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Unity in Diversity: Preserved Art Works of Abeokuta from 1830 to Date and Developmental Trends

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Abstract

Much has been written on the history of Abeokuta and their artworks since their occupation of Abeokuta. Yoruba works of art are in museums and private collections abroad. Many museums in the Western part of Nigeria including the National Museum in Abeokuta also have works of art on display; however, much of these are not specific to Abeokuta. Writers on Abeokuta works of art include both foreign and Nigerian scholars. This study uses historical theory to study works of art collected and preserved on Abeokuta since inception of the Egba, Owu and Yewa (Egbado) occupation of the town and looks at implications for development in the 21st century. The study involved the collection of data from primary sources within Abeokuta in addition to secondary sources of information on varied works of art including Ifa and Ogboni paraphernalia. In particular, this research unravels a mix up in international documentation of Abeokuta works. The study also shows that very little has been done to improve on indigenous technologies through introduction of modern machinery for production. Recommendations are made for improving production to promote tourism and industrialisation without undermining the cultural identity of the people.

Keywords: Abeokuta, artifacts, museum, tourism, industrialization and development.

Unity in Diversity: Preserved Art Works of Abeokuta from 1830 to Date and Developmental Trends

Introduction

Much has been written on the Egba, Owu and Yewa of Abeokuta. These are a people whose history has been intertwined from the earliest occupation of Abeokuta. Their artistic creations in historical records are also often intertwined, therefore, some works are labelled, for example, as Egba /Egbado. Scholarship on these peoples include Fadipe's (1970), 'Sociology of the Yoruba' with comprehensive sociological data, including pictures of their indigenous artistic practices from the earliest beginnings. Atanda (1980) in "An Introduction to Yoruba History" wrote on the earliest beginnings of the town including the foundation of growth vis a vis other Yoruba peoples, the Hausa, Nupe, Fulani, etc. Atanda gave a comprehensive history of the economic, social history, political organization, crisis of the nineteenth century, impact of foreign religions and colonial rule, change and administration within communities. Adepegba (1995) in his publication "Nigerian Art: Its traditions and modern tendencies" wrote extensively on Nigerian art practices including those of the peoples of Abeokuta. Some writers wrote specifically on Owu such as Mabogunje and Omer Cooper (1971) as well as Quadri (2003) who gave detailed migration history of the Owu with relevant information on the Owu from the Homestead and in the Diaspora.

Methodology

Using historical theory, this study is on trends in the artistic works of the peoples of Abeokuta. Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. Some research questions guided the study;

1. Who are the early occupants of Abeokuta? How and when did they occupy their present location?
2. Has their cultural lifestyle changed, in terms of religion, social life, etc.?
3. What cultural artifacts were involved in this cultural evolution?
4. Are the cultural activities of old still been practiced?
5. Are there variations in the present cultural practices and paraphernalia?
6. Are the artifacts documented in Museums at home and abroad?
7. What observable developmental trends are detected?

The History of the Occupation of Abeokuta

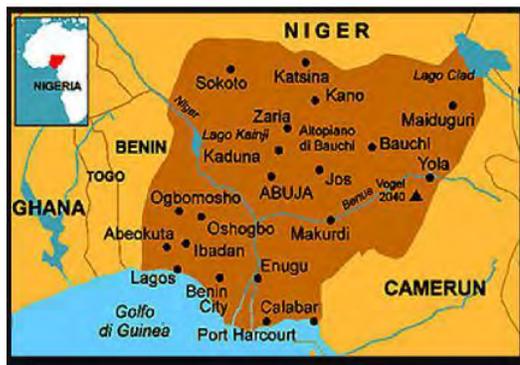


Fig. 1 Map of Nigeria Map-of-Nigeria-Showing-Osun-State-Source-



Fig. 2. Map showing Osun State. Nigeria_map_many_cities

Atanda (1980) explains that:

the Egba people were among the important kingdoms situated west of Ile-Ife, Osun State. The capital of Osun State is Oshogbo, Fig. 1. The Egba kingdom whose rulers were also believed to have come from Ife occupied the forest region between the borders of modern Oyo and Ijebu land. They formed a federation rather than a united kingdom divided into three; they include Egba Gbagura, Egba Oke Ona, and Egba Ake, each with a paramount ruler. Thus, Agura, the traditional ruler based at Ido became the head of Gbagura towns. The Osile, the traditional ruler based at Oko, became the paramount ruler of the Egba Oke Ona, while Alake the traditional ruler based at Ake became the paramount ruler of Egba Ake. The Egba Agbeyi subject to the Ojoko of Kesi was later absorbed into Egba Ake. (pg. 12)

