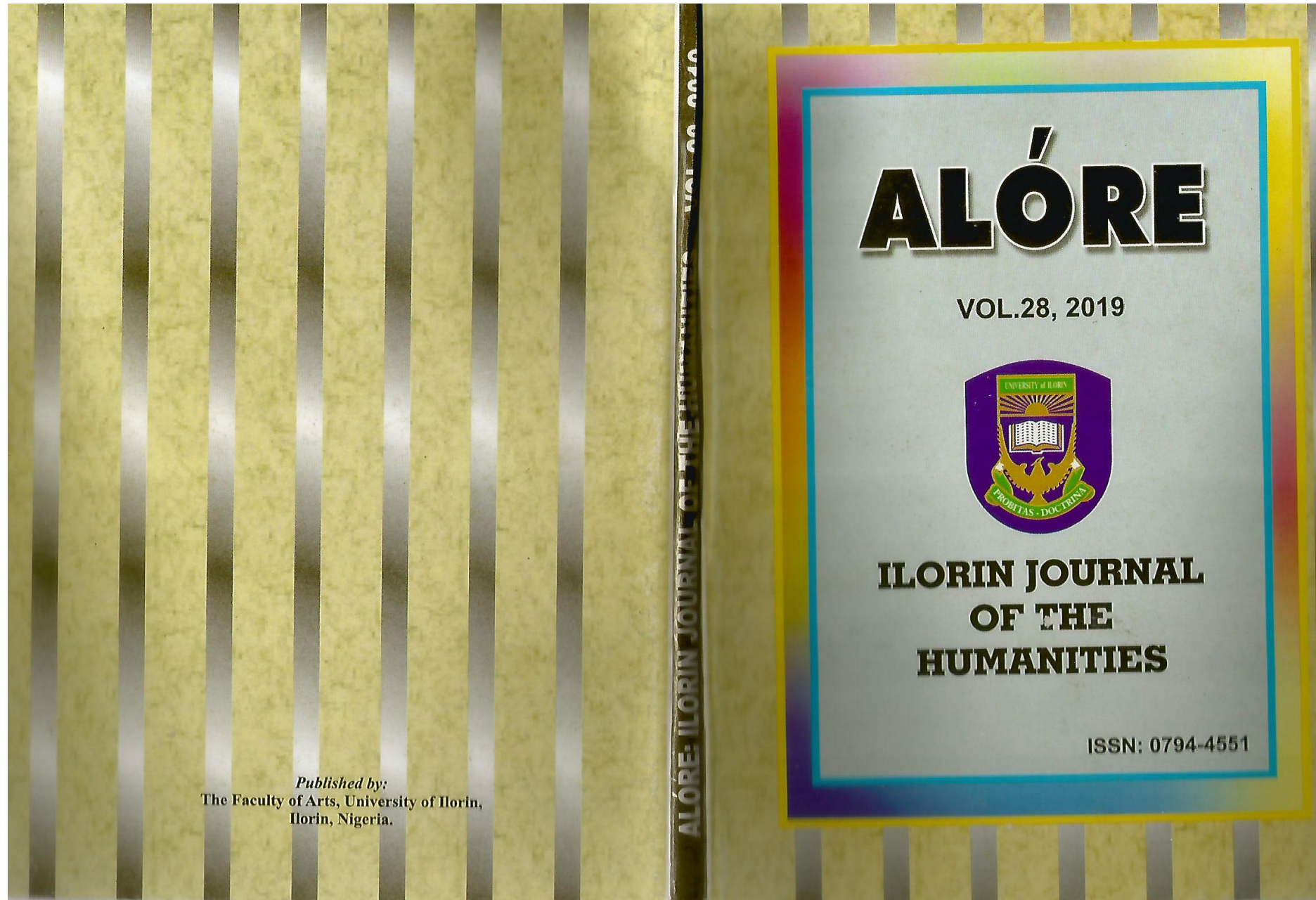




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HISTORICIZING THE CHANGING PHASES OF COLONIAL TRANSPORT SYSTEM IN ILORIN PROVINCE, 1900 TO 1960

