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Unveiling the origins and legacy: The historical trajectory of Ikire town in Yoruba land

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Abstract

Unveil the mystique surrounding Ikire, an ancient Yoruba settlement with uncertain origins. Blending oral tradition and historical evidence, this study recounts the founding by Prince Akinrere, a courageous hunter from Ile-Ife, during the 16th or 17th century. Akinrere's journey involved seeking Osakire's blessings, a paramount deity in Ile-Ife, culminating in the establishment of his rule. The intricate lineage of Akinrere's parentage is examined, revealing intriguing connections. Olabinjo, Akinrere's son, inherits his father's remarkable hunting prowess, and subsequent generations contribute to Ikire's political and economic landscape. The town's fertile lands and climatic conditions foster a thriving agricultural and trade-based economy. Ikire's governance structure, featuring Akire as monarch and a council of chiefs, underscores its unique governance system. This historical inquiry illuminates Ikire's profound cultural significance within Yoruba heritage, leaving an indelible mark on Nigeria's historical fabric.

Keywords: Yoruba, Ikire, tradition and origin, geography, economy and judicial system

Introduction

Unraveling the enigmatic past of Ikire, a venerable settlement within Yoruba territory, unveils a narrative that transcends time. Originating from a blend of oral tradition and historical documentation, the founding of Ikire emerges as a testament to the indomitable spirit of Prince Akinrere. Armed with courage and a hunter's prowess, Akinrere's odyssey led him to establish a kingdom that defied the boundaries of the 16th or 17th century. Guided by the blessings of Osakire, a deity of paramount significance in Ile-Ife, Akinrere's quest culminated in the founding of his rule, leaving an indelible mark on the town's heritage. Delving into the intricacies of lineage and parentage, this article navigates the tales of subsequent generations, each contributing uniquely to the fabric of Ikire's history. Against the backdrop of fertile lands and a hospitable climate, the town's economic prosperity and distinctive governance structure emerged, perpetuating a legacy that echoes throughout Nigeria's historical tapestry.

Tradition of Ikire people

Like in many other settlements in Yoruba land, the origin of Ikire is unknown. However, oral traditions complimented by archival evidences, have come to an agreement that Ikire town was founded between 16th and 17th century by Prince Akinrere, a warrior and renowned hunter from Ile-Ife. Prince Akinrere sought permission from his father, the Ooni of Ile-Ife to undertake an adventure to establish his own kingdom where he would reign as an Oba. Culturally, Akinrere consulted an Oracle and following its pronouncement, he was directed to worship Osakire one of the most important deities in Ile-Ife and his wishes were granted. Also, Akinrere was a favorite son of his father, Ooni because of his bravery and devotion to the worship of Osakire which he later adopted upon founding his own town ^[1].

While leaving Ile-Ife, his father, the Ooni of Ile-Ife, gave him an all white beaded crown (*adeseseefin*) with an instruction that he should not wear the crown until he succeeded in establishing his own kingdom ^[2].

At this juncture, it need be emphasized that many oral traditions and historical records has it that the Ooni of Ile-Ife who was the father of Akinrere was called Ewuwemi. However, historical evidences and others facts has it that no one name after Ewuwemi was among the kings who reigned in Ile-Ife as Ooni ^[3].

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Thus this work has been able to clarify the truth about Ewuwemi likely be the wife of Prince Akinrere who was called EWU (perhaps Ewuwemi might be her full name) ^[4]. No wonder Ikire people are praised as omuewu, as present in their praisename ^[5].

Inferred from above, be it the first or second argument, what is clear is that Ewuwemi is a parent to Akinrere, of course it is not clear at yet whether he is an Ooni, the father or the mother of Akinrere however, what is clear is that is Ewuwemi begat Akinrere and his father was the Ooni.

Prince Akinrere's first settlement was at Odi-Ayan-Nnagi now OkeAdesile, a place very close to Ayetoro, a few kilometers off old Ibadan and Ife road (about 13 kilometres to present Ikire). It was at this place that he begat his first son, Olaberinjo ^[6].

Idare-omo-oba-nla Prince Akinrere's pet name given by his admirer for his military prowess and ruggedness ^[7] Olaberinjo, Akinrere's son was given birth to on the day Akinrere killed a mysterious elephant in Ikire and inside it he met some valuables such as traditional crown, 'Osakire', 'Aja', and 'Opofa' which means my prowess resembles that of an elephant or wealth is accompanied by an elephant also took after his father. After the fall of Owu kingdom, Akinrere had to leave Odi-Ayan-Nnagi for Ilesha and before his death, his Son, Olaberinjo had become a wonderful hunter and a good archer who has earned the reputation of killing elephants at a very tender age ^[8].

