



## REFLECTIONS ON YORUBA CULTURAL HISTORY UP TO 1800 A.D.

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### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The editor of the book “**The history of the Yorubas**” written by Rev. Samuel Johnson in 1897, had made it known to the whole world in 1921 that, “*the original manuscripts got lost in the hands of the publisher and they could not be found*”. Some chapters had to be rewritten, some curtailed, others amplified, and new ones added where necessary.

Therefore, whatever historical information we are reading from the book by Rev. Samuel Johnson, (1921) does not represent the original historical information of the Yoruba people. We need to compare some areas and chapters of the book with other books of Yoruba history written by other scholars, otherwise, the book cannot stand as a book of Yoruba history.

Professor Rowe’s definition of history as an art which enables man to employ precarious experiences to further the course of a society in the complex world of conflicting interests; raises the study of history to the level of precision of research as in physical sciences. **We must, therefore, see why a historian must shun vanity, bias and stark untruth.** These factors militate against history.

History therefore is not to be limited to a simple record of what is known or believed to have occurred, history is more properly concerned with examining, analyzing, and explaining past events, particularly in human affairs.

In the words of R. G. Collingwood: The written records of more advanced people may similarly be but the materials of history. “**History needs to be, as indeed it is, re-**

**written from time to time and past events revalued in the light of fresh developments and new ideas”**

A knowledge of the Yoruba past must be gleaned from myths, legends, folk-tales, praise-songs and the like, all of which are rapidly being forgotten by all the younger generations according to Professor Lloyd P.C.

Thus, in an attempt to write about the founding of the Ancient City of Ife and the foundation of Yoruba kingdoms, it appears pertinent to recount such knowledge as well as what some ancient and contemporary historians have written about this subject.

## **2.0 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The author of this paper is gratefully indebted to the invaluable intellectual contribution of; Chief Omotoso Eluyemi, an historian and archeologist; Professor I.A Akinjogbin, Oluremi I. Obateru, Ambassador M.O. Ogunmola (Otun of Oyo), Emeritus Professor Bolanle Awe, Oba I.B. Akinyele, Mrs. Kemi Morgan, Rev. Samuel Johnson and Professor Dele Layinmola including Professor Saburi Biobaku, Professor J.A. Atanda and Professor Akin Mabogunje.

All of these scholars and traditional historians agreed that **Oduduwa** is regarded as **the first king of Ile-Ife**. There is also evidence in tradition that after the death of **Oduduwa**, the monarchical system of government which he established was continued. Names of **Oduduwa’s** successors to the throne of the Ile-Ife survive in tradition in varying forms. It is even believed that the other kingdoms which became prominent in Yoruba history were either offshoots of royal house at Ile-Ife or they copied the system of government established in that **kingdom of Oduduwa**. This partly explains why the majority, if not all, of the **traditional rulers** in Yorubaland trace their origin directly or ultimately to Oduduwa and Ile-Ife.

### 3.0 ODUDUWA IN ILE-IFE (1086-1150)

Like Maryan and early dynastic Egyptian cities, Yoruba cities evolved in a stable political environment created by immigrants headed by Oduduwa. The new comers established in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century (1086-1150) the most indigenous political systems ever found in pre-industrial societies. Classical Yoruba government system was not only hierarchical but also representatively democratic by any pre-industrial society standard.

The system of government differs from one community to another. It also varies in structures from leadership to the governed. When Oduduwa got to Ile-Ife, he met thirteen (13) Aborigines communities which he compressed to five (5) e.g. **Iremo, Moore, Ilode, Ilare and Okerewe**. Within each quarter there are compounds. Within each compound, there are family lineages. Land belongs to family lineages. To own land in Ife, one must belong to a family.

Information has it that scared kingship was to the Yoruba Aborigines. Apparently, the kingship institution was elaborately or highly developed among the **Oduduwa group**, the new comers who ruled Yorubaland between 1086 and 1150AD. The higher status of their institutions coupled with the elevated socio-political plan on which the newcomers (Oduduwa group) were placed by the aborigines as a result of the former superior culture, higher intelligence and greater military powers almost certainly aided the rise of Yoruba cities: on account of the charismatic personality of the new kings, the great palaces become pole of attraction for the inhabitants of the neighboring aboriginal villages and hamlets.

Yoruba cites cannot be ruled out, the rise of most of them appears to be organic, that is natural through the voluntary migration or movement of a large number of the aboriginal population to the royal capitals of the new rulers magnetized by their charismatic attributes.