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Abstract

Movement of people, goods and services had existed in human society since time immemorial. The colonial government effectively engaged the pre-colonial and the newly introduced colonial transport systems to exploit and developed their economic potentiality. This situation exploited the Emirate. The railway was meant for long distances freight evacuation, while the road served as a feeder to a major rail line, or the other, as well as human portage. The paper adopts a historical and analytical methodology using primary sources like archival documents, oral interview, newspapers, and some secondary sources. The paper concluded that the changing phases of colonial transport system had empowered, developed and generated huge revenue to the Province. It gave rise to the creation of a new class of elites among the people of Ilorin.

Keywords: Transportation, Colonialism, Railway, Road, Human Portage

Introduction

The history of transportation in Ilorin dates back to the pre-colonial era when modern transport facilities such as asphalt tarred roads, railways, air transport facilities were virtually non-existing. People of Ilorin and their distant and immediate neighbors have been interacting

with one another politically, economically and socially. Through human portage and pack animals, they have also interacted with peoples most especially, long distance traders from other parts of Nigeria and beyond. The level of this interaction went soar at the end of the eighteenth century, and the first half of the nineteenth century. From then, the former small settlement within the empire of old Oyo Empire now became an independent headquarters of Afonja, and later that of the Fulani emirate. Subsequent political activities in Ilorin catalyzed the Oyo Empire's downfall, and began to attract an influx of population including Yoruba, Hausa and Fulani groups (O'Hear, 1986:69). Under Afonja and thereafter the Fulani Emirs, the city rose in power and prosperity, becoming an important nineteenth century entrepot between Hausaland to the north and the new, feuding but wealthy, Yoruba States to the south (Hear, p.69).

Moreover, Ilorin became a hub of large and frequent caravans. One of the significant importance of transport history of Ilorin emirate was borne out of the fact that, the region served as a crucial and strategic centrepot and a transit belt between the south and northern Nigeria. Ilorin's external trade was so important to the prosperity of the city. The geographical location of Ilorin has been a great advantage to its economic, political and social development. It brought about its major historical changes (Omoiya, 2013:35). These geographical features had since the 19th century accorded her a heavy traffic volume of people or travellers of diverse tribal or ethnic background and nationality on her trade route. For instance, it was reported that in the second half of the 19th century, Ilorin slave route was more frequented than the Niger route (O'Hear, 1986:69). Omoiya also reported that slave merchants from several parts of the coastal region patronized *Eruda*, the Ilorin slave market (Omoiya, 2013:35). They brought along articles such as guns, gunpowder, mirror, and wine for the exchange of slaves from Ilorin slave market.

Therefore, the British colonial government built and consolidated on this historical foundation. They did not only make the newly introduced colonial transport systems to support and complement the strength of the old order, but also balanced and harmonized the operation of rail and road systems. The study historicizes the impact of

the collaboration and the supportive nature of several transport systems in Ilorin colonial history. The changing phases of the colonial transport system in Ilorin had facilitated social, political and economic development of the province. Her road map's natural, structural, physical and architectural design had since the pre-colonial era placed Ilorin as a seat of power and the center of political activities. It did not only turn Ilorin to a power to reckon with, but also a potent political entity. Traditional and modern transport systems turned Ilorin to a hub of economic activities accompanied with continuous rising population and changes in spatial distribution of the province. It also converted Ilorin to a center of modernity, and elevated, as well as transformed the status of many of her indigenes. The study revealed how the changing phase had empowered, developed and generated huge revenue to the province.

