and needle to make the work. At Yalwa/Kul-Kul ward close to Dala hill this work is abundant. In fact, the area is the best place where this work is found in the ancient city. Embroidery is also a specialisation of people of Jajira village in Ungogo local government area. In fact, this village is the outstanding base of embroiderers. Wudil is also a good source of embroidery (Barau, 2007).

### **Tourism**

The Dala hill serves as a centre of attraction for both local and international tourist due to its unique size, natural environment and built steps which aid climbing. Right from the pre-colonial period, European explorers such as

Clapperton in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century gave a remarkable account of the attention created in the minds and hearts of the traders and merchants who came from Europe, North America and parts of West Africa to trade with the people of Kano. Also, as the bedrock and foundation of the emergence of Kano as a city state, it occupied a special position in the economic activities that took place in sub-saharan Africa. Of all the city states to be reckoned with, Kano featured prominently as a result of the historical antecedents of the great Dala hill.

Leisure parks and resorts form part and parcel of the tourism assets of Kano State. These parks meet tourists' floating desire for green sites, wildlife, water, and past times. Some of the tourist sites and attractions in Kano include among others; Kano foundation park, Sani Abacha Youth Centre Amusement Park, Horse racing done by youths and adults at evenings of weekends at the Kano race course located at Nassarawa GRA, Kano Polo Club, Gidan Dan Hausa, Gidan Makama. Others include Dansoshiya forest reserve, Rurum tourist resort and the popular Falgore game reserve on the Kano-Jos expressway. There is also the international horse racing competition which attracts competitors and spectators from other African and European countries. This horse racing is partly organised by the Kano Emirate Council. All of these activities generate revenue for the people of Kano (Barau, 2007).

The first pointer to the socio-economic significance of the Hill is that early migration led to the conglomeration of people of different ethnic groups and backgrounds which in most cases helped to strengthen cross-cultural ties. Since the early settlers consistent of a mixture of groups of northern extraction, the traditional religious ceremonies of worship of gods of Barbushe who in turn mandated other groups to pay homage to the diety.

The Hill historically hosts religious and social activities and festivities including the Eid-El-Maulud celebrations:

This festivity marks the commemoration of the birth of the holy prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It comes annually on the Twelfth Day of the third lunar month of *Rabiul- Auwal*. On the eve of the day, the night atmosphere of Kano is filled with voices of chanting songs and praises for the beloved prophet. Seven days after is marked as naming ceremony day called '*Takutaha*'. On the



eve of the day, children slaughter chicken and fowls and in some places animals are killed. On the *Takutaha* day, Kano children take their picnic on top of Dala-hill from morning till evening (Barau, 2007).

### **Madabo Seminary**

Madabo seminary is located between Dala hill and the famous Kurmi market. Malians formed it in the fourteenth century, and it was and probably is still one of the wellhead centres of Islamic and oriental studies like astrology, Arab literature and linguistics, Quranology, prophetic traditions etc. The scholars up to now are consulted by the Kano palace on various issues through the Senior Scholar (*Babban Malami*). This seminary is attached to a mosque, which has been modernised. Some of the graduates of this institution taught at the famous ancient University of Timbuktu in Mali. Renowned scholars from Muslim countries like Egypt, Morocco, Libya etc had visited this seminary centuries ago (Barau, 2007).

### **Historical Classification based on Family Head and Occupation**

Each family had their heads, and their names and occupation are as follows:

*Gijigi*: Blacksmith for farm implements and other home needs He was said to be the ancestral father of Abagayawa blacksmiths. They were said to be the earliest inhabitants of Kano and came to Dala Hill in search of iron stone.

*Dan-buntinya* is the liaison officer between the community and their neighbors (*kakan kurnawa*)

*Jandodo*: Drummers and singers for social and religious ceremonies. Their musical instruments included uniquely named *kuru*, *gunduwa* and *tsintsima*.

*Magaji*: He is in charge of iron smelting from tin ore known in Kano as *tama*. He was also the ancestral father of *Maguzawa* clans.

*Asane*: He is in charge of fish industry, singing and public announcement (*Dan muabba*)

*Bakan yaki*: He is in charge of archery and hunting.

