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Governance and Ritual Sovereignty at the Niger–Benue Confluence:

**A Political and Cultural History of Nigeria’s Igala, Northern Yoruba and
Nupoid-Speaking Peoples to 1900 CE**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

Constanze Weise

2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Governance and Ritual Sovereignty at the Niger–Benue Confluence:

A Political and Cultural History of Nigeria’s Igala, Northern Yoruba
and Nupoid-Speaking Peoples to 1900 CE

By

Constanze Weise

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Christopher Ehret, Committee Co-Chair

Professor Andrew Apter, Committee Co-Chair

This dissertation provides a political, cultural, and social history of central Nigeria. The time frame spans from the initial arrival of hunting, farming and fishing communities in the fourth millennium BCE until the nineteenth century CE. This work differs from other histories in that it marks the first exploration of religious and political power dynamics of the early history of the Niger-Benue confluence region over the *longue durée*. The engagement of Nupe, Northern Yoruba and Igala polities with regional and global historical processes—involving the political, economic, and social transformations caused by the Trans-Saharan trade, Atlantic economy, and expansion of Islam—is of central concern. Particular attention is given to the post-1500 effects on the Nigerian hinterland brought about by West Africa’s integration into the Atlantic world system and their imprint on the production and transmission of knowledge through oral traditions, rituals and festivals.

The dissertation revisits debates on state formation and religious legitimization of power. These findings posit a new approach towards understanding the roles that religious institutions and rituals played in early African history as well as their relationship to an agriculturally defined material basis. It demonstrates that the Niger-Benue states were long characterized by a political order that valued ownership and control over rituals as a source of power and a sign of legitimacy. The expressions of sovereignty changed throughout time in response to local and regional power shifts.

Ritually based authorities, as well as the relations between them and the governing institutions, constituted the critical context for political change while at the same time preserved an archive of past knowledge, which was transmitted into the present and invoked in rituals and oral traditions in two forms: as latent knowledge with hidden meanings, and as present-oriented knowledge that is reshaped according to the heterodox discourses of contemporary political-religious factors. The dissertation engages these political-religious histories from a regional and comparative perspective with the recognition that ritual authority often extended beyond certain polities' jurisdictions. This political-religious fluidity drove historical change in the polities of the Niger-Benue confluence region until the establishment of the nation-state in the twentieth century.

The dissertation of Constanze Weise is approved.

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Michael Morony

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To my grandmother, Maria Weise,
and
to Dr. Ade Obayemi and Dr. Aliyu A. Idrees, two Nigerian scholars, who have
been pioneers in the study of the Niger-Benue confluence regions

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My interest in Africa and its history began in 1988 in the dark basements of the spinning mill in Flöha, in the German Democratic Republic, where I was working twelve-hour night shifts on the weekends during my training for a dual degree in textile technology and the German Abitur. It was there where I met my friends and colleagues from Mozambique and Angola, who had been sent to the cotton mills in Eastern Germany in order to receive training and to return to their home countries with the knowledge to build and improve their cotton industry. During the breaks, they taught me about Africa and told me that much of its history is still not written down but is instead transmitted orally from generation to generation. I was set to pursue a university degree in chemistry or engineering, but these conversations changed my path towards history. One person, my colleague Samuel Graca Chioco from Maputo (Mozambique), was particularly instrumental in this career change. He left Eastern Germany in November 1989, two weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

I never got to Mozambique but instead ended up studying at the University of Bayreuth in northeastern Bavaria, where I enjoyed the careful mentorship of Professor Dierk Lange, who not only trained me as an African historian, but also exposed me to the medieval Arabic texts of the Central and Western Sudan and

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It was not until I wrote my Masters thesis on the pre-colonial history of the city-state of Kano in Northern Nigeria and the non-Islamic elements in the *Kano Chronicle* that I became interested in writing a history of the pre-nineteenth century Nupe Empire. I owe much gratitude to Professor Till Förster, who now is the head of the Institute of Social Anthropology and the director of the Center for African Studies at the University of Basel in Switzerland. He supported me in the years after my Masters as a mentor during my participation in the DFG-sponsored research group "Religion and Normativity" in religious studies at the Ruprecht-Karl University in Heidelberg between 1999 and 2001. I am deeply indebted to

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When I started my research on the pre-nineteenth century Nupe Empire, I soon realized that I had to approach this topic regionally and that I had to learn one more important method— historical and comparative linguistics. This brought me to the University of California at Los Angeles, where I not only had the privilege to work with excellent history and linguistics faculty, but where I also found my intellectual home.

This dissertation would not have been possible without my mentor and committee co-chair, Professor Christopher Ehret, to whom I owe my deepest intellectual gratitude. Throughout my years of training at UCLA, and even after I left UCLA to teach at Western Washington University and Dickinson College, he guided and supported me with patience and enthusiasm. Professor Ehret has been a remarkable teacher, advisor and mentor. Through his unwavering confidence in me, and his boundless commitment to sharing his knowledge, he has steadfastly led me all the way through my graduate career. He patiently taught me how to use historical and comparative linguistics to uncover the stories that ancient peoples left us through the words they passed on to their children and grandchildren. Beyond the methodologies and epistemologies of history, he introduced me to the generosity of time and spirit that must be maintained between a graduate student and her adviser. I hope that the love for Africa and the thoroughly researching of

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- 2011 “The Ndako Gboya Masquerades of the Nupe.” In *Arts of the Benue River Valley*, ed. by Marla Berns, Richard Fardon, and Sidney Kasfir, 123-129. Los Angeles: Fowler Museum, UCLA.
- 2009 with Peter Robertshaw, Laure Dussubieux, James Lankton, Rachel Popelka-Filcoff, Michael D. Glascock , “Chemical Analysis of Glass from Nupe, Nigeria.” *Tribus*, 58, 83 -95.
- 2005 “Celebrating the Hybridity of Cultures in Kutigi, Nigeria.” In *Urbanization and African Cultures*, edited by Toyin Falola and Steve Salm, pp. 357-384. Durham: Carolina Academic Press, pp. 357-384.
- 2003 “Kingship and the Mediators of the Past. Oral Tradition and Ritual Performance in Nupeland,” In *Spoken, Written, Unearthed: Sources and Methods in African Historical Research*, edited by Toyin Falola and and Christian Jennings, 268-294. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.

Presentations

- 2013** “On Enchanted Soil: Ecology and Social Change in Central Nigeria 1600-1900, 56th Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Baltimore, MD”
- 2013** “Rural-Urban Migration and Urbanization in Nigeria: Case Studies from Lokoja and Kaduna,” in two panel series: *Creating Lives in and between Centers: Religious, Cultural, and Economic Geographies from Rural to Urban Africa*, Part 1: Healing Markets, Urban-Rural Networks, and Migration from Kano, Nigeria to Dakar, Senegal at the American Historical Association Annual Meeting in New Orleans, January 2013
- 2012** Roundtable “The Audacity of Gender: Power, Sex and Social Roles in Africanist Research on Early Africa,” 55th Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Philadelphia, PA,
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- 2012** Roundtable “Listening to African Voices: Integrating early African history into World History,” NERWHA Symposium on Africa in World History: Integrating Research and Teaching, African Studies Center, Boston University
- 2011** “The Niger-Benue Confluence: New Linguistic Perspectives and Their Implications for West African History,” 54th Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association, Washington, DC
- 2011** “The Return of the Dead: Ancestor Worship and Commemoration among the Nupe and Igala peoples”; Leon Wallace Symposium: Unmasking Benue River Valley Masquerades, Fowler Museum, UCLA, Los Angeles
- 2011** “Ancestors and Commemoration in Nupe Masquerades,” 15th Triennial Symposium on African Arts, ACASA, Los Angeles
- 2010** “Crossroads of Power: Religion, Ritual and Empire in the Nigerian Hinterland during the Atlantic Period c. 1600 – 1800,” Invited Lecture, Department of History, College of Charleston, SC
- 2003** “Celebrating the Hybridity of Cultures in a Nupe Town (Nigeria): History, Power, and Identity in Kutigi since 1770,” Conference

- “African Urban Spaces: History and Culture,” University of Texas at Austin,
- 2003** “Traditional Rulers” in Contemporary Northern Nigeria: Symbolic “Survivals” of the Past or Mediators between Grassroots Structures and the State?,” Colloquium: “The Postcolonial African State” with Patrick Chabal and Till Förster, University of Basel, Switzerland
- 2001** “Kingship and the Mediators of the Past: Oral Tradition and Ritual Performance in Nupeland, Nigeria,” Conference Pathways to Africa’s Past. A Conference on Sources and Methods in African Scholarship, University of Texas at Austin
- 2001** “History, Cultural Memory and Rituals among the Nupe People in Nigeria,” African Studies Workshop, Institute of Historical Ethnology, Johann Wolfgang Goethe University Frankfurt
- 2001** “Religious Legitimacy of Nupe Kingship, Nigeria,” Graduiertenkolleg “Religion und Normativität,” Ruprecht-Karls University Heidelberg,
- 2000** “Initiation into the Ndako Gboya or Gunnu Secret Society in Nupeland: Initiation, Mask and the Concept of Person among the Nupe, Nigeria,” Religious Studies Workshop, Ruprecht-Karls University Heidelberg, “Death and the Concept of Person: The question of the Unity of Person”
- 2000** “Fieldwork among the Nupe in Nigeria,” Ethnology Workshop, University of Bayreuth
- 2000** “The Nupe People and their Representation in the Anthropological and Historical Literature on West Africa,” Graduiertenkolleg “Religion und Normativität,” Ruprecht-Karls University Heidelberg

1 Ritual and Politics in the Niger-Benue Confluence over the Longue Durée

1.1 The Study Area: A Major Geographic Region in World History

Today, the Niger-Benue confluence is located in Central Nigeria and forms part of a contested political space—the so-called Nigerian Middle Belt. Political scientists characterize Nigeria as a divided state in which major political issues are negotiated along the lines of ethnic, religious and regional divisions.¹ In the post-colonial era, historians have begun to understand the Middle Belt of Nigeria as the cradle of several ethnic groups. Studying the area has become significant not only for the search for a proper identity of the diverse peoples of central Nigeria, but also for understanding the broader sweep of West African history.

The question whether the Niger-Benue confluence can be defined as a coherent and self-conscious region has been the subject of several regional studies by Nigerian and international scholars. Among these scholars was Ade Obayemi, who in his seminal chapter, “The Yoruba and Edo-speaking peoples and their neighbors before 1600 CE,” first addressed the emergence and state formation processes of the Yoruba and Edo-speaking peoples of central Nigeria as well as their neighbors, including the Nupoid-speaking peoples and the Igala. The anthropologists Daryll Forde, Paula Brown, and Robert G. Armstrong published

¹ Eyene Okpanachi, “Ethno-Religious Identity and Conflict in Northern Nigeria: Understanding the Dynamics of Sharia in Kaduna and Kebbi States”, in *IFRA Nigeria e-Papers* (Ibadan: IFRA Nigeria, 2010).

an anthropological survey in 1970 entitled *Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence: The Nupe, the Igbira, the Igala, the Idoma-Speaking Peoples*. In 1987 at a conference on “Man, History and Culture in the Niger-Benue Confluence Regions” held in Lokoja, Nigeria, Nigerian scholars discussed in wide-ranging fashion what this regional identity entailed through presentations concerned with the histories, languages and cultures of the confluence regions. Almost a decade later, historian Robert Sargent provided a regional approach to the area east of the Niger-Benue confluence in his book, *Economics, Politics and Social Change in the Benue Basin ca. 1300 -1700: A Regional Approach to Pre-Colonial West African History*. In 2002 Aliyu A. Idrees and Yakubu A. Ochefu published the first volume of the series, “Studies in the History of the Central Nigeria Area.” In 2011, a moving exhibition, accompanied by an elaborate art history exhibition catalog, on “Central Nigeria Unmasked: Arts of the Benue River Valley,” addressed the arts and histories of the peoples east of the Niger-Benue confluence and also included some of those located north and west of the confluence. ²

² Ade Obayemi, “The Yoruba and Edo-Speaking Peoples and Their Neighbors before 1600”, in , J. F. A. Ajayi and M. Crowder, eds., *History of West Africa* (New York: 1985), 255-322; Cyril Daryll Forde, Paula Brown, and Robert G. Armstrong, eds., *Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence: The Nupe, the Igbira, the Igala, the Idoma-Speaking Peoples* (London: International African Institute, 1970); Paul Chike Dike, ed., *Confluence Nigerians: Man, History and Culture in the Niger/Benue Confluence Region* (Abuja: National Gallery of Art, Nigeria, 2005); Robert A. Sargent, *Economics, Politics, and Social Change in the Benue Basin, c. 1300-1700: A Regional Approach to Pre-Colonial West African History* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Pub. Co., 1999); Aliyu Alhaji Idrees, and Yakubu A. Ochefu, eds., *Studies in the History of Central Nigeria Area* (Lagos, Nigeria: CSS Ltd., 2002); Marla Berns, Richard Fardon, Sidney Littlefield Kasfir, and Jörg Adelberger, eds., *Central Nigeria Unmasked: Arts of the Benue River Valley* (Los Angeles: Fowler Museum at UCLA, 2011).

In addition to its regional approach, this dissertation forms part of the growing number of *longue durée* studies in African History. As a regional and comparative history it addresses the particularities of the Niger-Benue confluence and the stories about power, politics, ritual and culture of the Nupoid-, Igala- and Northern Yoruba-speaking peoples. As a *longue durée* study, it shows the divergent and convergent historical developments in the polities in the study area and highlights the importance of understanding past developments over long time intervals in order to evaluate impact-bearing changes during major world historical transformative periods up till 1900 CE.

Apart from situating the Northern Yoruba, the Igala and the Nupoid-speaking peoples in their regional space, it is necessary to evaluate their roles in the emerging space of the Atlantic world, starting with the sixteenth century. Hence the study also contributes to the scholarly discourses that address political, social and cultural developments in central Nigeria as well as changes across West and Central Africa during the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The region, despite being situated in the so-called Nigerian hinterland, was significantly impacted by the growth of trans-Atlantic commerce and by migration and cultural change in the early modern period. Initially influenced

more indirectly, with the approaching of the nineteenth century, the region became more and more drawn into the happenings and repercussions of the Atlantic world economy. Therefore this work also contributes to the new evolving research, which engages local, regional and trans-Atlantic histories in order to show the kinds of changes African societies underwent during this time period.³

³ A few examples include Boubacar Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Robert Martin Baum, *Shrines of the Slave Trade: Diola Religion and Society in Precolonial Senegambia* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Toby Green, *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300-1589* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Roquinaldo Amaral Ferreira, *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World: Angola and Brazil During the Era of the Slave Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Sandra E. Greene, *Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Change on the Upper Slave Coast: A History of the Anlo-Ewe* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996); Walter Hawthorne, *Planting Rice and Harvesting Slaves: Transformations Along the Guinea-Bissau Coast, 1400-1900* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003); Robin Law, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving 'Port', 1727-1892* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2004); Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*. 3rd edn, *African Studies* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Joseph Calder Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730-1830* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); David Northrup, *Trade without Rulers: Pre-Colonial Economic Development in South-Eastern Nigeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); James F. Searing, *West African Slavery and Atlantic Commerce: The Senegal River Valley, 1700-1860* (Cambridge [England]; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Rosalind Shaw, *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Rebecca Shumway, *The Fante and the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011); John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*. 2nd edn (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Furthermore, this study demonstrates that the momentum of the slave trade, and the Atlantic economy that came with it, affected African societies in a variety of ways and instigated responses on many different levels, such as in ritual and religion, politics, economics and culture. But while these changes had major impacts, life in hinterland societies still continued to draw strongly on much older patterns of politics and religion within the Niger-Benue confluence region. This history is the main focus of this study.

1.2 Ritual and Politics: Driving Forces of History in the Confluence

For centuries, the Niger-Benue confluence region formed a complex contact zone between competing political realms, including the Nupe and Igala kingdoms, the Northern Yoruba city-states, and a number of other smaller kingdoms in central Nigeria. I argue that the states in the region were long characterized by a political order that viewed ownership and control over rituals as a source of power and a signifier of legitimacy. The expressions of sovereignty changed throughout time in response to local and regional shifts of power. Rituals served as media through which communities and kingdoms in the Niger-Benue confluence region negotiated their boundaries and forged political alliances.

The Nigerian hinterland region, when drawn into the Atlantic world system between 1500 and 1900, felt the effects on the local level in religious and political institutions. Religious loci and ritual performances started to integrate

sacrificial items and ritual paraphernalia drawn from the Atlantic World, along with icons of the slave trade, which had taken shape during the first half of the second millennium CE. Rituals and commemorative ceremonies integrated these encounters palimpsest-like into the embodied memory and the production of knowledge, leaving a deep imprint in the transmission of historical memory in oral traditions, ritual performances, festivals and their latent representations.

The emergence of Nupe, northern Yoruba and Igala political and religious institutions were a product of interactions at the regional levels, while the contours of change over time in these institutions were influenced by the dynamics of external historical processes, to which these polities were actively connected. Varying spheres of outside influence can be observed during the thirteenth through seventeenth centuries, coming from the Western Sudan and Sahara trading networks to the north and, after the late fifteenth century, from the Atlantic trade contacts to the south.⁴ These contact zones provided new ideas, objects and commodities that were later incorporated into existing ritual systems of ritual-political institutions. Applying this perspective offers a paradigm shift in anthropological and historical approaches to the study of Nupe,⁵ Yoruba⁶ and

⁴ Ade Obayemi, "States and Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence Area", in Obaro Ikime, ed., *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) PLC, 1980), 144-65.

⁵ S. F. Nadel, *A Black Byzantium: The Kingdom of Nupe in Nigeria* (London, New York: Published for the International African Institute by the Oxford University Press, 1961); Aliyu Alhaji Idrees, *Political Change and Continuity in Nupeland: Decline and Regeneration of Edegi Ruling Dynasty of Nupeland 1805-1945* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Caltop Publications, 1998).

⁶ Jacob K. Olupona, and Toyin Falola, *Religion and Society in Nigeria: Historical and Sociological Perspectives* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd., 1991; Pemberton, John III, and

Igala⁷ concepts of the institution of kingship, as well as a paradigm shift in understanding state building and governance in the Niger-Benue confluence region before the advent of the colonial state and the integration of local political entities in the Nigerian colonial and then nation state.⁸

On the regional level, what provides added cross-disciplinary salience to this study is an already emerging potential for correlation of its findings with archaeology. Recent pioneering investigations by archaeologists in areas immediately south of the Nupe lands, with which Nupe ritual history had deep connections, reveal the susceptibility of the material features of ritual in these areas, both objects and site layouts, to archaeological discovery.⁹ In using comparative ethnographic and linguistic methodologies to uncover the features of earlier ritual history among the Nupe peoples, this research poses new agendas for archaeologists, as they extend their inquiries northward into the current archaeologically almost unknown Nupe and Igala areas.

Funso S. Afolayan, *Yoruba Sacred Kingship: "A Power Like That of the Gods"* (Washington [D.C.]: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996; Apter, Andrew H., *Black Critics and Kings: The Hermeneutics of Power in Yoruba Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁷ J. S. Boston, *The Igala Kingdom* (Ibadan: Published for the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research by Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1968).

⁸ Olufemi Vaughan, *Nigerian Chiefs: Traditional Power in Modern Politics, 1890s-1990s, Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2000).

⁹ Aribidesi Adisa Usman, *State-Periphery Relations and Sociopolitical Development in Igbominaland, North-Central Yoruba, Nigeria: Oral-Ethnohistorical and Archaeological Perspectives, Bar International Series*; (Oxford: J. and E. Hedges: Archaeopress, 2001); Usman, *The Yoruba Frontier: A Regional History of Community Formation, Experience, and Changes in West Africa* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 2012).

The assessment of a variety of primary sources—including written documents as well as oral, linguistic, archaeological and ethnographic data, ritual performance and, in particular, environmental sources—indicates that diverse crops and plants domesticated in the Americas entered the Nigerian hinterland region during the era of the Columbian Exchange. Initial research findings suggest that major shifts in the agricultural production and practices of the Nupe, Igala and Yoruba peoples in the Nigerian hinterland were triggered by the introduction of American and Asian crops during this time period. It is further indicated that changes in the agricultural systems not only affected the hinterland economically, but also changed the material basis of the ritual-political order in the polities and of the ritual networks in the hinterland. This project demonstrates that foreign crops came to be integrated into existing economic, ritual and political systems, with further consequences for socio-cultural history.