Human Portage and Pack Animals as Means of Transportation in Pre-Colonial and Colonial Period

The earliest means of transport is man himself. Man walks on foot, from place to place to distant lands. He used his own hands or arms or his own head, shoulder or back as carriage for his load (Madugu, 2015:209). Emphasis then was on bush path. Human portage was the oldest and most widely spread form of transportation not only in Ilorin, but also in other parts of the world. The people that provided this type of services are simply referred to as porters. The operation of porters was common during the dry season; agricultural produce were harvested; trade routes were free and secured, because porters could be free to move with their goods (Rufa'i 2015:251). Scholars like Hopkins have argued that the availability of pack animals used for transportation services delayed the emergence of porters in Hausaland (Rufa'i, p.251). This was unlike the forest zone, where the prevalence of tsetse fly affected the existence of such beast (Rufa'i, p.251). Since the pre-colonial period, portage had made Ilorin transit region an important center of cattle and kola trade between the forest and savannah regions.

The 19th century was marred by incessant crisis and changing nature of power and political structure of the Yoruba nation. It was also a significant period in the history of Ilorin as an Emirate. Slaves as booties from several 19th century fratricidal wars and raiding, served as porters

and carriers in short and long distance journeys. According to O'Hear (1989), trade slaves from the north served as carriers in the long distance trade. He also reported that, the invasion of Ilorin by the force of the Royal Niger Company (RNC) in 1898 enabled many slaves to flee the employ of their masters, which motivated the emirates' ruling class, who had benefited enormously from slave services to become highly desperate to keep the remaining slaves at all cost. Slave carrier workers in Ilorin were therefore closely chained (Hear p.13). Porterage was a common practice associated with slaves in the 19th century (Lovejoy, 1980:68).

According to colonial evidence, human portage continued to serve as a reliable means of transportation throughout the colonial period (N.A.K/927). It served together with the motor lorry and the railway as popular and reliable means of transportation in Ilorin province and beyond throughout the colonial period. But portage became entrenched to the extent that, it competed conveniently with the road and rail transport system throughout the colonial period in Ilorin Province. Due to the bad condition of roads, most especially in the raining season, carriers functioned prominently to transact colonial business in districts like Borgu and Kaiama (N.A.K/1121B.III). In some districts, human carriers as means of transportation even surpassed the lorry transport. The table below shows the efficacy of human portage means of transportation in Ilorin province.

Table 1. Road Traffic Census

Period	Road (route)	No. of Carriers	Tons Carried by Carriers	No. of Lorries	Tons Carried By Lorries
11 th to 19 th Jan. 1936	209 1/2 Lagos to Ilorin	2356	29.39 tons	184	283.50 tons
21 st to 23 rd Jan. 1936	Jebba to Ilorin	2614	29.76 tons	33	63 tons
Jan. 31 st to Feb. 2 nd , 1936	Ilorin to Awtun	1718	19.39 tons	47	72.29 tons
5 th to 7 th Jan. 1936	Ajasse to Offa	2121	23.61 tons	3	9.00 tons
11 th to 13 th Feb. 1936	Ilorin to Igbetti	89	1.59 tons	6	13.50 tons
11 th to 13 th Feb. 1936	16 1/2 Alapa to Bode Saadu	39	0.65 tons	11	31.50 tons
1 st to 3 rd Feb. 1936	Ajasse to Yaru	2183	23.76 tons	2	9.00 tons
5 th to 7 th Feb. 1936	Omu-Aran to Egbe	2089	28.26 tons	17	27.00 tons
21 st to 23 rd Feb. 1936	Ilorin to Share	338	3.81 tons	21	49.60 tons

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Ajikobi (1997) reported that, between 1940 and 1950s, quite a number of villagers were seen bringing their commodities to various markets in Ilorin through human portorage. Such markets were Oloje, Abayawo, Pakata, and Pake markets. Some even brought firewood to sell in the markets. Many of these traders came from nearby villages and afar such as Foma, Ganmo, Shao, Tanke, Ogele, Eiye Nsunkun, Afon, Offa, Osogbo, and Ogbomosho. Professional porters were found everywhere around these markets (Ajikobi, p.22). Schram also reported how cattle and their herders crossed the Niger at Jebba. 85,000 out of 90,000 cattle arrived Ilorin on their way further to Ibadan in 1962 (Schram, 1968:402).

