

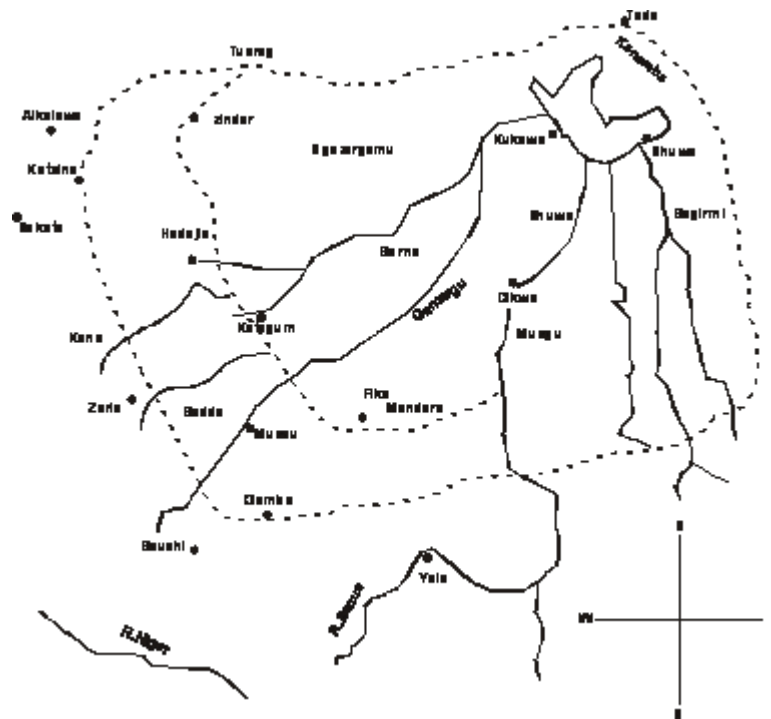
CHAPTER 2

BORNO UNDER THE SHEHUS

Objectives

After studying this chapter, students should be able to:

- describe certain socio-political developments in Borno at the beginning of the 19th century;
- discuss the cause of Fulani rebellion in Borno in the 19th century;
- examine the circumstances that led to the emergency of the Al-kanemi and his achievements;
- examine Shehu Umar's region and factors responsible for the collapse of Borno empire under the Shehus.



A sketch map showing Borno and its neighbours in the 19th century

Introduction

Borno Empire in the 19th century faced a lot of challenges which weakened the empire and eventually led to the glorious end of the Saifawa dynasty – the longest reigning dynasty in Western Sudan. Borno's war of expansion seriously weakened her economic base, revolts of the Mandara tribes and the Fulani uprisings which forced Mai Ahmed – the reigning mai of Borno into exile. Thus, the

inability of the Maidom to meet up with teething social, economic, political problems led to the seizure of political power by a Kenumbu scholar – Mohammed – Al – Amin – Al – Kanemi. With the passage of time, the Shehu dynasty faced a lot of challenges which led to its subsequently collapse.

2.1 Socio-Political Development in Borno at the Beginning of the 19th Century

The ruler of Borno Empire at the beginning of the nineteenth century was Mai Ahmed who ruled between 1793 and 1810. Mai Ahmed like his predecessors devoted a lot of time to religious rituals at the expense of administrative matters. This trend weakened the monarchy or maidom and gave rise to powerful courtiers like Kaigama who engaged in corrupt and oppressive practices. The reign of Mai Ahmed also witnessed serious decline of the Borno army. Lack of strong military force made vassal states in North Eastern parts of Hausaland, Baghirmi and Mandara to revolt against the central government.

The Fulani rebellion in Borno was caused by Borno's military alliance with many Habe rulers of Kano, Kastina and Daura, etc. For instance, in 1805, Mai Ahmed sent to military expedition to assist the embattled kingdom of Kano. This singular act made the Fulani Jihadists to attack and seize different territories in Western Borno such as Katagum, Hadeja and Gas regemo. The argument of the Fulani Mujahaddun (Jihadist) was that any Muslim who supports an infidel is equally an infidel.