With the rise of the Oyo Empire, the kingdom of Egba became a tributary of the Oyo Empire. Atanda explains that they were forced to found Abeokuta in the 19th century under Lisabi's leadership when the Egba successfully rebelled and asserted their independence from the Oyo Empire. The city was founded by the Egba people to protect themselves against slave raiders from Dahomey, and other Yoruba tribes, as well as internecine warfare.

The second group of people who settled in Abeokuta are the Owu. The earliest records of Owu history date back to 1834. Mabogunje (1971) claims that the Owu were led to Orile Owu by their progenitor Ajibosin (alias *Asunkungbade*, meaning the one who cried for the crown). History has it that Ajibosin was the grandson of Oduduwa. He founded his own kingdom, Orile Owu. The kingdom was adjacent to Ile-Ife and extends southward toward the lagoon between Oshun and Shaha Rivers. As a result of wars, the Owu were scattered in different directions. By 1834 the Owu settled in Abeokuta and had so king until 1855 when they chose Amororo as king from the family of Otileta. These facts were corroborated in an interview (2017) with the present Oba of Owu, Oba (Dr.) Olusanya Adegboyega Dosunmu who was crowned in 2006.

The third group of people are the Egbado, now called Yewa. Atanda (1980) informs that the Egbado kingdom emerged due to civil wars. In his words "these are actually a cluster of many towns founded mostly between the 16th century and 18th centuries" (pg. 17). Some claim to have come from Ife, some from Benin, some from Dahomey, and others from Oyo. Irrespective of their origin, they all came under the control of the old Oyo Empire from the 17th century onwards. In 1863, British administration responded to the Egbado's invitation to free them from Egba and Dahomeyans who wanted to acquire Egbado land for economic reasons. Today, while most of Yewa (*Egbado*) are in their own territory as separate from Abeokuta, however, some Yewa are in Abeokuta. This was asserted by the present Olubara of Ibara, Dr. Jacob Olufemi Omolade (Lafia II). He claims that they were in Abeokuta before 1830. The past and present Obas of the three groups of people in Abeokuta are in Tables 1-3.

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oba Sagbua Okukenu, Regent of Abeokuta 1846/1854 and 1st Alake of Abeokuta 1854/1868 • Oba Ademola I, 2nd Alake of Abeokuta 1869/1877 • Oba Oyekan, 3rd Alake of Abeokuta 1877/1881, died 188 • Oba Oluwajin, 4th Alake of Abeokuta 1881/1891 • Oba Oshokalu, 5th Alake of Abeokuta 1891/1892 • Oba Gbadebo I 6th Alake of Abeokuta 1892/1920 • Oba Adesiinan Samuel Gbadebo II (qv)<i>Generation</i>; HRH Kabiyesi Adedotun Aremu Gbadebo III (qv) 2005-date. |
|--|

<p>Table 1. Past and present rulers of Egbaland from http://members.iinet.net.au/~royalty/states/nigeria/abeokuta.html</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oba Pawu-1855-1867 • Oba Adefowope 1867-1872 • Oba Aderinmoye Adesina; 1873-1890 • Oba Adepegba1893-1905; Oba Owokokade 1906-1918 • Oba Adesunmbo Dosunmu 1918-1924 • Oba Adesunmbo Adesina1924-1936 • Oba Adelani Gbogboade, 1938-1944 • Oba Salami Gbadela Ajibola 1949-1972 • Oba Adebowale Oyegbade 1975-1980 • Oba Michael Oyelekan 9/4/87-8/5/87 • Oba (Dr) Olawale Adisa Odeleye 1993-2003 • Oba (Dr) Olusanya Adegboyega Dosunmu 2006 (to date)
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Table 2. Past and Present Owu Obas

