

Osadolor argues that there is no reason to think for upwards of three millennia, he opines that people speaking varieties of the Edo (Benin) language have occupied an area of some 31,000 square kilometers in extent, to the west of the River Niger in present-day southern Nigeria. From these people, the kingdom of Benin was established. The name by which these people were identified, or of their territory has not been found with reasonable confidence. The Benin people call themselves Edo and not 'Benin' while their Yoruba neighbours to the west call them 'Ado'.¹⁵ In line with Osadolor's argument, 'Ado' is an Ekiti community which Biobaku claims to have been established by a Benin prince called 'Ewi' who disposed-off its original traditional ruler to establish his kingdom there-in.¹⁶ He further argues that the charisma of their traditional rulers influenced the expansion of Benin to some part of Yorubaland.¹⁷ He further opined that the attempts to extend its power into south-eastern Yoruba-land led to a war with Benin, first in the late 16th century, and the sphere remained effectively outside of the control of Oyo because of the treaty signed with Benin which fixed the boundary between the two powers at Otun.¹⁸ Against Osadolor's stand, Dzeka and Osadola argue that the Benin kingdom and Oyo Empire did not influence one another regarding war or conquest because both shared a similar origin. The personality of Oranmiyan which has a more significant influence in the writing of Benin history and Yoruba history respectively gives much clarity to the argument.¹⁹ Besides the control of more considerable part of Yoruba-land, the neighbours of Benin to the north, south, and east were subjected to its rule. The most distant conquest became tributary states while those within some eight kilometers of Benin city were subjected to direct control, and those between were placed under Princes of the royal lineage whose political powers were derived from the authority of the Benin monarch.

The penetration of British commercial and political influence in Lagos, however, put an end to the control of Benin in the area. Not long before the British occupation of Lagos, Osemwede had sent the 'Osodin' and two other chiefs there to demand the tribute, presumably because it had not been delivered at the proper time. They found the town engulfed in a civil war

¹⁵ O. B. Osadolor, "*The Military System of Benin Kingdom*," Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Philosophy and History, University of Hamburg, Germany. 2001.

¹⁶ S. O. Biobaku. *Sources of Yoruba History*, (New York: Clarendon Press, 1973)

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ T. Dzeka, O. S. Osadola, Social-Cultural and Institutional Diffusion in Western Nigeria: An Assessment of Benin Influence on Ekiti, *Makurdi Journal of Arts and culture (MAJAC)*, Vol.13, 2015, pp. 215-225

between Akintoye and Kosoko, and it is not clear whether or not they succeeded on their mission. Akintoye, who held the emblems of authority from Osemwede, eventually had to yield to Kosoko, but the latter acknowledged to Beecroft in 1851, that he could not consider himself *de jure* of Lagos without the sanction of Benin, and that this could not be forthcoming so long as Akintoye lived.²⁰ Beecroft too gave explicit recognition to the Oba's authority in the town when he addressed a letter to him before the expulsion off Kosoko.²¹

Despite Beecroft's seeming readiness to acknowledge the Oba's rights in Lagos, Akintoye seized the opportunity of his restoration under British protection to repudiate his former allegiance. According to Consul Campbell, Akintoye on the application for the usual tribute sent the king of Benin's messengers home without anything, telling them that the trade of Lagos was henceforth changed and that he could not afford to pay any more tribute.²² No better fortune attended Oba Adolo's attempt in 1860 to re-instate Kosoko who had made his peace with Benin, perhaps by promising to resume payment of the tribute. Adolo sent a message to the new ruler of Lagos, Dosumu, informing him of his wish to place Kosoko on the throne. King Dosumu replied that he only recognizes the British government now, not as in former times when Lagos was under the king of Benin to whom annually a tribute was paid, and that he requested the king of Benin would not send any more messages relative to the bringing back of Kosoko to Lagos.²³ British consuls in Lagos approved of this shuffling off of dependence upon Benin because it left British suzerainty unchallenged; and when in 1861 Britain formally annexed Lagos, no reference was made to Benin. Nevertheless, though the Obas and chiefs of Lagos might repudiate all dependence on Benin in the face of the British consul, they appear on occasion to have sought the favour of the Oba with presents.²⁴

Ekiti, on the other hand, is an independent state before the British conquest. It is an upland zone rising over 250 meters above sea level. It, however, lies on an area underlain by metamorphic rock. It is generally an undulating country with a natural landscape that consists of old plains broken by step-sided out-crops that may occur singularly or in groups or ridges. Such

²⁰ R. S. Smith., *Warfare and Diplomacy in pre-colonial West Africa*, (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd. 1976.)