The assessment also takes into consideration climatic changes in the Sahel and Savanna region during this time period, and what effects these shifts might have had on the adoption of new world crops such as maize. It adds new information for understanding the cultural history of the Atlantic World and of the Diaspora, and also sheds new light on the consequences of environmental change and political shifts generated within the continent. This is an important corrective to the tendency in much of the historiography, which sees the outside factors—the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the inclusion of the region in the Atlantic economy—as the primary engines of historical change over the period since the late fifteenth century. What makes a more internally African-based perspective

possible is the unprecedented extent to which this work brings cross-disciplinary resources to bear on these issues.

Major questions that guide the research are: How can the states that emerged be characterized? What were their politics, ideologies, rituals and material bases, and how did these features change over time? Who and what were the agents of change? How did these states interact, and what was the conversation with trans-regional and trans- and intercontinental networks? What was their interaction with the better-documented states of the Western and Central Sudan during this time period? What impact did the introduction of Islam have on these states? And finally, what was the situation at the eve of the better-documented period of the Atlantic Age and afterwards? What historical conclusions and interpretations can we draw from the kinds of evidence available to us for this important region of world history?

1.3 Methodology and Data Collection

The methodology utilized in this work processes the evidence from field data collection, interviews, participant observations, fieldnotes, diary and journal keeping, documentary and archival research, and historical and archaeological data, as well as previous ethnographic field collections and observations. Furthermore, the data was collected from a diverse field and from multiple sites within the Niger-Benue confluence and in other areas in Nigeria. It involved traveling between different spaces within Nigeria and widely within the research

regions of the Niger-Benue confluence and southwestern Nigeria, the focus areas for this study.

The primary sources for this regional study consist of written documents, predominantly of an ethnographic and linguistic nature, as well as oral data and sources. I have made use of multiple written primary sources from the Nigerian National Archives in Kaduna and Ibadan, the Niger State Archives in Minna, the British National Archives in Kew, the Archives of the Sudan Inland Mission in Charlotte (North Carolina), and the Mennonite Archives in Mishawaka (Indiana). In addition, I consulted the Leo Frobenius holdings in the Archives of the Leo Frobenius Institute in Frankfurt am Main and the Siegfried Nadel holdings housed in the Archives of the London School of Economics and Political Science. These archival documents are supplemented with unpublished king lists and chronicles acquired within the study region, some of which are written in Arabic, Hausa, Ajami Nupe or other local languages.

A vast majority of my ethnographic and oral data was collected and enlarged during different phases of my fieldwork and research visits to Nigeria across several years, specifically in 2000, 2009 and 2010. Most historians of Africa have long considered fieldwork an essential research approach, not only for collecting historical evidence, but also for obtaining “a deeper understanding of both local historical consciousness and historical evidence results from personal immersion in the society and internalization of the culture studied.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Carolyn Keyes Adenaike and Vansina Jan, *In Pursuit of History: Fieldwork in Africa* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1996), XIII.

The data obtained in the field helped in critically evaluating the perspectives gained from various information obtained from the archival documents, especially pertaining to the nineteenth century. The field data were fundamentally important as a unique resource in providing vital information that pertains to the time period before the nineteenth century.

However, while the field data is of fundamental significance and relevance, due to the robust nature of the study region, there remains a huge arena for further historical scholarship and research regarding the historical and cultural phenomena of this area. I am very much aware therefore that my research remains a work in progress with regard to the full sweep of history and culture of this area. There are still more relevant materials that need to be discovered, collected, archived and possibly archaeologically verified.

In terms of my own ongoing scholarship, I believe that my engagement with the historical studies, cultural realities and phenomena of the Niger-Benue confluence area, while already wide-ranging and significant, calls for further heuristic visits to this area so as to enlarge and elaborate the present dimensions of my scholarship, especially for more gainful insights regarding the area's oral traditions and histories. It is my hope that future scholarship will revisit many of the historical proposals and conclusions that this dissertation puts forth, leading to more robust data sets and many new findings.

For more effective fieldwork and research, enabling me to understand my field better and to more fully engage the data, I decided to embed myself within

the cultural and linguistic milieus of my various field communities. As preparatory to my field research, I underwent language studies and immersion in Hausa and Yoruba, both Nigerian languages that serve as major *linguae francae* in the study region. I also immersed myself in the study of Nupe while in the field. In spite of these personal linguistic acquisition and competency learning efforts, I retained as my research assistants and interpreters, within all the regions of study, native speakers of the languages with which I operated.

The interviews were themselves the results of interactive processes. Some were conducted as group interviews, and some were conducted formally one-on-one with me as the interviewer and the individual interviewee. Often, these interviews were conducted in the presence of my research assistant. The interviews were for the most part formal and structured, though they allowed for interactive deviations, such as prompt feedback and clarifications. My interview scheme attempts to follow a schedule and structure. The structure is often formal rather than informal, as questions are asked directly on key issues that derive from a scheduled outline. The interview schedule always included a list of preliminary designed questions. However, these dynamics allowed for much interactive engagement as well as processual and built-in feedback mechanisms to apply in the course of the interview process, allowing for instant clarification and follow-up questions. This procedure at times highlights and generates further leads and also, from time to time, snowballs in its evoking of new materials and information regarding very important matters. During the interview process, I sought to gather a great deal of information on such themes as warfare, trade, succession to

rulership, traditions of origin, migration stories, prayers, praise-songs, ritual practices, beliefs, texts, social organization, group memory and material cultures.

All interviews were recorded using tape recorders, supplemented by photography and videotaping. These interviews were always, as best as it was possible, transcribed in the field. Festivals and ritual performances were also videotaped.

In developing the interview protocols, I realized from my earlier field and research experience that focused interviews usually do reveal much about the ethnic cultures, languages, religion, history, ritual practices and social organizations. Previous experiences have also taught me that Nigerians often talk about different issues but, more importantly, are preoccupied with the varying institutions significant to their lives and which influenced individual and social life-changing events and processes. Therefore, my interview scheme attempted to engage my research interviewees in referencing their oral histories, group memories and traditional institutions and the impact of these during various timeframes, especially during the colonial and postcolonial era.

I was also interested in how these markers' influence continuities. Therefore I always included a section of life histories in the interview queries. It was also my interest to ask how institutional knowledge, traditions and historical accounts operated in the past and how especially they helped to engender transformations, which in turn generated additional questions for me to ask. For instance, I was concerned about understanding how past institutions evolve new functionalities and take on new social roles, and how these changes were

determined and regulated. I further collected the life histories of kings, chiefs, priests and other traditional titleholders. Some of the individuals I interviewed had lived during the era of colonialism, and their life histories succinctly highlighted the effects colonialism durably imposed upon traditional institutions and their eventual historic courses.

To gain insight into any society, it is vital to immerse oneself in the culture. Thus, during my research I participated, observed and asked questions of major annual festivals, especially those that occurred during my stay within any locality. For instance, in Ila Orangun in Osun State, I was fortunate to have participated in the ancestral Egungun festival, which occurs only every seven years. Also, in Okene, Kogi State, I was able to observe several ancestral festivals on display. I aimed to observe many such festivals, but this was not possible in all cases. These festivals in their performances reflect and recast the past; the stories that the performances recount and dramatize provide valuable vital clues about the deep historical past of these various societies.

I collected oral traditions from all representative and recognized political domain centers within the study region. For Nupe these domains were: Emidawo, Bida, Gbado Pati, Patigi, Zugurma, Mokwa, Raba, Nku, Nupeko, Leamfa Kusa, Muregi, Kusogi Doko, Kusogi Cekpan, Kutigi, Lade, Sakpe and Gboloko. For the Igala, these were in Idah, Ibaji, Abocho, Ayangba (Anyigba) and Ugwolawo. For the northern Yoruba, I conducted interviews in the following regions: Kabba, Esie, Ila Orangun and Oke Ila. In the Nupoid-speaking areas, I visited and conducted interviews among the Ebira in Okene and its surroundings, Etuno

(Igarra) and Koton Karfi. For the Gwari, I derived information from Kwali and Abuja. Among the Gade I gathered information in Kuje for the Dibo, in Ewuti; for the Kakanda, in Budon and Muye; for the Kupa, in Eggan; for the Abawa, Kami and Gupa, in Muye and Paisa; and for the Asu, in Mazan Kuka and Kabogi.

The dissertation reflects the outcome of various journeys through the Niger-Benue confluence and the many stays I have made in villages and major urban centers, where I visited palaces and homes of chiefs and traditional title holders, shrines and ritual places, and where I observed festivals and ritual practices. But this history is the outcome of the productive gathering and integration of various source materials, data that was derived with great effort. Having my central base within the Niger-Benue confluence town of Lokoja enabled me to travel from there, fanning out to different places and gaining me access to all the places I visited, as well as facilitating the gathering of linguistic data for my research.

Imagining a history of the *longue durée* that pertains to the peoples and the political and religious institutions in the Niger-Benue confluence, I was interested in both continuities and changes over time as well as the crucial effects of these transformations. In spite of the primary concern of the dissertation's theme and scope with pre-nineteenth century history, it is not possible to neglect the present in trying to reconstruct the events of that era, because the field data I directly collected myself exists within the contemporary era, though they do, in fact, contain testimonies of the past. These materials also reflect the local historical consciousness and the contemporary meaning and uses of the past by

current societies and in their communal evolution and historical processes.

Overall, such roles as those of traditional elites, royal and chieftaincy institutions, and the priesthoods (or ritual specialists and/or experts) were key channels through which major historical changes proceeded.

This focus allies with the sociology of knowledge in interrogating the contemporary functionaries of traditional orders, who still perceive their roles and expectations in terms of a slipped-away past, both as authentic avatars of a predecessor era (ancient regime) and as the structural successors, who attribute their roles to the qualities of past and traditional institutions. Such overarching considerations also underlined the nature and quality of the research data material sought for this study.

Gatekeepers and local experts are often significant to any ethnographic or qualitative based research. In every society, there are gatekeepers, who provide essential means for one to gain a foothold. Consequently, in outlining my research plans, following the determination of the geographical scope and the identification of key political and religious institutions, I focused my attention on the quest for gatekeepers and key mediators of knowledge and cultural brokers within the communities that I earmarked for conducting research.

The assistance of the key gatekeepers, which I was privileged to have, has been very gratifying, insuring what otherwise would have been a rather long and winding process. Due to the fact that I had received great support from traditional functionaries, I was usually received with great openness and, also in many cases, with gratefulness for my work in recording and documenting the history of these

institutions for posterity's sake. Most of the narrators I had chosen to interview were individuals who held key positions within the kingdoms, chiefdoms and/or the priesthoods—in other words, within the ritual/religious realm. In addition to these persons, I interviewed designated and assigned traditional keepers of historical knowledge, such as royal historians, kingmakers, diviners, royal court musicians and praise singers.

In the field I observed many ritual practices. For instance, I witnessed the initiation of a young boy into the Ndakogboya masquerade secret society in the Nupe area of Kusogi. Although I was able to observe the public part of the initiation, I still had to send my research assistant into the inner shrine to continue observing the rest of the initiation rites. Being a strictly male secret society, women were not allowed access into the secret part of the initiation ceremonies. In most Nupe and Nupoid-speaking shrines, women are not allowed access. One noticeable exception is that of the *Enukus* among the Ebira, who are priestesses born under a special sign. Other notable exceptions are for menopausal elderly women in other areas within the region.

Such barriers make access to information not always easy to gain. I experienced this situation several times. During a visit to Igalaland, I was able to interview the Achadu, the head of the royal kingmakers of the Igala kingdom, and his coterie of chiefs. While I joined a morning ancestral ritual of thanksgiving and propitiation and was shown around some key areas, there were areas where I was informed that I could not be allowed access to visit because of the normative codes of the Igala society and the Achadu institution. In fact, there were times

during my research when I was unable to access certain key cultural brokers and mediators. This was, for instance, the case in Idah, where I was unable to meet and interview in person the paramount king of Igalaland, the since deceased Attah Aliyu Obaje.

Among other major obstacles and constraints that defined my field research, was the growing and pervasive fundamentalist approaches manifested by adherents of the two dominating monotheistic religions: Islam and Christianity. When I arrived for my first field research among the Nupe people in central Nigeria in 2000, the country had just undergone major changes during the post-military era, with democratic government ushered in since 1999. Some of these changes manifested as ethno-religious in nature. Among these changes was the incidence of the re-introduction of the Sharia (Islamic) legal code and enforcement and application of Sharia Criminal Law Code in almost all the Nigerian northern states. The provenance of this development is traceable to the formal launching of Sharia by Ahmed Sani, then the state governor of Zamfara State on October 27, 1999. Thereafter, this trend was extended to eleven other northern states: Sokoto, Kebbi, Niger, Katsina, Kaduna, Kano, Jigawa, Bauchi, Yobe, Gombe and Borno. Legally, the pretext for this development hinged upon the fact that these states evoked “the somewhat ambiguous clause in the 1999 Nigerian constitution that empowered a state assembly (or the National Assembly

in the case of Sharia Court of Appeal in the Federal Capital City of Abuja) to confer additional jurisdictions on the Sharia Court of Appeal.”¹¹

Niger State, where I did the majority of my research, had been declared a Sharia state in early 2000, shortly before my arrival. Thus, the town Bida, where I had established my first fieldwork base, showed all signs of the Sharia state. The effects were particularly perceptible in daily life occurrences. One of the major obstacles became the production, selling and consumption of alcohol. Though in principle the Sharia law applied only to the Muslim population and not to the Christians or animists living in the state, in practice the ban of alcohol was a state-wide exercise. While for many people this meant just an incursion in the joys of everyday life, it meant tremendous hardship for local beer breweries and pubs (mostly owned by Christians from the South or the Nigerian Middle Belt), which got their licenses revoked.

It also somewhat endangered the practice of traditional religions, as practitioners of traditional religions were used to offering traditionally brewed beer or palm wine in sacrifices, rituals, and ancestral veneration and propitiation rituals. The outlawing of alcohol at the state level endangered any participants caught using alcoholic product, traditional ritual practices included. In a sense, the legalization of Sharia also gave preeminence to Islam, and therefore, any religion or ritual practices and practitioners that seemingly undermined such preeminence

¹¹ Rotimi T. Suberu, “Religion and Institutions: Federalism and the Management of Conflicts over Sharia in Nigeria”, *Journal of International Development*, 21 (2009), 547-60.

by carrying out non-Islamic ritual acts and practices seemed to stand outside the prevalent law and were endangered. Some of the ardent practitioners were nominal Muslims, who could also be prosecuted and charged under the rigid terms of the Sharia Criminal Code. The elevation of Islam and the institutionalization of the Sharia code entailed that traditional religious practices and ritual acts went underground and were covertly practiced. As a result, many practitioners would not talk about this to anyone so as not to endanger themselves for fear of been discovered. This palpable fear, that induced an auxiliary code of silence, made collecting information regarding traditional beliefs and practices difficult and taxing.

In some Nupe villages, even in those in the neighboring Kwara state, which was not part of the Sharia states of the North, practitioners of non-Islamic religions were afraid to talk about non-Islamic religious practices because they feared the retaliatory consequences of chiefs, who had recently converted to Islam and had just performed the pilgrimage to Mecca. After their return, they had prohibited all non-Islamic practices. In one of the interviews I conducted in such a village, practitioners of non-Islamic religions tried to tie the origin of their masquerades to Mecca to underscore their legitimacy as Muslim practice. Of course the presence of the recently converted chief during the interview had contributed towards an additional pressure upon informants. In spite of efforts to secure information by seeking out practitioners to talk with me in this village, this task was unsuccessful and painstaking.

Fortunately, I was lucky, since in some places I encountered more willingness and openness among many other practitioners who boldly shared with me the knowledge regarding the Ndakogboy/ Gunnu, Elo and Mamma masquerade societies, in spite of the duress of these new religious pressures. Many elders shared aspects of their traditional history and many major features of their ritual and religious practices and knowledge because they believed that the implementation of Sharia endangered the continuity of their traditional practices. Many were delighted that, by sharing, many elements of their cultural and ritualistic practices would be aptly documented for posterity rather than die out without trace, following these new political and religiously induced pressures of the Sharia.

As a result of such pressures, I also learned about the other stresses facing surviving elements of the pre-colonial and pre-nineteenth century Nupe past. These stresses include the relegation of such past and cultural pathways to the sideline by the youths, who are increasingly discarding and deviating from these ritual and cultural practices. Such scenarios distressed many elders. I was also informed that these changes are similarly affecting the Nupe masquerade institutions, as their functional roles are now being diminished from witch-finding and policing in Nupe's rural communities to their public appearance for public entertainment. Essentially, Nupe society is facing a future in which their traditional ritual practices are now being relegated from the public sphere into the private sphere.

The rise of fundamentalist Islam and Christianity, in particular Pentecostal Christianity, affects traditional religious practices pejoratively, but even more uniquely negative in its impact is the manner in which it affects the narration of historical accounts. My observation reflects that some Nupe and Yoruba chiefs and kings distance themselves from the non-Islamic or non-Christian practices of their ancestors. Subsequently, such attitudes result in limiting the kind and amount of data collection to certain oral accounts, as they disavow and suppress aspects of the historic past and cultural elements that they associate with their “pagan past.” Some kings in Yorubaland, for instance, have embraced the Pentecostal tenets banning almost all Yoruba religious practices, including traditional festivals. Predictably, the consequences of such modes of action, arising from the biases as Christian and Islamic adherents, especially their radical and fundamentalist aspects, can lead to the loss of historical knowledge regarding these societies, rituals and traditional practices over time.

However, in some other instances, cultural traditions are transmitted to the younger generation, especially those political institutions vital for grassroots politics and community development. In all, throughout the oral (life) history interviews I conducted with functionaries of traditional institutions, it became clear that even the most educated are reverting to upholding the traditional institutions as custodians. Among this group, many seemed to have left their “worldly life” to embrace traditional leadership roles. For instance, the Nupe King of Patigi was an accountant before his election as traditional ruler, which he left to become a custodian of the cultural patrimony of his territory. In Ibaji, Igalaland,

Chief John Egwemi was a formerly elected state legislator, politician, public and church administrator, business entrepreneur and socialite, yet he was nominated as the traditional ruler of Uje, in Ibaji, and the Eje of Ibaji, as the highest-ranking chief. Equally, the head of the masquerade society of Ebiraland was a mathematics professor before taking this traditional office.

Another significant component of my work was to collect linguistic data. The data, which I collected while in the field, underlines the importance of historical linguistics in examining and analyzing cultural and linguistic affinities between, within and among language and cultural groups over time. This data was collected to establish chronological depth and to evaluate changes and continuities in the life world of the Yoruba, Igala and Nupoid-speaking peoples over the *longue durée*. I was able to elicit wordlists of 100 words core and 1500 words of cultural vocabulary from all Nupoid, Northern Yoruba and Igala people, and in some cases, also from major dialects of these languages. The 1500-word lists were grouped into semantic fields such as agriculture, politics, plants, animals, etc. Chapter 3 provides a description of the applied linguistic methods at the root of this analysis.

As previously indicated, I was fortunate to team up with research assistants whose multilingual competencies and fluent skillfulness in English was excellent in translating from a particular lingua franca (such as Nupe) into another target language (such as Asu, Gupa or Dibo). This allowed for a higher semantic accuracy than if the translation had been solely performed in English. The elicitation and analysis of most Nupoid languages provided big challenges

because most are oral languages and were never alphabetized. A phoneme inventory exists only for Nupe, Gwari, Epira and Gade. For the remaining Nupoid-speaking languages no linguistic analysis has ever been performed. This made phonetic transcriptions, as well as phonological, historical and comparative linguistic analysis very difficult. Therefore the elicited data will have to be supplemented with further elicitations in the future to allow for a higher variety of speakers of the same language in facilitating even more accurate transcriptions. One of the greatest obstacles for some research areas that I encountered is that of language death. For instance, Asu, a Nupoid language, suffers from a shrinking number of speakers, while the neighboring bigger languages such as Nupe or Hausa are swiftly expanding their numbers of speakers and continuing to threaten Asu.

I have sought to portray the methodologies and data collection instruments, processes, highpoints, challenges and problems encountered in the course of my research. The research study has offered me extensive understandings of the Niger-Benue confluence societies, yet what I have learned can be likened to an iceberg—so much more remains to be discovered. Additionally, follow-up research will need to pay more attention to the role of gender in political power and religion. One of the main questions still to be fully addressed concerns in which occasions, rituals and politics women participate and, if so, how. I am aware that women's roles are not explicitly discussed in my dissertation, but this does not imply that they are insignificant to the story I am telling. While I do touch upon traditions of female leadership in Hausaland and

among the Igala, more field research will indeed be necessary to collect data for telling a more gender-balanced story.

