

# HISTORICAL NOTES ON YORUBA-SPEAKING OF SOUTH WESTERN NIGERIA

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## ORIGIN OF HUMANITY

The ancestor of all humanity evolved in Africa. The earliest evidence of their existence had been found in the East Africa at locations scattered North and South of the Equator. The evidence consist of fossils bones, stone tool and poignant of all, is the trail of footprints preserved in the petrified surface of a mud pan more than three (3) million years ago (John Reader, 1998). About 100,000 years ago, groups of modern human beings left Africa for the first time and progressively colonized the rest of the world. They moved across the Sinai Peninsula and were living in Eastern Mediterranean Region by 90,000 years.

The fossils evidence shows that modern humans were present in the Middle East by around 100,000 years ago. Population that turned north from Middle East was well established in Europe by 40,000 years ago. Those that turned east have reached Australia by 35,000 years ago at the latest, and were in China before 30,000 years ago. From Asia, groups of modern human crossed the Bering Straits into North America between 30,000 and 15,000 years ago when sea levels were low, and had dispersed down to the tip of South America by 12,000 years ago.

John Reader concluded that several strands of evidence, fossil, generic and linguistic point persuasively to the conclusion that: **“every person alive today descended from a population of anatomically modern humans that existed only in Africa until about 100,000 years ago. They were nomads, and they soon spread around the globe.”**

The earliest archaeological evidence of Yoruba aborigines came to light in the Sangoan era of 55,000-40,000 years before the present. The two notable Sangoan sites in Yorubaland occur in the **Jebba** area and along the **Ibadan-Abeokuta** road.

Investigations revealed that Sangoan culture was created by Homo Sapiens, a genus to which the European Neanderthal men belonged. The genus occupied a transitional stage between **Homo Erectus** and **Homo Sapiens** (modern man).

The inference to be drawn from the foregoing is that people, whatever their evolutionary stage, have been living in Yorubaland since the dawn of **Homo Habilis**, some 2 million years ago.

Homo habilis advanced into Homo erectus of the Archeulean culture of about 500,000 years ago. Homo erectus in turn advanced into Homo Sapiens of the Sangoan era of 55,000 to 40,000 years past. Finally, Homo sapiens evolved into Homo sapiens the modern man.

### **The Myth of Origin of Yoruba Race**

The questions about the origin of human race and the significance have long intrigued historians. The myth of origin concern more than the moment of creation. They also deal with events of a mythical past when supernatural beings existed on Earth. They tell how old order turned into the new.

Usually, myths of origin are stories that evolve. Every teller changes the source slightly, as time passes, people from different villages develop different stories.

The Yoruba people believe that Oduduwa was sent by God from heaven to create the earth and the human race. Oduduwa therefore descended with his lieutenants and landed at Ile-Ife with a chain.

The Benin traditional history claimed that the mythical Ogiso (or the god of the sky) descending from heaven like Oduduwa. Thus, the myth of the world being created in Benin and Ife are like most creation stories including those of the Chinese and the Jews.

The idea of some Eastern or Middle East origin of these dynasties is also not restricted to the Yoruba and Benin/Edo people, but it is common to most West African dynasties. Even the Nubians or Kush kingdom and the Egyptians migrated from the East, the Mediterranean region referred as “**the Cradle of Civilization**”

The Kush Tribe were descendants of **Nimrod** which earlier established Babylon Empire and Sumerian Empire. The name Kush was corrupted by the Egyptians from Cush the father of **Nimrod** or the grandson of **Ham** (the second son of **Noah**).

Reverend Samuel Johnson (1921) in his book titled “History of the Yorubas” wrote: The Origin of the Yoruba Nation is involved in obscurity. Like the early history of most nations, the commonly received accounts are for the most part purely legendary. The people being unlettered, and the language unwritten, all that is known is from traditions carefully handed down.”

At page 5 of “The History of the Yorubas” Johnson quoted Capt. Clapperten (1822-1824) as saying that: “The inhabitants of this **Yarba Province**, it is supposed originated from the remnant of the children of Canaan who were of the tribe of Nimrod. The cause of their establishment in the West Africa was, as it is stated, in consequence of their being driven by **Yar-rooba**, son of Khatan, out of Arabia to the

Western Coast between. Egypt and Abyssinia. From that spot they advanced into the interior of Africa, till they reached **Yarba** where they fixed their residence.