2.2 Causes of Fulani Rebellion in Borno in the 19th Century

The years that preceded the outbreak of the Jihad in Borno were characterized by unhealthy social, economic, political and religious problems which prompted Borno Fulani minorities to declare a Jihad in Kanem – Borno. This Jihad eventually brought about the fatal end of the Saifawa dynasty. Certain factors that precipitated the Fulani rebellion are carefully analyzed below:

- (i) **Political factor:** At the onset of the 19th century, majority of Borno mais isolated themselves from the Borno populace and indulged more in religious rituals. These insensitivity to governance paved the way for the emergence of powerful palace officials who were mainly praise singers who engaged in corrupt and oppressive practices against Borno people.
- (ii) **Military factor:** The inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the mais (i.e. Borno Kings) affected the invincibility of the Borno Army. The Borno became weakened, paving the way for general insecurity and revolt of vassal states like Baghimi and Mandara. There were constant cases of livestock raids due the fact that the mai abdicated issues about defence and general security to provincial and local administrators who lacked military capabilities to enforce law and order throughout the empire.
- (iii) **Religious factor:** The drawn of the nineteenth century witnessed series of complaints by pious members of the Ulama class who accused both the Maidom, powerful countries/palace officials and local chiefs of indulging in un-Islamic practices such as paganism and fetishism.

The fact that many Borno Muslims practised religious syncretism whereby they mixed Islamic doctrines with paganism justified the jihad.

- (iv) **Social factor:** The jihad was launched mainly in the South, South – East and Western parts of Borno due to severe cases of exploitation of the peasantry in these areas by local rulers who were always in the habit of confiscating the livestock of Fulani Nomads. There were also rampant cases of corruption in high and low places. Judicial corruption also featured prominently. The Islamic judge (Alkali) openly took bribes and were said to have confiscated the property of orphans. The Borno Empire witnessed serious cases of perversion of justice which favoured the wealthy or aristocratic class.

Another disturbing social problem was the issue of slave trade within and outside Borno. Borno mais enslaved and sold indigenous Borno people as well as citizens of vassal states. The quest of slaves and booties brought untold hardships on the Borno people as well as social insecurity. Vassal states like Mandara, Gamergu and Marghi that suffered as a result of constant slave raids were encouraged by the Fulani, the Shuwa Arabs to maintain hostile relations with the ruler of Ngarzargamu.

The Fulani jihadists were also angered by the marginalization of non-kanuri groups in the offer of political appointments as many Fulani Islamic scholars were not appointed into lucrative positions.

- (v) **Natural Disasters:** The effect of famine that ravaged the Borno empire during the 19th century made life very intolerable for the Kanuri people. The devastating effects of natural disasters like famine were reported in the writings of pious Muslim Clerics like Abdal-Rahman Al Barnawi and Sheikh al-fallati who seriously frowned at the inability of affluent Mais and Court officials of this period to provide relief materials for victims of this natural disasters.
- (vi) **The Sokoto Jihad:** The military assistance which Borno rulers like Mai Ahmed gave to Habe rulers in Hausaland during the Uthman Dan Fodio's Jihad made Borno Fulanis to believe that Borno was a country of unbelievers. The Jihadists argued that Borno's military assistance to 'heathen' or 'infidel' states of Hausaland proved Borno as a heathen state that deserved instant Jihad.

In short, it was indeed Borno's military involvement in Hausaland that resulted in the immediate outbreak of the Jihad in Borno.

Conclusion

The Fulani rebellion in Borno could be attributed to tyrannical and oppressive leadership of the Mais. Equally the Second class citizenship status conferred on the Fulanis in spite of their great learnings and their membership of the privileged Ulama class who served in the king's court made the Fulani people to develop a sense of racial hatred against the Kanuri. In their search for social justice and fair

treatment from their Kanuri Landlords, the Fulbe class developed high sense of ethnic unity and solidarity called Pan-Fulanism. This spirit of Pan-Fulanism made Borno – Fulani stock to attach the Borno Empire of the proclamation of a Jihad in the 19th century.