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oba Onijale • Oba Onisaga • Oba Omala • Oba Elewu • and Dr Jacob Olufemi Omolade (Lafia II)

Table 3. Past and Present Rulers of Egbado/Yewa

Cultural Preservation Through Time

Art is preserved in different dimensions in the cultural life of a people. It occurs in ritual as a means of communication with superhuman entities, and in mundane contexts as a form of entertainment. Obayemi, (1983) infers that the origins of the masquerade in Africa are prehistoric. Reul (1969), Nickhin (1974 and 1979), Adepegba (1995) and Ifeta (2008) variously wrote on masks. According to Adepegba “the Yoruba have different kinds of masks. Their figures can be free or applied to containers and staff associated with their deities and their priesthoods. Their masks, except in the case of those that are used for satire, are mostly not of the face type. They are helmet types worn on top of the head“(pg. 54). Through time, cultural practices have been preserved through festivals and masquerade performances. For instance, a special class of masquerades prevent and neutralize, or at least prevent, witchcraft (Ojo, 1988). This is supported by Drewal (1974).

Gelede Masquerade

Gelede, the masquerade performances of ancestral spirits, comes from Yewa culture as confirmed by the Alake Oba Gbadebo and the Olubara, Dr. Jacob Olufemi Omolade. In contrast to information recorded in museums across the world, these sources report the Egba do not use Gelede masquerades. Gelede is associated with a deified founding foremother, either earth or water along with a forefather. The Gelede honors and serves spiritually powerful women-elders, ancestors, and deities (Drewal 1974). Among the Yoruba of South Western Nigeria and Benin Republic, Gelede masquerades honor and placate “the mothers” (witches) (pg. 9) so that they can use their powers to the benefit, rather than to the detriment, of individuals and the community. Witchcraft is the negative and destructive aspect of the power of the witch and can be neutralized by staging performances. Ojo (1988) explains that “the forms and function of masks are as diverse as the many nationalities of the African continent. Even within ethnic boundaries in each nation, there is a diversity and variation in types of masquerades” (pg. 119). Examples of these masks can be seen in Figures 3-5.

The Gelede masquerade consists of Efe and Gelede performances, with different masks worn for each event. In an oral interview, Dr. Jacob Olufemi Omolade (Lafia II), the Olubara of Ibara (2017), noted that the Efe masquerade, the symbol of masculinity, is staged at night while the Gelede masquerade is staged at noon the next day.

			
<p>Figure 3. Gelede Mask of Egbado-Abeokuta before 1886. British Museum</p>	<p>Figure 4. Egbado Headdress Early/mid-20th century Wood: 7 3/8 x 12 1/4 x 13 1/2 in. Flickr.com</p>	<p>Figure 5. Egbado (Yewa) Gelede Mask kwekudee-tripdownmemorylane.blogspot.com</p>	<p>Figure 6. Head-dress (ere egungun olode) Egba, Abeokuta, collections.fowler.ucla.edu</p>

Egungun masquerade

Egungun masks are associated with ancestors. Adepegba (1995) asserts that masks and masquerades are rarely identified as individual persons. Hunters are one of the social groups linked across different lineages with their own Egungun masquerades. Fischer (1978) claims that masks deal with all human concerns including war (*Egungun Olode*). Please see figures 6-9 which have direct and indirect connections with war, and some masquerades represent some of the wars fought in the past. Egungun is also used as part of funeral obsequies of a chieftain or well-to-do citizen who can afford a carnival in connection with his funeral rites (Johnson, 2009). Figure 9 is an Ogun Ceremonial Axe.

