

## ILE-IFE: THE GENESIS OF YORUBA RACE AND SOURCE OF CIVILIZATION

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### 1.0 THE ORIGIN OF YORUBA PEOPLE

Herbert J. Muller commenting on the use of the past: Happy is the people without a history and thrice happy is the people without a Sociology, for as long as we possessed a living culture we are unconscious of it, and it is only when we are in danger of losing it or when it is already dead that we begin to realize its existence and to study it scientifically. We cannot help having some philosophy of history however vague or unconscious. So we might try having a clear, conscious and coherent one.

The myth associated with Oduduwa is the myth of conquering people who took over the rulership of autonomous people and established representatives of the **Oduduwa dynasty** in almost all Yoruba areas. These immigrants probably came from the southern Nile area, particularly, the kingdom of KUSH, and particularly from its **iron working center of Meroe** which will locate it in the **present day Sudan**. Some Yoruba dynasty such as the one in **Ijebu-Ode** claim a **Waddai** ancestry (i.e present day Chad) which is not too-far from origin of Meroeas where Oduduwa came from.

Prior to the coming of the Oduduwa group, Ile-Ife was probably the sacred city of the aborigines. Yoruba tradition regard Ile-Ife not only as center 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 group almost certainly assumed positions of authority either immediately or soon afterwards.

#### 1.1 The Oduduwa Revolution in Ile-Ife

In his book, "Oba Adesoji Aderemi", Dr. Omotoso Eluyemi, an archaeologist in the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) writes that many of the most ancient **primitives' tribes** lived on the surrounding **hills tops of Ile-Ife and rock shelters**. Traces of this early occupant have been located near these hills, for example, the **Ora** and **Onigbin** hills.

Oral tradition of Ile-Ife says that in the most ancient days many of these tribes and settlements constituted themselves later into different **compact communities** that lived not very far from these hills. Tradition mentions their names as units or entities having their own **Oba** (ruler) and each **Oba had an array of chiefs under him**. These units were based on **idile** blood ties (that is, a group of families).

Archaeological field survey undertaken by Dr. Omotoso Eluyemi reveals that thirteen (13) of those **union-communities** have been located. They were the earliest known units or group based on **idile** (family units) in Ife environment. They are:

- 1) **Iddo** community headed by **Ompetu**
- 2) **Iloromu** community headed by **Obaluru**
- 3) **Ideta** community headed by **Obalesun** or **Obalale**
- 4) **Odin** community headed by **Lakore**
- 5) **Iloran** community headed by **Obaloran**
- 6) **Oke-Oja** community headed by **Obajio**
- 7) **Imojobi** community headed by **Apata**
- 8) **Iraaye** community headed by **Obalaaye**
- 9) **Ijugbe** community headed by **Obalejugbe**
- 10) **Oke-Awo** community headed by **Fegun**
- 11) **Iwinrin** community headed by **Obawinrin**
- 12) **Parakin** community headed by **Obalufe**
- 13) **Omologun** community headed by **Obadio**

**Obagbile market**, not very far from the **Obagbile hills**, (now University of Ife Agricultural firms) was the first **Oja-Oko** (rural market) known to ancient Ile-Ife while **Oja-ejigbomekun** (now **Oja-Ife market near Aiyebaju church**) was the **first urban market** known to Ile-Ife. According to chief (Dr.) M.A. Fabunmi (1985), there was evidence that there was trade contact among the tribes that constituted these different early communities.

## **2.0 ODUDUWA DYNASTIES IN YORUBALAND:**

Oduduwa and Ife, according to Professor Akintoye (2010), gave the Yoruba people their first kingdom, elaborated the structure of their type of kingdom, and pointed all of the Yoruba people in the direction to this higher level of political existence. Rev. Samuel Johnson in his book. “The History of the Yoruba” published in 1921, claimed that the following were the first seven kingdom founded from Ife by members of the Ife royal family: (i) the **Owu**.