2.3 The Outbreak of Fulani Jihad in Borno

Borno Fulanis launched the Jihad as soon as Borno sent military contingents to assist Habe rulers of Daura, Kano, Katsina and Gobir. The leader of the Jihad in Southern part of Borno up to Bauchi was Buta Nyaro. In the West, the leader of the Jihadists was Ibrahim Zaki who was assisted by Bi Abdur and Sambo. Both Bio Abdur and Sambo collected a flag from fodio and challenged the authority of the Galadima of Borno in the spirit of the Fatwa. As the Jihad wars progressed, Hadejia and Auyo fell to the superior forces of the Jihadists. In 1807, the Galadima of Borno was sacked from his provincial headquarters at Ngune.

In Southern Borno around Deya (in the present Gujba Local Government of Borno State) al – Bukhari and Goni Mukatar decisively defeated a local ruler called muhammed Saurima.

The third sector of military activities was in the South-Eastern part of Borno where Jihadists like Muhammad Wabi and Goni Muktar were in charge. Other menacing attack on Ngala by the Jihadists was so devastating that the ruler of Ngala requested Al-Kanemi to assume the leadership of a military formation that will repulse the attack of Muhammed Wabi. Al-Kanemi during an encounter with the Jihadists at the Ngala region defeated the Jihadists.

The crushing defeat which Mai Ahmad suffered in the lands of the Jihadists in the Western and Southern parts of Borno forced him to issue a decree which ordered the killing of all Fulani rebellion in Western Borno during which an arch-Fulani Jihadist – Ardo Lerhima was killed. Ahmad's military gains was quickly reversed when Bi Abdur inflicted heavy casualties on the Borno army.

In 1808, the leader of the Western Jihadists launched a heavy attack on Birni Ngarzagamu and nearly sacked the capital city before he retreated. Goni Muktar succeeded in driving Mai Ahmad out of Birni Ngarzagamu and consequently, occupied the Borno capital. Mai Ahmad fled to Eastern Borno and abdicated the throne of Maidom to his son Dunama. Dunama, after hearing of El-Kanemi's prowess and how he defeated the Jihadists at Ngala pleaded with this Kanembu scholar to help him recapture Birni Ngarzagamu from the Jihadists. El – Kanemi liberated Birni Ngarzagamu by defeating Goni Muktar.

In 1809, Ibrahim Zaki struck and recaptured Birni Ngarzagamu. Al-Kanemi regrouped his military force and Dunama to regain the capital city after beating the Jihadists into a retreat to the emirate of Katagum.

Al-Kanemi's military successes coupled with the Mai's continued reliance on his service made him to develop political ambition. His second liberation of Birni-Ngarzagamu earned him a fief

around the town of Ngurn where he later settled. Ngurno later became the political headquarters of Al-Kanemi.

In 1811, Mai Dunama was removed by some of his nobles and replaced by his uncle – Muhammed Ngileruma. Mai Muhammed Ngilenema passive dependence on the political wizardry of Al-Kanemi helped to launch El-Kanemi into the mainstream of Borno politics. Ngileruma built a new capital or Birnin Kafela in order to guard against constant Fulani incursions into Birni Ngarzargamu.

In 1813, Al-Kanemi consolidated his political ambition and desire by deposing Mai Ngilenima and re-instating Mai Dunama as the Mai. By this singular act, Al-Kanemi became a king maker in Borno as well as the most powerful man in Borno.

Conclusion: Mohammed Al-Amin-Al-Kanemi, a Kanembu scholar, rose into prominence in Borno political history as a result of his military process. As a warrior, he liberated both Ngala and Birni Ngarzagamu from the invading armies of the Fulani Jihadists. Al-Kanemi's adoption of dunde and rule tactics and shrewd diplomacy helped him seize political power in Borno.