²¹ A.E Afigbo, "The Benin Mirage and the History of South Central Nigeria." *Nigeria daily Magazine*, 1998 no. 137 p.23

²² S. A. Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland, 1840- 1993*, (London: Longman Group Limited, 1971)

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Omo N'Oba Erediauwa, *I Remain, Sir, Your Obedient Servant*, (Spectrum Books Publisher, 2004)

rocks out-crops exist mainly at Aramoko, Efon-Alaaye, Ikere, Igbara-odo, and Okemesi Ekiti. The state is dotted with rugged hills, notable ones being Ikere Ekiti hills called Olosunta in the south, Efon-Alaaye hills on the western boundary and Ado Ekiti hills in the center.²⁵

Ekiti was one of the many Yoruba states in what is today Nigeria. Ekiti as a nation and districts of Yoruba race had her progeny in Oduduwa, the father and progenitor of Yoruba race. Ekiti has her origin from Ile Ife. The tradition has it that Ekiti was formed when the grandchildren of Oduduwa journeyed through Iwo-Eleru (cave) near Akure in Ondo state and had stopped over at a place called Igbo Aka (Forest of termites) closer to Ile Oluji. Some of the grandchildren of Oduduwa, however, decide to form their own rule in their present location (forest of termites) while Owa-obokun the current day monarch of Ijesa land and Orangun of Ila chose to move ahead and settled in the present day Ijesha and Igbomina land in Osun state.²⁶ Due to the hills found in the area, they named the place in their mother's language "Ile Olokiti" meaning land of hills. So Ekiti derived her name from hills.²⁷

Much has been written concerning the Ekiti people, settlement patterns and geographical conditions. Biobaku and Olomola describe the Ekitis to be a sub-ethnic of the Yoruba derivation and are often symbolized by their dialectical homogeneity that the people themselves pride one another in their most familiar greeting of 'o kun o.' The Ekiti are historically homogenous, culturally identical, geographically contiguous and religiously similar. Apart from this, there exists a territorial unity that makes a clear distinction impossible.²⁸ However, if the above assertion is true, then it is apt to consider them as one of the dynasties formed by the children of Oduduwa. The nature of information is in contention. Oduduwa has sixteen grandchildren, Okanbi happens to be the only son of Oduduwa.²⁹ Orangun of Ila is the eldest while Oranmiyan is the youngest. It is however argued by the Benin historians that Oranmiyan ruled the Benin Kingdom at a point in time before he left in anger; this, however, gave reasons why the Yorubas

²⁵ A. Oguntuyi., *History of Ekiti: From the Beginning to 1939*, (Ibadan: Bisi Books, 1979,) p.21.

²⁶ T. Dzeka, O. S. Osadola, *Social-Cultural and Institutional Diffusion in Western Nigeria: An Assessment of Benin Influence on Ekiti*, *Makurdi Journal of Arts and Culture (MAJAC)*, Vol.13, 2015, pp. 215-225 see also A. Oguntuyi., *History of Ekiti: From the Beginning to 1939*, (Ibadan: Bisi Books, 1979,) p.28

²⁷ I. Olomola, *History of Ado- Ekiti from earliest times to the present*, (Ile-Ife: SA Printers Multi concept Co. 2017,)

²⁸ O. Biobaku, *Sources of Yoruba History*, (New York: Clarendon Press, 1973,) see also I. Olomola, *History of Ado- Ekiti from earliest times to the present*, (Ile-Ife: SA Printers Multi concept Co. 2017,)

²⁹ J. A. Atanda, *An Introduction to Yoruba History*. (Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1980)

share so many things in common with the Benins in names and culture.³⁰ The Ekiti never acknowledged one single leader, and in fact, no two kingdoms were known to have been ruled together by a single Ekiti Oba. In spite of this, Ekiti through intermarriage, socialization of children, princes, and attendance of social occasions continue to uphold their oneness.