Professor Saburi Biobaku (1973) in a book titled: “Sources of Yoruba History” was of the opinion that the Yoruba first settled in Nupe country North Central Nigeria from where they crossed the Niger River to Ile-Ife. Hence, there are close socio-cultural similarities among the Yorubas, Hausas, Kanuris and Nupes.

Rev. Samuel Ojo Bada (1937) in his book” Iwe Itan Saki” narrated how Namurudu died in Busa in Ibariba country. Namurudu and Kisra, king of Nupe, were said to be cousins and both belonged to the “**Kisra migration** from Upper Nile, Nubia between 600-1,000 A.D. through Lake Chad to the Kingdom of Kanem established in 1774 A.D.

The Maglaumi Berbers, a lineage of the Zaghawa Berbers, founded the kingdom and also migrated from Northeast Africa, entered the Lake Chad Basin to kingdom of Kanem. But the kingdom of Bornu on the western states of Lake Chad later superseded the kingdom of Kanem as the seat of power. Hence, the similarities in the Names, Zaghawa, Safuwa (Saufuwa) dynasty, Oduduwa. The kings of Gogobiri and of the Kukawa, two tribes in the Hausa country all belonged to Kisra migration (Oluremi I. Obateru, 2006).

Professor N.V. Marpet (1978), brought out the fact lucidly that “migration has played essential roles in all stages of the history of man right from the commercial tribal formation up to the era of class formation.

### **Pre-Oduduwa History of Ife**

Anthropological investigation has revealed that the Black people (Negroes) are indigenous to West Africa. For instance, in the March 1953 meeting of the New York Academy of Sciences, Daryll Forde asserted that;

*“..... the greater part of forest belt of West Africa, over a distance of a thousand miles from central Liberia to beyond the lower Niger in Nigeria is occupied by people speaking a series of related language to which the general name ‘Kwa’, the common root for “people”, has been given.....”*

The above funding of Daryll Forde confirms the claim of Samuel Johnson at page 15 of his book *“that the Yoruba country was not altogether unpeopled when Oduduwa and his party entered it from the east, the probability is that the aboriginal inhabitants were conquered and absorbed, at least at the central if not at the remote provinces of the Yoruba Kingdom”*.

In the “People of Southern Nigeria”. Vol. 1, by Talbot, it is written thus: “**Oduduwa and his followers came to Ile-Ife about A.D. 800**”. The Yoruba people are thus a mixture of two races, the Negro aborigines who numerically constitute the dominant population and the Berber immigrants who, because of their cultural superiority, became the ruling class (Oluremi I. Obateru, 2006).

The racial characteristics of the Negro show that he is ultricchous (wooly haired), prognathous and dark in colour. There were inter-marriages between these Negro horigenes and the Oduduwa group. One classical example was the daughter of Ore-Otun or Owafonran, Princess Yemoja or Lakange captured by Ogun and passed on to Oduduwa. She gave birth to Oranmiyan hence the reason for having hybrid of black and white colours. Ogun was dark, Oduduwa was white. Ogun and Oranmiyan are being celebrated every year at Olojo festival in Ile-Ife till today.

Another example was the Female Ooni of Ife by name, Luwo Gbagida (the 18<sup>th</sup> Ooni of Ife) from Okerewe Quarters who married Chief Obaloran of Ilode Quarters and she gave birth to Adekola Telu who grew up with a burning desire to wear a crown (Fabunmi, 1985 page 45). Obaloran was the head of a pre-Oduduwa community called Iloran community at page 20 of Ife; The Genesis of Yoruba Race. Luwo therefore sent him out of Ile-Ife to go and found a kingdom for himself. Adekola Telu was the progenitor of the founder of modern Iwo town. According to Oba I.B. Akinyele (1911) in “Iwe Itan Ibadan”, Adekola Telu settled at **Igbo-Orita near Ilesa** with his children who succeeded him before Pariu founded the present Iwo (pages 293-298).