- 1) The Owu, (that is, Owu Iponle) kingdom founded by the Olowu;
- 2) The Ketu kingdom founded by Alaketu;
- 3) The Benin kingdom founded by Oranmiyan;
- 4) The Ila kingdom founded by Orangun;
- 5) The Sabe kingdom founded by Onisabe;
- 6) The Popo kingdom founded by Onipopo; and
- 7) The Oyo-Ile kingdom founded by Oranmiyan;

Professor S. Adebajji Akintoye (2010) said, Johnson Obviously relied only on traditions collected by him in the **western parts of Yorubaland**. It is known that in other parts of Yorubaland, the following are mentioned among the earliest kingdoms founded by **Princess from Ile-Ife**: the **Ilesa kingdom** founded by **Owa Ajibogun** (also known as Obokun), the **Ijebu-Ode kingdom** founded by **Obanta**, the **Owa Kingdom** founded by **Ojugbelu** (hisson Imade), the **Ado Kingdom** in Ekiti founded **Awamaro**, and Ondo kingdom founded by the Osemawu (Pupu) and others.

Thus, it should be noted that involvement of the missionaries in the manipulation, misrepresentation of certain areas of the corollary of the Yoruba history, particularly the book written by Rev. Samuel Johnson, an indigene of Oyo, in **1897** and first published in **1921**, entitled “**The History of the Yoruba**”. The original manuscripts of the book had got lost in the hands of the publisher and they could not be found some chapters had to be rewritten, some curtailed others amplified, a new ones added where necessary according the Editor Dr. Samuel Johnson (1921).

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, and **in the words of R.G. Collingwood**:

“The written records of more advanced peoples may similarly be the same but the materials of history... **History needs to be, as indeed it is, rewritten from time to time and past events revalued in the light of fresh development and new ideas**”.

Nearly every kingdom states in its traditions claimed that its founder originated from Ife, that he was a descendant of Oduduwa, and that he migrated from Ife in the time of Oduduwa or close to it, according to Professor S. Adebajji Akintoye (2010). Ife palace traditions have it that Oduduwa himself, on his deathbed, initiated the **kingdom-founding** movement by urging members of the family to go out and establish kingdom like Ife in the rest of Yorubaland.

Thus, the Oduduwa followers under the leadership of Oduduwa set out to perform the task of reconstruction. Invariably a new settlement emerged from the hybridization of remnants of the pre-existing settlements. The emergence of the new settlement and the ascendancy group as a dynamic group went on together.

Another important aspect of royalty that also developed with Oduduwa was the **use of crowns with beaded fringes, “Ade Ileke”** which was not unknown in different parts of Yorubaland during the **pre-Oduduwa** era (R.P/ Bertho, 1950) but it was confined to rituals. In Ile-Ife itself, heads of pre-Oduduwa communities made use of **beaded crown wears**. That is, simple undecorated head wears (oro) made of straw as part of their **regalia**. **The use of ‘Ade’ was a symbol of authority**.

The ready acceptance and absorption of the **Oduduwa group** 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.

*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. (Chief M.A. Fabunmi, 1958).

Information has it that scared kingship belonged 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, and 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.

### **3.0 CONFLICTING ACCOUNTS OF ODUDUWA'S CHILDREN AND GRAND CHILDREN**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The current chieftaincy dispute between the Alaafin of Oyo and the Ooni of Ife over the right to confer pan-Yoruba titles is more than a passing quarrel, according to Adebamiwa Olugbenda Michael (2025). It is a profound reminder of the uneasy balance between history and modernity. Culture and law, tradition and democracy is contemporary Yorubaland. What appears on the surface to be a mere clash of egos between two revered monarchs is in act emblematic of deeper historical fissures, unresolved constitutional ambiguities, and the perennial contestation over Yoruba identity and authority.

The current hierarchies, distinguishing between the so-called primary and secondary Yoruba kingdoms, are usually treated as sacrosanct in both academic literature and popular imagination. However, these hierarchies, according to Professor Akinwumi Ogundiran (2020), are products of the regional political reorganization that followed the collapse of Oyo Empire, the instability of the nineteenth century, and the imposition of the British colonial rule. These gazette and standardized official template of hierarchies among the Yoruba kings during the early twentieth century was created at the instigation of the colonial officers, who needed this narrative to implement the British policy of indirect rule.

The **Alake** and paramount ruler of Egbaland, Oba Adedotun Gbadebo, **the Ooni is first among Yoruba monarchs, 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 were as follows:

- (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 Popos, and
- (vii) Oranyan, the First Alafin of Oyo

### **3.2 Contemporary Historical Facts:**

- (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, 2010).