In conclusion, there need to be further studies of this region, which presents a vital long-term history of cultural interaction and melding, crucial to unveiling the nature of pre-colonial societies and unmasking the different layers of cultural and historical processes that underlie its cultural matrix, social and inter-group relationships.

1.4 Chapter Organization

The dissertation is divided into six chapters and a conclusion. **Chapter One**, serving as the introduction, proposes a theoretical approach towards writing a regional history and discusses the interface between ritual and politics, data collection, research methodology and research questions. **Chapter two** discusses the state of the historiography of the Niger-Benue confluence region.

Chapter three depicts the methodological approach that is taken in the dissertation and focuses in particular on the method of corroborating historical and comparative linguistic data with oral traditions, archaeological, ethnographic and documentary sources. It offers a linguistic stratigraphy of the Yoruboid and Nupoid languages and establishes a relative chronology on which the succeeding chapters are built. Furthermore, it demonstrates how cultural vocabulary can provide a pathway to the reconstruction of the early cultural world of the region and the political developments that formed the preludes to state formation in the Niger-Benue confluence.

Chapter four lays out a foundational history of state formation processes, ritual sovereignty and governance at the Niger Benue confluence in the periods leading up to 1600 CE. **Chapters five and six** elaborate on the political and cultural changes set in motion by the growing inclusion of the region in the Atlantic economy between 1600 and 1900 CE, and on the interstate relationships that characterized the Niger-Benue confluence region during this period. These chapters probe the effects of those developments on local religious and political institutions. They examine, for example, how local shrines integrated items from the Atlantic world, along with icons of the slave trade, into much older ritual observances that had taken shape before and during the first half of the second millennium CE. They also evaluate the effects of these encounters on the production of knowledge and its transmission as historical memory in oral traditions, ritual performances and festivals. These chapters further offer new approaches and interpretations of the African experience in the Diaspora by showing how political and religious transformations in the Nigerian hinterland influenced the historical memory and ritual performances of the Africans who were taken as slaves to Brazil, Haiti, Cuba, Trinidad, Jamaica and North America.

Central to the discussion, moreover, are the episodes of military ruptures impacting the region after 1800, notably the Fulbe Jihads and the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate, the frequent enslavement of the Nupe and northern Yoruba people, Islamization, and the advent of missionaries and the related Christianization of the northern Yoruba and Igala, as well as the advent of the colonial state. The **conclusion** revisits the findings and implications of the

dissertation. It outlines the development of ritual sovereignty and its implication for rethinking the relationship between institutions of politics and religion for pre-colonial state formation in Africa.

2 Approaching the Niger-Benue Confluence

2.1 Introduction

It was not until after 1830, when the full course of the Niger River was drawn on European maps, that the lower reaches of the Niger became a highway for European explorers, missionaries and merchants. Already by that time, however, the Niger River for centuries had been a major artery of commerce for West African merchants and traders. The newly written descriptions of the Eastern Middle Niger River and the Niger-Benue confluence regions reached a European audience and Europeans, particularly the British, who began to establish mission stations as well as trading posts along the Niger and its biggest tributary, the Benue. What followed was an increased comprehension and occupation of the Nigerian hinterland during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by Europeans. The region today is an important one within the geopolitics of Nigeria. Its embedded nature in the politicized space of the so-called “Middle Belt” of Nigerian contemporary politics and social studies has brought attention to its cohesiveness as a region while simultaneously bringing recognition of the multiplicity of its sub-regional identities.

The history I present here will take the reader far back before the time of the nineteenth century CE and underscore that the comprehension of the Niger-Benue confluence as a cohering historical region started long before contemporary Nigerian politics “turned” it into one. The history of the region has been understood in bits and pieces, but never has been brought together in an

integrated regional fashion, essentially because of the lack of written sources and scarcity of archaeological and other datable records. Despite its political importance in the postcolony period, the Niger-Benue confluence figures in the historiography of Africa, West Africa and Nigeria only in flashes, and few comprehensive studies have been dedicated to the region per se.¹²

Because of this, and although the focus of this work lies in pre-nineteenth century times, insights gained from the histories of the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries will not be excluded, as these eras also refract the timeframe under review. The reason for this is threefold. First, most of the primary sources I am using were produced or written down after the periods I focus on, including the oral traditions and oral histories, which I collected during my field research residence in Nigeria in 2000, 2009 and 2010, and which need to be understood in the light of the cultural *Zeitgeist* that shaped their content and testimony about the past. Secondly, the pre-nineteenth century eras cannot be fully comprehended without the knowledge of how the histories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reshaped African understandings of the information passed down to them from earlier times. Thirdly, the historical and anthropological information gathered in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as academic history writings, have to be evaluated within the frameworks of knowledge and categories of knowledge production to which they belong, namely, colonial, postcolonial,

¹² Idrees and Ochefu, *Studies in the History of Central Nigeria Area*; Dike, *Confluence Nigerians*.

nationalist, and so forth. Recently Akin Ogundiran has brought attention back to the importance of research on pre-nineteenth century history. He writes:

The range of sources that these studies tend to amass to reconstruct Africa's deep past—linguistics, comparative ethnography, archaeology, art, oral traditions, and different forms of writing sources—not only illuminate social actions over long periods, but also allow us to understand how much the past is still lived in the present.¹³

2.2 Atlantic World Connections

The historiography of the Atlantic Age Africa is robust on economic and political themes, especially as it relates to the impacts of the Atlantic slave trade on Africa.¹⁴ The dispersal of enslaved Africans into the Diaspora in the Americas accounted for about 12.5 million people leaving the shores of Africa, reduced by trans-Atlantic mortality, over a period of three hundred years.¹⁵ Forty percent of

¹³ Akinwumi Ogundiran, "The End of Prehistory? An Africanist Comment", *The American Historical Review*, 3 (2013), 789.

¹⁴ See for instance: Walter Rodney, "African Slavery and Other Forms of Social Oppression on the Upper Guinea Coast in the Context of the African Slave Trade", *Journal of African History*, 7 (1966), 431-43; John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*. 2nd edn (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Stanley B. Alpern, "What Africans Got for Their Slave: A Master List of European Trade Goods", *History in Africa* (1995), 5-43; Paul E. Lovejoy "The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on Africa: A Review of the Literature", *The Journal of African History*, 30 (1989), 365-94; David, Eltis, *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas* (Cambridge, UK; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 2000); J. E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Economic Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); J.E. Inikori, Don C. Ohadike, and A. C. Unomah, eds., *The Chaining of a Continent: Export Demand for Captives and the History of Africa South of the Sahara, 1450-1870* (Mona, Jamaica: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies, 1992).

¹⁵ David Eltis, and David Richardson, "A New Assessment of the Transatlantic Slave Trade", in David Eltis and David Richardson, eds., *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*, ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 45.

all the people deported to the Americas under the slave trade came from the “Nigerian hinterland,” and this factor undoubtedly had impacts, most of which still need to be studied, upon history and culture in the New World.¹⁶

Viewed through the lenses of merchant records, ship logs and company account books, as well as the logic and value of Western capitalism, the historiography of the trans-Atlantic economy offers meta-narratives of imports and exports and focuses on the human and material capital flows on the African littorals of the Atlantic Basin.¹⁷ But these lenses leave historians with a one-sided and thematically limited understanding. They leave unanswered questions such as how the hinterland areas responded to the evolving new trade relations and how the regional systems of production and the polities of the interior integrated the new factors into the existing relations or changed in response to those factors.¹⁸

A growing effort of historians, archaeologists and anthropologists acknowledges the necessity to understand the African experience in Africa and the impact of the European-dominated modern economic system in the Atlantic world culturally, politically and economically.¹⁹ Paul Lovejoy argues in his

¹⁶ Paul E. Lovejoy, “Identifying Enslaved Africans in the African Diaspora”, in Paul E. Lovejoy, ed., *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery* (London and New York: Continuum, 2000), 1.

¹⁷ J. E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Economic Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁸ This gap is most noticeable in areas of documentary scarcity between the Sudan and the littorals; areas that neither received significant, if any, European documentation nor were documented by Muslim writers writings during the medieval period.

¹⁹ Akinwumi Ogundiran and Toyin Falola, “Pathways in the Archaeology of

seminal article, “The African Diaspora: Revisionist Interpretations of Ethnicity, Culture and Religion under Slavery”,²⁰ that African history is incomplete without the history of its diaspora in the Americas and that African history equally holds the key to the comprehension of the diaspora. He emphasizes that the enslaved and freed Africans in the Americas “interpreted their American experience in terms of the contemporary world of Africa” and identified themselves with their roots of African origin.²¹

Furthermore, the forced movements of identifiable groups of Africans were often tied to specific historical events and processes, which these Africans carried in their inscribed and embodied memory to the places of their destination.²² Africans were involuntary migrants who were enslaved but who had histories, collective identities and recognizable cultures, and who often established ethnic-based communities that together would constitute an “African” diaspora.²³ Lovejoy emphasizes:

In the context of diasporas, there was tension between local innovation, adaptation and rebirth, on the one hand, and the maintenance of connections with the homeland, often sporadic and

Transatlantic Africa”, in Akinwumi Ogundiran and Toyin Falola, eds., *Archaeology of Atlantic Africa and the African Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 3-45.

²⁰ Paul E. Lovejoy, “The African Diaspora: Revisionist Interpretations of Ethnicity, Culture, and Religion under Slavery”, *Studies in the World History of Slavery, Abolition, and Emancipation*, 1 (1991), 1-23.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

²² Andrew Apter and Lauren Hutchinson Derby, eds, *Activating the Past: History and Memory in the Black Atlantic World* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010).

²³ Paul E. Lovejoy and David Vincent Trotman, “Ethnicity and the African Diaspora”, in Paul E. Lovejoy and David Vincent Trotman, eds., *The Trans-Atlantic Dimensions of Ethnicity in the African Diaspora*, (London New York: Continuum, 2003), 2.

relying heavily on memory on the other.... The various ethnic communities in diaspora that came to form the African diaspora behaved differently, although for communities to sustain a diaspora, there had to be a common thread that connected with a homeland, whether remembered only or sustained by ongoing, even if interrupted, associations.²⁴

It is therefore necessary to establish methodological approaches that allow a decoding and reading of these links to the homeland by simultaneously situating it into the contemporaneity of its occurrence.²⁵

In this regard, Lovejoy demonstrates that particular institutions, religions and mythologies can likewise be considered instruments of domination or responses to oppression and subjugation. For example, the *ekpe* secret society of the Cross River basin, which had taken shape in the Nigerian hinterland as an instrument of governmental hegemony and social control, became transformed into the *abakua* society in Cuba where it protected the integrity of the oppressed. Additionally, the fact that the slave communities were multi-ethnic in background consequently engendered a degree of syncretism or hybridization that was inevitable in the context of the forced migration of the slave trade.²⁶

Thus, any analysis has to avoid essentialist approaches as undertaken by Melville Herskovitz and Roger Bastide, who were looking for cultural “survivals”

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ *slavevoyages.com* is a recently initiated website focused on the origins of enslaved Africans. It provides the opportunity to search a data base consisting of information about 67,000 Africans who were liberated from slaving vessels in the early nineteenth century. The website presents details about African languages, cultural naming practices and ethnic groups and provides the opportunity to identify, among others, slaves that came from the Nigerian hinterland. See <http://african-origins.org/index.htm> and <http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/index.faces>

²⁶ Lovejoy, “Introduction: Ethnicity and the African Diaspora”, 3.

and the “tribal” origins in West Africa where these slaves came from. In reference to this, the American anthropologist and African cultural scholar Andrew Apter highlights the importance of evading any “essentialized African baseline, its static retentions, and its unwitting conflation of racial ideologies with ideas about cultural purity.”²⁷ An assessment of the African experience in the Black Atlantic, he states, must also include the analysis of an “archive” that incorporates ritual associations, performative genres and embodied memories.²⁸

For West Africa, various scholars have examined the repercussions and memories of the Atlantic slave trade within social landscapes as it pertained to eight principal slave trans-shipment areas and their hinterlands: Senegambia (Senegal and The Gambia), Upper Guinea (Guinea-Bissau, Guinea and Sierra Leone), Windward Coast (Liberia and Ivory Coast), Gold Coast (Ghana and the east of Ivory Coast), Bight of Benin (Togo, Benin and Nigeria west of the Niger Delta), Bight of Biafra (Nigeria east of the Niger Delta, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon), West Central Africa (Republic of Congo, Democratic

²⁷ Andrew Apter and Lauren Hutchinson Derby, “Introduction”, in Andrew Apter and Lauren Hutchinson Derby, eds., *Activating the Past: History and Memory in the Black Atlantic World* p. xvii.

²⁸ Some of these vital efforts in this regard include Stephan Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2002); James Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religio: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005); Linda M. Heywood, *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Kevin A. Yelvington, *Afro-Atlantic Dialogues: Anthropology in the Diaspora*. 1st edn, *School of American Research Advanced Seminar Series* (Santa Fe; Oxford: School of American Research Press; James Currey, 2006); Kristin Mann and Edna G. Bay, eds., *Rethinking the African Diaspora: The Making of a Black Atlantic World in the Bight of Benin and Brazil, Studies in Slave and Post-Slave Societies and Cultures* (London; Portland, OR: F. Cass, 2001); Andrew Apter and Lauren Hutchinson Derby, eds., *Activating the Past: History and Memory in the Black Atlantic World*.

Republic of Congo and Angola) and Southeastern Africa (Mozambique and Madagascar).

Among these studies are those that offer methodologically challenging approaches to the analysis of rituals as the embodied registers of historical consciousness. Particularly valuable among such approaches is Rosalind Shaw's method of identifying "palimpsest memories," a layering of historical templates towards the understanding of a past whose documentary evidence and archaeological records are scanty. In the Niger-Benue confluence region the memory of the slave trade persists in personal stories, oral history and songs. While many of these accounts present broadly generalized and even mythologized memories, they cognitively affirm that Igala was among the enslaved. The various Niger expeditions observed enslavement still taking place in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁹

2.3 Prelude to Colonialism: Explorers, Missionaries, Travelers

European travelers, missionaries and merchants produced the first written accounts about the Nigerian hinterland regions. The Nigerian historian K. O. Dike coined the term "Nigerian hinterland" for this region, because it was the hinterland of the Slave Coast from which came a large majority of the slaves that was transported to the Americas. The Europeans entered the historical scene of the hinterland after the Islamic reformist movements had started in 1804 in

²⁹ M. Laird and R. A. C. Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa by the River Niger in the Steam Vessels Quorra and Alburkah in 1832, 1833 and 1834* (London: 1837), 150-51.

Hausaland and had led to the establishment of the emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate north of the Niger River. The Sokoto Caliphate was the largest slaving empire of Africa, if not of the world.³⁰ In Lovejoy's words:

The Caliphate was one of the largest slave societies in modern history, probably having more slaves than there were in Brazil or all of the colonies of the Caribbean at any time, either in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, certainly in excess of 2 million and perhaps more than 4.5 million.³¹

He points out that a third of the slaves exported to the Americas from the Bight of Benin during the first decades of the Sokoto Caliphate might have been Muslims from the hinterland areas such as Bornu, Hausaland, Nupeland, and the northern Yoruba region.³² Slaves were an integral part of the Caliphate's society and important for the Caliphate's economy. The Sokoto Caliphate was not only a major supplier of slaves for the trans-Atlantic slave trade, but also was strongly connected with the trans-Saharan trade in slaves until its collapse at the end of the nineteenth century. Many of the slaves remained within the Caliphate, and Lovejoy estimates that a quarter of its population was slaves. He points out that such a high figure of slaves indicates a "political order based on systematic enslavement".³³

At the time when the first European travelers reached these regions, the Fulbe jihadists were about to move southwards and had started to infiltrate areas

³⁰ Lovejoy, Paul E., *Slavery, Commerce and Production in the Sokoto Caliphate of West Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

west and south of the Niger River, particularly the Nupe areas and the northern Yoruba regions. One of the major empires of the region, the Nupe state, had just begun its decline during the political instability that had resulted from a series of succession disputes among the ruling Edegi dynasty after the death of King Etsu Mohammad in 1805.

This friction culminated in the splitting of the Edegi dynasty into the Gwaghabzhi and Yissazhi factions, who fought against each other. The political weakness of the Nupe state was exploited by the Fulbe under the leadership of Malam Dendo, who intervened in Nupeland and pushed the two dynastic groups into exile kingdoms.³⁴ The first European who visited Nupe and wrote about it was the Scottish traveler and diplomat Hugh Clapperton, who went, in the words of the title of his book, on an *Expedition into the Interior of Africa 1825-27* and simultaneously on an official mission of the British Government.³⁵

This expedition traveled under Clapperton's command from the Guinea coast through Yorubaland, Borgu, Nupe and Hausaland to Sokoto with the intention of following the Niger River to its delta on the Guinea Coast. And although Clapperton died in 1827, his writings were brought back to Britain and published posthumously by his assistant, Richard Lander. His reports are invaluable first eyewitness accounts of the areas through which he had traveled.³⁶

³⁴ Murray Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate* (London: Longman, 1977).

³⁵ Hugh Clapperton, Abraham V. Salamé, and Richard Lander, *Journal of a Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa, from the Bight of Benin to Soccatoo* (London: J. Murray, 1829)

³⁶ Jamie Bruce Lockhart, and Paul E. Lovejoy, eds., *Hugh Clapperton into the Interior of Africa: Records of the Second Expedition, 1825-1827* (Leiden, Netherlands ; Boston,

He documents the military turbulences in Nupeland lands during the civil wars of the 1820s.

It was a period of war and devastation across the entire region through which Clapperton traveled, beginning with the outbreak of the jihad in the Hausa states 1804-08, which spread to Nupeland in 1810-12 and continued with the Muslim uprising in Illorin in 1817, the ascendancy of Malam Dendo at Raba in Nupeland by 1819³⁷ and the independence of Illorin from Oyo in c. 1823 and its incorporation as an emirate into the Sokoto Caliphate. By 1831-33 the jihadists had taken Oyo, and by 1836 the capital city and much of the lands around the city had been deserted and devastated, while the population either fled southwards to new centers, such as Ibadan or New Oyo, or were enslaved.³⁸

Interregional slave trade increased after the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade by the British in 1807, but the trans-Atlantic slave trade continued up to 1853 before the shipping of enslaved people was completely outlawed.

Concrete evidence about pre-nineteenth century Nupe slave export is scanty, but according to Femi Kolapo, “there is a great deal of circumstantial evidence

Mass.: Brill, 2005); Dixon Denham, Hugh Clapperton, Walter Oudney, and Abraham V. Salamé, *Narrative of Travels and Discoveries in Northern and Central Africa in the Years 1822, 1823, and 1824*. 2d edn (London: John Murray, 1826); Richard Lander and Hugh Clapperton, *Extract from Records of Clapperton's Last Expedition to Africa*, by R. Lander, [England: s.n.], 1834.

³⁷ Michael Mason *Foundations of the Bida Kingdom*, Ahmadu Bello University History Series (Zaria, Nigeria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1981), 2.

³⁸ Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire, C.1600-C.1830: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, *Oxford Studies in African Affairs* (Oxford [Eng.]: Clarendon Press, 1977).

showing that Nupe indeed sold slaves across the Atlantic in what must have been significant numbers before the nineteenth century.”³⁹ Thus one of the missions of Clapperton was to get information on the slave trade back to the British government, which was engaged in the suppression of the Atlantic side of this trade. However, the export of slaves across the Atlantic and the revenue that could accrue from such trade was not as critical to the economic and political well-being of the Nupe leadership as it was to the coastal societies. Kolapo points out that it is “unlikely that the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in the nineteenth century could produce cataclysmic effects on them [the Nupe] as it did among the societies which nearly totally depended on that trade and on the Atlantic market.”⁴⁰

In 1830, Richard Lander returned to Africa with his brother John. Both traveled from Badagry to Bussa on the Niger where they bought a canoe and paddled downstream to the Delta. In this way, the Landers finally brought the knowledge to the Europeans that the course of the Niger terminated into the Atlantic. The descriptions from both Clapperton and the Lander brothers represent invaluable eyewitness accounts of the Nupe and Northern Yoruba region. After the Landers’ journeys came the multiple Niger Expeditions (1832-3, 1840-1, 1854 and 1857). Out of these expeditions came a variety of historically informative

³⁹ Femi Kolapo, *Military Turbulence, Population Displacement and Commerce on a Slaving Frontier of the Sokoto Caliphate C. 1810-1857* (PhD Thesis, York University, 1999).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

written reports by the British merchant and shipbuilder MacGregor Laird⁴¹ and other involved persons, such as Thomas Hutchinson.⁴²

Also important are the later accounts of the British medical doctor W. B. Baikie, who first took part in the Niger expedition of 1854 and then later performed the function of the British consular officer in Lokoja from 1857 to 1864. During this period, he provided the Foreign Office and others, such as the Manchester-based Cotton Supply Association, with information on Nupe and the adjacent countries.⁴³

The writings of the Church Missionary Society representative, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a liberated Yoruba from Sierra Leone and the first ordained African bishop of the Anglican Church, are full of insightful information, too.⁴⁴ Crowther was instrumental in establishing various mission stations in Brass, Bonny, Osomare, Asaba, Onitsha, Lokoja and Eggan. The latter two were situated in the confluence region, whereas all the others were located in different areas along the lower River Niger. All of these mission stations were manned with native Africans from Sierra Leone, most of them had been trained in the famous

⁴¹ Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition*.