Archaeologically, the Yoruba race is not more than 2000 years,³¹ meaning other tribes existed before the Oduduwa appearance, this, however, gave credence to Benin's claim that they did not originate from the Yorubas.³² Oranmiyan returned to Ile- Ife from Benin after he installed his son, Eweka as the first Oba of Benin having being frustrated with the strange land. Benin was said to mean “the land of vexation” (Ile-Ibinu) because Oranmiyan left the place in annoyance.³³ Although there are controversies whether actually, Oranmiyan returned to Ile- Ife, it is undisputed that his remains were buried at Ile- Ife. Samuel Johnson gave a critical analysis of this controversy. He is of the view that due to the distance of traveling between the variously established dynasties during this era, it might be difficult if not downright impossible to bring the complete remains of Oranmiyan down to Ile- Ife. But customs allows the shaving of the deceased head and paring of his nails for burial rites.³⁴

The above, however, gave us a better understanding of the relationship between the Binis and the Yorubas no matter how controversial it might be. There is no doubt that the Edo people of Benin took some of their political ideas from their Yoruba neighbours. This historical understanding of the Benin and Yoruba correlation in ancient origin is of use to our knowledge of Benin's imperial activity in Ekiti land. Since Ekiti is said to be a sub-ethnic of the Yoruba derivation usually symbolized by their most familiar greeting of ‘*n okun o*’ (well-done), the similarities between the various villages that make up the entity called Ekiti cannot be discarded.³⁵ Aside from the fact that the word Ekiti connotes a hill- like land structure (Okiti),

³⁰ J. Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin*, 5th edition, Benin City: Fortune Publisher, 2004, see also T. Dzeka, O. S. Osadola, Social-Cultural and Institutional Diffusion in Western Nigeria: An Assessment of Benin Influence on Ekiti, Makurdi Journal of Arts and culture (MAJAC), Vol.13, 2015

³¹ J. A. Atanda., *An introduction to Yoruba History*, (Ibadan, University Press, 1980)

³² S. O. Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*. (London: Lowe and Brydone printers, 1921,) pp. 159-160

³³ O. S. B. Omoregie., *Benin under the Ogiso Monarchy*, (Benin City: Neraso Publishers Limited, 1988,) See also T. Dzeka, O. S. Osadola, Social-Cultural and Institutional Diffusion in Western Nigeria: An Assessment of Benin Influence on Ekiti, Makurdi Journal of Arts and culture (MAJAC), Vol.13, 2015, C. O. O. Ugowe., *Benin in World History*, Lagos Kosayaz Nigeria Limited, 1997.

³⁴ S. O. Johnson., *The History of the Yorubas*, (London: Lowe and Brydone Printers Limited, 1921.)

³⁵ O. Biobaku, *Sources of Yoruba History*, (New York: Clarendon Press, 1973,) see also I. Olomola, History of Ado- Ekiti from earliest times to the present, (Ile-Ife: SA Printers Multi concept Co. 2017.)

the various villages have decided to include the term not only as a name but also an identity. This explains why all the communities in the present day Ekiti state have the word Ekiti tagged to their names, i.e., Ado-Ekiti, Ikere-Ekiti, Ikole Ekiti, Aramoko Ekiti, etc.³⁶

Benin's Influence in Ekiti Land: Unending Dialogue

According to legend, Benin's influence and expansion in Ekiti land are ascertained. The present-day Ado Ekiti was formerly known as Ilesun. The community has her traditional ruler called Elesun who led and administered the town in full capacity, which according to Biobaku was efficient enough for the period in question, not until a visitor was accommodated from Benin kingdom who was said to be one of the princes of Benin called Ewi.³⁷ He uses his superior strength, maybe as a result of his exposure and military tactics, to seize the community and eventually behead it, traditional ruler. The head of Elesun was said to have been buried at Erekesan market in Ado Ekiti opposite the Ewi's palace.³⁸

