

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NEW OLUBADAN

ULTRA MODERN PALACE

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1.0 BRIEF HISTORY OF THE YORUBAS

At the discussion on the significance of **Okebadan Festival** in contemporary period, organized by Okebadan Union on 17th March, 1988, Professor Bolanle Awe warned that “**Every other nation will make a jest of those who know not their origin and who are without any culture of theirs**”. She therefore submitted that everyone should be proud of his/her culture and that every Black man should be proud of his/her origin.

The Yoruba people are 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.

According to Daryll Forde (1953), at the meeting of the New York Academy of Sciences: “the greater part of forest belt of West Africa over a distance of thousand miles from 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.”

It is noteworthy from the above Daryll Forde’s claim that Yoruba language is that of the aborigines of Yorubaland. Greenberg classifies the Yoruba language as belonging to the **Kwa subgroup (family)** which extend from around Liberia to the Cross River in Nigeria. The best known languages of the Kwa subgroup are the Kru, Baule, Twi, Ga, Ewe, Fon, Yoruba, Edo, Ilupe, Igbo, Idoma, Ijo (Ijaw) and Efik (A. Adetugbo, “The Yoruba Language in Yoruba History” in S.O. Biobaku (ed), Sources of Yoruba History, Claredon Press, Oxford, 1973, P. 178).

The findings of these experts have confirmed the claim of Rev. Samuel Johnson as page 15 of “History of the Yorubas” 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 promises of the Yoruba Kingdom”.

Oduduwa imposed a central divine kingship system and regrouped the 13 villages he met in Ile-Ife into five original quarters. In the new central authority, there was a Council of State (Igbimo Ilu) comprising most Senior Chiefs whose head was the Prime Minister or Obalufe in Ile-Ife, Basorun in Oyo, Olisa in Ijebu-Ode and Lisa in Ondo. There were also quarter and compound heads. There were Baales or Obas in the Districts. Thus, Yoruba Chieftaincy titles were organized in hierarchical form with the king at the pinnacle of the pyramid of power.

The quest for imperial expansion and establishment of unique military institutions of the 17th and 18th century were prompted mainly by hostilities of invaders from Nupe and Borgu and eventually led to the collapse of the Old Empire after the reign of Alafin Aole. Consequently, Yoruba nation was engulfed in 100 years civil war from 1793-1893.

1.1 Pre-Oduduwa Settlements Patterns

An article titled “Revisiting Oduduwa and the Yoruba beginning” by Ade Ajayi in the Daily Monitor of Thursday, April 16, 1998 quoted Fadipe (1970) as saying that “Yoruba did not seem to have found the country of their new settlement previously untenanted although they never found it necessary to displace or exterminate the existing inhabitants. For one reason or another, however, the leader of the **new comers** generally eclipsed in importance the leader of the earlier inhabitants”.

Indeed, Akinjogbin suggested that there were at least thirteen villages in what became known as Ife territory. All of which were absorbed by the new settlements, that is, Ile– Ife.

Similar claims regarding existence of human settlements before the hegemony of Odudwa was instituted were made regarding other towns in Yorubaland. Some of these towns are now called Ondo, Oye-Ekiti, Owo, Sagamu, Owu, Ipole, Kabba, Ago Iwoye, Ilesa, Akure, Idanre, Ekiti, Igbomina and Benin.

In Akure, there were Oba, Idapetu, Igan, Ileru, Upalefa “communities before the arrival of Oduduwa group led by either Ajapade or Udeji..... There may have been more communities that we do not know yet”. Among other things Alakunre was the official title of the traditional head of Igan which also controlled Ileru and Upalefa, the reigning Alakunre from whom Oduduwa group took over power “after a struggle” was called Omolaju.

Ulero, Isinla, Ilamoju, Aso, Asa, Ukere and Abgaun were named as settlements that existed at Ado prior to the arrival of Oduduwa group. Ilesu or Ilesuu was the headquarters and was headed by Elesun. Owo town now in Ondo State had Upa, Afo, Ilale, Isinjogun, Amurin and Ilemo, while Ile-Ife itself had thirteen villages before Oduduwa's arrived. They were Ido, Iloromu, Ideta, Odin, Iloran, Oke-Oja, Omologun, Imohubi, Iraye, Ijugbe, Oke-Awo, Iwinrin, Parakin.

It is assumed that each of these villages had a head. The head-ship was taken over and the villages fused presumably together by Oduduwa group into five original quarters namely: Okerewe, Ilode, More, Ilare and Ireto. Obalaye joined Ife to establish Iraye the sixth quarter. Obalaye was from Ipole.

Even in the Savannah area of Yoruba country, there were evidences of human habitation, people who had to be overpowered by force – before Oduduwa group could institute its hegemony on the land. Mention can be made here of the forceful taking-over of Oyo by Sango from the town's reigning King-Egboro

Oranyan was not the founder of Oyo Ile. Not until Sango's reign did the city become the seat of the paramount Yoruba ruler. On his return from Tapaland, Oranyan had established his home at Oko now in Osun State of Nigerian.