In connection with the paternity of Oranmiyan which is said to be disputed Oduduwa and Ogun, Ile-Ife tradition has it that Oduduwa was white-skinned; Oduduwa took as his wife a woman slave named **Lakange** captured by Ogun who had fallen in love with her, when she gave birth to Oranmiyan, **he was half white-skinned like Oduduwa and half black-skinned like Ogun. In commemoration of this in Ile-Ife, young Emese run through the street with the right half of their bodies coloured red with camwood and the left side with coloured white with chalk** during the Olojo (Ogun) festival in honour of Ogun and Oranmiyan

(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 they 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 and Balogun 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 between 1505 and 1578 during the reign of Oba of Benin called Orhoghua. **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.

Lagelu later married the daughters of **Oba Agura of Gbagura**, his neighbours with the headquarters at Ido by name **Atage Oota** (a.k.a Olomu-Oru) and the **first Aboke**. He also married the daughter of **Oba Akarigbo of Ijebu-Igbo** who gave birth to **Efunyele**, who became the **second Aboke** (Chief M.K.O. Adebayo, 2015).

### 3.3 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>AJIBOSIN</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).*

### **3.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Oyo expansionists can keep crafting their distorted history, but Yorubaland was never at any time a single kingdom. Indeed, until colonialism, no part of what is the South-West today, apart from Oyo and its tributaries, was ever known as Yoruba. The word Yoruba was just borrowed for convenience and if the owners want it back, let it be returned to them. The fact that your ancestors murdered and oppressed many people does not make you a perpetual lord over unwilling peoples. It is a grievous disease to be idle and jobless, fishing for trouble. Will a son be worshipped by his own father just because he has or once had power?

During the 17th century, Oyo had horses and grains, reaching its acme in the 18th century, largely through profits derived from the slave trade. With the abolition of slavery, its power waned. Yes, the British colonialists initially gave higher recognition to the Alaafin of Oyo due to the memory of Empire, but the Oodua nations chose to return to their history. The Oyo that the Alaafin hankers after did not start great; it only attracted greatness at a point, and then went into decline. No Alaafin is king over the Ekiti, the Ijesha, the Owo, the Ondo, the Ilaje, the Awori, the Remo and the Ijebu. How can the people who threw off Oyo yoke via Ibadan through the 16-year Kiriji (Ekiti Parapo) War (July 30, 1877-March 14, 1893) now return to that yoke in 2025? Will the children of Fabunmi of Oke Mesi and Ogedengbe of Ilesa be enslaved again? Ibadan has actually served Oduduwaland more than Oyo ever will, yet the Olubadan has never threatened fire and brimstone.

Breathing fire in 2025 is not the way to build this land. The crown that the Ondo, the Remo, the Ilaje, the Awori, the Ijebu, the Ekiti and others wear today did not come from Oyo. I am tired of addressing professors and pursuers of violence. When certain wild, analphabetic thugs shout themselves hoarse, chanting “Oyo owns the crown,” ask them which crown they are referring to. The Ooni acknowledging the military might of Oyo at any point in time does not diminish his throne in any way. Let the warmongers rest.

Who hinges present action on past glory? Your forebears and power yesterday, and then you want to seize tomorrow? Did your fathers tell you they own even-today? You expansionists, why not climb Olumo Rock and claim ownership, and see if your head will still rest on your neck by midday? Your fathers of whom you are so proud must have owned the Atlantic and the Sahara desert. Now that I remember, they owned Karachi and the Congo goldmines. They invented mummification in Egypt; they occupied America long before the Paleo-Indian, and long before the Barbarians of Gaul fought the Battle of Maldon. They owned and still own everything, even the air we breathe. Yes they own the clouds and hailstones; they were such good inventors. They will not cease telling us about their ancestors.