		
<p>Figure 7. Abeokuta Egungun mask early/ mid 20th century, 80.25.4x27.9cm – Gift of Dr. Jimmy and Mrs. Jetta Jones 1999.381 http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/artwork</p>	<p>Figure 8. Headdress (Egungun) 19th–20th century Abeokuta 40.6 x 19.8 x 33.8 cm.</p>	<p>Figure 9. Aringo Jagun (Ogun Ceremonial Axe)</p>

Epa Masquerade

Regarding the Epa mask, Adepegba (1995) believes that the significance of the Epa mask has not been ascertained. However, Ojo (1974) in his work on “The Symbolism and Significance of the Epa-type Masquerade Headpiece” reports on the Epa mask in the Age Grade System. According to Ojo, on one occasion, the leader of the youngest age grade carries the subsidiary mask in the festival of the warrior age grade. Of interest is Ojo’s reference to *Ageji* or *Alarinjo* “which not only performs during the annual festivals, but also anytime of the year travelling from one town to another. With the aid of stage properties and costumes they change to animals such as leopard, monkey, crocodile and boa constrictors as well as human social types of the Yoruba and other ethnic groups” (pg. 455).

Ere Ibeji (Twin figures)

The Yoruba commemorate dead twins with statuettes, *ibeji*, to which sacrifices are made. The carvings are commonly done in respect of twins who die in infancy and not those who die when they are old enough to be parents (Adepegba 1995). Figures 10-13 show *Ere Ibeji* among the peoples of Abeokuta.

			
<p>Figure 10. A pair of Ibeji, Male And Female Egba/Egbado, Nigeria - Kunsthaus Lempertz</p>	<p>Figure 11. Yoruba Ere Ibeji (Twin Figure), http://www.imodara.com/item/nigeria-yoruba-ere-ibeji-twin-figure-egba-abeokuta/</p>	<p>Figure 12. Ere Ibeji Ado-Odo</p>	<p>Figure 13. Owu Ere Ibeji</p>

Oro Masks

According to Johnson (2009), *Oro* system is found amongst the Ijebu and the Egbas. *Oro* (Figure 14) is more sacred than the Egungun and is the executor of criminals.

			
<p>Figure 14. Yoruba Oro Mask, Egba - Abeokuta</p>	<p>Figure 15. <i>Esu Elegba</i> figure, Abeokuta https://www.pinterest.com</p>	<p>Figure 16. Wooden <i>Ifa</i> divination tray- <i>Ifa</i> Divination Tray (<i>Opon Ifa</i>) - 19th–20th century.</p>	<p>Figure 17. Abeokuta Agere Ifa 20thC (late) http://www.britishmuseum.org/research.</p>

Ifa Paraphernalia in Divination

Art is also preserved in various aspects of the religious life of a people. This is supported by Ojo (1980). In Yoruba traditional settings, *Ifa* was and is central to the daily activities in many Yoruba towns. Many scholars have written on *Ifa*. Ajayi and Ojo (2009) claim in an interview carried out by Ajayi (1982) that “the celebrated cultures of traditional festivals,

chieftaincy installations, re-enactment, ceremonies, among others, all of which transmit culture, emanated from *Ifa Corpus*” (pg. 43). *Ifa* festivals include *ise* festivals.

Abimbola (1973) explains that the essential material that an *Ifa* priest uses to determine the problems of his clients is known as the *Ifa* literary and divinatory corpus. The *Ifa* priests (*Babalawo*) are very important in Yoruba socio-cultural setting (Mabogunje and Omer 1971). Of utmost importance in the divination process is paraphernalia that includes materials in wood, iron, bronze, leather, and textiles. The paraphernalia include *Opon Igede ifa* (divination containers) *Apo Ifa* (divination bag), *Odigba Ifa* (*Ifa* diviner’s necklace), *Iroke* (divination tapper) *Opa Osanyin* (divination staff) *Opele* (Divination Chain). Figure 16 is a wooden *Ifa* divination tray (*Opon Ifa*) collected in the 19th–20th century while Figure 17 shows Abeokuta *Agere ifa* (divination bowl). Figure 15 is *Esu Elegba* (messenger) and part of the *Ifa* divinatory corpus.