This was where Ajaka, Oranyan's immediate successor and Sango, another Oranyan's son, first ruled. It was Sango who shifted the seat of government from Oko to the town hitherto called Oyokoro later known as OYO-ILE. He did this according to Rev. Samuel Johnson after defeating Olowu his uncle and after killing the Oloyokoro as the town's king was called. The reigning Oloyokoro when this happened bore the name Egboro.

Also, at various other times in Yoruba history, several Yoruba ethnic groups migrated from the new quarters in Ile-Ife namely: Adekola Telu, the first Oluwo from **Ilode ward**; Lagelu, the legendary founder of Ibadan was from **Ilare ward**; Ijebu Remo people from **Ireto ward**; The Egbas were from Ile-Ife; and Egbado people migrated from Ile-Ife in **Ilare ward** and a host of other founders of Yoruba towns and cities.

2.0 YORUBA CITY CONCEPT

The city in Yorubaland was described as the royal capital. Each ethnic group had a paramount ruler, the Oba (or King). The seat of the potentate was the **capital city** which was the religious, political administrative and economic centre of all the territory (i.e. kingdom) of the ethnic group whose name is customarily bore.

The word '**Ilu**' is used in Yorubaland for a town. The royal capital was called '**Ile-Alade**' (chief town) or '**Olu-Ilu**' (chief town). The royal capital was invariably the largest settlement in the kingdom.

In addition to the royal capital or city, a kingdom may contain one or more towns ruled by a '**bale**' or '**oloja**'. In pre-industrial societies, it was the royal palace that conferred **city status** on urban settlement. Any urban settlement lacking a royal palace was denied the status and designation of city

Prior to the advent of Oduduwa group, Yorubaland was dotted with villages and hamlets. Since the evolution of the institution of kingship in the ancient Middle East, monarchs have been founders and growers of cities like China, Britain, West Africa, and East Indies.

In the selection of their political capitals from the existing rural communities and the foundation of new ones, the Oduduwa group (new comers) generally undertook a good deal of wondering and shifting before finally selecting or founding their capitals

2.1 Location of the Palace in the City

The position of the palace was invariably the city's geographical centre or close to it as much as possible if there were physical constraint. The arteries of communication converge on it as the embodiment of the city and the foundation of city life. Exceptions were Abeokuta and Shagamu where you have more than one palace, this also include Igboho.

The sitting of the royal palace on an elevated land is not peculiar to the Yoruba city. Urban history, since the early dynastic periods in Mesopotamia, reveals that the palace and the great temple have almost everywhere been associated with low hills, or an extensive eminence in the city centre where the sheer magnitude and upward thrust of the palace usually dominated the rest of the city.

The hill in the ancient time was a military device. It was a natural fortress commonly walled to protect the king against enemies within the city and without. The Greeks associated the hill with kings, oligarchies and tyrants, and the lowland with democracy. (R.E. Wycherley on “How the Greeks Built Cities, P. 37).

Ibadan has no central palace because of its social system. The residences of the ruling class were always converted to a palace when they become the Bale or Olubadan. Those that resemble old Yoruba palace structures in traditional architecture are the palaces of Oluyole, Alesinloye, Ogunmola, Foko and Irefin. The choice of the new Olubadan Palace at the slope of Sapati Hill at Oke-Aremo at the centre of the city is in line with Yoruba tradition for the following reasons;

- (i) Apart from the environmental qualities, a hilltop or elevated landscape is a lookout a palace from which the surrounding urbanscape and the countryside beyond could be viewed.
- (ii) A buildings erected on a hilltop was an eye-target for people as it was readily seen.
- (iii) Eminences afforded their occupiers usually privacy, protection against overlooking by neighbouring residents.
- (iv) Elevated grounds were well drained contrasting with low grounds and valleys which might be played by flooding, river pollution and diseases.

2.2 Shape and Size of Palace

The large size of ancient Yoruba palace was due to the fact that it was a public edifice, built and maintained not only by the population of the royal capital but also by the entire population of the kingdom. Consequently, the larger the populations of a kingdom the greater were the human and material resources available for its establishment and sustenance.

In terms of size and magnificence, the ancient Yoruba palace was the grandest residential unit in both the royal capital and its kingdom. The palace was a highly elaborate complex of the contemporary courtyard compounds.

