



The fruit seller who  
opened Gombe Town  
to the Gospel

Karau Pane



HISTORY OF AFRICAN MISSIONARIES

# KARAU PANE

## The fruit seller who went where no foreign missionary could go

In 1915, there was not one Gospel messenger in the 650 km-wide Tangale-Waja Division in northern Nigeria! SIM missionaries came and a small group of Tangale people accepted Christ. Their numbers were multiplied, and before long, their zeal for evangelism bore fruit:

“Constrained by the love of Christ, the believers went forth by twos and threes on preaching tours over the surrounding hills and plains and brought the Good News to bush and towns near and far. Evangelists with their wives volunteered and went forth to open up work in many of the towns. Many couples are doing valiant work and various outstations have been opened. Counting the nearby one there are 33 outstations altogether.” (quote from missionary Harry Harling)

By 1930 all the major nearby Tangale communities had been reached by the Tangale converts.

At the time, the nearby Gombe Emirate and Gombe town, the seat, was described in missionary records as the “hardest and most closed area”. The first white missionary posted to Gombe, around 1920, was denied residence and driven out of the town. The Fulani there believed that the missionaries came to mislead Muslims. Up until 1929, white missionaries made repeated efforts to work in the Gombe Emirate, but faced Muslim resistance. The Hausa people circulated malicious stories about the whites, while making threats.

Karau Pane from Tangale was the first Christian to unlock Gombe. Baptized in 1930, he was trained as an evangelist and language teacher, and also worked as a gardener for the missionaries. He was a hard-working man who cultivated mangoes, oranges, bananas and guava trees, and when he began selling fruit at the Gombe market, he discovered a ripe field for evangelism.

His customers saw that he was generous and did not retaliate against those who stole from him. Eventually in 1935, he was invited to settle in Gombe to teach literacy classes, where he befriended a Fulani named Modibbo with whom he spoke at length about Jesus. He became known as a great teacher, and the Muslim malams (teachers) liked to engage him in debate. Some of the Bagarmi people began to listen more and asked him to come and live among them with the message.

Karau Pane was a determined itinerant evangelist who traveled widely, even going to Niger, Borno and Chad republics. His persistence made it possible for Tangale evangelists to begin work in Gombe Emirate and for the Gospel to be preached widely.

From the book *Transforming Africa's Religious Landscapes*, Chapter 16: SIM and the Tangale Factor in the Christianization of the Hausa of Northern Nigeria 1915-1976 by Reuben Goje Maiture

# AFRIGO