Since the Ado and Ikere people shares boundaries, the people of Ado under the influence and political power of Ewi, (the Benin Prince) began to seize their farmlands having seen their political weaknesses. Ikere was headed by a traditional priest who has the sole responsibility of worshipping their famous rock called 'Olosunta'.³⁹ The zeal of overcoming the oppression of the Ado people under the leadership of Ewi, however, prompted the Ikere people to seek for the assistance of a Benin hunter who was known to be strong and powerful. He usually hunts for animals in the forest in-between Ikere and Akure which was said to be under the imperial power of the Oba of Benin as at that time. His name is 'Ogoga.' Although he was successful in his mission, the people, however, refuse to allow him to go back to his hunting because of the fear that the people of Ado might attack them again in no time. He was however offered accommodation and was encouraged to live among them. For the love and confident the people had in him, he was made the political head of Ikere while the existing chief priest retained his position as the traditional head of the community. This, however, explains why Ikere people up

³⁶ T. Dzeka, O. S. Osadola, Social-Cultural and Institutional Diffusion in Western Nigeria: An Assessment of Benin Influence on Ekiti, Makurdi Journal of Arts and culture (MAJAC), Vol.13, 2015

³⁷ O. Biobaku, *Sources of Yoruba History*, (New York: Clarendon Press, 1973),

³⁸ I. Olomola, *History of Ado- Ekiti from earliest times to the present*, (Ile-Ife: SA Printers Multi concept Co. 2017,) see also T. Dzeka, O. S. Osadola, Social-Cultural and Institutional Diffusion in Western Nigeria: An Assessment of Benin Influence on Ekiti, Makurdi Journal of Arts and culture (MAJAC), Vol.13, 2015

³⁹ Ibid

to date had two traditional heads, Ogoga, (the lineage of the Benin hunter) and Olukere (the descent of the Olosunta, chief priest).⁴⁰

Oguntuyi acknowledged the scholarly works of Johnson, Biobaku and Abraham who all accepted that “the Ekitis are among the aboriginal elements of the country absorbed by the invaders from the east.” Even though the belief of these scholars concerning the number of groups that invaded Ekiti varied, but they all acknowledge that the Ibinnin people who came into Ado-Ekiti, Akure, and Ikere probably in the 17th century were among the groups.⁴¹

Basil Davidson opines that one of the most famous Obas of Benin during the period of expansion was Ewuare who came to the throne in about 1440.⁴² According to him; Ewuare was powerful, courageous and wise. He was said to have fought against and captured 201 towns and villages in Ekiti, Ikare, Kukuruku, Eka and Ibo society. He, however, took their rulers captive and he compelled the people to pay tribute to him, but there was no written record or even oral tradition that laid credulity to Basil's claim, as no community in Ekiti was recorded to have paid tribute to the Oba of Benin.⁴³

According to Paula Ben-Amos, Benin was ruled by a series of kings who were called Ogisos or ‘rulers of the sky’.⁴⁴ Depending on the tradition, this dynasty consisted of thirty-one, twelve Ogisos.⁴⁵ A revolt by the people removed the Ogisos from the throne. After a brief attempt at republican government, the people asked the king of Ife in Yoruba land for one of his sons to rule them. He sent Oranmiyan whose own son Eweka became the first Oba in the dynasty which rules Benin today. By estimating the average reigns of Obas, scholars have suggested that the new dynasty was founded in the 13th century or somewhat earlier.⁴⁶ The transition of this new dynasty symbolizes a change in basic temporal and spatial orientation. The Ogiso period is archaic and essentially mythological. Neither strict chronology nor the exact number of kings is

⁴⁰ A. Oguntuyi, *History of Ekiti: From the Beginning to 1939*, (Ibadan: Bisi Books, 1979,) p.21.

⁴¹ Ibid p.3.

⁴² B. Davidson., *The Growth of African Civilization*, (London: Longman Group Limited, 1965.)

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ A. Ben-Paula., *The Art of Benin*, (London: Thames and Hudson Publishing, 1974.)