## **APPENDIX I**

### **ONI'S LIST OF YORUBA A KINGS IN 1903**

The Oni of Ife visited Lagos in 1903 at the invitation of the Governor, Sir William MacGregor, to give his ruling to the Governor and the members of his Central Native Council (a body mainly representative of Lagos and the Colony) on the complaint of the Akarigbo of Ijebu Remo against the wearing of a crown by the Elepe another ruler in Ijebu Remo. Sitting with his back to the Council, the Oni stated that only the following obas were entitled to the crowns with beaded fringes which were conferred by his predecessors at Ife and which usually denote membership of the house of Oduduwa:

1. Alake of Abeokuta
2. Olowu of Owu (Abeokuta)
3. Alafin of Oyo
4. Oba of Ado (Benin)
5. Oshemawe of Ondo
6. Awujale of Ijebu Ode
7. Alara of Ara (Ekiti)
8. Ajero of Ijero (Ekiti)
9. Orangun of Ila
10. Owa of Ilesha
11. Alaye of Efon (Ekiti)
12. Olojudo of Iddo (Ekiti)
13. Olosi of Osi (Ekiti)
14. Ore of Otun (Ekiti)
15. Akarigbo of Ijebu Remo
16. Alaketu of Ketu
17. Elekole of Ikole (Ekiti)
18. Olowo of Owo
19. Ewi of Ado (Ekiti)
20. Oloko (or Gshile) of Oko (Abeokuta)
21. Alagura (or Agura) of Gbagura (Abeokuta)

On the strength of our historical knowledge of the kingdoms of the Golden Age, the following kings were mistakenly left out by the Oni:

22. The Onisabe of Sabe,
23. The Deji Akure
24. The Olupopo of the Popos,
25. The Onidada of the Fon,

26. The Oninana of the Gas of Accra,

(see Appendices 5.2 to 5.4)

*Sources:*

- (a) The above up to number 21 is extracted from RS. Smith, 1976, p. 241.
- (b) W. Barron 1969, p. 11
- (c) Those listed 22 to 26 are the additions of the writer based on Appendices 5.2 to 5.4.

*Note;* on page 15 of his book, *The History of the Yorubas*, Samuel Johnson asserts that Yoruba tradition has it that:

“...the Yoruba sway once extended as far as Ashanti and included the Gas of Accra, for the Gas say that their ancestors came from Ile-Ife; and the constitution of the Gas Language is said to be more like Yoruba than like Fanti; the language of the Gold Coast and the area in which that language is spoken is strictly limited.”

## **APPENDIX II**

### **WILLIAM BASCOM'S LIST OF YORUBA KINGS**

According to William Bascom, the most commonly mentioned Yoruba kings who are the direct descendants of the sixteen sons of Oduduwa are:

1. The Oni of Ife,
2. The Alafin of Oyo,
3. The Onisabe of Sabe,
4. The Alaketu of Ketu,
5. The Osemawe of Ondo,
6. The Owa of Ilesha,
7. The Orangun of Ila,
8. The Alaye of Efon,
9. The Alara of Ara,
10. The Olojudo of Ido,
11. The Elekole of Ikole,
12. The Oba of Ado (Benin)
13. The Onipopo of Popo (Egun) at Allada,
14. The Onidada of the Fon at Abomey (Benin Republic)
15. The Oninana of the Gas of Accra in Ghana,

*Source: William Bascom, The Yoruba of South-Western Nigeria, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1969, p. 11*

### **APPENDIX III**

#### **OMOTOSHO ELUYEMI'S LIST OF YORUBA KINGS**

On pages 18 and 19 of his book. This is Ile-Ife published in 1986 Omotosho Eluyemi asserts that the children and grandchildren of Oduduwa who left Ile-Ife to found other kingdoms were:

1. Odede Oranmiyan (grandson) - who founded Benin and Oyo Kingdoms.
2. Ajagunla Fagbamila - the Orangun of Ile-Ila
3. Soropasan - the Alaketu of Ketu (now in Benin Republic)
4. Ajaleke - the Alake of Egbaland,
5. Ajibogun - the Owa of Ilesha
6. Lugborogan - the Awujale of Ijebuland,
7. Obarada - a kingdom in Benin Republic,
8. Oninana - a kingdom in Ghana,
9. Onipopo (Okanbi) - Popo kingdom in Benin Republic,
10. Onisabe - Sabe kingdom in Benin Republic,
11. Pupupu - the Osemawe of Ode Ondo,
12. Ajaponda - the Deji of Akure,
13. Ajibosin - the Olowu of Owu,
14. Awamaro - the Ewi of Ado-Ekiti,
15. Arere (Ojugbelu) - the Olowo of Owu,
16. Adarawale - the Alara of Aramoko,
17. Ogbe - the Ajero of Ijero,
18. Owaranran - the Owore of Otun kingdom destroyed  
by the Fulanis in Ilorin Province,
19. Akinsola - the Elekole of Ikole,
20. - the Akarigbo of Ijebu Remo,
21. - the Olosi of Osi,
22. - the Alaaye of Ipole Aaye (Efon Alaaye)
23. - the Olojudo of Ido, (Ekiti)
24. Adegbola Akeran - the Owa Arigbajo of Igbajo,
25. - the Owa Otan of Otan Aiyegbaju