### 4.0 CONFLICTING ACCOUNTS OF DIRECT SONS OF ODUDUWA

According to the **Alake** and paramount ruler of Egbaland, Oba Adedotun Gbadebo, **the Ooni is first among Yoruba monarchs. He identified ego as the cause of disunity among monarchs in Yorubaland.** (The Nigerian Tribune of Monday, February 8, 2016). He then listed the five (5) principal Obas in Yorubaland classified on a **supremacy basis as follows:**

- (i) The Ooni of Ife,
- (ii) The Alaafin of Oyo,
- (iii) The Oba of Benin,
- (iv) Alake of Egbaland
- (v) The Awujale of Ijebuland.

According to Rev. Samuel Johnson's book "The History of the Yoruba" published in **1921**. The **children of Oduduwa** classified according to **age and seniority** in the family of Oduduwa after **Okanbi the eldest**; but not the father of these seven (7) children as popularly claimed by Obas and scholars in Yorubaland.

- (i) The mother of the Olowu of Owu,
- (ii) The mother of the Alaketu of Ketu
- (iii) The King of Benin
- (iv) The King of Ila
- (v) The Onisabe of Sabe
- (vi) The Olupopo of the Popes, and
- (vii) Oranyan, the First Alafin of Oyo

#### 4.1 Correcting Some Historical Errors:

- (a) According to Oluremi I. Obateru (2003), former Head of Ibadan Polytechnic Town Planning Department, (Now late), said, **the historical error regarding Oranyan is noteworthy**. It was **Oranyan who founded the kingdoms of Benin and Oyo**. He first founded Benin Kingdom in **1170** and put his son **Eweka I** in charge when returning to Ile-Ife. From Ile-Ife, he again moved northwest to found Oyo Kingdom between **1200 and 1300**. He returned to Ile-Ife where he died leaving his two children, Dada Ajuwon (a.k.a Ajaka) and Songo to consolidate the kingdom. However, he became the fourth (4<sup>th</sup>) King of Ife before he died. So, Oba of Benin was a grandson of Oduduwa
- (b) In the two list **Owa Obokun** was missing. **Owa Ajibogun**, the paramount ruler of Ijeshaland was a direct son of Oduduwa whose mother was **Saparakunmi**. He also went to **fetch sea-water with Aremitan**, the founder of **Idanre** to cure Oduduwa's blindness. Hence, he was given the nickname "**Owa Obokun**".

According to Chief (Alfa) Samuel Ojo Bada in “Iwe Itan Saki published in 1937 and reprinted in 1986, both were led by **Ajabadi**, the son of **Owafonran or (Ore Otun)**. Owafonran was the father of **Yemoja** who was the **mother of Oranmiyan Odede**. Thereafter, **Ogun** who has been **Regent on Oduduwa throne** returned to Ire-Ekiti where his son, **Ogundahunsi was installed king in 1192A.D.** before returning to **Asabari Hill** in Saki, founded by him. He died there (see Tribune pg. 22 of Tuesday, 16 July, 2019).

(c) About **Awujale of Ijebu-Ode** by name, **Lagborogan**. He was the son of Oduduwa through **Gborowo** his mother and the daughter of **Olu-Iwa** who claimed to have come from **Waddai** (the present day Chad) and passed through Ife to found Ijebu Ode. **ARISU** succeeded Olu-Iwa before Lagborogan migrated to Ijebu-Ode

The paramount Ruler of **Remo Kingdom** migrated together with Lagborogan before the parted ways to found Ijebu Remo. The ruler of Ijebu-Remo migrated from **Iremo quarters of Ile-Ife**.

(d) As regards the founding of **Ibadan** by **Lagelu**, he was **Jagun Oshin of Ife kingdom** who fought along with **Agura of Gbagura** to support **Olofin Ogunfunminire**, also from the royal family of **Sooko** when the Benin army invaded Iddo in Lagos. **Lagelu thereafter, migrated to Ibadan as Jagun Oshin while Oyo was returning from exile at Gbere in Ibariba country** (1530-1542). Obalokun (1590-1600) the father of Alaafin Ajagbo (1600-1658) conferred Jagun of Oyo Kingdom on Lagelu a.k.a. Oro-apatamaja. Thereafter **Alaafin Ajagbo** established the institution of Aare-Ona-Kakanfo in **1640** while Alaafin Sango, the second son of Oranmiyan reigned in the 13<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Therefore, Lagelu did not found Ibadan during the reign of Alaafin Sango as claimed by I.B. Akinyele (1911) and quoted by Alaafin of Oyo, Oba Adeyemi III.