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ J. U. Egharevba, *The origin of Benin City*, (Benin City: African Industrial Press, 1954.)

essential. The second dynasty, in contrast, is founded on temporal duration and the activities, personalities, and innovations of nearly every Oba are remembered in excessive detail.⁴⁷

The reign of Ogiso Owodo witnessed unprecedented crises, conflicts, misrule, acrimony, and anarchy. Ogiso Owodo was said to have summoned the State Council Meeting only when there was trouble and had no respect for the kingmakers (Uzamas). He was said to have seriously breached the norms and ethics of the culture when he executed a pregnant woman who was said to be a helper to Queen Esagho. This was an abomination in Benin. It is further said that Ogiso Owodo had physical defects which affected his personality. This accounted for his erratic behaviour. It was therefore not a surprise that the people revolted and rejected the monarchical system of Government. This episode brought the Republican system of Government under the leadership of Evian for the first time in their history.⁴⁸

However, the establishment of a Yoruba dynasty brought Benin into a broader political and cultural orbit and redirected its spatial orientation from east to west. The east is the cardinal direction associated with the creator god, 'Osanobua,' and with the creation of the land, which first rose out of the primordial waters in a place which today is the Igbo town of Agbor to the east of Benin.⁴⁹ All the sites where once the Ogisos built their palaces and ancient quarters are on the eastern side of the present city. In contrast, the founder of the second dynasty came from Yoruba land to the west of Efon, and many of the essential early Obas came from western districts of the Benin kingdom. The change in spatial orientation was accompanied by a shift from a closed society to an open one; Benin became cosmopolitan, receptive to foreign ideas not only from the Yorubas but through expansion and trade, from other neighbouring groups and eventually from the western world.

Conclusion

This paper has been able to examine the history of the people of Benin and Ekiti. It has also been able to discuss the various ways in which Benin influences the people of Ado and Ikere Ekiti as a way of establishing the central question of this paper; that Benin people at a particular

⁴⁷ A. Ekhaguosa, *Benin City: The Edo State Capital*. (Benin City: Aisien Publishers, 1995.)

⁴⁸ M. Ediagbonya, *The Socio-political and Economic Transformation of Ughoton, (Benin Kingdom), ca, 1440-1897*, Ph.D. Thesis presented to the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, September 2015; pp. 37-38

⁴⁹ J. U. Egharevba., *A Short History of Benin*, 5th edition. (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1964.)

time affected the people of Ekiti. The relationship between the Ekitis and the Benins cannot be destabilized. The presence of Ewi and Ogoga in the Ilesun and Ikere political structure respectively depict a deep sense of relationship which must have occurred about cultural superiority. Furthermore, having the heads of all the late kings of Benin buried at Ile- Ife at a particular point in time is an indication of a uni-source explanation for both dynasties; a fact that can hardly be contended.

It could also be postulated that where whole complexes are similar in two differing ethnic stocks, the two groups have a common origin in the remote past which is the case of the Benin and Ekiti people. Whether single traits in entire complexes are adopted, it may be that the adoption answers the need in which adopting culture is deficient. More important, the items may be in tune with the present cosmos in the accepting culture. However, the relationship has gone a long way even in the area of names being answered by the Ekitis and the Benins; for instance, names like Osadola and Obaseki being answered by two essential families in Aramoko Ekiti has been argued to be a result of dovetailed cultural ethos due to the similarity-base among the Benin people.⁵⁰



⁵⁰ The people of Benin also bear similar names like "Osadolor" (Benin) closely pronounced with "Osadola" (Ekiti). "Obaseki" is also a notable family name in the history of Benin; 'Agho' known as Chief Obaseki. The people of Ekiti also answer these names. See also T. Dzeka, O. S. Osadola, Social-Cultural and Institutional Diffusion in Western Nigeria: An Assessment of Benin Influence on Ekiti, *Makurdi Journal of Arts and Culture (MAJAC)*, Vol.13, 2015, P. A. Igbafe, Obaseki of Benin, (London: Heinemann, 1972) pp. 3-5