



## AFRICA IN MOVIMENTO / AFRICA ON THE MOVE

MACERATA 17 -20/09/2014

### TITLE: CARAVANS OF CLOTH: CHANGING PATTERNS OF TRADE ACROSS THE SAHARA AND THE TEXTILE-LED MARKET ECONOMIES OF PRE-COLONIAL CENTRAL SUDAN

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**ABSTRACT:** During the nineteenth century, the consolidation of the Hausa states into the Sokoto Caliphate (Northern Nigeria) entailed major political, economic and demographic changes leading to market expansion and an unprecedented growth in the Hausa textile industry. Political and institutional changes played a central role in increasing trading expeditions and the immigration of foreign traders and weavers into Hausa towns which produced cloth. This paper suggests that changes in local political and commercial structures largely account for the Sokoto Caliphate's displacement of Borno as centre of textile production as well as *entrepôt* of trans-Saharan trade in the Central Sudan. The *jihād* that took place in 1804 had major repercussions on patterns of trade growth and consolidation of decentralized political authority in the Sokoto Caliphate, characterized by a confederation of emirates and coordinated by a common Caliph. Decentralized control produced an adaptively efficient set of institutions, borrowed from Islam and the commercial culture of North Africa, that promoted local trade and commercial infrastructure, attracting merchants from North Africa and the Sahara. This proved more effective than the mechanism adopted in Borno, where a centralized political authority controlled and monopolized trans-Saharan trade. I also suggest that an efficient Caliphate's juridical system, enforcing commercial and credit arrangements, provided a safety for mobility of capital and practices of delegation of credit that lowered transaction costs and benefited investment in the savanna from North African traders. This not only reinforced the interaction between long-distance trade and the economies of the Sub-Saharan savanna, but also permitted imports of low cost goods, including cotton cloths, by Saharan caravans as well as the export of Sudanese textiles over most of West Africa.

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