⁴² Thomas J. Hutchinson, *Narrative of the Niger, Tshadda, & Exploration: Including a Report on the Position and Prospects of Trade up Those Rivers, with Remarks on the Malaria and Fevers of Western Africa* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855); William Balfour Baikie, *Narrative of an Exploring Voyage up the Rivers Kwora and Binue (Commonly Known as the Niger and Tsádda) in 1854. With a Map and Appendices. Pub. With the Sanction of Her Majesty's Government. By William Balfour Baikie* (London: J. Murray, 1856).

⁴³ Baikie, *Narrative*.

⁴⁴ J. F. A. Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 184 -91: The Making of a New Elite* (Longman, 1965).

Fourah Bay College in Freetown.⁴⁵ Missionaries and merchants alike contributed after 1865 to the increase of knowledge about the regions, in writings, which appeared as reports in newspapers and commercial newsletters as well as articles in government and missionary society publications.

The situation in the Niger-Benue confluence region changed with the establishment of the Royal Niger Company in 1886, which came to exercise a virtual monopoly of trade on the Niger River. Official correspondence of the Company from that time provides some insights into the happenings on the spot, although the Company's employees were bound to maintain a strict code of silence regarding the subject of their employers' activities.⁴⁶

Of particular interest are the published works, retrospective memoirs and official correspondence of British people, who were involved in the military campaigns fought in 1897 and 1901 against the Nupe emirates. These campaigns ended the independence of the Sokoto Caliphate and established British colonial rule in Northern Nigeria. The British intervention ended the supremacy of the Fulbe-dominated emirates, in particular the Bida Emirate, established in 1857 in Nupeland.⁴⁷ Both successor dynasties of the earlier Nupe kingdom received political territories in Nupeland as a "gift" for their collaboration with the British.

The Yissazhi were given the Emirate of Patigi in 1898, and the Gwaghbazi received a small district around the town of Zugurma, which was integrated into

⁴⁵ Akamisoko Duke, *Samuel Ajayi Crowther: His Missionary Work in the Lokoja Area* (Ibadan: Sefer, 2002) 28.

⁴⁶ Mason, *Foundations of the Bida Kingdom*, 4.

⁴⁷ Idrees, *Political Change and Continuity in Nupeland*, 52.

the Emirate of Kontagora in 1906.⁴⁸ Both dynastic groups maintained the oral transmission of the history of the Nupe Empire during their time in exile. The Nupe kings of Zugurma and Patigi and the local Nupe chiefs and bards, as well as the priests of the Ndakogboya cult centers, preserve and transmit this historical testimony up to the present. These traditions constitute a significant aspect of constructing and upholding Nupe identity among the Nupe residents within central Nupeland and among their kin in the diaspora.⁴⁹

2.4 Colonial Epistemologies

As already mentioned, following the Niger Expedition of 1857, Baikie set up a British station in 1860 in Lokoja at the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers. It was the first British Government post in the hinterland, and Baikie was the first British official representing the Northern territories. The important records of this period are the minutes of the Courts of Equity, which were “international” courts set up to settle disputes between European and African traders in the Niger Delta trading centers and ports. The records of these courts provide valuable insight into the nature and constitution of local communal life of this period and, equally important, contain essential data and information pertaining to the trade between the confluence and the Delta.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 73-91.

⁴⁹ Constanze Weise, “Kingship and the Mediators of the Past: Oral Traditions and Ritual Performance in Nupeland, Nigeria”, in Toyin Falola and Christian Jennings, eds., *Sources and Methods in African History: Spoken, Written, Unearthed* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003), 268-94.

In 1891, the consul in Calabar in the Delta area took on the role of commissioner, and in 1893 the territory he oversaw was renamed the Niger Coast Protectorate. Vice-consuls and later district commissioners were stationed at Degema, Bonny, Bras, Warri and Benin and carried out expeditions against different African rulers and groups. In 1899 the Protectorate, previously controlled by the Foreign Office, was transferred to the Colonial Office. In 1886 the Royal Niger Company (until then named the National African Company) was authorized to administer the protected territories in Northern Nigeria.

In 1894, the British signed a treaty with the kingdoms of Borgu, the neighboring area to the west of Nupeland, which brought that territory under British protection, and in 1897 they levied successful military campaigns against the emirates of Nupe and Illorin. In 1899 the charter of the Royal Niger Company was revoked, and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, under direct British rule, was formally proclaimed. In 1914, the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria were amalgamated as the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. Flora Shaw, Lord Lugard's wife, coined the name Nigeria for the whole colony, deriving the name from being where the Niger River flows. The British government appointed a governor-general of Nigeria together with two lieutenants-governors (later chief commissioners) put in charge of the two divisions, the Northern and Southern protectorates respectively. Their headquarters were established respectively at Kaduna and at Lagos. In 1939, the Southern protectorate was divided into Western and Eastern Provinces, each

under a chief commissioner, with the western headquarters in Yorubaland at Ibadan and the eastern capital in Igboland at Enugu.⁵⁰

In Nigeria, the British entered a new world that they tried to comprehend using their own forms of knowing and thinking. Similar to other colonies, particularly India, which was their largest and most important possession, the British tried in Nigeria to approach the colonial administration in ways that made use of existing indigenous authorities. Bernhard Cohn argues that, in India, “they unknowingly and unwittingly invaded and conquered not only a territory but also an epistemological space.” This idea can be transferred to Nigeria as well.

The difference between the approaches the British took towards their model colony India, as opposed to Nigeria, was that many ethnic groups represented in India had written texts, which the British admired and privileged. An entire “oriental” approach arose to learn and study languages such as Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit to “comprehend the Indian mind.” This knowledge, according to Cohn:

Was to enable the British to classify, categorize and bound the vast social world that was India so that it could be controlled. These imperatives, elements in the larger colonial project, shaped the ‘investigative modalities’ devised by the British to collect facts.⁵¹

This investigative modality includes, according to Cohn, the definition of a body of information that is needed, the procedures by which appropriate

⁵⁰ For a more detailed background on colonial history and administration in Nigeria see Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 85-110.

⁵¹ Bernhard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 4-5.

knowledge is gathered, and the modes for its ordering and classification, and then even more how it is transformed into usable forms such as published reports, statistical returns, histories, gazetteers, legal codes, and encyclopedias.

Most investigative modalities in Nigeria were joined to certain institutions and administrative sites with fixed routines, in particular the district and provincial offices. The annual and quarterly reports are today archived in the Nigerian National Archives in Kaduna, Ibadan and Enugu and, to some extent, in the British National Archives in Kew. The Gazetteers of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria were published in 1920 and 1921.⁵² The relevant volume for my study is volume three, which is entitled *The Central Kingdoms*, pertaining to the Kontagora, Nupe and Illorin provinces. For the adjoining Igala region, historically crucial to the rise of states in my region of study, unfortunately no gazetteer exists. However, in spite of this lacuna, different quarterly and annual colonial reports and assessments, especially for tax purposes, were collected at different times of the colonial era. Many of these are extant within the archival records.⁵³

The province gazetteers contain historical records of the more important, bigger kingdoms and chiefdoms, including kinglists, oral traditions, genealogies and local customs, but also contain census data, industrial and agriculture information, information on roads, river and caravan routes, as well as information about the railway. The district gazetteers, which are housed in the

⁵² Anthony Kirk-Greene and Hamilton Millard, eds., *Gazetteers of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria*, IV vols (London: F. Cass, 1972).

⁵³ Mohammed Sani Abdulkadir, *A Political and Economic History of Igalaland, Central Nigeria, 1896-1839* (Saarbrücken Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011).

Niger State Archives in Minna, (Nigeria), are handwritten and provide insightful and detailed information regarding the district and village organizations and local customs and religions of the Nupe and Nupoid-speaking peoples.

Land was another major concern of the British colonial interests. The British tried to measure land for the purpose of establishing boundaries and to inspect and supervise land use. In the context of colonial Nigeria, the British carried out systematic surveys and drew maps of towns and regions. The production of these texts is a practical expression of the concept of indirect rule and the so-called “Dual Mandate” that was developed by Frederick Lugard in the 1920s, according to which British colonial rule should be “beneficial to both the British and to the peoples of Nigeria”.⁵⁴ The British argued that it was their duty to run the colonies efficiently so that raw materials could be extracted from Nigeria. As Nigerian societies opened up to the European markets, the economy would develop, while equally ensuring that corruption in traditional political institutions was reduced and populations were educated according to European normative standards of ethics, healthcare and hygiene.⁵⁵

Both historians and anthropologists were always directly involved in the colonial project and envisioning. It is indeed verifiably true that the origins of anthropology as a distinctive form of knowledge owed in large measure to the establishment of the European colonies and to European interests of perpetuating

⁵⁴ Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 111.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

control. In particular, the emergence of functionalism in British anthropology has been often linked to the policy of indirect rule in British colonies in Africa.⁵⁶

Adam Kuper argues that it was the Rockefeller Foundation and other such non-governmental agencies, not the colonial governments, that supported the research of the first anthropologists conducting fieldwork in Africa and that colonial officers did not necessarily find the work of the anthropologists useful.⁵⁷ This may have been partially true especially for South Africa, where Kuper carried out his primary research. My own reading of the relevant documents leads me to argue that there was more collaboration in West Africa between anthropologists and officials, even though it varied at different levels, depending on the characteristic interest and politics of individual anthropologists, in fostering the goals of colonial domination.

For instance, for Nupeland, it is clear that Siegfried Nadel's work was partially aimed towards feeding the British colonial state information about local conditions. Correspondence between Nadel and the British colonial officers, as

⁵⁶ Talal Asad, ed., *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* ([London]: Ithaca Press, 1973); Henrika Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The Social History of British Anthropology, 1885-1945* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Adam Kuper, *Anthropology and Anthropologists: The Modern British School*. 3rd rev. and enl. edn (London; New York: Routledge, 1996); George W. Stocking, *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology, 1888-1951* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995); Jack Goody, *The Expansive Moment: The Rise of Social Anthropology in Britain and Africa, 1918-1970* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Apter, Andrew Andrew, "Africa, Empire, and Anthropology: A Philological Exploration of Anthropology's Heart of Darkness." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 28 (1999): 577-98.

⁵⁷ Adam Kuper, "Anthropology", in Theodore M. Porter and Dorothy Ross, eds., *The Cambridge History of Science, Vol. 7: The Modern Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 354-78.

well as, specifically, Lord Lugard's foreword to Nadel's first monograph, *A Black Byzantium*, reveal a strong interdependence between the anthropologist and the colonial state:

Dr. Nadel's first object was to discriminate between the essential characteristics of Nupe culture, and the variations from the typical patterns in 'a heterogeneous society divided by gulfs of culture, ethnic attraction, community, and class.' For this purpose he considered that what he calls 'the anthropological quadrivium—kinship, political organization, economics, and religion'—was unsuitable, and decided to base his research on 'the two inseparable aspects of culture, political and economic organization', with special reference to religion and law.

This involved in the first place an examination of 'the factors of social cohesion' upon which the claim of a community to rank as a unit of self-government is based, and in the second place the effect of changes brought about, inter alia, by contacts with Europeans and especially by the British Administration — the two main objectives in his 'terms of reference'.

Since it is the declared policy of the British Government to help the different units of native society to govern themselves in accordance with civilized canons of justice, and of impartiality between rival claims arising from 'the interpenetration of essentially different social systems', such as Islam and paganism, it goes without saying how valuable such an objective study would be to the Administration. We find that, in fact, it has been utilized in conjunction with the researches of District Offices.⁵⁸

Although Nadel can be considered the first anthropologist to conduct field research in Nupeland and produce ethnographic monographs, he was, however, not the first anthropologist who went to Nupeland.⁵⁹

The German anthropologist Leo Frobenius visited Nupeland during his

⁵⁸ Siegfried F. Nadel, *A Black Byzantium: The Kingdom of Nupe in Nigeria* (London, New York: Published for the International African Institute by the Oxford University Press, 1961), IV.

⁵⁹ About the anthropologist Nadel see Jana Salat, *Reasoning as Enterprise: The Anthropology of S. F. Nadel* (Göttingen, Fed. Rep. of Germany: Edition Herodot, 1983).

fourth research expedition to Nigeria and Cameroon in 1910-12. His research resulted in the publication of *Und Africa sprach...*, which appeared in English translation as *Voice of Africa* in 1913.⁶⁰ Frobenius' work clearly expresses the affinity of German ethnology with geography and its concern with the spatial distribution and diffusion of cultural traits. The field was strongly influenced by philological and folklore studies, which, as Kuper points out, led to a distinctive emphasis on mythologies.⁶¹ In 1897 Frobenius published his programmatic essay entitled *Kulturkreislehre* (doctrine of cultural circles) in which he propagated the idea that seemingly related cultural traits belong to a cultural circle of a region and are trans-ethnic. He insisted that African cultural traits diffused from the Asiatic-Oceanic regions. In this respect, his cultural philosophical theories were based on Friedrich Ratzel and Adolf Bastian.

Adolf Bastian's theory was that all cultures are historically diverse but depend on borrowing and undergo constant change. All cultures were rooted in a universal human mentality that leads to the production of similar basic ideas; but these ideas are constrained by the natural environment and shaped by contact with

⁶⁰ Leo Frobenius, *An Der Schwelle des Verehrungswürdigen Byzanz* (Berlin: Vita, 1912); Leo Frobenius and Herman Frobenius, *Auf dem Wege nach Atlantis: Bericht über den Verlauf der zweiten Reiseperiode der D.I.A.F.E. in den Jahren 1908 bis 1910* (Berlin-Charlottenburg: Vita, Deutsches Verlagshaus, 1911); The English translation of the expedition account can be found in Leo Frobenius, *The Voice of Africa: Being an Account of the Travels of the German Inner African Exploration Expedition in the Years 1910-1912* (London: Hutchinson & co., 1913); Frobenius also collected mythology and folk tales, some pertaining to the Yoruba and the Nupe: Frobenius, *Atlantis: Volksmärchen und Volksdichtungen Afrikas*, 12 vols, *Universität Frankfurt Am Main* (Jena: E. Diederichs, 1921).

⁶¹ Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge*, 3-15; Adam Kuper, "Anthropology", 365.

other groups. Environmental pressures, migration and trade caused this cultural change, and it followed that history had no fixed pattern of development.

Bastian's student Franz Boas, who introduced these ideas to American anthropology, later developed them further.⁶²

Frobenius' work on the Nupe and Yoruba peoples demonstrated not only the influence of diffusionism, but also his subtitle revealed his quest for a lost Atlantis, which he thought to have found in Yorubaland, while he believed that the former Nupe empire would resemble the Byzantine empire. However, Frobenius' research unearthed valuable information, which was uncovered also by Nadel, who conducted his research in Nupeland twenty years later. Frobenius collected important oral traditions from the ruling houses and documented masquerades that seemed in danger of disappearing due to the increasing Islamization and the influence of the CMS missionaries.

In his expedition, Frobenius was able to research and photograph some masquerades at Mokwa, being the first anthropologist to do so. Among Frobenius' published collections of Nupe myths, legends, proverbs and tales are some that refer to the Ndakogboya masquerades as well as to the Gunnu ritual, both of which play an important role in the history of Nupe, to be recounted in

⁶² Woodruff D. Smith, *Politics and the Sciences of Culture in Germany, 1840-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); George W. Stocking, *Volksgeist as Method and Ethics: Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996); Robert Lowie, "Reminiscences of Anthropological Currents in America Half a Century Ago", *American Anthropologist*, 58 (1956), 995-1016; Franz Boas, *The Mind of Primitive Man: A Course of Lectures delivered before the Lowell Institute, Boston, Mass., and the National University of Mexico, 1910-1911* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911).

subsequent chapters.⁶³

The painter Carl Arriens, who accompanied the expedition, also drew some of the masquerades, an accomplishment remarkably important for documentation, since at that time there only existed black and white photography. His work gave me the opportunity to compare the findings of my research to them, and I was able to discover major changes but also resemblances and continuities a hundred years later in the organization, form and appearance of the Ndakogboya ancestral masquerades.⁶⁴

For the Yoruba region, we also find indigenous written accounts by local historians either in English or in Yoruba. Most of the Yoruba local histories were written in the Roman script and followed European models. There was, however, a tradition of literacy in Arabic script derived from Muslim societies to the north. Such indigenous texts written in Arabic script are known as Ajami texts. Muslims resided particularly in the northern Yoruba kingdom of Oyo.⁶⁵

Nonetheless, apart from a few other Arabic documents, the greater part of written documentation started to be produced in about 1838, when many liberated Yoruba slaves settled in Sierra Leone and adopted Christianity, and, with it, an

⁶³ Frobenius, *Atlantis*; Constanze Weise, “The Ndako Gboya Masquerades of the Nupe”, in Marla Berns, Richard Fardon, Sidney Kasfir and Jörg Adelberger, eds., *Central Nigeria Unmasked: Arts of the Benue River Valley*, 123-29.

⁶⁴ Weise, *ibid.*

⁶⁵ The French trader Landolphe met ambassadors from Oyo to Benin in ca. 1787 who were literate in Arabic. Jean François Landolphe and Jacques Salbigoton Quesné, *Mémoires du Capit. Landolphe, contenant l’histoire de ses voyages pendant 36 ans, aux côtes d’Afrique et aux deux Amériques, Tome 2* (Paris: Bertrand, 1823), 61.

English education. Christian missions established elementary and secondary schools in southern Yorubaland, starting with the 1840s, and thus supported the education of the broader masses. The earliest attempt to write a history of Yorubaland was made by Samuel Crowther, himself a native of Oyo, who had been enslaved and later liberated in Sierra Leone. His publication on the Yoruba language contained two additional parts: *Early Traditions of the Yorubans*, recounting the traditions of the Yoruba, and *The Kings of the Yoruba*, an account of the history of Oyo from 1780 to 1840.⁶⁶

Active historical interests in Yorubaland itself started among the educated Yoruba elite in the 1880s with several publications. The most famous one is Samuel Johnson's *The History of the Yorubas*.⁶⁷ Johnson's account was written in the 1890s, though it did not achieve publication until 1921. It covered the whole of Yoruba history from the origins to the establishment of British authority in the region in 1893. Johnson, a Sierra Leonian of Oyo education, served in the CMS while working as schoolmaster first at Ibadan and then, after his ordination in 1888, as a pastor in Oyo.⁶⁸

Originally, he had submitted his manuscript to the CMS for publication, but the publication was denied. The commercial publisher who had agreed to publish the manuscript lost it, and when Johnson died in 1901, his brother Obadiah Johnson used Samuel Johnson's notes to rewrite the manuscript, which

⁶⁶ Robin Law, "Early Yoruba Historiography", *History in Africa*, 3 (1976), 71.

⁶⁷ Samuel Johnson and O. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (London: G. Routledge & sons, ltd., 1921).

⁶⁸ Law, "Early Yoruba Historiography", 72.

he completed in 1916. Johnson's work must, however, be read with caution because it glorifies the Oyo Empire and marginalizes the northeastern Yoruba states on which I am focusing here.

This period, as the historian Robin Law indicates, saw the first development of an organized interest in historical research outside of Lagos and Abeokuta. The foundation of a society, called the *Egbe agba o tan* in Ibadan in 1914, supported the production of local histories with the intention "to make research of the past and retain the existing wisdom and knowledge of our Forefathers."⁶⁹ The early twentieth century saw the rise of local history books in the tradition of the *iwe itan*.⁷⁰ The production of local history books has been interpreted by most historians of Yoruba history as part of the general movement of "cultural nationalism" that arose at the end of the nineteenth century, especially in Lagos, and spread to other places in Yorubaland.

The movement was a reaction to increasing racial discrimination by Europeans in West Africa, where educated Yoruba tried to redefine and reestablish their own identity within the indigenous society. This led not only to the production of historical work, but also to the collection and publication of Yoruba oral literature and studies on Yoruba religion and Yoruba customs.

Cultural nationalism was responsible for the adoption of Yoruba names, the defense of indigenous institutions and customs (including polygamy and pawning) and the use of the Yoruba language for education and the formation of

⁶⁹ Ibid.,74.