## **5.0 DIRECT SONS AND DESCENDANTS OF ODUDUWA:**

All Yoruba sub-groups are unanimous in their claims of descent from a common ancestor ODUDUWA. This is unlikely to be completely true. What probably happen, according to Oluremi I. Obateru (2004) was that the early provincial rulers descended from Oduduwa. The most comprehensive list of Yoruba kings was on page 18 and 19 of Omotoso Eluyemi’s Book- “This is Ile-Ife published in 1986. Omotoso Eluyemi, an historian and

archeologist, asserts that the children and grandchildren of Oduduwa who left Ile-Ife to found other Kingdoms were:

**(A) DIRECT SONS OF ODUDUWA**

S/N	THE CHILDREN	KINGDOMS	WIFE/DAUGHTER OF ODUDUWA
1.	<b>AJIBOSUN</b> (Asunkungbade)	Olowu of Owu	Lawuni Iyunade (Daughter of Oduduwa)
2.	<b>SOROPASAN</b>	Alaketu of Ketu and Ake	Daughter of Oduduwa
3.	<b>AJAGUNLA</b> (Ifagbamila)	Orogun of Ila	Adetinrin Anasin (Wife)
4.	<b>ORAMIYAN</b> (Odede)	Alaafin of Oyo	Yemoja (Daughter of Ore-Otun known as Owafanran )
5.	<b>AJIBOGUN</b>	Owa of Ilesha	Saparakunmi (Wife)
6.	<b>LUGBOROGAN</b>	Awujale of Ijebuland	Gborowo (daughter of Olu-Iwa) - Founder of Ijebu-Ode

*Sources:*

1. *Omotosho Eluyemi in this Ile-ife (1986)*
2. *Chief (Dr.) Fabunmi M.A. in Ife: The Genesis of Yoruba Race (1985)*
3. *Prince Adegbola Adelegan in Ile-Ife: The Source of Yoruba Civilization (2009)*
4. *Oloye Alfa Samuel Ojo Bada in iwe itan saki (1937, 1954, 1966 and 1986).*

**(B) CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN OF ODUDUWA**

S/NO	CHILDREN & GRANDCHILDREN	KINGDOMS THEY FOUND
1.	Oranmiyan (Odede)	Who founded Benin and Oyo Kingdoms
2.	Ajagunla (Ifagbamila)	The Orangun of Ila
3.	Soropasan	The Alaketu of Ketu (Now in Benin Republic)
4.	Ajaleke	The Alake of Egbaland
5.	Ajibogun	Owa of Ilesa
6.	Lugborogan	The Awujale of Ijebu-land
7.	Obarada	A Kingdom In Benin-Republic
8.	Oninana	A Kingdom in Ghana
9.	Onipopo (Okanbi)	PopoKingdom in Benin Republic (Egun)
10.	Onsiabe	Sabe Kingdom in Benin Republic
11.	Pupu (female)	The Osemawe of Ondo
12.	Ajiponda (Asodeboyede)	The Deji of Akure
13.	Ajibosin (Asunkungbade)	The Olowu of Owu
14.	Awomaro	The Ewi Of Ado ekiti
15.	Arere	The Oluwo of Iwo
16.	Adarawale	The Alara of Arameko
17.	Ogbe (Prince)	The Ajero of Ijero
18.	Owaranran	The Oware of Otun Kingdoms destroyed by the Fulani's in Ilorin
19.	Akinsola	The Elekole of Ikole
20.	Owa Ajaiye	The Akarigbo of Ijebu-Remo
21.	N/A	The Olosi of Osi
22.	Obalufon Aloyemore (3 <sup>rd</sup> & 5 <sup>th</sup> Ooni of Ife)	The Alaaye of Ipole (Efon Alaaye)
23.	Olojudo	The Olojudo of Ido-Ekiti
24.	Ademola, Akeran and Agbon	The Owa Otan of Otan Aiyegbaju

*Note: The early Monarchs before 1500A.D. at Ile-Ife probably gave their offspring's political jurisdiction over the provinces at different period of time e.g. Adekola Telu, Ogunfunminire and Lagelu.*

**6.0 THE FOUNDATION OF YORUBA KINGDOMS**

Apart from the arrival of Oduduwa and his group in Ile-Ife, there were other kingdoms that developed in Yorubaland up to 1800 notably, **Owu, Oyo, Ijebu, Ijesa, Ketu, Popo, Egba, Sabe, Egbado, Igbomina, the sixteen Ekiti principalities, Owo, Ondo and Ibadan.**

The **ruling dynasties** of most, if not all, of these kingdoms trace their origin to Ile-Ife and their decent directly or indirectly to Oduduwa, according to Dr. J.A. Atanda (1980).