2.4 The Ascendancy and Achievements of Mohammed Al-Amin-El-Kanemi

Al-Kanemi was a Kanembu Muslim cleric who had close connection with the Muslim world than Shehu Usman Dan Fodio. His father, Sheikh Nunga was a Fezzaine 'Faqeh' of Kanem origin while his mother's birthplace was Zuwillla, also in Fezzan.

Al-Kanemi made several pilgrimages to Medina and Egypt. Al Kanemi's popularity in Borno started in 1809 when he successfully recaptured Birni Ngarzargamu from the Fulani Jihadists with an invincible troop made up of Kanembu and Shuwa Arabs. He also repulsed the attempt made by Ibrahim Zaki to recapture Nigarzarmu in 1811.

As a scholar of great repute, he challenged the convert intentions of the Fulani Jihadist through scholarly correspondences and diplomacy. He wrote several letters to Mohammed Bello of the Sokoto caliphate where he wanted to know whether the essence of the Fulani Jihad in Borno was to purify Islam or to endanger (foster) Fulani imperialism.

Before his death in 1835, he made several golden achievements:

- (i) **Political achievements:** Al-Kanemi helped Mai Ahmad to crush Fulani rebellion on the Western shores of the Lake Chad and also recaptured Birni Ngarzargamu from the Jihadists. His ability to crush invading Fulani Jihadists in 1809 saved Borno Empire from falling into the political and religious influence of the Sokoto caliphate.

Al-Kanemi established a new capital of Borno at Kukawa in the present day, Maiduguri. He worked very hard to integrate various ethnic groups in the empire through his policy of cultural inter-marriage. Al-Kanemi used his position as the Shehu to bring minority ethnic groups like the Kanebie and Shuwa Arabs into the mainstream of Borno politics. He ensured peaceful existence with the Sokoto caliphate and this measure enabled him to carry out social economic and politicians in the empire.

Al-Kanemi used shrewd diplomacy to establish the Shehu dynasty in Borno which replaced the age-long Saifawa dynasty that expired in 1846. The Shehu dynasty which was named after its founder, Al-Kanemi has remained the ruling dynasty in Borno till date.

- (ii) **Military achievements:** As part of his military achievements, he raised an unwinnable army that protected the territorial boundaries of the Borno empire. During his military campaigns, he restored Borno's supremacy over Kanem and Bagirme. He also won back the former vassal states which were previously under the rule of the Jihadists except Gombe, Hadejia, Katagum and Missau.
- (iii) **Religious achievements:** Al-Kanemi's regime promoted extensive propagation of Islam in various parts of Borno, particularly, in the Western marchlands. He promoted orthodox Islam and discouraged the practice of religious syncretism by nominal Muslims.
- (iv) **Judicial achievements:** Al-Kanemi acted as the highest judge in the empire and by so doing. During this reign, he fused political judicial authorities. He reformed local courts and retained the court of appeal over which he presided.
- (v) **Economic achievements:** Al-Kanemi promoted activities and by so doing, contributed to the economic prosperity of Borno. He attracted foreign investments by ensuring adequate security of lives and properties. Al-Kanemi played host to foreigners like Hugh Clapperton and Major Datitiam.

Conclusion

El-Kanemi reforms made his empire to maintain a prosperous economy. As a pious Muslim, he encouraged orthodox Islam. Al-Kanemi's political ingenuity enabled him to put in peace the shehu dynasty which till date has remained the ruling dynasty in Borno in North Eastern Nigeria.

2.5 Borno under Shehu Umar (1835 – 1880)

After the death of Al-Kanemi in 1835, his son Umar, succeeded him as the shehu. Mai Dunama Lafiami was also succeeded by his brother, Mai Ibrahim who ruled between 1818 – 1846. Umar, a peace-loving shehu had an ambition to regain the Western marchlands which Borno lost to the Sokoto caliphate. To this end, he launched military attacks against Jemaa, Misau and Lere districts of Kalagun. However, during the reign of caliph Aliyu Baba (1842 – 59), the successor of Mohammed Bello, Sokoto and Kukawa achieved lasting peace over the administration of the Western marchlands.