⁷⁰ Ibid.,73.

separatist African churches.⁷¹ Law remarks that the “cultural nationalist” interpretation “is likely to have produced a tendency to idealize pre-colonial Yoruba society” and that the writings produced during that time should not only be used with caution, but not necessarily given more value than oral tradition simply because they are written.⁷²

Due to this increase in the production of written sources at the beginning of the second half of the nineteenth century, it is not surprising that academic historiography also paid particular attention to topics such as the advent of missionaries, emigrants from Sierra Leone, and officials of the British government. The Yoruba historian Toyin Falola points out that the nineteenth century indeed “had its fascinations: the wars, the spread of Christianity, the emergence of the new elite, British conquest, etc.”, and remarks that these events have all been studied extensively, resulting in a copious literature on especially the second half of the nineteenth century.⁷³

However, in Falola’s view, the significance of the nineteenth century in relation to the preceding centuries and to the contemporary society has been little explored. He points out that it would be of interest to know how institutions were affected by the revolutionary changes and to assess their impact. He further underscores the necessity for research and application of new methodologies for the pre-nineteenth century history:

⁷¹ Ibid., 76.

⁷² Ibid., 77.

⁷³ Toyin Falola, “A Research Agenda on the Yoruba in the Nineteenth Century”, *History in Africa*, 15 (1988), 211-27.

[...] Without understanding the preceding centuries, it is difficult to understand and appreciate the nineteenth century.Very little is known of this period, and the tragedy is that scholars in other disciplines (e.g. anthropology or linguistics) seem to have abandoned it to historians and archaeologists. A few of the essays on the period suggest the mess, which those who do not appreciate the need for the tools and theories of other disciplines can produce. If the constraint is the lack of documentary sources, more can still be done with the use of traditions. More time may have to be devoted to methodological issues and to collection of data on the pre-1800 era. So far few serious works exist on the reconstruction of history based on the extensive use of traditions.

Falola's research agenda was written in 1988, but this quote is still valid today. Although research has improved on central Yorubaland—more excavations have been conducted particularly in the regions of Old Oyo⁷⁴—there are still not many new scholarly contributions for the time period before 1800 on internal Yoruba history, if one excludes those related to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Major works have concentrated on the Oyo-Yoruba region or on the impact of political events in central Yoruba and the coastal areas, such as Akin Ogundiran's work on Oyo colonies within Yorubaland.

The northeastern, eastern and southwestern Yoruba regions have benefited relatively little from the scholarly endeavors. The history of the communities and city states in the northeast, the Igbomina and Okun-Yoruba regions (in particular Oworoland, Bunuland, Ijumu, Mopamuro, Ikiri, Igbede, Iyagba, the Yoruba of Kabba), are still marginalized within Yoruba scholarship. Johnson's work

⁷⁴ See for instance Jonathan Oluyori Aleru, *Old Oyo and the Hinterland: History and Culture in Northern Yorubaland, Nigeria, Ibadan Studies in Nigerian Past* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Textflow, 2006).

somewhat disregarded the Okun-Yoruba, and he was not even sure how to treat the important kingdom of Ila-Orangun and the other Igbomina regions. It seems that postcolonial scholars have acquired the bias of the nineteenth-century writers. R. S. Smith's opus magnum *Kingdoms of the Yoruba* and his joint work with Ajayi do not mention the northeast.⁷⁵ However, art historians, archaeologists and historians have been engaged with the region and brought to scholarly attention its importance as an important interconnecting zone within in the Niger-Benue confluence region as well as for the new evolving field of Nigerian Middle Belt studies.⁷⁶

Up to the present day, scholarship on Nupe history and culture continue to rely very much upon the anthropological work of Siegfried Nadel, the Austrian-born and British-trained functionalist anthropologist, who conducted the first extensive field research in Nupeland in 1934 and 1935-36. In the introduction of his pioneering monograph on Nupe, *A Black Byzantium: The Kingdom of Nupe in Nigeria*, he states, "once I spent two weeks in Patigi (a quite uninteresting visit by the way) because there the last descendants of the old dynasty of Nupe kings hold court".⁷⁷ With these dismissive words, he determined the way anthropologists and

⁷⁵ Ajayi, J. F. Ade Ajayi and Robert Sydney Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge [Eng.]: University Press, 1964); Smith, Robert Sydney, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*. 3rd edn (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

⁷⁶ Obayemi, *The Yoruba and Edo-Speaking Peoples and Their Neighbors before 1600; Confluence Nigerians*; Sargent, *Economics, Politics, and Social Change in the Benue Basin*; Idrees and Ochefu, *Studies in the History of Central Nigeria Area*; Berns, Kasfir, Adelberger, *Central Nigeria Unmasked*. Andrew Apter, *Black Critics & Kings: The Hermeneutics of Power in Yoruba Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992; Elisha Renne, *Cloth That Does Not Die: The Meaning of Cloth in Bunu Social Life*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995.

⁷⁷ Nadel, *A Black Byzantium*.

historians would look at Nupe history and culture for the next fifty-six years. Following a functionalist perspective, Nadel evaded historical questions, finding it difficult to cope with problems of change, since functionalistic approaches focused on the social system, rather than its history.⁷⁸

It remains important, however, to ask whether it was his functionalist approach or the negative reception Nadel had received from the Nupe ruling house at Patigi, as we learn from his field diaries, that led him to disregard the bearers of oral tradition and royal rituals related to the ancient ruling house of the Nupe kingdom.⁷⁹ A closer look at Nadel's work reveals that what he ended up describing were the institutions of the Fulbe Emirate of Bida, and thus the subtitle of his book, *The Kingdom of Nupe in Nigeria*, is indeed misleading.

The throne succession wars between the two dynastic successor groups of the Nupe Edegi ruling dynasty, the Yissazhi and the Gwagbazhi, had led to a weakening of the Nupe empire's frontiers after the death of the last king of a unified Nupe kingdom in 1805.⁸⁰ The resulting power vacuum had enabled Fulbe, coming from the neighboring northern Hausa states, which had just been turned into emirates, to take up political power in Nupeland. The establishment of

⁷⁸ Kuper, "Anthropology", 353.

⁷⁹ Roger M. Blench, ed., "S. F. Nadel: The Field Diaries of an Anthropologist in Nigeria 1935-36" (Cambridge, UK: 2006); My investigations in Patigi also revealed that the king was indeed very hostile towards the British colonial administration and would have considered Nadel a spy working for the colonial state. Weise, *Fieldnotes*; 5/5/2009. Interviews: NUP-ETH-PAT-M-6-6/29/2000; NUP-ETH-PAT-M-7-6/29/2000.

⁸⁰ Idrees, *Political Change and Continuity in Nupeland*.

emirates, and the integration of large parts of Nupeland into the Sokoto Caliphate, followed this occupation.

The Nupe successor dynasties maintained their autonomy to some extent in exile kingdoms in Nupeland throughout the nineteenth century until the British occupation of the region in 1898. There they continued to maintain traditions and religious practices until the British recalled them from exile. In 1902 the British forced them to emigrate out of their exile kingdoms to territories where emirates had been created for them. This was done for two reasons: to weaken the power of the Fulbe and to facilitate indirect rule and colonial governance, since the successors of the ancient Nupe Empire enjoyed a greater legitimacy among the Nupe people.

2.5 Postcolonial Historiography

The aforementioned “awareness” by outsiders, which basically starts with the nineteenth century and generated new “written” knowledge of the region, is also reflected in the postcolonial academic treatment of the region. Until the present study, in the general overviews of West African or Nigerian history, the pre-nineteenth century Nupe, Igala and Northern Yoruba states (Igbomina, Ekiti, Ibolu, Yagba, Bunu and Owe) are mentioned either as a footnote to the history of other regions or in connection to the European expansion of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in West Africa. Because of their geographical positioning between the historically well-known pre-colonial (in most cases, pre-seventeenth century) empires of the Sahel, such as Songhay or Kanem-Bornu, and those that

existed along the coasts of the Bights of Benin and Biafra, such as the Benin Empire, the regions of the Nigerian hinterland⁸¹—namely the Middle Niger region and the Niger-Benue confluence region—remained unknown to non-Africans until the nineteenth century, and got labelled the “belt of ignorance,” termed by the historian Robin Law.⁸²

The pre-colonial empires of the Sahel, such as the Hausa kingdom, the Kanem-Bornu Empire or the empires of the Western Sudan, have been documented primarily through the use of external sources, mostly produced by geographers or historians writing in Arabic or Persian during the eighth through the fifteenth century. The regions along the coast were described in sources produced by Portuguese travellers as well as in trade and business documents written in Portuguese, Dutch or English. These sources have been correlated with rich oral traditions, linguistic studies and archaeological findings and, in the case of the central and western Sudan, with indigenous written records.⁸³

⁸¹ I am aware that the use of the term Nigerian hinterland at this place here is anachronistic since Nigeria did not exist at that time, but this is the term now used by scholars writing about the region.

⁸² Law, Robin, “The Northern Factor in Yoruba History”, in Akinjogbin, I. A. and E. Ekemode, eds., *Proceedings of the Conference on Yoruba Civilization* (Ile-Ife: 1976), pp. 103-32.

⁸³ Roderick J. McIntosh, *The Peoples of the Middle Niger: The Island of Gold* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1998); John O. Hunwick, *Literacy and Scholarship in Muslim West Africa in the Pre-Colonial Period: Two Public Lectures Delivered at the Institute of African Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, on 22nd and 23rd March, 1972* (Nsukka: Institute of Africa Studies, University of Nigeria, 1974); John O. Hunwick and Alida Jay Boy, *The Hidden Treasures of Timbuktu: Rediscovering Africa's Literary Culture* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2008); Abd al-Rahman ibn Abd Allah Sa'idi and John O. Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire: Al-Sa'idi's Tarikh Al-Sudan Down to 1613, and Other Contemporary Documents, Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999) Levtzion, Nehemia, *Ancient Ghana and Mali*

The Nupe, Igala or Northern Yoruba states were not the subject of any written external sources before the sixteenth century. Internal sources, mostly kinglists and short chronicles, written in Arabic and Ajami, are available for the Nupe and Yoruba regions, although they are scarce, as previously mentioned. For the Igala, such written lists do not exist at all. The necessity of correlating the existing written documents with oral traditions and archaeological sources has been recognized for the Northern Yoruba region, whereas the archaeologist Aridibesi Usman has conducted recent excavations in the Igbomina area and in the Old Oyo neighbourhood. Usman's research focuses on the interrelationship between the Yoruba Igbomina and the Nupe.⁸⁴ His original data analysis is, however, more relevant for the developments in the Northern Yoruba region and for Yoruba history in general, in that it reveals only indirect information concerning Nupe history and the expansion of the Nupe Empire into these regions, about which we know more from oral tradition.

No excavations have been conducted in Nupeland and in the Igala region. Igalaland is situated in areas between the Nok sites, in which archaeology has now revealed dates as early as 1000 BCE for iron production, and the areas west of the lower Niger around Igbo-Ukwu, for which archaeology reveals a later era of iron production and trade relationships with the western Sudan between the ninth and the fourteenth centuries CE.⁸⁵ As Ade Obayemi affirms, it is the lack of

(New York, N.Y.: Africana Pub. Co.,1980).

⁸⁴ Usman, *State-Periphery Relations and Sociopolitical Development in Igbominaland*.

⁸⁵ Bernard Fagg, *Nok Terracottas* (Lagos: Published by Ethnographica for the National Museum, 1977); J. F. Jemkur *Aspects of the Nok Culture* (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello

written and archaeological sources and the requirement that a scholar have a wide knowledge of interdisciplinary methods and make use of non-written sources, such as oral traditions, ethnographic sources or linguistic data, that constitute the major reasons why the history of the Igala, Nupe and Northern Yoruba remained understudied for the period before the nineteenth century.⁸⁶

Nadel's publications, especially *A Black Byzantium*, which was published in 1942, were celebrated as outstanding anthropological studies shortly after their appearance. Indeed, *A Black Byzantium* became the standard reference on Nupe culture and history and was used in anthropology and history courses at universities throughout the world. Yet, the "Kingdom of Nupe," which Nadel had described, was actually a kingdom of the Fulbe alien emperors. This historical misconception became reinforced through the historian Michael Mason's *Foundations of the Bida Kingdom*, which was published in 1981. This work is basically a political history of the nineteenth-century civil wars in Nupeland and focuses very much on the establishment of the Fulbe Emirates in Nupeland. He does not discuss the "Nupe" kingdoms or Nupe institutions, as the title misleadingly promises, but rather the institutions of the Fulbe Emirate of Bida.⁸⁷

University Press, 1992); J. F. Jemkur, Gert Chesi, Gerhard Merzeder, and Mark Rasmussen, eds., *The Nok Culture: Art in Nigeria 2,500 Years Ago* (Munich; New York: Prestel, 2006); Peter Breunig, ed., *Nok: Ein Ursprung Afrikanischer Skulptur: Eine Ausstellung der Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung Frankfurt und der Goethe-Universität Frankfurt in Kooperation mit der National Commission for Museums and Monuments Abuja, Nigeria, 30. Oktober 2013 Bis 23. Februar 2014* (Frankfurt am Main; Frankfurt [am Main]: Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung; Africa Magna, 2013).

⁸⁶ Ade Obayemi, "The Yoruba and Edo-Speaking Peoples and Their Neighbors before 1600."

⁸⁷ Mason, *Foundations of the Bida Kingdom*.

It was not until 1998, due to the late Nigerian Nupe scholar Aliyu Idrees' publication, *Political Change and Continuity in Nupeland: Decline and Regeneration of the Edegi Ruling Dynasty of Nupeland 1805-1945*, that scholars started to take a closer look at the complexity of Nupe history. Idrees shows that the kingship institutions described by Nadel were in fact the institutions of the Fulbe Emirate. Their legitimacy was based on the support of the Sokoto Caliphate, which had integrated Hausaland, Nupeland and parts of Northern Yorubaland into its system of Islamic theocracies.⁸⁸ The Nupe people, however, never really recognized the Fulbe as the legitimate rulers of Nupeland, despite their claim to the Nupe throne and the appropriation of the Nupe ruling title *Etsu* or king.

The reason the Fulbe kings lacked legitimacy was that they were not recognized as the descendants of Tsoede, the legendary founding hero of the Nupe Empire, and possessed neither the traditional regalia nor performed the traditional enthronement rituals. The Fulbe Emirs of Bida—the ruling dynasty consists of three rotating ruling houses—claim today that the book by Nadel is telling the “truth” by showing that they are the legitimate rulers of Nupeland and that, in fact, Idrees' book was “wrong”. This led even to the prohibition of the launching of his book in Bida in 1998 and demonstrates a vivid example of how the present informs the past.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ For a more detailed history of the Fulbe Emirates see Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate*.

⁸⁹ Oral history account, Mohammed Ndanusa, *Weise Fieldnotes*, Bida, May 26, 2000.

Among the three major political entities I explore in this dissertation, it is the Igala kingdom that has received probably the least attention by historians. Since the publication of the anthropologist John Boston's monograph *The Igala Kingdom* in 1968, and some of his writings in scholarly journals, there has been no significant work done on the Igala, and none at all for the pre-nineteenth century history.⁹⁰ Some locally produced histories of the Igala exist, but their scope is very narrow, biased towards the ruling house of the Attah of Igalaland and very much based on neither primary nor secondary source material.⁹¹ Local Igala historians and cultural experts have contributed to the understanding of Igala history. Phillip Okwoli documented Igala history from its earliest beginning until about 1970. This historical compendium attempts to document Igala origins, traditional institutions and cultural systems. Following in the tradition of Nigerian-trained and local historians documenting their ethnic history, this work, while relevant, largely remained, "a short history" of the Igala, as claimed by its title.⁹²

John S. Boston, a British anthropologist of the structural functionalist school, studied the Igala with an initial interest on their kinship, ritual, and social structures, and produced diverse referential texts, which possess great historical relevance. Qualitatively, he studied the Igala political system, through cogent

⁹⁰ Boston, *The Igala Kingdom*.

⁹¹ Ukwedeh, Joseph N., *History of the Igala Kingdom C.1534-1854: A Study of Political and Cultural Integration in the Niger-Benue Confluence Area of Nigeria, Arewa House Studies Series* (Kaduna: Arewa House, Ahmadu Bello University, 2003).

⁹² Okwoli, P. E., *A Short History of Igala* (Illorin, Nigeria: Matanmi and Sons Printing, 1973).

fieldwork and cultural observation, examining in detail the Igala traditional past, kinship patterns and social systems and structures.⁹³ His other works compared the Igala with their neighboring Igbo ethnic groups, with whom they have had centuries of inter-contacts.⁹⁴ In referencing this diffusive contact, Boston also touches upon specific themes such as masquerades and other art forms indicative of the extensive and diffusive nature of such interactions.⁹⁵

P.A. Oguhua and Chike Dike equally validate the longstanding Igala-Igbo relations.⁹⁶ The late Igbo historian Adiele Afigbo was an exception to Austin Shelton's claims granting dominance to the Igala over the Igbo. A product of the Ibadan School, with its privileging of "cultural nationalism," Afigbo's perspectives aligned with that tradition in granting preeminence to one's own ethnic or national group. Appropriately, given such ideological stance, Afigbo attempted to subsume and subordinate the Igala under Igbo political and cultural hegemonic control.⁹⁷

Regardless of such antics, Afigbo acknowledged, however, the longstanding trading relationships that existed in pre-colony eras between the

⁹³ Boston, *The Igala Kingdom*; Boston, "Igala Political Organisation", *African notes.*, 4 (1967), 18-31.

⁹⁴ Boston, John S., "Notes on Contact between the Igala and the Ibo", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria.*, 2 (1960), 52-58.

⁹⁵ John S. Boston, "Some Northern Ibo Masquerades", *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 90 (1960), 54-65.

⁹⁶ P. A. Oguagua, "The Beginnings of Igbo-Igala Relations up to c. 1650 A.D", *Nigeria Magazine* (1984), 47-60.; P. Chike Dike, "Origins of the Pre-Colonial States of Africa: The Case of Igala", *African Notes*, 9 (1982), 15-26.

⁹⁷ A. E. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture*, Published for University Press in association with Oxford University Press (1981).

Igala and Igbo merchants. He relates the existence of trade routes that ensured such contacts.⁹⁸ Like Shelton, Nwando Achebe's more recent scholarship documents such a relationship, and also posits the Igala dominance over some Igbo communities along the Nsukka Igbo axis.⁹⁹

Furthering the Igala-Igbo relationship, and adjudging it as a case of "indigenous colonialism," the American anthropologist Austin Shelton concluded that the Igala kingdom of Idah subjugated Igbo communities within the Nsukka area into its controlling frameworks of political and ritual hegemony. He views these hegemonic influences and their interpenetration as an instance of an African colonizing order, within the dominance and superimposition of Igala cultural, ritualistic and cultural forms upon those of Igbo communities, leading to shifting cultural paradigms, dominance and many years of Igala significant influence within the Nsukka region.¹⁰⁰ Further, Shelton alludes to the legends about Onoja Ogboni [Oboni], an Igala warlord and conquering figure, as further confirming the former Igala dominance within this region.¹⁰¹

Robert Sargent notes the antiquity of the Igala monarchy in Idah and utilizes oral traditions and reconstructions of royal lists in making this claim.

⁹⁸ A. E. Afigbo, "Trade and Trade Routes in Nineteenth Century Nsukka", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 7 (1973), 77-90.

⁹⁹ Nwando Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); Nwando Achebe, *Farmers, Traders, Warriors, and Kings: Female Power and Authority in Northern Igboland, 1900-1960, Social History of Africa* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2005)

¹⁰⁰ Austin J. Shelton, *The Igbo-Igala Borderland; Religion and Social Control in Indigenous African Colonialism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1971).

¹⁰¹ Austin J. Shelton, "Onoja Ogboni: Problems of Identification and Historicity in the Oral Traditions of the Igala and Northern Nsukka Igbo of Nigeria", *The Journal of American Folklore*, 81 (1968), 243-57.

Specifically, he indicates the existence of different dynasties of Bini and Yoruba origin to which the Igala populations transferred political sovereignty. Later on, the current dynasty, tracing their descent to the Kwararafa kingdom of the Jukun, took power.¹⁰² Erim O. Erim, a Nigerian historian who wrote on the Idoma, argues from the traditions that a wave of Jukun migration into the Igala territory took place via the river Benue, settling within the vicinity of Agatu in Idoma and Abejukolo (Amagede) in Igalaland.¹⁰³ Ukwede, an Igala historian and academic, has also examined the chronological indications regarding the Igala kinglists.