Researches that have been carried out in the Department of History, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife in the last couple of years have shown that, there were population settlements all over Yorubaland before the advent of Oduduwa era. In what is now Ondo and Ekiti states, there were groups of people at Oke-Isolo near Ikole, Agbahum near Ado-Ekiti, Ido near the present day Idoani, Afon neat the present day Owo, the Ilale Ijegin occupying the present site of Owo town.

In Ile-Ife, there were 13 groups of villages. According to Professor I.A Akinyogbin, 2002 in his book titled “Milestone and Social System in Yoruba History. A key to understanding Yoruba History” each of the 13 communities was patrilineal and had a head apparently called Oba. All the 13 communities also had one single head. The leadership appears to be rotated among all the groups and symbol of the overall head was the Ade-Are (Are Crown). The community heads are tabulated below:

S/No	Name of Community	Head of Community
1.	Iddo	Onipetu
2.	Iloromu	Obaluru
3.	Idita	Obalesun/Obalale
4.	Iloran	Obaloran
5.	Odin	Lakore
6.	Oke-Oja	Obajio
7.	Imojubi	Apata
8.	Iraaye	Obalaaye
9.	Ijugbe	Obalejugbe
10.	Oke Awo	Owa Fegun
11.	Iwinrin	Obawinrin
12.	Parakin	Obalufe
13.	Omologun	Obadio

**Sources:** *Chie Dr. M.A. Fabunmi – IFE: the Genesis of Yoruba Race (1985) Omotoso Eluyemi, This is Ile, 1986.*

The shrines of these community heads are still in Ile-Ife today like Obameri, Obawinrin, Obatala, Ijugbe and Oduduwa shrines including those of Oranmiyan, Oluorogbo, and Ogun. These history sites and cultural heritage are a vital part of the city of Ile-Ife and crucial to its “identity”, its cultural and social wellbeing as the Yoruba cradle of civilization.

These thirteen pre-Oduduwa communities were reorganized by Oduduwa to form five (5) original Quarters in Ile-Ife and appointed head of each quarter who now formed the State Council called Ihare or Agba Ile-Ife. They are: Ireto, More, Ilare, Ilode, and Okerewe. Obalufe of Ireto is the Prime Minister also called Orinto the name of Oduduwa’s younger brother. Iraaye later became the sixth Quarter in Ife allocated to Obalaaye from Ipole. Obadio of Omologun a pre-Oduduwa community became Onisoro or traditional keeper of Oduduwa shrine.

## **The children of Oduduwa (Oduduwa Dynasty)**

Historians had posited that despite the claim of Ife tradition which refers to Oninana, Onipopo and Oba Arada as children of Oduduwa, traditions in these areas do not mention Oduduwa as the father of their kings nor do they have Oduduwa type of monarchy.

Professor I. A. Akinjogbin (2002), wrote that some of the earliest migrants left Ile-Ife in protest against Oduduwa take over. Examples were: Idanre in Ondo, Ugbo in Okotipupa and probably Ketu in the present republic of Benin although these group of people later established Oduduwa type monarchy. However, Obadada by which title the king of ancient kingdom of Dahomey were called did not refer in its traditions to an Ife origin or to descents from Oduduwa.

Abajadi the son of owafonran followed owa Ajibogun and Aremitan (the two sons of Oduduwa) to the Atlantic Ocean to fetch water to cure Oduduwa blindness. Owa's mother was sarakun (Fabunmi, 1985). Owa and later became the Oba of Obokun (1150-1255 A.D.) and later the king of Ijesaland while Aremitan became Oba of Idanre (Fabunmi M.A. 1985). Ore towns are now in Osun and Ekiti states with their traditional heads as members of the Traditional Councils of respective states, owore of Otun also signed the Treaty of peace in 1886 along with Obaloran, Obajio and Obalufe on the side of Ekiti parapo Confederation after the Kioji war.