Yemoja

Yemoja literally means “Mother whose children are the fish”; this is the *orisha*, i.e. the spiritual entity charged by *Olofi* (God) to assist the *orisha*-*Obatala* with the formation of human creation of the earth. *Yemoja* was said to have descended to Earth on a rope with sixteen other *orisha* from *Orun* (heaven) engaging other *orisha* around the world in preparing the world for humankind. *Yemoja* is the *orisha* of the *Ogun* River, the largest river in Yorubaland. *Yemoja* is said to be the counterpart of *Olokun*, who represents the unknowable bottom of the sea. *Yemoja* is frequently portrayed as the wife of various male personified *orisha*, including *Obatala*, *Okere*, *Orisha Oko*, and *Erinle*. She is also said to be the mother of *Ogun*, *Sango*, *Oya*, *Osun*, *Oba*, *Orisha Oko*, *Babaluaiye*, and *Osoosi*. *Yemoja* is often depicted as a mermaid, and is associated with the moon, water, and feminine mysteries. Figure 29 shows Abeokuta *Yemoja* pots.

Artistry of indigenous crafts

In the cultural life of a people, such as the *Ifa*, masquerades and social artifacts are made from wood, ivory bronze/brass beads etc. and represent varied occupations. Fadipe (1970) listed the occupations to include bead making, mat making, basket making, body adjournment including tattooing, hair plaiting, *adire*, pot making and weaving using looms, which are mainly women’s occupations.

The male occupations include blacksmithing (making simple kinds of sliding bolts for keeping doors shut, chains, bangles, rings, amulets, bells, cutlasses, hoes, axe heads, etc.). Fadipe points out that “iron smelting was an important industry until cheap imported iron made its continuance a needless waste of energy” (pg. 152). Other male occupations include wood carving (masks, mortars and pestles doors, images, bowls both for washing clothes and for washing corpses), calabash carvers, leather workers, amusement materials (drums and bards), brass and lead working. Mabogunje and Omer Cooper (1971) add to information about blacksmithing. They claim that the original site of the *Owu*, “the first Yoruba kingdom to grow out of *Ife*, was most likely established in the *Igbomina* area. Incidentally, there was a tradition of one blacksmith warrior, *Olowu* in *Esie* and neighbouring communities” (pg. 136). Fadipe also mentioned something unusual which is pool scooping. According to Fadipe (1970) “in this trade, they scooped out pools to have water to sell in the dry season...all the above crafts and trades were practiced at least as far back as 1825 at the time of Clapperton’s visit to Yorubaland” (pg. 153).

Weaving

Two types of weaving are observed in Yoruba land one of which is about 10cm wide and the other about 45cm by 60cm wide. Figure 21 is a male woven tunic with trousers.

Adepegba (1995) explains that

“the types of patterns on both looms are almost the same but the ingenuity and skill of the variety of patterns achievable appear infinite. The color arrangement of the warp threads determines the longitudinal patterns if combined with a single colour. This is the case with the traditional silk *sanyan* pattern. The longitudinal orientation of such patterns can however, be de-emphasised by the use of more than one weft color. In the case where the two colors are alternated in both weft and warp, two colors tend to blend at a distance. This is true of another prized design of the Yoruba *etu* with holes called ‘Spanish lace’. The Yoruba *eleya* are often incorporated into the weave by simply forcing the warp and weft open with a piece of metal. Loop weft can also be used to create soft fibrous surfaces as the case is with Yoruba baby carriers and the shoulder piece *itagbe* of the members of the Yoruba Ogboni society” (pg. 70). (Figure 28)

			
<p>Figure 18. Woman’s Wrapper with Starch-Resist Dyeing,” late 1960s-Philadelphia Museum of Art</p>	<p>Figure 19. Wrapper ca. 1930 - 1970 Cotton.</p>	<p>Figure 20. Embroidered Tunic for men</p>	<p>Figure 21. Aso Oke attire for men</p>

Dyeing

Dyeing is an age-old Yoruba art for which Abeokuta is the most popular source in Nigeria (Figure 18). Adepegba explains that “in the past, the yarns used to be dyed locally and the colours were limited.... There were local colors like red and yellow but the commonest was blue from indigo-dye” (pg. 70), but at present the yarns are in different industrial colors. The method involves the resist method popularly called tie-dye. Sieber (1972) claims that the clothes designed by resist method are more common as single-piece clothes such as wrappers than as tailored garments. The same has been observed of the cloths woven on broad looms. Barbour and Simmonds (1991) claim that “unfortunately the traditional makers of patterns have considerably reduced in number and in some quarters, there is the fear that the makers may die out.”