Tension has also been a part of the Igala history, with intra-group frictions having been well-documented. Ukwede notes the mechanism for controlling social tension and rivalry within the Igala kingdom, using an iron-made implement called Udulugbo. He equally alluded to a case where this mechanism failed to work effectively, leading to a war between the forces of the Attah and a related rival chief of Abejukolo, who was publicly insubordinate to the Attah.¹⁰⁴ The Abokko and Agaidoko clans also have been noted for their internecine wars against each other on the Niger River, especially as they affect commercial

¹⁰² Robert A. Sargent, "On the Methodology of Chronology: The Igala Core Dating Progression", *History in Africa*, 11 (1984), 269-89. Miles Clifford and Richmond Palmer, "A Nigerian Chiefdom", *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 66 (1936), 393-435.

¹⁰³ E. O. Erim, *Idoma Nationality, 1600-1900: Problems in Studying the Origins and Development of Ethnicity* (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1981); Joseph N. Ukwedeh, "Chronology and the Study of Igala History to C. 1830 A.D", *Savanna*, 11 (1991), 66-83.

¹⁰⁴ Joseph N. Ukwedeh, "The Udulugbo War Technology in Igala Kingdom: Some Historical-Archaeological Implications", *Nigerian Heritage*, 10 (2001), 135-41.

relationships.¹⁰⁵ Idah additionally was embroiled in a civil war between 1833-35, following the assassination of the Attah Ekalaga, by royal eunuchs and servants. Such crises often led to population dissemination out from Idah into the adjoining areas, accentuating the significance of new settlements and inter-clan coalition alliances among the royal lineages.¹⁰⁶ The Igala Kingdom appears to have reached its apogee in the eighteenth century; it declined in the mid-1840s, apparently due to such internal and external factors.¹⁰⁷

The Igala Kingdom, apart from the monarchy and its interlinked networks of dispersed royal clans and local chiefs, includes the masquerades, as do other significant institutions. The masquerades constitute of an essential feature within the Igala ancestral cosmological and ontological systems. They also play vital roles within the social and political order. Masquerades are considered to represent the royal and non-royal ancestors¹⁰⁸ and serve as the link between the

¹⁰⁵ Schön, James Frederick Schön and Samuel Crowther, *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr. Samuel Crowther, who, with the Sanction of Her Majesty's Government, accompanied the Expedition up the Niger in 1841 on behalf of the Church Missionary Society* (1942; reprint, London: Cass, 1970); Hutchinson, Thomas J. Hutchinson, *Narrative of the Niger, Tshadda, & Binue Exploration: Including a Report on the Position and Prospects of Trade up Those Rivers, with Remarks on the Malaria and Fevers of Western Africa* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855).

¹⁰⁶ Boston, *The Igala Kingdom*, 100; Okwoli, *A Short History*.

¹⁰⁷ R. G. Armstrong, "The Igala", in Cyril Daryll Forde, Paula Brown, and Robert G. Armstrong, eds., *Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence*, pp. 84-85; Miles Clifford, "A Nigerian Chieftdom", p. 404; F. J. Kolapo, "Post-Abolition Niger River Commerce and the Nineteenth-Century Igala Political Crisis", *African Economic History* (1999), 45-67; Ebere Nwaubani, "The Political Economy of Aboh, 1830-1857", *African Economic History* (1999), 93-116; Clifford, Miles, "95. Notes on the Bassa-Komo Tribe in the Igala Division", *Man*, 44 (1944), 107-16.

¹⁰⁸ Miachi, Tom A. "The Masquerade Phenomenon in Igala Culture: An Anthropological Analysis." PhD Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1991; Miachi, Thomas Ajayi. "Masquerades as Agents of Social Control among the Igala", in *Masquerade in Nigerian History and Culture* (1983): 460-88; Tom A. Miachi, *The Incarnate Being Phenomenon*

dead and the living. They are also utilized for policing and as instruments of social control. The nine Igala royal masquerades, especially the lead masquerade Ekwe, represent the embodiment of the monarchy, as well as the royal ancestors of the entire ruling class.¹⁰⁹ Non-royal ancestral masquerades like the Egwu-Afia, in contrast, represent the non-royal ancestral lineages and clans. Erim O. Erim believes that many groups within the area adopted the Ekwu Afia from the Ebira.¹¹⁰ Miachi agrees from his research that many Igala royal and non-royal masquerades were borrowed, or diffused into Igalaland, from among the Jukun, Nupe, and even from Hausaland.¹¹¹ Other masquerades are used for entertainment, as well as for the expression of law and order within Igala society.¹¹²

The Ebira (Igbira, Igbirra among other variations) represent a focal ethnic group within the Niger-Benue confluence. The Ebira consist of three major groups: Ebira Tao (Okene), Ebira Etuno (Igarra), and Ebira Panda (Koton Karifi), along with other communities, at times settled in pockets within the region. All the three major Ebira groups claim migratory origins from Kwararafa (Jukun) and

in African Culture: Anthropological Perspectives on the Igala of North-Central Nigeria (Ibadan: Kaft Books Limited, 2012).

¹⁰⁹ Miachi, "Masquerades Phenomenon in Igala"; Miachi, "Masquerades as Agents of Social Control"; Kenneth C. Murray "Idah Masks", *Nigerian Field*, 14 (1947): 86.

¹¹⁰ Erim, *Idoma Nationality*, 31.

¹¹¹ Miachi, "Masquerade Phenomeon in Igala"; Miachi, "Masquerades as Agents"; Murray, "Idah Masks", 85.

¹¹² Sieber, Roy, "Masks as Agents of Social Control", *African Studies Bulletin* 5, no. 2 (1962):12; Doran H. Ross and Sieber Roy Sieber, "Interview with Roy Sieber", *African Arts* 25, no. 4 (1992): 43; Miachi, "Masquerades as Agent in Igala".

equally declare colonizing ties with the Igala Kingdom of Idah.¹¹³ In their oral history, the Ebira Tao also claim to have settled in Idah, together with the Idoma, and other groups in Idah, before their eventual migration out of Idah to their various present locations.¹¹⁴ The Ebira acknowledge a history as well of fervent resistance against the forces of Nupe and Fulbe Jihadists, directed from Bida and Ilorin (whose forces the Ebira call “Ajinomoh”) in the late nineteenth century, especially during 1860-1880. Later, from 1898 into the early part of the twentieth century, they also vigorously fought British colonialism and imperial interests to no avail.¹¹⁵

The Ebira Language, with its Panda, Ihima or Tao (Okene), Igu (Koton Karifi), and Etuno (Igarra) dialects, belongs to the Nupoid language cluster.¹¹⁶ Paula Brown maps the Ebira essential cultural, historical and social organizational structures and systems.¹¹⁷ An Ebira scholar, Y. A. Ibrahim, has closely examined the cosmological frameworks, as well as the social organizations and political

¹¹³ Paula Brown, “The Igbira” in Daryll Forde ed., *Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence* (London: International African Institute, 1955): 57.

¹¹⁴ Constanze Weise, Field Interview with the Otaru of Igarra, 2009, 5/24/2009; Field Interview with Dr. Hassan, Koton Karifi, 06/01/2009.

¹¹⁵ Adam Ahmed Okene, “Colonial Conquests and Resistance: The Case of Ebiraland 1886-1917 A.D.”, *Kano Studies, N. S.* 1, no. 1 (2000): 13-36.

¹¹⁶ Brown, “The Igbira”, p. 58; Diedrich Westerman and M. A. Bryan, *The Languages of West Africa* (London; New York: Published for the International African Institute by the Oxford University Press, 1952), 87; Peter Ladefoged, “Igbirra Notes and Word-List”, *Journal of West African Languages* 1 (1964): 27-37.

¹¹⁷ Brown, *ibid.*

formations that undergird and characterize Ebira cultural structure.¹¹⁸ John Picton aptly depicts the essential place and role that masquerades (Eku) play within the Ebira social and cultural imagination.¹¹⁹ The performance of the masquerade and the ideas expressed in it make it a cogent traditional institution for gaining an understanding of Ebira cultural ideals.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Yusuf Abd al-Maqsud Ibrahim, "Igbirra Traditional Institutions, Part I", *Nigeria Magazine*, no. 119 (1976): 51-66; Ibrahim, "Igbirra Traditional Institutions, Part II, *Nigeria Magazine*. no. 120 (1976): 14-21.

¹¹⁹ John Picton, "On Placing Masquerades in Ebira", *African Languages and Cultures African Languages and Cultures* 2, no. 1 (1989): 73-92.

¹²⁰ Ibrahim, op. cit.; E. A. Morohunfola, "Igbirra Culture: The Eku Festival", *Nigeria Magazine*, no. 105 (1970): 94-97.

3 Peoples and Words: The Ancient Cultural World at the Confluence

3.1 Introduction

The Niger-Benue confluence region has long been recognized as part of the geographical belt of West Africa in which the Niger-Congo Civilization took shape. In the first millennium BCE it was also home to Nok, believed to be the first recognizable territorial state of West Africa. This chapter starts with the time period of the early divergence of the proto-Western Benue-Congo, out of which emerged the ancestral speech communities of the later Yoruba, Igala, and Nupoid-speaking peoples. These developments occurred in the region around the Niger-Benue confluence from as early as the fourth millennium BCE. We will consider the bases for these data proposals below.

Archaeologists date the span of the Nok culture from the tenth century BCE to 200 CE. Its spatial expanse extended westwards towards the rocky stretches of the Niger River, where the modern-day Kainji Dam is located. The farthest westward extensions of this culture may have reached into the eastern parts of the early territories of Nupoid- and Defoid-speaking peoples. In this regard, future archaeological work in the regions west of the currently known excavation sites of the Nok culture may yield valuable information regarding the cultural exchanges among the different involved groups. However, there are still many open questions and missing data in regards to what actually comprised the Nok culture. The archaeologists Breunig and Rupp argue that it was a society emerging in tandem with early agricultural developments and with the use of iron

technology.¹²¹ Especially with respect to ironworking, the historical linguistic data from the Nupoid-speaking area, as well as archaeological data from northern Yorubaland and the Igala region, point to similar developments during the same broad time period as in the Nok region.

The linguistic time scale presented here, about which more will be said below, projects the emergence of distinct Nupoid- and Defoid-speaking groups of peoples back to the period around 3500 BCE, well before the earliest absolute chronological dates yet available for the region, all of which come from Nok sites and belong to the period around 1000 BCE. The linguistic reconstruction of ancient lexicon, by its nature, reveals long-term features of change in culture and economy. The long ongoing trends of change in the internal political and social fabric of the region began to receive new transformative impulses from the outside from 1000 BCE onward, first as long-distance trading systems emerged across the Sudan belt in the first millennium BCE, and then, later, when the Nigerian hinterland became drawn increasingly into the Atlantic economy by the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.

The history of the Niger-Benue confluence region, and its long-term historical developments and transformations, in addition to disruptive historical moments, left an imprint on the latent historical memories of the peoples of the region, as well as those in-migrating into or out-migrating from the region.

Material culture, ethnographic information, oral traditions, ritual histories, and

¹²¹ Nicole Rupp and James Peter Breunig, “New Studies on the Nok Culture of Central Nigeria”, *Journal of African Archaeology* 3, no. 2 (2005): 283-90.

historical linguistic data and, where available, archaeological findings are repositories of information on these long-term historical changes.

Thus, writing the history of cultural, social and political interactions over the *longue durée*, in particular a history of the rise of different societies and cultures in the Niger-Benue confluence region before the developments of the wider Atlantic world intruded into it in the seventeenth century, requires using and interpreting sources outside the usual purview of historians. These kinds of sources have been basic to the application of interdisciplinary methods in a growing number of studies of Africa's deep past.¹²² Furthermore, writing a long-term history requires one to combine an epistemology that critically assesses the information from the past that can be gained from these sources with an awareness of the potential feedback¹²³ into these sources from ideas and ways of

¹²² Christopher Ehret, *An African Classical Age: Eastern and Southern Africa in World History, 1000 B.C. To A.D. 400* (Charlottesville; Oxford: University Press of Virginia; J. Currey, 1998); Fields-Black, Edda L. *Deep Roots Rice Farmers in West Africa and the African Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); Catherine Cymone Fourshey, *Agriculture, Ecology, Kinship and Gender: A Social and Economic History of Tanzania's Corridor 500 Bc to 1900 AD* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 2002); Gonzales, Rhonda Marie Gonzales, *Societies, Religion, and History: Central-East Tanzanians and the World They Created, c. 200 Bce to 1800 CE* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Kairn A. Klieman, *The Pygmies Were Our Compass: Bantu and Batwa in the History of West Central Africa, Early Times to C. 1900 C.E* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003); Christine Saidi, *Women's Authority and Society in Early East-Central Africa* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2010); David Lee Schoenbrun, *A Green Place, a Good Place: Agrarian Change, Gender, and Social Identity in the Great Lakes Region to the 15th Century* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998); Rhiannon Stephens, *A History of Motherhood, Food Procurement and Politics in East-Central Uganda to the Nineteenth Century* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 2008); Stephens, *A History of African Motherhood: The Case of Uganda, 700-1900* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Jan Vansina, *The Children of Woot: A History of the Kuba Peoples* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978); Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Vansina, *How Societies Are Born: Governance in West Central Africa before 1600* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004).

¹²³ Feedback is a term applied by David Henige to a process in which elements emanating

the world generated by more recent historical political, cultural and economic events. Feedback can affect how stories are told, but the power of such feedback, in particular the one generated during the twentieth century, to reshape fundamental historical narratives, has often been overestimated.

Overemphasis on the possibilities of feedback has caused what Ann Stahl has called the creation and maintenance of a series of silences of the past, which is then perpetuated by contemporary academic practice and preferences. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's edited volume *The Invention of Tradition*, published in 1983, initiated an academic discourse which revolved around the question of whether and, if so, to what extent African institutions and entire histories were "invented" or manipulated during colonial time through the influence of the colonial state, in particular within the British system of "indirect rule". In the introduction, Hobsbawm argues that traditions that appear or claim to be old were often quite recent in origin or were invented to satisfy legitimizing needs. He defines "invented tradition" as:

a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable past.

from a literate discourse enter into and become an integral part of oral traditions. David P. Henige, *Oral Historiography* (London; New York: Longman, 1982); Henige, "The Problem of Feedback in Oral Tradition: Four Examples from the Fante Coastlands", *The Journal of African History* 14, no. 2 (1973): 223-35; M. R. Doortmont, J. H. Hanson, J. Jansen and D. van den Bersselaar, "Literacy's Feedback on Historical Analysis Revisited: Papers in Honor of David Henige", *History in Africa* 38 (2011): 1-6.

Hobsbawm states that the continuity of these “invented traditions” with a historic past is largely fictitious, as he distinguishes them from ‘custom’ which dominates so called ‘traditional societies’.” In his view:

‘Custom’ is what judges do; ‘tradition’ (in this instance invented tradition) is the wig, robe and other formal paraphernalia and ritualized practices surrounding their substantial action. The decline of ‘custom’ inevitably changes the ‘tradition’ with which it is habitually intertwined.

According to Hobsbawm, the inventions of traditions occur more frequently when

rapid transformations of society weaken or destroy the social pattern for which ‘old’ traditions had been designed, producing new ones to which they were not applicable; or when old traditions and their institutional carriers and promulgators no longer prove sufficiently adaptable and flexible, or are otherwise eliminated.¹²⁴

The evolving discourse, which defined to a great extent the deconstructivist historiography in the 1980’s and early 1990’s, has led to a more revisionist perspective in Africanist scholarship since then, specifically with regard to Terence Ranger’s chapter, “The invention of tradition in colonial Africa”, in the same volume.¹²⁵ Ranger initially had explored how colonial authorities adopted recently devised British institutions of the military, public school, country house, civil service and imperial monarchy in Africa. He argued that the colonial administration created rigid ethnic categories and fossilized African customs and traditions. Africans, on the other hand, had also confronted

¹²⁴ E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions”, in E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 5.

¹²⁵ For a good summary of the discourse revolving around the “invention of tradition”, see Thomas Spear, “Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa”, *The Journal of African History*, 44 (2003): 3-27.

this constructed colonial social order, and he therefore suggests that a wide array of adaptations and reconfigurations by both Europeans and Africans took place.¹²⁶

In a sub-sequent autocriticism, Ranger distanced himself from the term “invention of tradition” as a rather misleading and ahistorical term and instead suggests the use of Benedict Anderson’s term ‘imagined’, emphasizing thereafter the multi-dimensionality and interactivity of historical processes.¹²⁷ Spear points out that also the term ‘imagined’ has its problems as it “neglects the economic, social and political factors that help shape identities and the complex processes of reinterpretation and reconstitution of historical myths and symbols to define them.” And he concludes:

Traditional discourses, customs and ethnic groups all have their own histories and are subject to their own interpretative rules in response to popular issues and sensitivities. Tradition was both more flexible and less subject to outside control than scholars have thought. What gives traditions, custom and ethnicity their coherence and power is the fact that they lay deep in people’s popular consciousness, informing of who they are and how they should act. Yet, as discourses, traditions, customs and ethnicities are continually reinterpreted and reconstructed as ‘regulated improvisations’ subject to their continued intelligibility and legitimacy [...]. The limits of inventions are great, challenging us to account historically for changes in meaning and significance.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ T. O. Ranger, “The invention of tradition in colonial Africa” in E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition*, 211-46

¹²⁷ Spear, “Neo-traditionalism”, 5; Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 1991); Terence Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition Revisited: The Case of Colonial Africa”, in T. O. Ranger and Olufemi Vaughan, eds., *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth-Century Africa: Essays in Honour of A.H. M. Kirk-Greene* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan, in association with St. Antony's College, Oxford, 1993), 62-70, 78-82.

¹²⁸ Spear, *ibid.* 26; cf. Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 167-75.

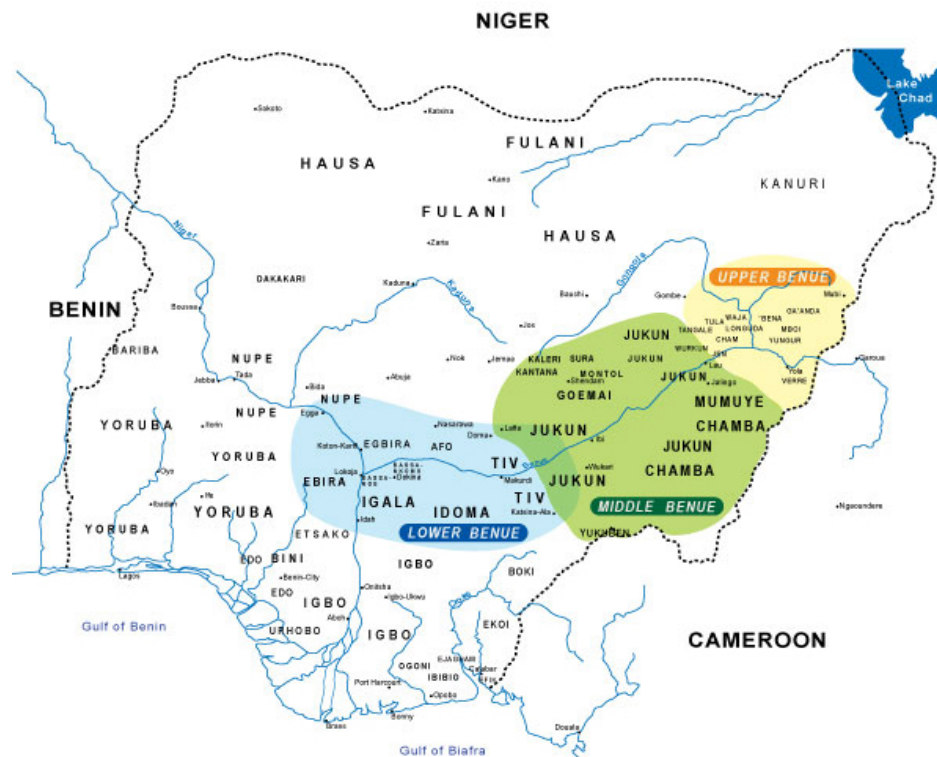
In that sense also Stahl underscores that the discursive view of history and the constructionism associated with the “linguistic turn” in the 1980s and 1990s focused attention “on how the past is made in the present” and diverted attention from the problem of “how or whether that history is rooted in a lived past.” She states:

The notion that history is mere discourse, that traditions are invented, rests on false dichotomies between a lived past and historical memory, “real” traditions and “invented” ones, as well as a conceit that the everyday struggles of peoples to make a life for themselves and their families through changing circumstances—the lived past—are largely irrelevant.¹²⁹

One important conclusion that can be drawn from this discourse is that historical traditions are never simply invented. People draw upon preexisting stories and transmitted memories out of necessity. Without a foundation of what people already accept as true, new interpretations and new claims would not gain a wider traction in society. This is not to say that invented traditions do not exist. It is up to the historian to make sense of the variety of existing traditions that all together form part of the historical memory of a people, and to unfold and interpret the archive of past knowledge. It remains the task of the historian to uncover this kind of knowledge, which has been transmitted into the present and is invoked in rituals and oral traditions in two forms: as latent knowledge with hidden meanings, and as present-oriented knowledge that is reshaped according to the heterodox discourses of contemporary political-religious factors.