(i) **Owu kingdom:**

The first king was **Asunkungbade** whose mother **Iyunade Lawumi**, the eldest child of Oduduwa. He established Owu, in a grassland area a little north of the present Orile-Owu.

(ii) **Kingdom of Oyo:**

The kingdom was the largest and the most powerful of the kingdoms ever established in Yorubaland and was founded by **Oranmiyan**. He settled at a place, after leaving close to River Niger within the territories of Nupe and Borgu, known as **Oko**. When he died, the work of consolidation was left to his sons, Dada Ajuwon a.k.a. Ajaka and Sango. It was Alaafin Sango that transferred the seat of government to **Oyokoro**.

(iii) **Ketu Kingdom:**

The founder of Ketu was **Sopasan** who left Ile-Ife, accompanied by his nephew called **Owe**. In their temporary sojourn at **Aro** where Sopasan died, six other kings ruled. Thereafter, the town of **Ketu** was founded by the seventh king called **Ede**. Ede and his followers overcome the people whom they met around Ketu.

(iv) **Egba kingdom:**

Before they were forced to found Abeokuta between **1829 and 1830** by the allied army that occupied Ibadan aftermath of Owu wars that ended in **1825 A.D**, the Egba people occupied the forest region between the borders of **modern Oyo and Ijebuland**. They formed a federation rather than a united kingdom, according to Dr. J.A. Atanda, (1980). They were grouped into three as Egba Gbagura, Egba Oke-Ona and Egba Ake. There was, in fact, a fourth group of the Egba, known as the Egba Agbeyin subject to the **Ojoko of Kesi**, but this group later became absorbed into the Egba Ake.

Thus, the **Agura** based at **Ido** (now part of Ibadan) became the paramount head of Gbagura towns; similarly the **Osile** based at Oko (now in Ogbomoso District) became the paramount ruler among the Egba Oke Ona; while the **Alake** based at **Ake** became the head of the Egba Ake.

(v) **Kingdom of Ijebuland:**

According to tradition, its foundation resulted from three separate and successive migrations from Ile-Ife led by **Olu-Iwa** who claim to be from Waddai and gave his daughter in marriage to Oduduwa, the name of the daughter was **Gborowo** who gave birth to **Ogborogan** or **Lagborogan** through Oduduwa.

**Olu-Iwa** was accompanied by two warrior companions, called **Ajebu** and **Olode**. The town founded was named after Ajebu and Ode, now known and called **Ijebu-Ode**.

The second migration was led by Arizu and third by Ogborogan, afterwards called Obanta. *The leader of the third migration later became the Awujale of Ijebu Kingdom.*

(vi) **Ijesa kingdom:**

Its founder was **Ajibogun**, the Owa Obokun of Ilesa, his mother was **Saparakunmi**. He settled at **Igbadaye**, where he died. His successors moved on and settled first at **Ilowa**, then at **Ilamuren** and **Ilaye** before the fifth Owa finally chose Ilesa as the permanent capital. In the process he has to subjugate the previous ruler of the place who was then made the second in rank to the Owa with the title of **Obanla**.

(vii) **Ila kingdom:**

Orangun, known as **Ifagbamila**, whose mother was **Adetunrin Anasin**, another wife of Oduduwa, was the founder of Ila. The Orangun was later recognized as the paramount ruler among a group of people known as Igbomina.

(viii) **Lagos kingdom:**

Lagos was founded by a small group of migrants of Awori-Yoruba who first settled at **Iseri** under the leadership of **Olofin Ogunfunminire**, whose origin is traced to the royal family house (known as Sooko ) at Ile-Ife. From **Iseri** these migrants spread to **Ebute Meta**, then **Iddo** and finally to the **Island of Lagos**, founded by AROMIRE; the children of Olofin Ogunfunminire. Eko

was changed to Lagos in **1472 A.D.** when a Portuguese expedition led by **Ruy de Sequeira** landed there.

**(ix) Ibadan City State**

The city was founded in the sixteenth (16) century at a time the Oyo people were returning from exile from **GBERE** in Ibariba country after **1542 AD**. Lagelu, the **Jagun Oshin of Ife Kingdom**, migrated to found **the first and second** Ibadan. He was made Jagun of Oyo Kingdom by Alaafin Obalokun (1590-1600), **and not Alaafin Sango** as claimed by His Imperial Majesty, Oba Adeyemi III in the Tribune of October 10, 2021. His son, Alaafin Ajagbo (1600 -1658) established the institution of the Aare Ona-Kakanfo in **1640 AD**. i.e The General Officer Commanding Imperial Oyo Army; the first incumbent being his friend from Iwoye, by name, Kokorogangan.