On the other hand, the practice of traditional dyeing has evolved. Many scholars have reported changes in the trade over time. In research conducted in Abeokuta, Ifeta and Omole (1991), it was observed that the traditional weavers were still dyeing but largely with imported

dyes. Adepegba (1995) also had reported a revival. According to him “They were in vogue in the sixties and from the early eighties, they have appeared again in different colors” (pg. 71). Presently tie-dye is common place again in Abeokuta, particularly, because it is taught commonly as a vocational subject taken by students across many disciplines in all tertiary schools in Ogun State.

Embroidery and bead work



Figure 22. Front of Woven tunic (*agbada*)

Figure 23. Back of Woven tunic (*agbada*)

Embroidery on clothes is common place in Abeokuta as in many other parts of Yoruba land. Figures 21-23. The crowns of traditional rulers in south western Nigeria are made or embroidered in beads, also. It is, however, with the tiny beads that very colorful and figural works are found. Figures especially of birds are common features of the Yoruba traditional crown. Figure 25 shows a beaded crown. Adepegba (1995) reports that “Yoruba chiefs and priests, also, sometimes embroider their garments and objects of religious significance as in Yoruba twin figures with bead embroidered garments. Beads are primarily ornaments and their use is fairly old in Nigeria” (pg. 69).



Figure 24. Box from Abeokuta at the Smithsonian



Figure 25. Beaded crown



Figure 26. Egbado Pot



Cast Bronze

The Egba cast bronze figures and staffs, for the Ogboni Society of elders, are made in the lost wax process. The figures are *Onile* figures meaning "the owner of the earth", and the staffs are called Edan staffs (Figure 27).