According to Oluremi I. Obateru (2006), the palaces of Oyo built in 1839 covering 6.9 hectares and that of Abeokuta around 1830 are products of the civil strife. This is why they are relatively small in size; they also lack royal parks of Old Oyo and Owu covering about 259 hectares. The present day sizes of Yoruba palaces are: Ife total palace area cover about 8.1 hectares, Ijebu-Ode about 7.7 hectares; Akure about 8.3 hectares; Oyo about 6.9 hectares; Ila 5.8 hectares, Abeokuta (Ake) about 2.5 hectares. Out of these palaces, Oyo and Ake are fully built while others

have Royal Parks of 78% for Ife; 63.2% for Ijebu-Ode; 82.4% for Akure; and 19.0% for Ila (Ojo, Yoruba Palaces, 1966, P. 27). Thus, of all the Yoruba Palaces, that of the present Oyo, 6.9 hectares, has the largest built-up area. However, the New Olubadan Palace has an area of 9.89 hectares with a built up area of 5.98 hectares, while the old Ireferin palace in Ibadan was built on 4.0 Acres of land.

2.3 Multi-Purpose Functions of Yoruba Palace

As pointed out earlier, the royal palace is a public edifice built and maintained by the entire population of the kingdom. It is therefore not the private property of the incumbent king. Like the ancient palaces in the Middle East, the Yoruba palace is functionally multi-purpose, the most notable being residential religious governmental, industrial, socio-cultural, recreational and storage.

The **royal market** originated from the palace. The frontage of the “residence” of the founder of a town was the first covering point of commercial activities. Today, market is still an integral part of the palace. It was removed out of the palace complex and located a few distance from it to give room for the sacred life of the Oba. Market is an integral part of the New Olubadan Palace at Oke-Aremo located along the major road far from the palace activities and the residential areas.

The palace is also a place for **socio-cultural activities**, such as social functions and annual festivals. Various association and societies hold their meetings in the palace, for instance in IBADAN HOUSE located within the New Place Complex. It is there also that dancers and masquerades entertain the king and the community.

As the chief priest of his kingdom, all **national deities** had their shrines in the palace. However, today, the shrines of those deities are found in and around the palace. These are **religious element** of the ancient Yoruba palace and it included the cemetery of the deceased kings. Except **the cults of kingship** which were ignored, Ibadan also had similar religious practices with the rest of other Yoruba groups but the radical innovations against the traditional divine kingship system did not allow such deities in the palace.

One of the purposes of the **royal park** in the palace background is recreational to meet the recreational needs of the king and other residents of the palace. The park is also used as a botanical garden and a zoo where rare animals and special medicinal plants were conserved and cultivated.

3.0 THE BUILT-UP AREA OF THE PALACE

The developed land of the palace is divisible into two areas: the public and residential areas. Land use specialization is a noteworthy feature of the Yoruba Palace. The various functions and activities of the Palace were segregated but they were not haphazardly sited. The ordered use of the Palace ground is based on the functional relationship of the apartments.

Table: Yoruba Palaces; Built-up Area and Royal Parks

Palace	Total Palace Area	Built-up Area	% of Palace Area	Royal Park	% of Palace Area
Owo	43.9ha	3.8ha	8.8%	40.1ha	91.2%
Ilesha	20.6ha	2.4ha	11.8%	18.2ha	88.2%
Ondo	17.4ha	2.0ha	11.6%	15.4ha	88.4%
Ado-Ekiti	10.9ha	5.3ha	48.1%	5.7ha	51.9%
Ile-Ife	8.1ha	1.8ha	22.0%	6.3ha	78.0%
Ijebu-Ode	7.7ha	2.8ha	36.8%	4.9ha	63.2%
Akure (a)	8.3ha	1.5ha	17.6%	6.8ha	82.4%
Oyo	6.9ha	6.9ha	100.0%	-	-
Ila (b)	5.8ha	4.7ha	81.0%	1.1ha	19.0%
Ake (Abeokuta)	2.5ha	2.5ha	100.0%	-	-
Ibadan	9.8ha	5.98ha	61.0%	3.91ha	39.0%

Sources: Oyo, *Yoruba Palaces, 1966, P.27 Annual Ibadan Week Programme, 2001*

(a) Public Areas

The public areas were devoted to governmental activities, the most important being legislative, executive, judicial and administrative functions. The most important of the public areas were the courtyards for public assembly which is the front courtyard of the palace. It is used for the various public assembly purposes, religious ceremonies as well as political and socio-cultural activities. Others are state Council meetings, public reception, entertainment and homage payment as well as those for religious purpose: religious worship and sacrifices, oracle consultation, Oath taking, and festivities.

(b) Residential Area

The residential area consists of the private apartments of the king; the private apartments of the king's wives; the apartments of the princes and princesses; the apartments of the king's retainers; and the apartment of solves.

(c) **The Royal Park**

The king's park was the most extensive land-use element of the ancient Yoruba Palace. The park was a multi-purpose public establishment, however, such 19th Century cities as Oyo and Abeokuta lack palace parks but alternative areas are provided in their outskirts for royal recreation.