**The Third Ibadan** wa established when the allied army of Ife, Oyo, Ijebu and friendly Egba's occupied Ibadan, aftermath of the destruction of **Owu Ogbere** in **1825** while the Owu's migrated to join the Egba's in **1834 A.D**

## **6.0 URBANIZATION OF YORUBALAND**

Prior to the coming of the **Oduduwa group**, Ile-Ife was probably the sacred city of the **aborigines**. Yoruba traditions regard Ile-Ife not only as the centre of the world but also the place where all mankind was created. Information about the significance of Ile-Ife must have attracted **Oduduwa** there. On arrival, **Oduduwa** and his followers almost certainly assumed positions of authority either immediately or soon afterwards.

Numerically, the **immigrants** were probably relatively few. Moreover, it appears the aborigines put up limited resistance to the penetration and settlement of Oduduwa and his followers. If not, Yoruba tradition would have contained stories and epics of conquests both along the routes and on arrival in Yorubaland.

The ready acceptance and absorption of the Oduduwa group (immigrants) have been due to their high intelligence, dynamism and superior culture; and also to the liberal and progressive capacity of the aborigines to accommodate strangers and new ideas. The

richness of Yoruba culture is therefore due largely to the blending of the two cultural traditions evolved in different environment.

The period of Golden Age (1086-1793) is characterized as such because it witnessed the grandest cultural achievement of the Yoruba people:

- (i) The magnification of the divine-kingship;
- (ii) The establishment of many kingdoms including Oyo Empire;
- (iii) The flowering and building of cities; and
- (iv) Elaborate execution of art and sculpture

Urbanization of Yorubaland therefore, connotes civilization. Since the rise of the ancestral cities of the Near East some **5,500 years** ago, **urbanization has always been associated with civilization. The cultural history of Yorubaland in no exception.** The beginning of Yoruba cities marked the inception of the Yoruba Golden Age (1086-1793).

In addition to initiation of urbanization of Yorubaland, Oduduwa established a highly sophisticated *constitutional monarchy with well-defined system of separation of powers and checks and balances* based on an unwritten constitution. If the separation of powers was not made, the life and the liberty of the subjects would be exposed to arbitrary manipulation. Each organ of the government was a check upon the other.

However, the system of government differs from one community to another. It also varies in structures from leadership to the governed. For example, Ibadan modernized the hereditary monarchical system and evolved a republican system made up of the civil and the military traditional council and kingmakers. Ibadan also introduced women as headed by Iyalode into the system.

#### 7.0 THE TRADITIONAL PALACE:

**The royal palace is a public edifice built and maintenance edifice built and maintained by the entire population of the kingdom it is therefore not the private property of the incumbent king (oba).** In terms of size and significance, the **ancient Yoruba Palaces** were the grandest residential unit in both the royal capital and its kingdom.

The palace was a highly elaborate complex of the contemporary courtyard compounds (see table below):

**Table: List of Some Traditional Palaces**

Traditional Palace	Total Palace Area in Hectares	Built up Area		Royal Park	
		Hectares	% of Palace Area	Hectares	% of Palace
Owo	43.9	3.8	8.8%	40.1	9.2%
Ilesa	20.6	2.4	11.8%	18.2	88.2%
Ondo	17.4	2.0	11.6%	15.4	88.4%
Ado-Ekiti	10.9	5.3	48.1%	5.7	51.9%
Ile-Ife	8.1	1.8	22.0%	6.3	78.0%
Ijebu-Ode	7.7	2.8	36.8%	4.9	63.2%
Akure	8.3	1.5	17.6%	6.8	82.4%
Oyo	6.9	6.9	100.0%	----	-----
Ila-Orangun	5.8	4.7	81.0%	1.1	19.0%
Abeokuta (Ake-Palace)	2.5	2.5	100.0%	----	-----
Ibadan Irefin palace	3	1.0	33.0%	2.0	67.0%

**Sources:**

1. *Ojo, Yoruba Palace, 1996 p.27*
2. *Ige, the Royal Palace of Akure*
3. *Oyelade, the Royal Palace of Ila*
4. *Ademola Adejumo-Irefin Ogundeji Palace (1912)*

In traditional Yoruba history, Oba's Royal Palace was the most important in terms of locations and functions. The position of the palace was invariably the city's geographic centre or as far as possible if there were physical constraints. As the embodiment of the city and the foundation of city life, all the radial arteries of communication coverage on it. Irefin Ogundeji palace was built in 1912 on 3 hectares of land at Oke-Ife, Ibadan when he became the Baale of Ibadan since 1825, others were leaving in their residential buildings.