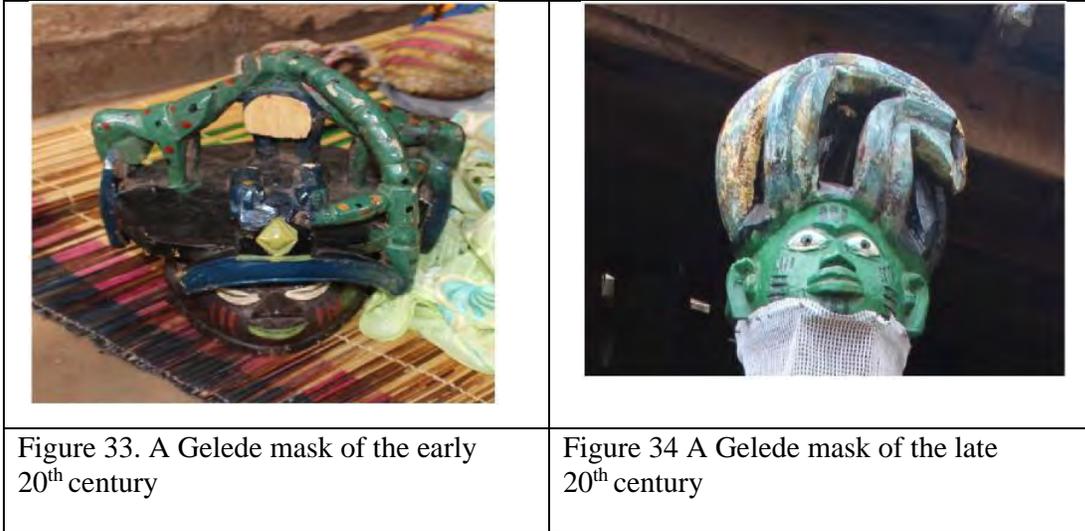
Abeokuta in the 21st century

Continuum of Cultural Practices

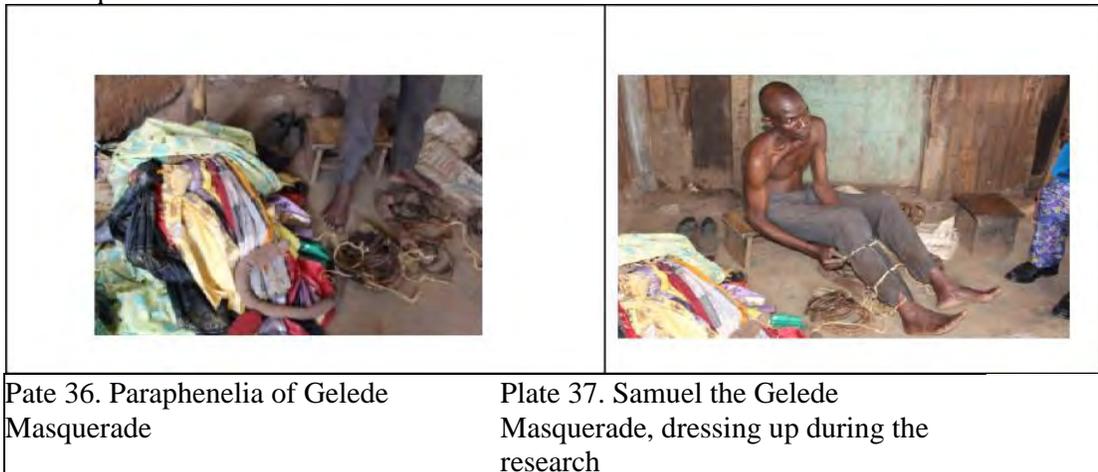
The present Obas (Figures 30-32) have over the years created the peaceful, enabling environment to perpetuate our cultural traditions without hindering sustainable development. "Abeokuta" is now the name of a town that serves as the capital of Ogun State, inhabited by the Egba, Owu and Yewa people. The artistic creations of the Egba, Owu and Yewa have improved relatively while retaining cultural patterns passed down over the years as in adire, weaving, wood carvings, blacksmithing etc.



The variations of old still exist with very little departure from indigenous methods. Also, cultural practices and paraphernalia have endured over time, and most of the festivals go on despite the influence of foreign religions among both the people of Yewa and their counterparts outside the Abeokuta environs. Figures 33 and 34 show the paraphernalia of a Gelede Masquerade in Ilaro as it is also still practiced by the Yewa of Abeokuta.



According to Samuel Akanja Akotemi, who was to wear the costume, he has (although a Christian) been wearing the mask since 1976. In figures 35 and 36, he can be seen dressing up for a gelede masquerade.



He first wears the amulets (*iku*) encased in pellets that rattle when he dances to a tune with drum beats. He wears a waist band (*bebe*) and breasts, with an array of colorful head-ties of the wives (*iyawo ile*) around the waist. Akotemi has in his possession a *gelede* mask (Figure 33) passed down to him by his father, said to have been produced in early 20th century while the mask in Figure 34 was produced in the late 20th century. Figure 37 is a photo of some of the researchers with the masquerade and family members.



Figure 37. The Gelede Masquerade in the middle fully dressed with his wife in striped blouse and some of the research team.

Observable Developmental Trends

The immediate past Governor of Ogun State, Ibikunle Amosun is an Owu. His efforts at developing Abeokuta town are unprecedented in the history of Abeokuta. Figure 38 shows a great contrast of the original picture of Abeokuta passed down to the present (Figure 39). The development of the town is evident, not only in the buildings but in new connecting tarred roads, fly-over bridges, and an uplifting of the Olumo rock to encourage tourism (Figure 40) to generate revenue for the State.



Figure 38. Olumo Rock surrounded by houses in the Past. PD-US, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=23324703>

Figure 39. Abeokuta today <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abeokuta>



Figure 40. Uplifting of terrain of the Olumo rock environment

Presently, the Alake's Palace and Owu Palace have just been renovated. Of utmost importance is the effort of both Obas to build worthy museums to house the artifacts in their kingdom. Figures 41 and 42 show artifacts meant for the Owu Museum. These include the cannon seized by the Owu from the Dahomey warriors, and the chains used on slaves in the slave trade era, among others. The Olowu of Owu, Oba Adegbyega Dosunmu, also recently made changes to a cultural practice that the people of Owu had adopted from the Ogboni culture and which is in the Ogboni culture that have practiced for over a century. According to Oba Adegboyega Dosunmu, "I ended the practice of conferment of Ogboni traditional titles in Owu Abeokuta because the Ogboni culture is alien to Owu culture and the Owus do not have Ogboni assemblies."