Umar's reign was characterized by some internal problems:

- (a) **Revolts by members of the Saifawa royal family:** Umars regime witnessed different attempts made by members of the Saifawa ruling dynasty to overthrow the shehu dynasty. For instance, Mai Ibrahim who was a nominal monarch that ruled with Shehu Umar allied with the army of the sultan of Wadai to oust Umar when Umar's troops were on a military expedition to Zingir. The political rivalry amongst members of the Saifawa royal family and the shehu royal family was exploited by the Sultan Wadai, Muhammed Salih to invade the Borno Empire. Umar, reacted to this

situation by capturing Mai Ibrahim and as well, mobilized troops who fought against Wadai's incursion. As the Borno-Wadai war raged on, Umar's troops were defeated at the battle of Kusari while Umar's vizier Tirab was killed, Umar himself took refuge in the Western provinces from where he ordered for the execution of Mai Ibrahim.

The Wadai army that pillaged Borno installed a puppet government in Borno under the leadership of Ibrahim's son called Ali Dalatumi.

As the Bornoese army were trooping in from Zender military assaults, the sultan of Wadai's army quickly retreated after Umar handed down the sum of 10,000 (Maria Therea) dollars to the sultan of Wadai. When the sultan of Wadai's army retreated, Umar's troops fought with troops that were loyal to Ali Dalatumi. Ali Dalatumi's forces were defeated at the battle of mirage in Yobe region while Ali Dalatumi himself lost his life. The death of Ali Dalatumi marked the glorious end of the ancient Saifawa dynasty which reigned in Borno for over one thousand years.

(b) Dynastic struggles amongst members of the Shehu ruling dynasty: Umar's tenure as Shehu was challenged by his brother, 'Abdal al Rahman who disputed Umar's legitimacy to the throne. He was also unhappy with the unwieldy influence of Umar's vizier – Al-Hajj Bashir over the Shehu. These unsettled issues made Rahman to revolt against Umar in 1853. Rahman's rebellion led to the death of Bashir as well as the forcing of Umar into self exile at Dikira. In 1854, supporters of Umar staged a counter-coup and assassinated Rahman in order to restore Umar to power. Umar reigned as Shehu till his death in 1880.

2.6 The System of Government in Borno Empire during the Shehu Dynasty

Borno government under the Shehu's witnessed a centralized administrative structure. This centralized political structure was introduced as a result of the incorporation of many autonomous territories acquired through military expeditions. These territories include, Daya, Gawa, Dikwa, Marte, Ngala and Koloko states.

The Shehus who abandoned the title mai were semi-divine monarchs who had spiritual and temporal powers. The Shehu was assisted by a council – the 'Nokena' whose members consisted of the Maina, princes of royal blood, and Kokenawa, the 'new men'. The Kokenawa council included the heir-apparent, the sons and daughters of the shehu, great nobles, army commanders, slaves and eunuchs. The Kokenawa were divided into two grades, the Kambe-men of free birth, and the Kachella or Kazallahs eunuchs of servile origin. These eunuchs occupied important positions in the Shehus' courts. For instance, Shettima Abdul Karim was the defacho (rightful) master of Borno for nearly half a century.

The 'Kokenawa' performed various administrative functions and in turn, received lands and territories instead of salaries. Prominent among these officials was the Digma – a royal secretary in charge of foreign affairs. He was also in charge of administrative distinct. During the reign of Umar, the Digma's position was curtailed such that it assumed a nominal status. There was also the Fugoma – the executioner and the governor of the town of Ngurno, the Kagelma – the governor of Yo, was

also given the special duty of checkmating the military ambitions of the Tuaregs, the Galadinma who ruled the Western provinces was removed after the Fulani rebellion and his office was taken over by the Kachella – Abdullahi.