In some parts of Ilorin province, the effectiveness of human portorage was enormous in the colonial period to the extent that, some districts had no record of movement of other means of transportation on their route for one month except human portorage (Alh. Saliu, Oral Interview, 26/2/2017). For instance, in the Emir of Pategi's report of September 1942 to the District Officer,

I have to report to you that the two books (registers) you sent to me to be kept here for registering every vehicle travelling on a journey to Pategi or passing through were received, but I am sorry to let you know that no vehicle come to Pategi in this month of September, 1942. So the books are kept here (N.A.K/Monthly Vehicle Returns).

It is noteworthy that human portorage had been a veritable means of transportation in the rural and urban areas up till the contemporary period. Its major flaw did not lie in road accident, crashes or collision, but in encounters with dangerous animals like snakes. Oral evidence revealed that incessant occurrence of snake bite among the short and long distance porters motivated and stimulated the Igbomina people for the demand for a modern health centre referred to as *Ile Imose* (a place to treat snake bite) from the colonial masters (Pa Aboyeji, Oral Interview, 22/4/2015).

Rail Transport as an Evacuator of Freight and Long Distance Movement

The goal of the imperial government to construct rail transport to link several miles of distance in Nigeria, was not only to evacuate freights from the hinterland to the sea at a very cheap rate, but also to enable the large revenue of Southern Nigeria to be spread out for the development of the whole country, and put an end to the financial difficulties of the North (Greene, 1968:29). Rail development in Nigeria began in 1895 and 1898, precisely with the construction of 32 kilometres rail track from Iddo to Otta extending north-eastern direction from Lagos (Lawal, 2006:71). Railway construction work started from Ibadan in 1901, with the distance of 295km that passes through Ilorin and reached Jebba in 1908 (Lawal, p.71). The Ilorin-Jebba and Northern Nigerian Frontier at Offa railway lines were formally commissioned on

August 27, 1908, and on that day, the first train reached Ilorin (Jimoh, 1994:233 and Greene, 1968:59). The significance of the Ilorin rail lines was not borne out of the fact that she was a hub of cash crop, but her strategic location as the link between the forest and savannah belt of the country. Therefore, Nigeria railline map's architectural design had positioned Ilorin as a seat of power and center of colonial political activities in the Province.

The railway track that passes through the Ilorin province, the second longest in distance, had attracted modern colonial social amenities to the province. In 1908 a Railway Medical Officer was stationed at Ilorin rail-head, who cared for the Europeans and natives engaged in laying the railway. The rail-head facility was also referred to as Railway hospital solely because it was situated along the railway station in Ilorin (UITH Manual, 2010). When the railway from Ilorin to Jebba was opened in 1913, the seat of Government was removed to the "square mile" in Ilorin proper; the old Railway Hospital was taken over to become the first Government Hospital (GH) in Ilorin Province (Herman-Hodge, 1929:259). Although the initial aim of the colonial government in taking possession of the health centre was to treat the wounded soldier of the First World War, it later catered for the health needs of the indigenes. The hospital became better known in the province and outside it, and there was a constant flow of patients from Borgu in one direction, and Agunjin, Oro, and Egbe in another direction. By 1927, the number of the Government Hospital's out-patients had increased to 2423 (Hodge, p.260).

Construction of the railway was meant to serve and fulfill one of the cardinal objectives of colonialism, which was to provide maximum advantage for the growth of their home country. In this, they seek to open up the colonial areas to market goods produced by the metropolitan industries and obtain raw materials for their running (Omojaya, 2013:35). The establishment of merchandise stations by different foreign companies in Ilorin was therefore expected. Rail transport development in the colonial period expanded the commercial activities and profits of the commercial firms, and paved way for European trading firms to move from the coast into the hinterland of Nigeria. Many of these firms had opened shops and ware houses in different parts of the country with

Ilorin Province inclusive. This turned Ilorin to a hub of European economic activities. For instance in Ilorin, some of them like the Niger Company, Lagos Stores, Messrs John Walkden, Messrs John Holt, Miller Brothers, Messrs G.B. Ollivant, Messrs Peterson Zochonis, PZ Limited and Campagnie Francaise de L'Afrique Occidentale situated their trading sites, sidings, shops and ware houses along the Ilorin and Offa railway station (N.A.K/382/1914).