Secondly, the park was also a zoo where special and rare animals were conserved for medicinal purposes. It was a botanical garden where rare and special medicinal plants were cultivated and conserved.

Thirdly, it was a mausoleum, a place where deceased monarchs were buried. A small section of this park is set aside for this purpose.

4.0 THE WINDS OF CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

The basis of social, political and economics organizations in the traditional society is traditional religion. Religion permeated every aspect of the society. Not only the land and its resources but also the people belonged to the gods. Every act and every pronouncement of the divine rulers were regarded as coming from the gods.

However, more than other factors, foreign religions and education have dealt a crippling, if not crushing blow on Yoruba traditional religion, social and political institutions. With the coming of Islam and Christianity, the latter in particular, to Yorubaland, the tight grip of traditional religion on the people began to loosen, and the myth of divine kingship began to dissolve.

The problem of neglect and disuse is compounded by the fact that the palace is today no longer the principal focus of religious, social and political life of the city. Most of the palace functions have been taken over by such public establishments as churches, mosque, town halls, court houses, local council offices, sports ground among others. For instance, the Itoro palace of Ijebu-Ode has been taken over by several buildings of public, religious, educational and residential uses. However, most of the palaces have not attained this terminal stage of extinction.

Most of the Yoruba palaces have not been able to withstand the test of the cultural metamorphoses, or cultural decay, while some are at various stages of cultural transformation.

Due to neglect and disuse, many palace buildings have collapsed and have been replaced by modern buildings to benefit both socio-political status of the Oba and keep abreast of cultural transformation. As pointed out earlier, the Yoruba Palace is functionally multi-purpose, most

notable being residential, religious, governmental, industrial, socio-cultural, and recreational and storage.

4.1 The Old Ibadan Traditional Palaces

Like their Middle East precursors, Yoruba palaces were walled rectangular enclosures with one main gate in front. Both Olubadan Alli-iwo and Irefin Palaces are rectangular in appearances and consist of 2 to 3 core areas. The inner core area served as the palace which faced a larger inner court in Alli-Iwo's palace which served as the festival palace. The last core area served as the Oba's residence. The rigidity of the Irefin Palace Fencing wall portrayed the exclusiveness of the Oba's of yester years.

FROM TRADITIONAL TO MODERN PALACE



(a) Front View of Irefin Palace Built in 1910 on 4 Acres of Land Picture



(b) Perspective View of New Olubadan Palace To be built on 9.87 Hectares of land

The palaces of Alli-Iwo and Irefin portrayed the African architecture in its originality which has been in existence before the proliferation of the Western civilization.

However, Balogun Adebisi's Palace was a classical example of the early thirties in Yorubaland as a result of cultural transformation. Similar architectural features of the building could be noticed in few notable structures in Ibadanland. The buildings are the Oke-Are court house, the Agbaje Family Palace and the Mopo Hall to name a few. These English Architecture, seconded to the Yoruba race were also available in other Yoruba cities, like Atiba hall in ancient Oyo town and Ilesha City Hall.

4.2 The Concept of the New Olubadan Palace

The palace site is at the foot of the rugged Shapati Hill which occupies the gently sloppy area of Agala Forest Reserve. The critical analysis of the natural and man-made physical development constraints showed that the site is free from any serious constraints which may limit urban developments, the like of Olubadan Palace Complex and Ibadan House.

The inadequacies of the first central palace built for Olubadan at Oja'-ba are as follows;

- (a) That it is rather choky for present day usage and because of constraint of space, it has no room for expansion.
- (b) That there is no open space for ceremonies and other out-door activities.
- (c) That the environment falls short of a befitting Palace of the most populous, indigenous African city.

4.3 The Land-Use Analysis

From the view points of location, adjoining properties, site coverage (about 9.87 Hectares) accessibility, existing/proposed infrastructural services, security, centrality of the site to the Ibadan indigenous population, land morphology, natural man-made physical development constraints and the location was found suitable for the construction of the New Olubadan Palace Complex.

The Olubadan Palace Project will consist of the following

- Residential Area
- Royal Guest House
- Ceremonial Pavilion
- Reception Block
- * Power House
- * Police Post
- * Fire Station
- * Wood Land

- Main Gate House
- Festivities Ground
- Car Parks
- Palace Transport Pool`
- * Existing Ibadan House
- * Olubadan Market (Oja'ba)
- * Future Development
- * Gate House

Thus the modern Olubadan Palace Complex Buildings provide both office and residential accommodation including other infrastructure, and services that would benefit the social and political status of the monarch in conformity with the prevailing physical and cultural transformation.

NOTE: - The writer was the Secretary of the Olubadan Palace Site Selection and Appraisal Committee (SSAC) set up by the Central Council of Ibadan Indigene (CCII) in 1993 under the Chairmanship of Chief (TDL) Dosu Babatunde and three other professionals.