#### **4.0 THE CONFLICTS BETWEEN YORUBA KINGDOMS AND THEIR NORTHERN NEIGHBOURS IN THE 15TH CENTURY**

The incipient political centralization taking place among the Nupe came at expense of the several cultural hybrid, but Yoruba-dominant communities along the Niger. Many of these communities north of the Niger were already being displaced in the last decades of the fourteenth century. *Most of them, according to Professor Akinwumi Ogundiran (2020), south of the river and mostly Yoruba speaking, fell under Nupe's control in the first half of the fifteenth century. However, the Oyo, under Alaafin Kori and Oluaso, stood their ground against the Nupe incursion. Nevertheless, things were about to get worse.* ‘

Equipped with horses, their newly found military hardware, **Nupe militarists**, engaged in activities that affected the northern frontiers of the **Yoruba world**, and they penetrated over one hundred kilometers deep into the region, ransacking the **Yagba** and other **Okun areas**. Westward, the militarists were involved in conflicts against their **Ibariba neighbors** in the **Niger-Moshi** area. And, **toward the end of the century, the Nupe invaded and sacked Oyo, laying waste the core of the kingdom**, this was between **1530 and 1542, according to Dr. J.A Atanda**.

The displaced Oyo population set up new homes in **Saki, Kisi, Igbeti**, and **Igboho**, as well as in **Ibariba country**. A section of the **Oyo Royal House** managed to keep the idea of the kingdom alive by relocating the seat of power to **Igboho**, where **four Alaafins** (kings of Oyo) ruled in the **sixteenth century**. Tasting the sweetness of victory in the north, the **Nupe militarists** penetrated deep into **Ekiti, Igbomina**, and **Ibobo**, all Ife centric areas. **Massive abandonment of towns and villages preceded and followed those attacks**.

The Oyo were not the only Yoruba elements seeking to expel the Nupe militants from their homeland. Further south, in the upper reaches of the rain forest, several Ekiti polities fought the Nupe under the banner of Benin. *Ile-Ife is also said to have been engaged in a protracted and costly war at Ara (in Ekiti country) during the sixteenth century, probably during the reign of Luwo Gbagida, the only female Ooni of Ife. This was in alliance with several Ekiti polities against the Nupe brigands.*

#### **4.1 REGENERATION AND RESTORATION OF KINGDOMS**

However, while the **Oyo in exile** were able to mount a resistance against the Nupe militarists, many other Yoruba polities and communities in the **Moshi-Niger frontier did not survive the Nupe scourge** and the military maneuver that followed. For example, **the savanna metropolis of Owu**, around River Ogun, was liquidated either by Nupe militarists or by the combined force of the Oyo and their allies. For the latter, it would have been **a revenge attacks on Oyo's former overlord during of Alaafin Sango and Alaafin Ajuwon**.

Whatever be the case, the turbulence in the Moshi-Niger area pushed the Owu south ward into the rainforest where they rebuilt their polities in the area between Ife and Egba territories in the late sixteenth century, now referred to as Owu-IPOLE before destruction in **1822** by the allied army of Ife, Oyo, Ijebu, and Egba army while Oyo emerged the dominant state in the fifteenth century.

Later, with the destruction of Oyo kingdom by Nupes between 1530-1542, **Alaafin Abipa** and his chieftains immediately began using their newly acquired military hardware, horses, to launch a swift expansion across the entire northern Yoruba region. His successor, **Alaafin Obalokun (1590-1610)**, maintained the momentum. One of the most celebrated warrior kings in Oyo history, **Alaafin Obalokun** used the **restless spirit** of his soldiers to accelerate Oyo's expansionist campaigns during the **1590s** and the first decade of the seventieth century, fighting wars in many directions: in Igbomina, east central Ekiti, Ilpper Osun, EGba, and the Yewa-Ogun area.