*Awar*: He heads the salt making industry (*gishiri awar*) and control of river means of communication (*Pito*).

As the idea of having sarki as a political leader was not known, the chief priest Mazauda became the natural leader of the community- who was surplanted by the dala priesthood which Dala established on his arrival in the area. In addition to the Dala community, there were other family groupings that lived at some small distance from Dala but had social and economic relationships with each other. These family groupings lived under various leaderships including:

*Damburu* : whose settlement was at Jigirya, the present day Yan-kaba district.

*Jan-Damisa or Rumu*: who lived on Dutsin Magwan in Nassarawa district near the present Nassarawa Emir's palace (He was the leader of Rumawa).

*Hambarau*: who occupied Tangar hills in the present day Dawakin Kudu district.

*Nissau*: who lived in Panisau rock, now Ungogo district (Adamu, 1999).

When these settlements grew in number and territorial expansion, the *chronicle* gave each region a name for simple identity these regions were known as *Gazargawa, Sheme, Zadawa, Funkwi, Sheriya, Gaji, Rauna, Takowa, and Dundunzuru*. Thus Dala established a quasi-government which was based on religious fellowship, rather than feudalism, which enjoyed the total submission of all the associations within what was then known as Kano (Adamu, 1999).

## Conclusion

The Dala Hill served as the commercial nerve centre of commercial activities in Kano in early times. Today Dala serves as one of the most significant land marks in the history of Kano and would continue to be a valuable monument for the reconstruction of the history of Kano. Dala is an old settlement area in Kano which settlers' took refuge for defensive purposes. The Kano Chronicle maintains that before the foundation of the ancient city of Dala Hill, there were specialised occupation such as blacksmithing, hunting, brewing, smelting, archers and producers of salt. A natural industrial centre with the iron stone of Dala hill, its development was assured through its situation in the heart of some of the most fertile agricultural land. Over the centuries it has attracted and maintains a large and diverse population by its sheer wealth. The migration of Gijimasu from Sheme with his host to Dala hill, according to tradition, added

just that element to the Dala community necessary for its eventual development. It has also attracted centres of historical significance, one of which is the kurmi market. The **hill** is indeed the pride of the Dala people and the whole of Kano. Its historical, social and economical importance cannot be overlooked. The hill along with the **groundnut pyramids** and **dyeing pits** is a major tourist attraction in Kano city.

## References

- Adamu A.U. & Ado-Kurawa I. (2010), Perspectives on Kano, A Jama'ar Inuwa Kano, Tellettes Consulting Coy Ltd.
- Adamu M.U (1999), Confluences and Influences; The Emergence of Kano as a City-State, Manuwwar Books Foundation, Kano.
- Barau A.S. (2007) The Great Attractions of Kano, Research and Documentation Directorate, Government House Kano.
- Bello Gambo (2014), "Origin and Growth of Urban Kano" in Tanko A.I, Momale S.B. (ed), *Kano: Environment, Society and Development*, London: Adonis & Abbey Publishers.
- Broadus Helen, My Visit to Northern Nigeria, N;D.
- Excerpts from, "A General Study of Dala and Goron Dutse" hills (N:D), As archeological sites.
- First Post Nigeria, History: The Groundnut Pyramids of Kano, <https://firstpost.ng/groundnut-pyramids-kano/>
- Hogben S.D. & Kirk Greene A.H.M. (1966), The Emirate of Northern Nigeria: A Preliminary Survey of their Historical Traditions, Oxford University Press, London.
- Kano Annals (1988), A record of Events and Developments in Kano State for 1988, Kano State History and Culture Bureau.
- Kano State History and Public Bureau (N:D), Dala Historical Site: The Foundation of Kano City (C. 635 A.D.), Kallitho Press & Publication.
- Oldnaija: Home of Nigerian History and Cultures, The Legends, Mysteries and History of Dala Hill, the Pride of Kano, <https://oldnaija.com/2017/08/02/the-legend-mysteries-and-history-of-dala-hill-the-pride-of-kano/>
- The Nation (2014), Reviving Dala Hill of Kano, [www.nationonlineng.net/reviving-dala-hill-of-kano/](http://www.nationonlineng.net/reviving-dala-hill-of-kano/)