



Queen Amina of Zaria (1530 – 1590)
(16th century)

The seven original states of Hausaland: Katsina, Daura, Kano, Zazzau, Gobir, Rano, and Garun Gabas cover an area of approximately 500 square miles and comprise the heart of Hausaland. In the sixteenth century, Queen Bakwa Turunku built the capital of Zazzau at Zaria, named after her younger daughter. Eventually, the entire state of Zazzau was renamed Zaria, which is now a province in present-day Nigeria.

However it was her elder daughter, the legendary Amina (or Aminatu), who inherited her mother's warlike nature. Amina was 16 years old when her mother became queen and she was given the traditional title of *magajiya*. She honed her military skills and became famous for her bravery and military exploits, as she is celebrated in song as "Amina daughter of Nikatau, a woman as capable as a man."

Amina is credited as the architect who created the strong earthen walls around the city, which was the prototype for the fortifications used in all Hausa states. She built many of these fortifications, which became known as *ganuwar Amina* or Amina's walls, around various conquered cities.

The objectives of her conquests were twofold: extension of Zazzau beyond its primary borders and reducing the conquered cities to vassal status. Sultan Muhammad Bello of Sokoto stated that, "She made war upon these countries and overcame them entirely so that the people of Katsina paid tribute to her and the men of Kano [and]... also made war on cities of Bauchi till her kingdom reached to the sea in the south and the west." Likewise, she led her armies as far as Nupe and, according to the *Kano Chronicle*, "The Sarkin Nupe sent her [the princess] 40 eunuchs and 10,000 kola nuts. She was the first in Hausaland to own eunuchs and kola nuts."

Amina was a preeminent *gimbiya* (princess) but various theories exist as to the time of her reign or if she ever was a queen. One explanation states that she reigned from approximately 1536 to 1573, while another posits that she became queen after her brother Karama's death, in 1576. Yet other claims that although she was a leading princess, she was never a queen.

Despite the discrepancies, over a 34-year period, her many conquests and subsequent annexation of the territories extended the borders of Zaria, which also grew in importance and became the center of the North-South Saharan trade and the East-West Sudan trade.

Books

General History of Africa, Vol. IV: Africa from the Twelfth to Sixteenth Century, UNESCO. University of California Press, 1986.

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A Short History of West Africa: A.D. 1000 to the Present, T.A. Osae, S.N. Nwabara and A.T.O. Odunsi, Hill and Wang, 1973.

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The Story of Nigeria, Michael Crowder. Faber and Faber, 1962.

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West Africa Before the Colonial Era: A History to 1850, Basil Davidson. Addison-Wesley, 1998.

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Women Leaders in African History, David Sweetman. General Publishing Company, Limited, 1984.

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