In front of the court of Elders (*Iji Ere*) is a collection of artifacts reported by Peter (2010) to date from 1854. However, because many of these are in wood, many have been destroyed over time but a few are in fairly good condition. These include, among others, the works shown in Figures 43-46. These are, however, not works used in masquerades. In Figure 45, is a bust of the immediate past Oba Lipede.



Figure 41. Chains used on slaves for the Owu Museum



Figure 42. Cannon seized by the Owu from the Dahomey warriors for the Owu Museum



Figure 43 Bust of the previous Oba
Plate 17: Lipede



Figure 44. Wood carving *Kabiyesi*- Oba Lipede
Plate 6: Motherhood



Figure 45. Wood carving



Figure 46. Wood carvings with researcher in the background

Figure 47 shows the Museum curator (*Oluwo Iji Ere*) in Ake and Engineer Julius Olusoji Sodipe as the curator enlightens one of the researchers on the history of the artifacts on display in front of the Court of elders (*Iji Ere*) mentioned above.

Figure 47. The Curator Enlightening one of the researchers.



Sophisticated companies have emerged in Abeokuta with methods that are removed from indigenous methods. Examples include Oluga Yombo Blacksmith and Welders who deal in automobile and construction and ‘exclusive’ makers of ceramic products, sanitary fittings, tiles and marbles, and textile companies such as Taoram Nigeria Enterprises, a clothing lifestyle and textiles company to mention a few.

Observable Developmental Trends of The Varied Artistic Vocations



Figure 47 Participants practicing throwing on the wheel

Figure 48. Wares produced after three months

Efforts are being made to expose traditional potters to the use of modern machines for production. One of these efforts was reported, for example, in Ifeta (2013), when some traditional potters were given a three-months workshop by Conner Resources, Ltd. with Ifeta as facilitator hosted by the Art Department of Federal College of Education, Oshiele. The female potters produced clay wares as in figures 47-48.

Summary

The Egba, Owu and Yewa live together in ways that they have survived through many generations. Collaborative efforts have resulted in a reinforcement of the term “unity in diversity” which allows the communities to grow individually in their age-long traditions.

Today, Abeokuta is a cosmopolitan city and the capital of Ogun State. The city houses not only the three peoples--Egba/Owu/Yewa-- but also other peoples of Nigeria and peoples from

outside Nigeria. Nevertheless, age-old patterns are retained because artisans learn to produce through an apprenticeship system and there is little variation in patterns produced by both the apprentice and the master, thereby perpetrating age-old traditions into the present, including paraphernalia produced for festivals, masquerades, religion and the general social life of the people.

Other people's ways of life, designs, and patterns have an influence on artistic production. However, their influence is more on contemporary artists trained in formal art schools, which have not been included in this research. Unfortunately, until today, no effort has been made to consciously collect and present artifacts to the public in the Palace of the Obas, except the display outside the court of the elders at Ake. The motivation to preserve artifacts has been enlivened by the Obasanjo Presidential Library owned by former President Olusegun Obasanjo, which was formally opened in March 2017. Amongst other things on display, this library has a few works of Abeokuta art, including beaded crowns that have not yet been written about by scholars.

Recommendation

While it is laudable that artistic traditions from the past still exist, with little or no modification, it is appalling that in an era of globalisation when machinery is available, successive governments have made no conscious effort to make use of modern machinery to produce traditional wares. What is indigenous to a people are essentially designs and patterns. The indigenous people of the past made use of available materials and methods at their disposal. With modern machines, the people of Abeokuta could have factories to support their textile and ceramics industries, as well as modern machines for producing furniture. While craftsmen still produce age-old designs, the same people—if given the opportunity—could use sophisticated machines to produce their wares as proven by the experience of female potters using modern throwing wheels. Doing so would make employment available to many youths in town, thereby reducing the mass unemployment prevalent in our city.

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