Olaberinjo, married a woman called Akanji-Aranat Ilesha, however, Akinrere died few days before Akanji-Aranat delivered her baby ^[9]. Hence, Olaberinjo named his child Kujemilayo which means death deprived me of joy. Much as he would have rejoiced over the birth of his first son, the death of his father ironically made it impossible, lamented Olaberinjo. After this event, Kuje also grew up as a brave hunter like his father. Kuje and his father migrated back to Odi-Ayanngi where they settled again. By the time of their return, Olaberinjo had become old and died leaving his son Kuje at Odi-Ayanngi ^[10].

Kuje had 3 wives, the first one was Olakoyi, an Egba woman, and then he married Oyolola a woman from Oyo who used to come to buy bush meat from them. Oyolola was the first to have a child and Kuje named the child Disamu. About 3 months after the birth of Olakoyi too had his first child called Ladekan. Lambeloye was born by the third wife. And the fourth child was named Onisokan. Before kuje died, he still married a new wife, at this time, Kuje was advance in age at the time of this marriage and so she did not have an issue by marriage. According to custom, Disamu being the eldest son inherited the woman and through her, Disamu had a child called Aketula. At the time Aketula was born, Disamu was not at home, he was away on a hunting expedition and he gave the child another name Layidu to assert his paternity ^[11].

However, before Olaberinjo died at Odi-Ayan-nag he had advised his children to leave Odi-Ayanngi because of scarcity of water. Kuje and his children then moved to the bank of River Osun otherwise known as Ikire-Omi, that is "Ikire by the water side" while Osakire was located at Moosa, both within the vicinity of the present-day Ikire ^[12].

After settling at Ikire-Omi, Kuje fell sick and died. His children faced yet another problem, this time not that of a drought, which drove them to their present site, but paradoxically, floods, as Osun River, was incessantly overflowing its banks, thereby destroying their camps and

other valuables ^[13].

Before Kuje died, Disamu was away to contest for the Alafin vacant stool in his maternal side, after the death of Kuje, he was sent for but he refused to return, so the people made Ladekan as the first Akire, and it was he who brought Ikire back to the present site free of drought and flood.

However, when Disamu lost the contest to the Alafin stool, he returned but the people refused to make him the Akire but as a mark of respect for his brother, Ladekan gave him the title of Aladekan meaning the person to run to for protection in times of difficulty and hence the saying Asalu 'babaoba' meaning Asalu, the father of the King ^[14].

The four children of Kuje namely; Disamu, Ladekan, Lambeloye, and Onisokan comprise the ruling houses in Ikire land and they have produced kings in Ikire land up till present Akire, Olatunde Falabi (first educated king in Ikire) ^[15].

Akire, is the official title of the ruler of IKIRE, and it is a contraction from Akinrere, the founder of IKIRE while the town itself derived its name from Osakire, which is the Chief Deity of IKIRE ^[16].

Geography of Ikire people

Ikire is highly blessed with a conducive climate. The availability of the fine climate has broadly enhanced the cultivation of Arable and cash crops, which has further contributed to the economic development of the area. In addition, the vegetation cover of the Local Government Area is typically evergreen rainforest that is normally luxuriant during the raining season. The presence of the evergreen luxuriant forest has aided the rearing of cattle and other domestic animals at the Irewole Local Government Area.

The Ikire Township basically lies within the rain forest area of the state on latitude 7 30° North and longitude 4.20° East within the basin of the Osun River and is located in Irewole Local Government. It shares common boundaries with Ayedaade Local Government to the East, and South East by Egbeda Local Government in the South, and Ayedire Local Government in the North.

Ikire is an ancient town which is surrounded by other towns and villages such as Apomu, Ikoyi, Odeyinka, Majero, Wasinmi, Ayetoro, Bamidele, Agbora, Fidiwo, Funlayo, Ayedaade, Oke, Oloowa, Arosun, Itamrin, Adela, Wakayeye, Arinkinkin, to mention a few. Irewole Local Government is highly blessed with a very conducive climate. The availability of the climate made it a collecting point for local cashcrops (cacao, palm oil and kernels), it also serves as a trade centre for yams, corn (maize), cassava (manioc), palm produce, cotton, and kolanuts.

The cultivation of arable and cash crops which has contributed to the economic development of the town. In additional, the vegetation of the Local Government is typically evergreen rain forest which is normally luxuriant during the rainy season. The presence of the evergreen luxuriant forest has aided the rearing of cattle and other domestic animals in the Irewole Local Government area.

Irewole Local Government is situated in the South Western part of Osun state with latitudes of between 121.92m and 298.67m² with over 300 villages and hamlets. It is the rain forest belt of the country. Going by the provisional figure for the head count of 2006, Irewole local Government has estimated population of 143,599 people ^[17].

The old Irewole Local Government with its headquarters in

Ikire was created in 1976 following the Local Government Reform of that year. In 1989 and 1996 the present Ayedade Local Government and Isokan Local Government areas respectively were carved out of the old Irewole area. With this development the present Irewole Local Government is made of people of Ikire who share common ancestry.