These trading firms occupied sites very close to the railway station so as to make them accessible to easy freight haulage. For a full participation in the colonial economy, some of them sent their agents, who were mostly indigenes on trading expeditions through the trunk and feeder roads to the interior districts of Ilorin Province and other parts of the transition belt of Nigeria. The Niger Company, Paterson, Zochonis & Co and G.B. Ollivant covered Lanwa in Bode Saadu, Oke-Ode and Jebba rail axis for the purchase of groundnut, shea butter, hides and skin, native cloth and Beeswax (Jimoh, 1994). Jimoh further claims that, Lagos Store and Paterson patronized the road that linked Offa rail station and her neighbors to purchase palm kernels, cotton and hides and skin. Campagnie Francaise, John Holt and John Walkden companies trend the roads in Ilorin and her adjacent neighbors to purchase cotton, hides and skin, native cloth, shea butter and groundnuts. After purchasing these bulky goods from the interior parts of the province, the company agents thereby used their vehicles to transport it to their warehouses at the nearest rail station for further evacuation to the seaport.

Some of the agents that were engaged in the sales of the British products were granted credit facilities in form of differed payment of the goods supplied. The commercial companies sold Manchester cotton, hardware, etc.; the Compagnie Francaise sold European provisions, spirits, wine and beer; and John Holt (Ilorin) have a wine and beer "off" licence (Herman-Hodge, 1929:198). For those engaged in the procurement of produce, cash grants were given to them to procure different cash crops such as coffee, cocoa, tobacco and others that could be obtained from the area (Banwo, 1998). After brokering deals with the indigenous cash crop producers, they evacuated the goods through the trunk roads to their sites on several railway stations for further evacuation through the railway to the sea port. At times, foreign

manufactured products were also being carried back to the hinterland through the rail (AbdulSalami, 2014:17). The credit facilities granted these agents naturally provided them an economic lifeline, to emerge as new class of stakeholders in Ilorin. By the end of the Second World War in 1945, the agents of these commercial companies in Ilorin like Alhaji Yahaya Kola Alikinla of Ita Ogunbo, Alhaji Yahaya Eleesu of Galadima of Gegele's compound, Alhaji Musa Sule of Idiagbede, Alhaji Iliasu Aluko of Ile Onikanwun, Audu Baki of Isale Aluko, Alhaji Woli Baruba and Alhaji Ahmadu Kannike had formed another influential group in the community (Omoiya, 2013:40). Apart from the fact that they enjoyed public respect, they formed good link between the company, colonial administration and indigenous population. They were the first set among the indigenous people of Ilorin to bring or use any element of modernity like motor cars and building with corrugated iron roofing (Oral Interview, Alh Abdullahi Onagun).

In Ilorin Province, the total amount of food exported from Ilorin by rail alone in 1919 amounted to about four thousand tons. This increased to about nine thousand and six hundred in 1920 (Banwo, 1998:273). Between 1933 and 1941, 11527 tons of yam, 2298 tons of yam flour, 300 tons of maize 352 tons of guinea corn and 1727 tons of locust beans were railed from Ilorin to other provinces (Banwo, p.273). Ilorin was a food supplying depot both for the north and south. It was also a great exporter within the Protectorate of native cloth, pottery, mats, and shea – butter (Herman-Hodge, 1929:197). As a result of the increasing amount of food which continued to leave Ilorin for other provinces in this period, the emirate began to be referred to as the "Market Garden of Nigeria" (Banwo, 1998:273).