2.7 Factors Responsible for the Doctrine and Fall of Borno Empire Under Shehus

Borno Empire reached the peak of her economic prosperity and military might during the reign of Al-Kanemi. However, Borno Empire and her fortunes declined seriously towards the end of Umar's reign. Umar's death appeared to have increased the pace of decline until the empire fell first in 1893 to Rabeh Zubair and finally, to European colonizers in 1900. Several factors accounted for the eclipse (decline) of the Borno Empire under the Shehus.

a. Political factors

- (i) **Weakness of the central administration:** The central administration in Kukawa became weakened when Shehu Umar went into seclusion like the Mais that reigned before him, thereby abdicating (leaving) his responsibilities to weak and corrupt court officials. The weaknesses of the central administration made many vassal states like Zinder to stop paying tributes to Borno. The Galadinma who ruled the western territories of the empire took independent decisions and actions without consulting the centre administration at Kukawa.
 - (ii) **Leadership crises and its concomitant effect on Borno politics:** Leadership crises seriously weakened the Borno Empire. Shehu Umar who ruled the empire for a period of thirty-four years, was a weak ruler. Umar, while on the throne, allowed his imperial authority to be hijacked by his slave officials and courtiers. For instance, the greedy activities of Umars Wagiri-Al-Hajj Bashir caused Abdul-Rahman, his brother to plot a coup d'état against him in 1853. This coup d'état created serious disunity amongst members of the Shehudom and created room for coups and counter coups in the empire.
 - (iii) **Problems associated with successive weak leaders:** Shehu Umar's successors in the persons of Shehu Bukar (1881-1884), Ibrahim (1884-1885) and Hashim (1885-1895) were crop weak rulers who lacked the political will to keep the empire united and strong.
- ### b. Military factors:
- The unending political feud amongst members of the royal family weakened the Borno arm. For instance, provinces in the Western borderlands like Ngizim Manga, and Kerekere revolted against the Borno empire. Zinder took advantage of the military weakness to attack and absorb several towns in Borno Western provinces like Gumel and Munio. The allegiance of Baghirmi was also lost to Wadai.
- ### c. Economic factors:
- The loss of control of the southern end of the eastern Trans-Saharan trade route by Borno owing to Wadai's control of the Lak Chad region was an economic blow to Borno. Thus, the trans-Saharan trade routes which helped to sustain the Borno economy came under the control of the Sokoto caliphate and Wadai respectively
- ### d. Social factors:
- Borno under the Shehu's were plagued by myriad problems such as insecurity, corruption in high and low places neglect of the peasantry and slave riders. The failure of Al-

Kanemi and his successors to initiate sound economic and social policies like those of Caliph Mohammed Bello of the Sokoto caliphate made the Shehu's to depend on the meagre resources of the peasantry thereby causing abject poverty amongst the Borno people. For instance, Shehu Bukar who ruled in the mid 1880's introduced the 'Kumoreji' tax as a result of his desperate need of funds. The Kumoreji tax policy caused the removal of half of the wealth of the peasantry in grain, cattle and even, houses.

- e. **Environmental factors:** The Borno Empire's economy was adversely affected by series of droughts and famine which resulted in mass starvation and hunger.
- f. **External factors:** The growing power of Wadai was great threat to Borno's survival as an imperial power. Wadai after invading Borno expanded her territorial frontiers to Begirmi and Kanem. The loss of Bagirmi and Kanem after the economic fortunes of Borno.

As Borno's military strength waned, Rabeh Zubair in 1863 defeated Borno army at the battle of Ngala and consequently, imposed his leadership on the empire.

Finally, Borno collapsed in 1900 when Rabeh coincided with the scramble for and partition of African territories by European countries. The ancient Borno kingdom was eventually divided among the French, the British and the Germans. Currently, different tribal and social groups that make up the extensive Borno empire can be found in Niger Republic, Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria.