Economic System and Activities of Ikire People

Agriculture is the mainstay of Ikire economy. Ikireland is suitable for agricultural practices and it is blessed with fertile land which enhances cultivation of food and cash crops such as Cocoyam, Okro, Vegetables, Plantain, Banana, Cocoa, Kolanut, Coffee, Palmtree etc. Consequently, these made the people to be predominant farmers and traders while the presence of evergreen luxuriant forest aided the rearing of cattle and other domestic animals in Ikire land ^[18].

Fadipe stated that the two major factors to the economic organization of Yoruba; the first is land which he posited to be free to all, while the second he said is that the Yoruba population is predominantly urban.

He furthered his explanation by saying that the farming flocks have their houses in the town and look up on their farms which are in many cases situated at great distance from the town merely as place of work and temporary residence ^[19].

This statement is true with the people of Ikire, the town is divided into two; Ikire-Ile and Ikire-Oko. The latter is the part consecrated for farming while the former is where the people live to carry out their day to day activities e.g selling of crops and farm produce gotten from the farm in the market. Also, that Ikire-oko is set apart for farming doesn't mean that there is no place of residence for the farmers. It should be understood that there are huts and different shelters where the farmers who have decided to stay in his/her farm for weeks or months could lodge and it is usually called 'Aba.'

Similarly, due to the fertility of Ikire land, some practiced what could be regarded as a subsistent farming – oko-etil-. This is a small farm beside one's house where farming could be practiced to feed one's household ^[20].

The town has a central market where periodically, goods and services are traded on five-day intervals. Be that as it may, there is also a daily market generally called oja-ale (located beside the king's palace) this market is set to meet the daily needs of the people before another market day.

Political System and Structure

The political structure of the people of Ikire is not different from other Yoruba kingdom though the rear some distinct things in their political system. Fadipe's assertion: "the average Yoruba state (i.e polity) comprised the capital, generally walled (in some cases with double walls) together with one or more other towns, townlets, farmers, villages and hamlets whose inhabitants regarded themselves as belonging to one or another of the towns"

This is true with Ikireland. The system of the government of Ikire was monarchical; that is, it was headed by an Oba, (King) who is entitled to wear a crown. The traditional system of the government of Ikire is monarchical in nature which centres on Akire, the King with his subordinate chiefs. Each chief headquarters and compound of the kingdom respectively.

Akire's position is the helm of the kingdom's political

affairs. His position is hereditary from the four ruling houses namely; Disamu, Onisokan, Ladekan, Lambeloye. The position is based on rotation from the given ruling houses and the King chosen is the supreme head of government and he is also regarded as the custodian of the Kingdom. He wields authority and power which made him sacred to his subjects. Thus, he is regarded as divine king and also with absolute power in theory. Despite this the king is not autocratic because he could be checked and the system was balanced by his subordinate chiefs.

There are eight kingmakers in the system who are known to be first-class chiefs. They are; Chief Oosa (second in rank to Akire also chairman), Chief Osolo, Chief Aro, Chief Odofin, Chief Baase, Chief Ejemu and Chief Iyalode (representing the women folks).

First six (6) chiefs are the principal chiefs in the town. They are called the Baras or Olopos or Ilopos. The Asalu is the head Royal chief common to the royal house. He represents the interest of all the ruling houses while Iyalode represents the female interest in the town. The seare chiefs advisers the King must be consulted before the king could make any law or take decision on matters fundamental to the town.

Those who run the administration with the King are stratified into these categories; The First class-16, Second Class -16, Third Class Chief- 60, Royal Chief (the Ojele), Baale- 40 and the Ajagunna (warlord).

Judicial System

The process of judicial administration of Ikire before the establishment of UNOSUN is more reformatory than being punitive. The structure was designed in such a manner that entailed the involvement of a broad spectrum of the people. Offences were clearly classified as either criminal or civil, and punishment is spelt out for general awareness.

Maintenance of laws and orders were wholly the duty of the quarter chiefs in collaboration with the elders in each community. Thus, the quarter chief's decision on many civil issues was final. Matters beyond the jurisdiction of the quarter chiefs were brought before the supreme council which is made up of the High chiefs and the Akire.

In other word, while the high chiefs administer justices on issues that concerns their quarters, inter-quarter disputes and conflicts were handled by the supreme council under the leadership of Akire. Moreover, exceptional issues rarely deliberated upon were internal strife, murder, arson, land disputes etc. ^[54] All these were presided over by the Akire before the establishment of UNIOSUN.

It is pertinent to state clearly that the deciding factor in determining who has jurisdiction over a matter depends on the severity of issues involved and the onus lies on the High Chiefs to evaluate. As such, if they could not make decisions alone, Akire thus preside over such matters.

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3. Osaikire is seen as important because he was the god who gives child/ children to the barren; hence he is regarded as one of the important deities in Ile-Ife as

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