Feeder Roads and Short Distance Voyages

As it was with the railway, road transport development in Nigeria was not intended as the development needs of the local inhabitants. It was constructed to feed the railway line for convenient evacuation of resources of the interior or places which hitherto could not be reached either by water or the railway (Walker, 1955). Walker further claimed that at the inception of the colonial period, road transport was developed to cover a short distance journey such as rail line feeder roads,

and those that linked important administrative settlements. In the West, roads were built to the railway as it was extended from Lagos. Road transport development in Nigeria began in 1906, with the construction of Oyo-Ibadan road, which thus became linked by a railway-operated road transport, by the colonial government. This was thus followed by similar services from Osogbo to Ife, Ilesha to Ogbomosho, and from Ede to Iwo, and Zungeru-Zaria road in 1914 (Peter, 1997).

By the year 1914, there were about 3200km of tarred motorable roads in the country, out of which more than half was cited in the south (Peter, p.35). In the Southern part of the country where drought animals could not be used owing to the presence of tsetse fly, the possibilities of motor transport served as an early stimulus to the building of roads. At that point in time, there are few automobiles plying the few roads in Ilorin province and other parts of the northern protectorate, as human portorage was the predominant means of transportation. However, the first set of colonial officers made use of bicycles and motorbikes up till 1920s (Ajikobi, 1997:23). It was not until 1926 that the then Resident Hermon Hodge was provided with a kit car and he became the first user of car in the province. Shortly thereafter, AbdulKadir Bawa, the Eight Emir of Ilorin, the Chief Medical Officer of the main Ilorin hospital, Mr. T.S. Phillips who was the Superintendent of Education and the Police Commissioner Mr. Wilson were also provided with kit cars.

By 1928, spectacular progress had been recorded in many areas of development in the province as a result of the emirate progressive disposition. According to Herman-Hodge (1929):

All motor roads were constructed and maintained in the first instance by the Native Administration, the bridges and culvert being erected by the public works department on reimbursement – some of them under contract carried out by the Italian firm of Dolcino, Father and Sons.

By 1929, the relentless efforts of the Native Authority systematically expanded the pace, mile and distance of roads to link trunk A (Regional) or B, (Provincial) or a rail terminal. It brought about an expansion of road transport facilities and linked the emirate to several parts of the country. This achievement was confirmed by Herman-Hodge who was the then Resident Officer of Ilorin Province. Ilorin – Budo Egba 18 miles trunk B was constructed to link Oyo to Lagos road. Ilorin –

Awtun 60 miles road that linked her with Ondo and Benin, 9km Ajasse – Offa, Awtun and Lafiaji roads were constructed to link Offa railway line and station. Similarly, 72km Ilorin – Jebba Great North Trunk A road, 30km Ilorin – Odunfa road was linked to tap the trade of Kishi, Igbetti, Kaiama and Bussa were also tarred (Jimoh, 1994). The Native Authority also constructed the 44km Alapa – Bode Saadu to serve the six Districts and connect the rich food areas with Ilorin markets. The 13km Iponrin – Yaru linked Jebba rail station and Lafiaji road, and 19km Share – Shonga connecting Ilorin with River Niger were also constructed by the Native Authority. Most of the roads were constructed to feed a rail line, trunk A road or a major water way.

Additional access roads in the province were tantamount to an increasing number of vehicle (Lorries) plying the roads. In the 1930s, commercial transport business sprang up not only in the province, but also in other parts of the country. The commercial lorries were mostly of Mercedes Benz, Bedford, Smallest Austin (Marina), Medium Austin (*Onimunasinrin*) and Morris brands (Oral interview, Alh Baba Alabi). Initially, only two were plying the Lagos route (Ajikobi, 1997:24). Subsequently, two trucks were introduced plying village markets, such as Alapa, Onire, Malet, Megida, and Arobadi on market days, which were being held bi-weekly (Ajikobi, p.22). The table below shows an increase in the number of vehicles, most especially the commercial lorries plying the roads toward the end of the 1930s. It also shows that, apart from the railway, the lorries on the several feeder roads in the province evacuated a huge volume of freight.