He also engaged in skirmishes in **Owena** He completed the process of transforming Oyo's Calvary from defensive to offensive force and laid a comprehensive frame work for **Oyo's imperial ambitions**, even if his equestrian forays sometimes had to deal with many detours, as well as trial and error. His expansionist drive earned him the sobriquet "**aganna erin**", - "the plundering elephant" (Professor Akinwumi Ogundiran, 2020).

Because of his relentless ambition, however, the limitations and possibilities of **Oyo's Calvary** were tested under his rule. These provided his successors with insights into effective military diplomatic strategies to use for their expansionist drive. **Alaafin Ajagbo** the son of Obalora established the office of Aare-Ona-Kakanfo in **1640 A.D.**



*Oyo and Benin established themselves as the two dominant powers in the Yoruba world in the aftermath of the Nupe militarist crisis*, but their stories do not tell us everything about the regional political reorganization that took place between **1570** and **1650**. According to Professor Akinwumi Ogundiran (2020), they were not the only ones seeking to fill the **lingering vacuum** that the collapse of **Ife Empire** had created in the central Yoruba region, composed mostly of **Ekiti** in the East, Upper Osun in the west, and **southern Igbomina** in the north.

The spate of military activities and politics maneuvering that took place in the area between **1570** and **1590** was the most important and dramatic development on the **political landscape of the Yoruba region** during the **Restoration period**. The power politics associated with these events led to the creation of a new kingdom, **Ilesa**, in the **1580s** just twenty kilometres northeast of Ile-Ife. Over a period of three decades (1580-1610), this young kingdom was instrumental in drawing the political geography of the region.

#### **4.2 FALL OF THE OYO EMPIRE AND THE RISE OF IBADAN**

The power politics and political intrigues in metropolitan Oyo; the increasing demand for human cargo in the waters of the Bight of Benin; and the unsuitability of the merchant capital that underwrote power, wealth, and social inequality pushed the Yoruba region to reach its socio-political breaking point between **1790** and **1837**. During that long night of confusion, the underclass revolt in Oyo and the **Ife-Ijebu siege of Owu** were **particularly momentous**. Both events, according to Professor Akinwumi Ogundiran, (2020) launched the Yoruba world into its worst region wide crisis since the second half of the fifteenth century. The aftermath culminated in the collapse of the Oyo Empire in **1837**.

The competition to fill the **vacuum of hegemony** created by Oyo's full fueled **more wars**. **Ibadan emerged as the dominant state in the region in 1840** following its defeat of **Ilorin jihadist**. The young state had proved to be the most resilient avenger of Oyo humiliated during the **Eleduwe War** three years earlier, but its own draconian style of imperialism led to a **provincial revolts** and a **sixteen-year war** (the Ekitiparapo War) that pitted a **regional alliance** against Ibadan between **1877** and **1893**.

Located almost equidistant between the capitals of Oyo and Benin, Ilesa Influenced the external policies of those two regional powers far more than any other polity during the decades of regeneration.

The desire to build an empire also brought **Owa Ajibogun** (a.k.a Obokun) to conquer some of the territories that his senior brothers had already acquired soon after conquering several polities in the area, Owa Ajibogun died and sons continued the struggle, with the defeat of Owari and other competitors and foes, and with his successful establishment of Ilesa as the capital of the new kingdom. Owoluse, the fourth Owa, laid the foundation for what would soon become the most powerful kingdom in the central Yoruba region, east of River Osun. He was succeeded by Atakumosa,

The generation of **various war veterans** and their immediate successors who ended Nupe militarist crisis proved to be masterful **agents of change** who used power politics, diplomacy, and military strategies to reconfigure the regional political landscape. They were sometimes brutal conquerors, but they were also **state-builders** who forged regional alliances, notable among them were **Abipa, Obalokun,** and **Ajagbo** of Oyo; **Obarabara, Olokunesin, Owoluse** and **Atakumosa** of Ilesa; and **Orhogbua** and **Ehongbua** of Benin.

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