¹²⁹ Ann Stahl, *Making History in Banda: Anthropological Visions of Africa's Past, New Studies in Archaeology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 26.

By taking a pathway towards the past of the Niger-Benue region, what remains essential are the questions of which kinds of histories can be reconstructed and which interpretative methods can be deployed in order to unpack “the hidden voices, repressed memories and compressed/congealed temporalities” as we encounter them in the extant primary sources now available.¹³⁰



Map 1: The Niger-Benue Confluence (© 2011 Fowler Museum at UCLA)

¹³⁰ Apter/Derby, Introduction, *Activating the Past*, XV

3.2 Methodological Considerations

3.2.1 Language Paths to the Niger-Benue Past

As for most parts of Africa, we lack contemporary documents that tell us about the divergent societies and cultures that lived within the Niger-Benue confluence region from the late Stone Age, around 4000 BCE, up to the era of the Middle Atlantic Age around 1700 CE. The absence of written documents directly concerned with the region up to the nineteenth century reflects a phenomenon that is not unique to Nigeria, but also applies to other regions of Africa that were not exposed to encounters with literacy, mainly propagated for religious, political or economic purposes. Historians of Africa have therefore developed critical alternative methods to utilize sources other than written ones.¹³¹

The sources I employ to reveal developments of the early periods are historical linguistic reconstructions of spoken words utilized by people inhabiting this region in the past; the oral traditions and varying transmitted ethnic and discrete histories of the Northern Yoruba, Igala, and Nupoid-speaking peoples; archaeological evidence (limited as yet to the Yoruba region and the vicinities of Igalaland); and comparative ethnographic reconstructions, especially utilizing emergent and extant ethnographies from the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as my own extensive field collections. However, the main sources I privilege towards providing a chronological framework for recovering

¹³¹ For a good overview of the various sources deployed by Africanist historians, see John E. Philips, *Writing African History* (NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006).

social, cultural and political history are linguistic data. In this regard, this research relates to an important range of studies on early African history in other parts of Africa, but it represents the first of its kind for West Africa.

To establish a relative chronological frame, the historian first has to rely on historical and comparative linguistic data and methods to establish a linguistic stratigraphy. A linguistic stratigraphy that can be applied for such a purpose rests on the genetic classification of the languages spoken by the peoples whose history is the subject of historical study and analysis. In the text that follows, the methodologies used in the genetic classification of languages will be outlined; thereafter it will be shown how linguistic classifications can be used for the establishment of a relative chronology. It will also be demonstrated how to apply such classifications toward reconstructing historical lexicons of the culture at successive earlier stages of the history of the peoples under consideration.

By reconstructing the ancestral lexicons of culture, one can uncover many features of the social and cultural fabrics of such former societies. These lexical data inform us about the world inhabited by the people who spoke the languages at different periods of time. Ethnographical evidence and oral traditions can then be used to illuminate the cultural implications of reconstructed vocabulary and advancing historical arguments to assess the time depths of the changes revealed in this fashion.¹³² The potential correlations of these findings with archaeology

¹³² See the very good discussion by Rhiannon Stephens of how to correlate comparative ethnography with linguistics data, in: Rhiannon Stephens, *A History of Motherhood, Food Procurement and Politics in East-Central Uganda to the Nineteenth Century* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 2008), 61-67.

will be explored where archaeological data are available. Along with numerous facets of material culture and economy among such peoples, such data can also reveal the richness of the cultural universe of early societies and key elements of their spiritual and ideological understandings. Equally important are the “copied” or borrowed words that we can reconstruct in the lexicons of those past eras. These data tell us which societies interacted with each other and reveals a great deal about the kinds, content and consequences of cross-cultural encounters among and between the peoples in far-off times.

The first step in reconstructing earlier vocabularies of culture is a genetic classification of the languages to establish a historical stratigraphy, which in turn enables the situating of the previous existence of particular words within a relative time frame. Genetic classifications establish which languages have descended from the same protolanguage and can depict their historical relationships. When language speakers separate from each other and move apart spatially and temporally, each daughter speech community gradually changes their inherited language, beginning first to speak evolving distinct dialects, and as linguistic change proceeds these dialects evolve with progressing time into new and distinct languages. Those dialects and languages retain core lexical and grammatical features in common with the others that diverged from the same initial or protolanguage, while at the same time developing new words and grammatical features.

The patterns of shared innovation in the development of new features reveal to the linguistic historian which daughter languages are more closely

related, and thus belong to the same branch, and which are less closely related and belong to different branches of the language group. From a historical linguistic point of view, if two or more languages belong within the same subgroup, then they emerged out of a common intermediate protolanguage and thus are more closely related to each other than to languages outside their subgroup. These languages share particular phonological, lexical and grammatical innovations because these shared changes arose within their protolanguage. As the historical linguist Terry Crowley, among others, has suggested, shared innovations in particular linguistic features are unlikely to occur by happenstance.¹³³

Internal developments and cultural contact can initiate language change on the levels of syntax, morphology and, in particular, lexical semantics. These changes, however, are rather more visible within the cultural vocabulary and not so much within the core vocabulary, which is less subject to rapid changes. The universal core items of basic vocabulary contain such terms as first and second person pronouns, the numerals 1-2 (3 is also included in the version used here), the most basic body parts (foot, hand, head, eye, ear, nose, heart, etc.), universal environmental features (rain, for example) and primary actions (go, come, sit, stand, lie, die, kill, etc.). The method operates under two premises: that the words for these core meanings are more resistant to replacement than any other part of the lexicon and that they are rarely affected by word borrowing.¹³⁴ To use

¹³³ Terry Crowley, *An Introduction to Historical Linguistics*, 3rd edn. (Auckland; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 168

¹³⁴ Christopher Ehret, *History and the Testimony of Language* (The California World History Library. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 171. Such comparative

Crowley's term, these words, as opposed to cultural-specific words, are unlikely to be replaced by words "copied" from other languages.¹³⁵ Changes visible in the cultural vocabulary people use can shed light on historical developments within a geographic and spatial region. This kind of evidence can equally supplement, as well as correct, other available sources, in particular, oral traditions within the collective memory.

3.2.2 Applying the Historical Linguistic Method to History

While historical linguists are interested in language change in order to learn about how developments take place diachronically, historians using historical linguistics apply linguistic methods to learn about the people who spoke these languages in the past and about the world they lived in. In the past two decades a growing array of historians of Africa have utilized historical linguistic data to build integrated regional stories of the cultural, historical and social past of those regions and their peoples. As Ehret has pointed out, this new methodological approach differs from previous works engaged in by anthropologists and ethnographers of Africa, who have used linguistic evidence and comparative ethnography to primarily retrace population movements and

use have been applied by anthropologists and linguists to some of the Benue-Niger languages. Armstrong, Robert G. "Comparative Wordlist of two Dialects of Yoruba with Igala," *Journal of West African Languages* 2, no. 2 (1965): 51-78; Similarly, works by Victor Manfredi, have attempted similar comparisons within and between the Benue-Niger languages. See Victor Manfredi, "Áfa, the Nri-Igbo Counterpart of Ifá", 2013, posted online- <http://people.bu.edu/manfredi/IfaAfaNri.pdf>.

¹³⁵ Ehret, *History and the Testimony of Language*, 172.

ethnic shifts and origins, along with the spread and development of specific ideas, institutions, rituals or elements of material culture.¹³⁶

Historians of Africa who apply the comparative method to the subclassifying of a language family often use it in conjunction with lexicostatistics, a technique for generating a numerical measure of the time distance of the relationship between languages. This relationship is expressed in a shared cognate percentage rate in core vocabulary. The common list for eliciting this kind of data consists of 100 core meanings and is often called a 100-word list or a Swadesh list, after Morris Swadesh who first proposed this approach. The version used here is a 99-meaning list, which includes nearly all of the usual meanings, but without the “not” of Swadesh’s original list. This latter is not a good item because the negative in languages is often expressed by one or more negative clitics or affixes, depending on tense or aspect, rather than by a distinct word for “not”.¹³⁷ If the core vocabularies of two related languages retain a relatively high proportion of the same words with the same meanings, that means that they have diverged more recently and belong therefore in a lower level subgroup. By the

¹³⁶ Ibid. 4

¹³⁷ A 100-word list is a list of concepts of basic vocabulary and was developed by the linguist Swadesh in the 1950s. Based on the 100-word list Swadesh proposed the method of “glottochronology” by which he hoped to determine the date at which genetically related languages diverged. He assumed that every language has a basic vocabulary (defined in practice by a list of 100 or of 200 concepts) whose members are replaced, by internal change or borrowing, at a constant rate. If that assumption were accepted, one could take a set of languages known to be related, and, by comparing their basic vocabularies, one could determine that some diverged more recently than others. If the rates themselves were known, one could also determine the dates at which successive ancestral or proto-languages were spoken. As noted, in my language evaluations I have decided to use a 99-word list and to exclude the term for not.

same token, if the core vocabulary is more dissimilar, then these languages will have diverged at a much earlier time and thus belong to a much higher level of subgrouping.¹³⁸

Crowley applies the following naming system to different relative distances of relationship:

<u>Levels of Sub-grouping</u>	<u>Shared Cognate Percentages in Core Vocabulary</u>
Dialect of Language	81-100
Languages of a Family	36-80
Families with a stock	12-35
Stocks of Microphylum	4-11
Microphyla of a Mesophylum	1-3

Figure 1: Crowleys' table of Linguistics Distance Relationship

Given that this dissertation will be operating with distances marked by percentages not lower than the 12-36 percent range, a less detailed terminology is needed. Based on Crowley's reckoning, the Niger-Congo family as a whole would be designated a "stock". Distances on the order of 12-36 per cent, as in the Nupe group, will be taken as marking a major branch, or sub-family, within the overall Niger-Congo family.

By using the comparative method, one can not only reconstruct a proto-language, but also determine which languages are more closely related than others in a language family tree. The establishment of a full classification of a group of

¹³⁸ Crowley, *An Introduction to Historical Linguistics*, 172.

related languages can be diagrammed as a *linguistic stratigraphy*, allowing the establishment of a relative chronology of the history of the language group and the people who spoke the languages. Having established a relative chronology, the second task for the historian is to give absolute dates where possible to strata in the stratigraphy. The strongest cases are those where the archaeological and linguistic histories match up point-for-point in their stratigraphies and where the material cultural features attested in the archaeology match up with the lexically reconstructed features at the comparable periods in the linguistic stratigraphy. The absolute dates derived from the archaeology data can then be extended to the correlative points evident in the linguistic history.¹³⁹

One feature of the lexicostatical measuring of core vocabularies offers an additional tool for attaching absolute dates, although of a very rough and probabilistic kind, to linguistic stratigraphies. What has been observed in languages from many language families and from different parts of the world is that the accumulation of change in core vocabularies over particular time spans tends to similar median outcomes.¹⁴⁰ The early developers of the method treated the phenomenon as if a regular rate of attrition characterized this part of the lexicon of all languages and proposed a mathematical formula for calculating the date of the split between two languages from the percentage of words they still retained in common in the 100-word list:

¹³⁹ Ehret, *History and the Testimony of Language*, chapter 5, presents an extended range of examples of this kind of correlation in Africa.

¹⁴⁰ D. H. Hymes, "Lexicostatistics So Far", *Current Anthropology*, 1 (1960), 3-44, and by the same author, "More on Lexicostatistics", *Current Anthropology*, 1 (1960), 338-45, is an early survey of work along this line.

$$t = \frac{\log C}{2 \log r}$$

The value t stands for the number of thousand years that two languages have been separated, while C represents the percentage of cognates as worked out by comparing basic vocabulary, and r stands for the observed approximate median retention factor of 0.86 in a single language over a period of around 1000 years. Ehret argues that what is involved here is not a regular rate of replacement but rather the “accumulation of individually random change among quanta of like properties”:

...the individual lexical changes in basic vocabulary take place randomly ... but the overall accumulation of such random changes over long time periods tends to form normal distributions.

The standard retention figures, he says, “have often continued to be treated as if they expressed a constant rate of change rather than merely the median of a statistical distribution.”¹⁴¹ Essentially, what glottochronology describes is the cumulative effect over the long term of innumerable small choices reflecting usages and vocabularies made by people in their everyday language use.

The tendency of the quantities of change in basic vocabulary to cluster around median figures over particular spans of time allows the investigator to use the actually attested ranges of shared cognates in related languages to propose a rough range of time in which their common protolanguage most probably was spoken. The particular figures and associated dating scale followed here specifically applies the results of Ehret’s study of over twenty African

¹⁴¹ Ehret, *History and the Testimony of Language*, 106.

correlations of archaeology and language groups, the findings of which produce results that parallel those from other parts of the world.¹⁴² According to these findings, two languages that retain the same core vocabulary item in close to 73 percent of the 100-word list can be argued to have probably begun to diverge out of their common protolanguage sometime on the order of around 1000 years ago. Similarly, languages that share around 53 percent in core vocabulary most likely began their divergence from each other somewhere in the span of centuries around 2000 years ago. With around 39-40 percent cognation, their divergence took place in the range of 1000 BCE; with around 29-30 percent, most likely in the span of centuries around 2000 BCE; with around 21-22 percent, sometime in the range of 3000 BCE; with 16 percent, in the rough neighborhood of around 4000 BCE; and with 12 percent, in a span of time dating back as long ago as 5000 BCE.

For the languages of the confluence region, the possibilities for direct correlation of linguistic history with archaeology are still few. The glottochronological dating of the linguistic stratigraphies, thus for now, remains the key tool for provisionally estimating the spans of time, especially relating to the period before the past thousand years. The application of the techniques of lexicostatistics and glottochronology require thorough knowledge about the languages as well as training in linguistics, in particular in phonetics, phonology

¹⁴² Christopher Ehret, "Testing the Expectations of Glottochronology against the Correlations of Language and Archaeology in Africa", Chap. 15 in C. Renfrew, A. McMahon and L. Trask, eds., *Time Depth in Historical Linguistics* (Cambridge: McDonald Institute, 2000), 373-99.

and morphology. Training in these techniques provides the necessary skills for the historian to uncover and establish regular sound correspondence histories, and these in turn provide the critical framework for determining which items should be counted as cognate and which can be excluded as borrowed vocabulary. These perspectives shall be examined within the specific instances of the linguistic frameworks, contextual groundings and geospatial realities of the Yoruba, Igala and Nupoid groups relative to their place within the Niger-Congo linguistic mapping.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Ehret, *History and the Testimony of Language*, 183. Crowley also points out that these methods have been accused of being a little arbitrary because the determination of cognates involves a certain amount of intelligent guesswork. Therefore the better one knows the language systems the better one can establish sound correspondences and thus reduce the arbitrariness.

Here is how Crowley schematically represents the time spans of his classification nomenclature:

Level of Subgrouping	Years of Separation	Approximate Median Percentages
Dialect of a Language	Less than 500 years	86
Languages of a Family	500 to 2499	46-85.99
Families of a Stock	2500 to 4999	22-45.99
Stocks of a Microphylum	5000 to 7499	10-21.99
Microphyla of a Mesophylum	7500 to 10000	5-9.99
Mesophyla of a macrophylum	More than 10000	>4

3.2.3 Yoruba, Igala and Nupoid and their Place in Niger-Congo

The Yoruba, Igala and Nupoid languages belong to the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo Languages. The Niger-Benue confluence region is today considered as the cradle of the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo language family. It is viewed as the region from which the early peoples of this branch spread out initially, diffusing across large swaths of Nigeria. Of particularly important interest relative to population movements, although not part of our immediate considerations herein, was that of the Bantu peoples, a sub-branch of the Benue-Congo that moved out of the far southeastern edges of modern-day Nigeria around 3000 BCE, eventually spreading across the southern third of the continent.¹⁴⁴

The Niger-Congo family as a whole is the largest language family in Africa, consisting of over 1200 languages. The enormous spread of the Niger-Congo languages across Africa is accompanied by a very complex phenomenon of language contact between, for instance, the Benue-Congo languages and languages of other major language families, such as the Nilo-Saharan languages or the Afrasian (or Afroasiatic) languages. One of the largest Afrasian branches is the Chadic group, to which, for instance, northern Nigeria's most widely spoken language, Hausa, belongs.

¹⁴⁴ Klieman, *The Pygmies Were Our Compass*, synthesizes the early parts of this history in the Congo Basin; Ehret, *An African Classical Age*, surveys the later stages of Bantu spread into eastern and southern Africa.

The Niger-Congo languages only gradually gained recognition as a unit.¹⁴⁵ The relatedness of a large number of the Niger-Congo languages was noticed already in the nineteenth century, when the German missionary Kölle collected wordlists from over one hundred languages from liberated slaves in Sierra Leone, many of whom spoke various Niger-Congo languages.¹⁴⁶ In the early twentieth century, the German linguist Dietrich Westermann tied the West African Niger-Congo languages together, summarizing the comparative lexical evidence and using the term “Western Sudanic” for these languages.¹⁴⁷ The eventual crucial identification of the entire family was the product of the work of Joseph Greenberg, who established the new paradigm in a set of articles published between 1949 to 1953, which would later become published in book form first in 1955,¹⁴⁸ and later, in 1963, in *The Languages of Africa*.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ J. C. Adelung and J. S. Vater, *Mithridates, Oder Allgemeine Sprachkunde*, Vol. 3 (Berlin 1812); Adrien Balbi, *Atlas Ethnographique du globe ou classification des peuples anciens et modernes d'après leur langues* (Paris: 1826); H. Lichtenstein, *Bemerkungen über die Sprachen der Südafrikanischen Wilden Völkerstämme, nebst einem kleinen Worterverzeichnisse aus den gebräuchlichsten Dialekten der Hottentotten und Kaffern* (Weimar: Allgemeines Archiv für Ethnographie und Linguistik: 1808); John C. Pritchard, *Research into the Physical History of Mankind* (London: 1826).

¹⁴⁶ S. W. Kölle, *Polyglotta Africana*, Unveränderter Nachdruck der Ausg. London, 1854, Vermehrt durch eine Historische Einführung von P. E. H. Hair und einen Wortindex von David Dalby (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1963).

¹⁴⁷ Dietrich Westermann, *Die Sudansprachen: Eine Sprachvergleichende Studie* (Hamburg: L. Friederichsen & Co., 1911).

¹⁴⁸ Joseph H. Greenberg, *Studies in African Linguistic Classification* (New Haven: Compass Publishing Company, 1955).

¹⁴⁹ Joseph Greenberg, *The Languages of Africa* (The Hague: Mouton, 1963). For a historical overview of linguistic research and codification of African languages see Augustine Aguwele, “Practice of Historical Linguistics and Language Codification in Africa”, *History Compass* 6, no. 1 (2008): 1-24.

Greenberg's work identified six major branches of the Niger-Congo language family: West Atlantic (today labeled Atlantic), Mande, Gur, Adamawa-Eastern (today labeled Adamawa-Ubangi), Kwa and Benue-Congo. Greenberg's conclusions have been modified in major respects since 1963, especially in terms of internal subgroupings, but his identification of the overall scope of the family has stood the test of time.¹⁵⁰

The second major work evoking new evidence bearing on the language classification schema was Bennett and Sterk's provocative article published in 1977 and entitled: "The South Central Niger-Congo: A reclassification". In this work, they proposed a reclassification of the Niger-Congo based partly on lexicostatistics and partly on a study of commonly shared lexical innovations.¹⁵¹

The third major work on the Niger-Congo classification project appeared in 1989 in Bendor-Samuel and Hartell's *The Niger-Congo Languages*.¹⁵² The findings in this work provided the still most widely used statement on Niger-Congo classification.

The Niger-Congo peoples of the confluence region all speak languages of the Benue-Congo branch of that family. This branch of Niger-Congo encompasses twelve subgroups: Oko, Edoid, Nupoid, Idomoid, Igboid, Kainji, Platoid, Bantoid (to which Bantu belongs), Defoid (including Yoruboid with

¹⁵⁰ Kay Williamson, "Niger-Congo Overview", in John Bendor-Samuel and Rhonda L. Hartell, eds., *The Niger-Congo Languages: A Classification and Description of Africa's Largest Language Family* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 3-45.