Table 2. Road Traffic Census

Route	Period	Total Freight Volume	Motor Lorries Traffic
Lagos and Ilorin	Jan. 1936	190.10 tons	173.20 tons
	June 1936	227.95 tons	207.01 tons
	Jan. 1937	208.67 tons	178.00 tons
	June 1937	252.45 tons	227.18 tons
Ilorin and Jebba	Jan. 1936	62.24 tons	47.10 tons
	June 1936	70.39 tons	44.82 tons
	Jan. 1937	69.25 tons	49.50 tons
	June 1937	58.39 tons	40.93 tons
Ilorin and Awtun	Jan. 1936	57.99 tons	25.82 tons
	June 1936	65.60 tons	42.58 tons
	Jan. 1937	54.18 tons	28.50 tons
	June 1937	60.81 tons	44.75 tons
Ajasse and Offa	Feb. 1936	29.75 tons	9.00 tons
	July 1936	14.93 tons	1.50 tons
	July 1937	18.77 tons	1.50 tons
Ilorin and Igbetti	Feb. 1936	45.39 tons	27.42 tons
	July 1936	30.52 tons	23.33 tons
	Jan. 1937	45.04 tons	39.00 tons
	July 1937	56.19 tons	45.00 tons
Alapa and Bode Saadu	Feb. 1936	31.29 tons	25.92 tons
	July 1936	18.66 tons	16.50 tons
	Jan. 1937	15.37 tons	13.50 tons
	July 1937	19.32 tons	12.00 tons
Ilorin, Omu-Aran and Egbe	July 1936	27.98 tons	12.00 tons
	Jan. 1937	25.74 tons	7.50 tons
	July 1937	39.01 tons	27.00 tons
	Feb. 1938	46.39 tons	25.50 tons
Ilorin, Agbeyangi and Yaru	June 1936	6.22 tons	1.50 tons
	Jan. 1937	5.09 tons	3.00 tons
	June 1937	20.95 tons	13.50 tons
	Jan. 1938	5.79 tons	1.50 tons

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By 1937, rapid road development had prompted the activities of commercial transport business in Ilorin. Commercial transport activities directly boosted the economy of the province, as it did not only give rise to indigenous lorry owners, but also employed many as drivers, conductors, and carriers. Lorry owners like Salimonu Haji Memudu Oniyangi, Bello Lalanga Ile-Ijesha, Buraimo Parati Ita-Ajia, Bello Falaya, S.O. Falokun (SCOA Agent), Busari, B.M. Isale Oja, Bello Kolawole Omupo, Liasu Osogbo (NAK/Ilo.Prof./3248), and eminent drivers like Yisa Adisa, Adenipekun Adegbola, Alhaji Kareem Omu and Alhaji Durokudi, Alhaji Yusuf Omoiya, Alhaji Ajao Anuoluwapo Motors, Mr. Jembere of Oko-Ode Alhaji S.K. Dan Alhaji, Alhaji Owolagba had formed an important merchant class in the Province (NAK/Ilo.Prof/4461). These merchants had the highest number of vehicles and maintained orderliness in their respective units.

Moreso, road transport expansion brought about the emergence of new class of rich business men and women, who traveled as far as Kano, Onitsha, and Lagos to purchase luxury goods like clothes and jewelries in wholesales (Oral interview with Elder Samuel Igbayilola).

Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis, it is obvious that effective operation and management of the several means of transportation in the colonial period had brought about socio – economic development in Ilorin and other parts of the country. In the colonial era, freights and long distance trip were being accomplished mostly by the rail transport. Most roads served as feeders to a major rail track, regional trunk A roads or water ways. Activities of human porters were also highly effective in supplementing the strength of the other colonial systems of transportation. Collaborative and supportive nature of the colonial transport systems did not only enable more of economic development, but also strengthened internal development.

It rendered Ilorin as a hub of opportunities where local, national and foreign merchants were engaged in profitable, as well as lucrative commercial endeavors. Supportive transports and the strategic geographical location of Ilorin Province turned her into a center of cash and food crops, foreign manufactured goods and services. It exposed

Ilorin to several phases of development which rendered her as a suitable and formidable seat of power before, during and after the colonial period. The British transacted colonial business with other parts of Nigeria through the effective management and collaboration of the existing transport system.

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