Oranmiyan was the fourth ruler of Ile-Ife whose real name was Odede (Fabunmi M.A. 1985) Ornamiyen did not succeed Oduduwa as claimed by Johnson. He was the founder of Eyeo or Katunga and later settled at Oko. His mother was Yemoja or Lakange, the Princess of an aborigine Oba captured by Ogun before passing her on to Oduduwa, his father, after founding Oko, Oranmiyan left for Ile-Ife where he died and was buried. He left behind two children, Ajuwon (Ajaka) and Sango who succeeding him in term. The wife of Oranmiyan was Torio, a princess of Nupe king who gave birth to Alafin Sango and Ejigolo who gave birth to Akinbekun the first Okere of Saki. Ogun founded Saki and was the Regent in Ile-Ife when Oduduwa became blind. He died in Saki and was buried there (S.O. Bada, 1937)

According to Samuel Johnson (1921) page 11 of The History of the Yorubas, Oranmiyan left behind **ADIMU**, the Oduduwa's trusty servants in charge of the royal treasures and the charms to observe the customary worship of the nation god '**IDI**' and '**ORISA OSI**'. Adimu was the son of a sacrificial victim "Omo Oluwo Oni". He was commonly designated "Adimu Ola".

However, Ife historians and tradition, particularly Chief Fabunmi M.A. (1985) revealed that obadio or Onisoro is the keeper of Oduduwa Shrine. **Obadio is one of the pre-Oduduwa community**

**heads.** This had been the practice all over the world since ancient time when some tribes and clans with better organization and skills seeking to enlarge their spheres conquered or absorbed the aborigines. The first Chinese dynasty, the Xia, was established this way (2070BC-1600BC) and in the Indus Valley (now Pakistan) in the third millenniums BC (about 2500Bc) according to Anwar Shah with Sana shah (2006).

In Benin, the Ogiso dynasty was replaced by the Oduduwa type of monarchy through Oranmiyan the grandson of Oduduwa. Oduduwa himself took over Ife and subdued the aborigines or the pre-Oduduwa communities. Alafin Atiba (the son of Alafin Abiodun) in 1849 subdued Bale of Ago-Oja, his age long friend, and elevated its status to Ashipa of Oyo. When the allied army took over Ibadan, Lagelu dynasty represented by Aboke was made to worship 'Oke-Badan' and another Ife man from Oke Eso by name Labosinde became the Oluwo of Ibadanland or the Kingmaker. Till today, the representatives of Ogiso dynasty remain the keeper of Benin treasure and culture.

Benin traditions claim that the first Oba (king) of Benin, Oranmiyan, was grandson of Oduduwa, Benin history also goes further to pin down about 1170 A.D. as the year of his reign. His son Eweka through a Benin woman became the king of Benin in 1200 A.D.

According Elizabeth Cox and Erica Andersen (1984), the first settler in Lagos was Aromire, a Yoruba fisherman, who swam across from Iddo to Lagos. He began to grow pepper on what is today the site of the Oba's palace before the Island was discovered by the Portuguese explorer, Sequeria in 1472 A.D. he and his brothers are regarded as the ancestors of the Idejo, the white cap Chiefs, who traditionally own all the land in Lagos.

The office of Oba (king) was introduced at the behest of Oba of Benin who was able to exercise an effective veto on the appointment of the Oba of Lagos and the early Obas acknowledge his suzerainty.

There were other present Obas in Yorubaland who are illustrated personalities, either individually or in groups, who migrated from Ile-Ife for diverse reasons e.g. hunting adventure, ambition to found own villages and towns and later established themselves as Yoruba sub-groups.

## Yoruba Subgroups

The Yoruba people are made up of a number of subgroups of which the principal ones are as follows (Oluremi I. Obateru, 2006 1.63)

- 1) Atakpa of central eastern Togo;
- 2) The Sha (or Isha) of centre Benin ( Dahomey) whose main urban centres include Dasa, Sabe, Sabelu. Basida and Saoru- names which the errors of French orthography have converted into dassa, Save, Savaheu, Bassila and Tchaourou
- 3) The Holli ( Ahoi, Nago or Anago ) of southern Benin Republic whose main urban centres include Ketu ( Ketou), Pobe, Sakete and Porto Novo;
- 4) The Awori of Badagry area of western Lagos states
- 5) The Egbado and Egba of western Ogun state;
- 6) The Oyo and Ibadan of Northern and Southern Oyo state respectively;
- 7) The Ijebu of Eastern Ogun of Lagos states;
- 8) The Ife and Ijesha of southern Osun states;
- 9) The Osun of Northern Osun states;
- 10) The Iloye and Ikale of southern Ondo states;
- 11) The Ondo, Akure and Owo of central Ondo states;
- 12) The Akoko of northern Ondo state;
- 13) The Ekiti of Ekiti state;
- 14) The Igbomina of Ilorin area; and
- 15) The Yagba, Bunu and Aworo (Kakanda) of Kabba District.