The British colonialists controlled the Borno territory in Nigeria and through indirect rule system of government, recognized the descendants of the Al-Kanemi dynasty and by this means, restored the power of governing Borno region on the Shehu dynasty.

Summary

- The Saifawa dynasty became very weak in the 19th century because its rulers like Mai Ahmad devoted much time to religious rituals, thereby abandoning the art of governance to powerful palace officials who engaged in corrupt oppressive policies.
- The Fulani rebellion or Jihad could be attributed to the oppressive leadership of the mass and racial dissemination perpetrated against the Fulbe class.
- Al-Kanemi became prominent in Borno history because he recaptured Ngala and Burni Ugarzargamu from the invading armies of the Fulani Jihadists.
- Al-Kanemi carried out social, economic and political reforms and was also responsible for the birth of Shehu ruling dynasty in Borno.
- Umar's tenure as Shehu was not as eventful as that of his father Al-Kanemi due series of revolts by members of the Saifawa royal family and dynastic struggles between him i.e. Umar and his brother, Abdal Rahman.
- Borno's system of government under the Shehu dynasty depicted a centralized administrative structure whereby the Shehu worked with councils like the 'Nokena' and 'Kokenawa'.

- Borno's myriad of social economy, political problems made Ren to conquered in 1893 by Rabeh Zubair who was later killed by French imperialist forces in 1900 sequel to the scramble for, and partition of African territories.

Revision Questions

Objectives

- One of the following Borno Mais who engaged in a military alliance with Habe rules of Kano, Katsina and Daura is _____.
 - Al-Kanemi
 - Idris Alooma
 - Ali Ghaji
 - Mai Ahmad
- The following reasons caused Fulani rebellion in Borno except:
 - oppressive administration of the Mais:
 - general insecurity caused by weakness of the Borno Army.
 - pactice of religious syncretism by Borno people.
 - Borno's military assistance to pagan states in Hausa land.
- Pan-Fulanism as a social concept means _____.
 - Fulanis in diaspora
 - development of high sense of ethnic unity and solidarity by the Fulani race
 - unity of Fulanis who rear cattle
 - Fulani people who oppose Borno rulers
- _____ led the Fulani Jihadists in the Southern part of Borno up to Bauchi.
 - Bi Abdur
 - Sambo
 - Ibrahim Zaki
 - Goni Muktari
- _____ liberated Ngala and Birni Ngarzargamu from the invading arms of the Fulani Jihadists.
 - Shehu Umar
 - Ibadahim Zaki
 - Al-Kanemi
 - Muhammed Ngileruna
- Al-Kanemi established a new capital of Borno at _____ in the present day Maiduguri.
 - Ngwne
 - Ngala
 - Birni Ngarzagamu
 - Kukawa

7. The Saifawa dynasty seized to exist as a reigning dynasty in Borno in the year _____.
- A. 1900
 - B. 1893
 - C. 1846
 - D. 1804
8. _____ revolted against the regime of Shehu Umar in 1853.
- A. Ibrahim Zaki
 - B. Goni Muktari
 - C. Ibrahim
 - D. Abdal Rahman
9. Which of the following European powers colonized Borno territories and rested the state dynasty in Borno region?
- A. France
 - B. Belgium
 - C. Germany
 - D. Great Britain
10. The Borno monarch who played host to Europeans like Hugh Clapperson and Major Dentiam is _____.
- A. Idris Ali
 - B. Idris Alooma
 - C. Shehu Umaru
 - D. Mogammed-Al-Amin

Essay Questions

1. Discuss socio-political developments in Borno at the beginning of the 19th century.
2. Examine three factors that led to the Fulani rebellion in Borno.
3. Discuss five achievements of Al-Kanemi in Borno.
4. Discuss the system of government in Borno during the era of the Shehu dynasty.
5. Discuss five factors that were responsible for the decline and fall of Borno under the Shehus.