The process of establishing Oduduwa type of monarchy, according to Akinjogbin I.A (2002), went on from about the 9<sup>th</sup> century until about the 15<sup>th</sup> century or later. Not all the kingdoms went directly from Ife; many others went from the kingdoms that originally migrated from Ile-Ife. All of them had one symbol or the other that tied them to Ile-Ife and made them “ **Sons of Oduduwa**”, so that today after a thousand years of history, most Oba’s who wear the beaded crown are regarded as descendants of Oduduwa.

However, Bashorun Oluyole of Ibadan (1835-1847) was suspicious and apprehensive of the demands and exertions of hereditary royalty as it obtained in the Oyo monarchical system. Consequently, Ibadan introduced a modernization of the system of government making it more responsive to change and fulfilling the expectations of the people.

The advantages of a republican constitution over the old order had also been established beyond doubt. Ibadan in the 19<sup>th</sup> century thus became haven for the progressives who became disillusioned about the hereditary monarchial system practiced in Yorubaland.

### **The British Influence on Traditional Institution**

It is important to make some clarifications at this juncture. According to Prof. 3 A Atanda (1979) in his book- “The New Oyo Empire” the erroneous idea about the extent of the old Oyo Empire was also shared by British Official, probably through the influence of men like Crowther and Johnson- page 2.

- i) Some parts of Yorubaland were tributary to the kingdom of Benin and were never controlled by Oyo, as Benin itself was not. For example, Benin tradition shows that Ekiti, Owo and Ondo areas were for a long time under the rule or influence of the kingdom of Benin (J. Eghareuba, 1960).
- ii) Ilesa, Ile-Ife and Ila were kingdoms, each with a considerable area of influence and independent of old Oyo. With respect to Ilesha, it will be recalled that the attempt which old Oyo made in the seventeenth century, during the reign of Obalokun, to reduce Ilesha to submission resulted in heavy losses, for Oyo (Johnson, P.168).
- iii) Ila was the capital of a kingdom people by the Igbomina with Orangun of Ila as the king himself considered a king of equal rank with the Alafin- page 8 of “The New Oyo Empire”.
- iv) And both Oyo and Egba traditional histories agree on the fact that the Egba were under the control of the old Oyo Empire. It was because the Egba found that control tyrannical that they revolted between (1775-80 A.D. (Johnson and S.O. Biobaku, 1957, P.8). Ibadan at that time was regarded as one of the Egba villages.

The imperialist powers had different ideas about how to run a colony. Britain’s colonial policy differed from that of France. Germany’s attitudes were not the same as Belgium’s. The indirect rule of the British imperialist- “ Pax Britannica” endeavoured to teach the people in Africa to administer their own affairs by building on the institution of the people themselves, that is, tribal institutions which have been handed down to them through the centuries.

Thus, the Traditional council established by Colonial Administration from 1897 starting from Ibadan in Yorubaland and the seat of Government became the instrument by which the British introduced innovation into the traditional political, economic and social systems of the area.

During the Elepe of Epe and Alaperu of Iperu, the intervention of Alafin Adeyemi I was rejected, hence Ooni Olubuse I of Ife was invited to give testimony in 1894 as to which Oba in Yorubaland has the

right to wear a beaded crown. The Ooni of Ife listed 21 Oba's which was published in the colony of Lagos Gazette on 24<sup>th</sup> February, 1903 pages 166 and 167 ( Mr. Ebenezer Williams in " Sunday times" of April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1976) and an Advertorial titled Rejoinder on " Awutale Misfired on Osile, Agura, Olowu". Published in the Sunday Tribune, 28 may, 2000. The list excluded the Oba's in the Republic of Benin claimed to be descendants of Oduduwa thus confirming Professor Akinjogbin I.A findings that they left in protest of Oduduwa takeover of Ile-Ife like Ugbo community in Okitipupa whose present Oba is Akinruntan, the business magnate in the petroleum industry.

In 1917, the Governor MacGregor listed 22 Oba's as the only kings permitted by Yoruba tradition to wear beaded crown for the purpose of safeguarding the Yoruba institution. He arrogated to himself the right to confer the title of "Kings" and the wearing of beaded crowns on people. In 1936 for instance, the Bale of Ibadan was elevated to the rank of a kinglet (Olubadan), an act against which the Alafin of Oyo (Oba Ladigbolu I) indignantly and vehemently protested as Ibadan was a dependent town (not a city) under his territorial jurisdiction (Oluremi I. Obateru, 2006). Several Olojas in Ekiti and Bales have now become "Kings" in Yorubaland.

This marked the beginning of departure from the Yoruba institution of kingship practice of wearing beaded crown. The policy was incorporated into various chiefs' law and was vested in the Executive Governors of the states. This was followed by changes in the traditional structure of Obaship with the creation of Divisions during the Colonial era.

Up till 1921, Ijebu Division was under Abeokuta Province while Alake of Abeokuta was the paramount Oba. Ijebu Division (Ijebu and Remo) was carved out of Abeokuta Province in 1921 with the Awujale of Ijebu Ode as a paramount ruler (Sunday Tribune, 28 May, 2000).

In 1934, the new Oyo province created in 1914 was split into five independent Native Authorities namely: Oyo, Ibadan, Ife, Ilesha and Ila with Alafin of Oyo, Olubadan of Ibadan (Then Bale of Ibadan), Ooni of Ife, Owa of Ijeshaland and Orangun of Ila became the paramount rulers of their respective Native Authorities (National Gazette No 17 of 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1934).

In 1952, the Action Group Government under Chief Obafemi Awolowo created Remo Division out of Ijebu province and Akarigbo of Ijebu Remo became the paramount Oba.

In 1966, by virtue of the Council of Obas and Chiefs Law W.N.L No, 33 of 1966, the late Lt. Col. F.A. Fajuyi constituted and expanded membership of the Council of Obas and Chiefs from seven (7) in 1959 to eleven (11) with the following members as permanent members:

- i.) The Alafin of Oyo to represent Oyo South and Oyo North Division.
- ii.) The Ooni of Ife to represent Ife Division
- iii.) The Alake of Abeokuta to represent Egba Division
- iv.) The Awujale of Ijebuland to represent Ijebu A vision
- v.) The Owa Obokun of Ijesaland to represent Ijesa South and North Division
- vi.) The Ewi of Ado-Ekiti to represent Ekiti Central Division
- vii.) Osemawe of Ondo to represent Ondo Division
- viii.) The Olowo of Owo to represent Owo Division
- ix.) The Orangun of Ila to represent Osun North East
- x.) The Olubadan of Ibadanland to represent Ibadan City and Ibadan Division
- xi.) The Akangbo of Ijebu Remo to represent Remo Division

## **CONCLUSION**

In summing up the history of Yoruba Nation before it became a British colony, we have to consider some of the factors which always influenced the course of history in Yorubaland. There had been great Empires and civilizations which have lasted for a time and then passed away as a result of wars of conquest by stronger and sometimes less civilized tribes and nations. Egypt, Greece, Rome, Sumer are great examples of these great civilizations that have passed away as a result of wars of conquest by stronger and sometimes less civilized tribes and nations.

Some of these and societies, such as ancient Summer, have also passed from the pages of history, their people absorbed by other societies and their cultures changed beyond recognition. In some others, the people survived as a people, but their cultures entered a period of decline and decay from which they are yet to recover.

Each of these societies made significant contributions to the world and each played a major role in the shaping of human history. These societies helped to advanced human progress in the areas of technology, the arts and sciences, and in the general field of human thought.

Yoruba people remain to a large extent, a people identifiable by their language and culture. They are bound together by the idea of a common origin and the belief that they are all descendants of Oduduwa. However, as long as there is internal strife so long shall the Yoruba race continue to be weak, and being weak, it will easily succumb to stronger and more powerful forces.