¹⁵¹ R. Patrick and Jan P. Sterk Bennett, J., "South Central Niger-Congo: A Reclassification", *Studies in African Linguistics* 8 (1977), 241-273.

¹⁵² John Bendor-Samuel and Rhonda L. Hartell, eds., *The Niger-Congo Languages..*

Yoruba and Igala), Cross River (with Bendi and Delta Cross) and the two language isolates Ukaan and Akpes.

Of the three language groups, Yoruba, Igala and Nupoid, whose speakers form the key peoples of this historical study, the Nupoid and Igala have been among the lesser-researched groups, despite representing some of the largest ethnic minorities in present-day Nigeria. According to *Ethnologue*, the Yoruba today comprise about 18,900,000 speakers in Nigeria, the Igala about 1,340,000, and the Nupoid languages about 2,400,000—the largest groups among them being Nupe with 800,000, Ebira with 1,000,000, and Gbari/Gbagyi with 350,000.¹⁵³

Defoid divides into the Akokoid and the Yoruboid branches. Yoruboid contains the Yoruba-Itsekiri group and the Igala.¹⁵⁴ Ehret proposes, based upon historical and comparative linguistic data, that the separation between the Yoruba-Itsekiri and Igala group took place around 2,000 years ago, followed by a further divergence between Yoruba and Itsekiri at around 1,700-1,500 years ago and then, at around 1,400-1,200 years ago, by the evolution of Yoruba dialects as expressed in figure 5 below. Ehret and Ogundiran identify the proto-Yoruba-

¹⁵³ National Population Commission, Abuja, Census 2006; *Ethnologue.com*

¹⁵⁴ Capo, Hankpati B. C. “Defoid”, in John Bendor-Samuel and Rhonda L. Hartell, *The Niger-Congo Languages: A Classification and Description of Africa's Largest Language Family* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989), 281. There are only word lists and no Igala dictionary available, and one dissertation by R. O. Silverstein on Igala historical phonology that was written in 1973. In 1978 the Yoruba linguist Femi Akinkugbe finished a dissertation entitled *A Comparative phonology of Yoruba dialects, Itsekiri and Igala*. Extensive Igala materials are also included in the comparative reconstruction of proto-Yoruba-Igala, which I am suggesting based on my field research. R. O. Silverstein, *Igala Historical Phonology* (UCLA, 1973); Femi Akinkugbe, *A Comparative Phonology of Yoruba Dialects, Itsekiri and Igala* (University of Ibadan, 1978).

Itsekiri society as a set of communities that diverged out of the proto-Yoruba-Igala society by moving south from the Niger-Benue confluence and establishing settlements in the rainforest areas west of the lower Niger River. By around 600-800 CE, the proto-Yoruba language began to develop a north-south division of two major dialects. By 800 CE or before, speakers of the northern dialect started to scatter across a large part of the modern-day central Yoruba-speaking area leading to the divergence of the northern proto-Yoruba dialect into about fifteen different daughter dialects.

Ehret points out that the land encompassed by this expansion extended from the present-day southwestern Kogi state across Ekiti, Osun and northern Ondo states and into the eastern fringe of Ogun state. Later expansions, which, according to Ehret, happened in the first half of the second millennium, account for the spread of Yoruba speakers further westward and northwestward, followed by migrations into the southern parts of the modern day Benin Republic.¹⁵⁵

Ehret underscores that these linguistic findings contradict the oral traditions that give Ile-Ife preeminence within Yorubaland, since the Proto-Ife-Ilesha dialect was just one among fifteen others that emerged in the second half of the first millennium. Interestingly, however, these findings fit well with other Yoruba traditions, which recount the formation of Yoruba society as beginning with a first era involving the founding of sixteen separate Yoruba cities. Thus, the reason why oral traditions refer to Ile-Ife as the cradle of the Yoruba and give the

¹⁵⁵ Ehret, *Linguistics and Yoruba History*, unpublished manuscript, Panafrican Congress of Prehistory and SAfA 2010, Dakar, Senegal.

town such a specific position within Yoruba history must lie in other achievements. Some of them will be explored in chapter 4. Here, future archaeological findings and a more specific analysis of ethnographic sources and oral traditions will be important in uncovering the actual historical processes during these early time periods.

Figure 2 below depicts the historical divergence of Proto-Yoruba-Itsekiri and subsequent linguistic stratigraphy, as developed by Christopher Ehret based on the analysis of elicited 100-word lists of 26 existing Yoruba dialects and previous historical linguistic work on Yoruba-Itsekiri and Igala. The arrows identify dialect-chaining effects. The lines of descent connected by arrows would have been neighboring dialects in the early cluster of emerging dialects, which influenced the course of linguistic change in each other. The directions the arrows point indicate the directions of the influences. In a lot of early cases the influences appear to have flowed in both directions, but in later eras the directions of influence often went in one direction between dialects but not in the other, as indicated by arrows going just one way.

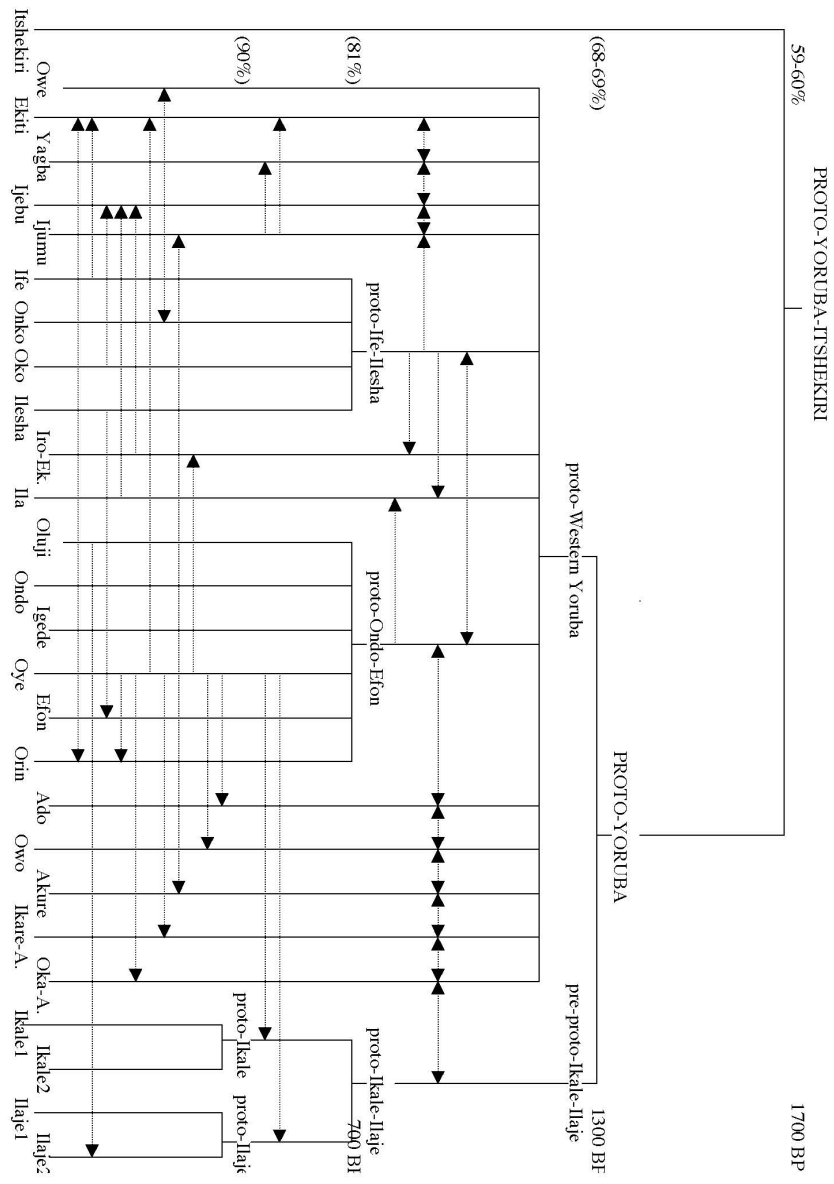


Figure 2: Yoruba-Itsekiri Stratigraphy

3.2.4 Proposing a New Sub-Classification for Nupoid and Its Historical Implication

Recent linguistic research on the Nupoid-speaking group has been dominated by the writings of Roger Blench, who postulated in 1989 a unity of Nupoid based on the similarity of lexical items.¹⁵⁶ He groups the following languages as Nupoid: Nupe, Nupe Tako, Ebira (with the dialects of Ebira Okene, Ebira Etuno, Ebira Koto) Gade, Gwari (with the dialects Gabgyi and Gbari) Asu, Kupa, Kakanda, Dibo, Kami, Gupa, and Abawa (Abugi, Saka, Edzu). Blench pointed out that research on the Nupoid languages had been unsystematic up to that time, and that, for some of the languages taken into account, he did not have standardized wordlists to work from. Moreover, published lexical material for Nupe Tako (Bassa Nge), Asu, and Kupa, derived from Koelle,¹⁵⁷ seem to be inadequate in both elicitation and orthography. Based on this, he suggested the following classification of Nupoid:

¹⁵⁶ Roger M. Blench, "Nupoid", in John Bendor-Samuel and Rhonda L. Hartell, *The Niger-Congo Languages*; see in particular page 306.

¹⁵⁷ Kölle, *Polyglotta Africana*.

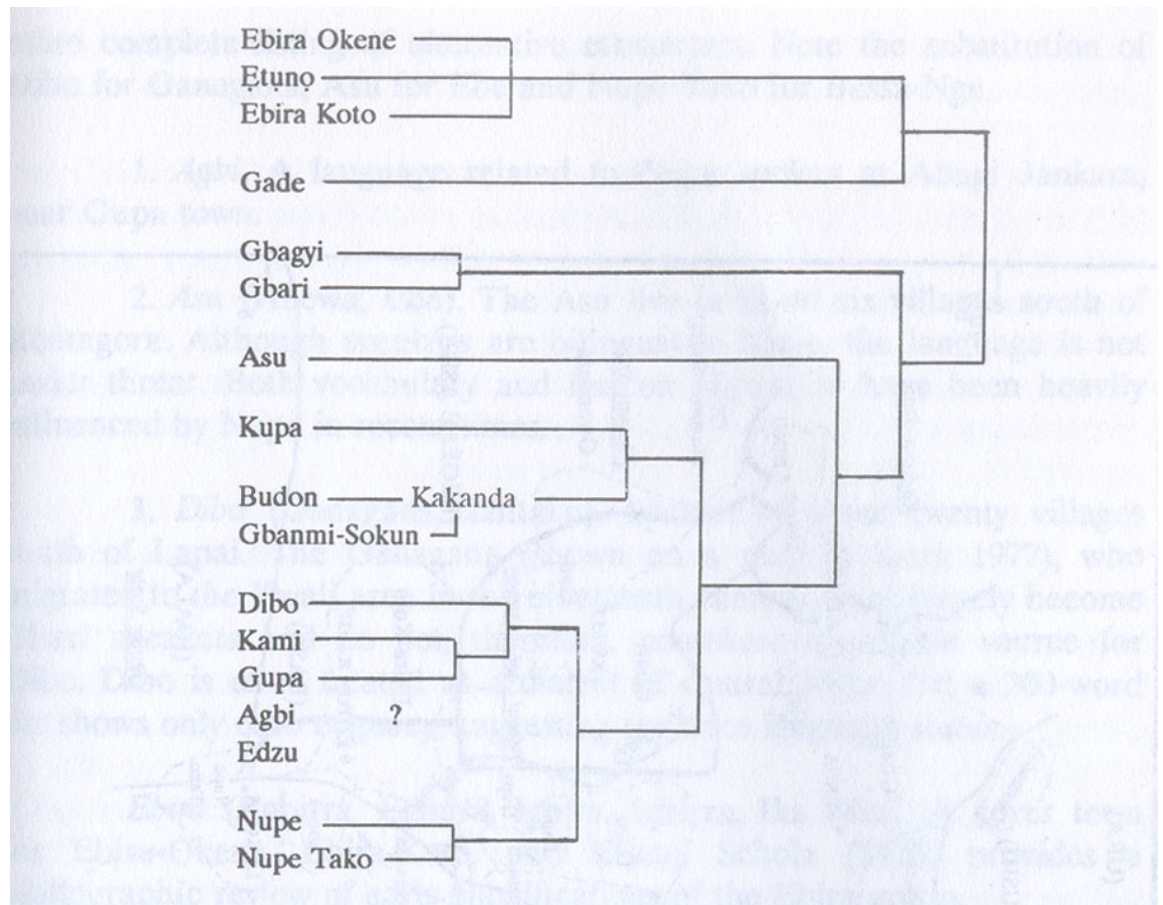


Figure 3: Nupoid Classification according to Blench

Here I propose a new sub-classification that is derived from a comprehensive collection of new linguistic data in 2009 and 2010.¹⁵⁸ This sub-classification consequently embodies and unveils a new approach to the existing historical stratigraphy of the Nupoid speakers, based on field elicitations of complete 100-word lists of all Nupoid languages (including various dialects). Based on these results, Ebira-Nupoid forms a deep branch, with two sub-branches, Ebira and Macro-Nupoid. Macro-Nupoid in turn breaks into two sub-

¹⁵⁸ The wordlists I collected during my field research can be viewed in the appendix.

branches, Gbagyi and Nupoid proper (see figure 7). Gade stands off from Ebira-Nupoid, forming a separate deep branch of West Benue-Congo.

Proto-West Benue-Congo, in the view presented here, is the ancestral language of the Gade, Ebira-Nupoid, Defoid (including Yoruba-Egbira group), Akpes-Ukaan, Idoma, Edoid and Igboid groups. The stratigraphy in figure 6 includes the four groups, Gade, Ebira-Nupoid, Yoruba-Egbira (from Defoid) and Edoid, the speakers of which directly figure in the history presented here, but leaves off the other three.

The lexicostatistical results for Gade and the Ebira-Nupoid branch form the following matrix of cognation counts, as depicted in figure 4.

NUP E M A T R I X

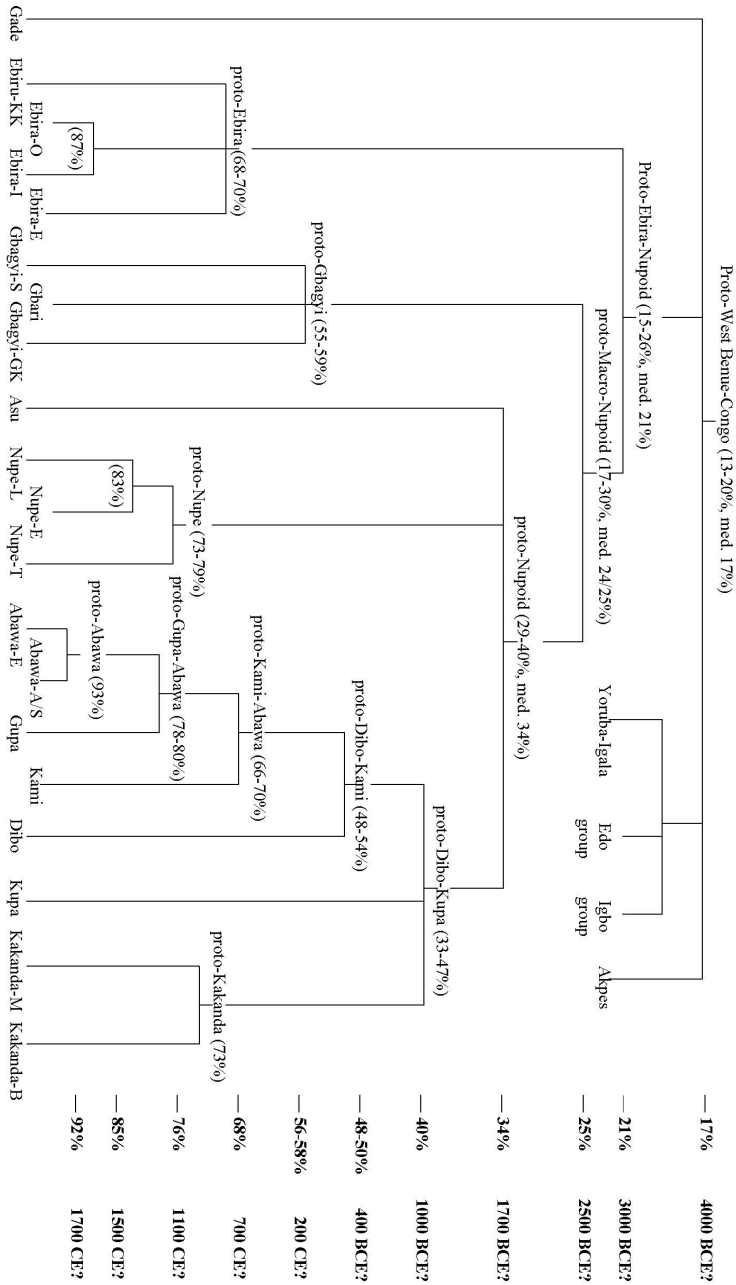
Nup e L																			
83	Nup e -E																		
73	79	Nup e -T																	
44	43	44	D bo																
31	31	35	54	G upa															
35	34	37	49	80	A bawa A /S														
34	33	35	50	78	93	A bawa E													
34	34	36	48	66	70	68	K am i												
37	40	35	35	31	43	43	44	K upa											
32	33	32	35	37	47	44	50	46	K ak and a M										
33	33	30	33	33	44	42	45	44	73	K ak and a B									
31	29	28	29	34	39	40	38	34	31	31	As u								
30	28	29	26	24	31	29	28	30	23	23	25	G b a r i							
22	23	24	21	21	29	24	25	22	20	17	21	55	G ba gy i Sh						
27	26	25	25	24	30	27	26	27	17	21	24	57	59	G ba gy i G K					
20	18	19	18	24	25	26	24	21	26	24	22	20	18	21	E b i ra K K				
17	15	16	17	22	23	23	22	20	23	21	21	19	15	19	70	E b i ra E t			
18	17	18	19	23	24	24	26	20	24	21	22	19	19	20	68	76	E b i ra O k		
18	17	18	19	23	24	24	25	20	24	21	22	19	17	17	69	71	87	E b i ra I h	
15	15	14	17	13	19	16	19	17	13	15	16	20	16	18	21	18	20	19	G ad e

Figure 4: Cognation Counts of Nupoid

The triangular matrix has been arranged in such a way that the more closely related languages are represented side by side. The lowest range of the percentage of shared cognates among these languages corresponds to the first period of divergence in the group. The Gade percentage range, with the rest, although only slightly lower than the Ebira percentage with Macro-Nupoid, is consistently so, forming a tight range of 15-21 percent, with a median of 17-18. The lower end of the Ebira group range with Macro-Nupoid overlaps the Gade range, but, running from 15 up to 26 percent, its median is distinctly higher at 21.

The two medians and ranges of cognation suggest a likely time span of something on the order of 1,000 years of history between the earliest divergences of the descendants of Proto-West Benue-Congo and the beginning of the divergence of the proto-Ebira-Nupoid language. The successively higher percentage ranges among the various subgroupings of the remaining languages reflect a history with successive later divergences into daughter languages.

Figure 5: Nupoid Language Tree (next page)



The family tree in figure 5 is a representation of the genetic relationship of linguistic descent from Proto-West Benue-Congo down to the four daughter languages noted here and from them to all of their daughter languages of recent

times. The diagram represents the points of divergence depicted in the percentage ranges of the cognation chart as in figure 4. The percentages of cognation shown for each node on the tree represent the medians of the ranges of cognation between the primary subgroups descending from that node.

On the basis of the new established schemes, I propose the following new classification in figure 6. Akpes-Ukaan, Idomoid and Igboïd are not included here but would form branches V, VI and VII if they had been included.

Figure 6: Outline of New Nupoid Language Classification

West Benue-Congo (13-20%, med. 17%)

- I. Edo
- II. Yoruba-Igala
- III. Gade
- IV. Ebira-Nupoid (15-26%, med. 21%)
 - a. Ebira (68-70%)
 - i. Ebira KK
 - ii. Ebira O-I (87%)
 - 1. Ebira Okene
 - 2. Ebira Ihima
 - iii. Ebira Etuno
 - b. Macro-Nupoid (17-30%, med. 24/25%)
 - i. Gbagyi (55-59%)
 - 1. Gbagyi Shaita
 - 2. Gbari
 - 3. Gbagyi GK
 - ii. Nupoid (29-40%, med. 34%)
 - 1. Asu
 - 2. Nupe (73-79%)
 - a. Nupe Tako

- b. Nupe L-E (83%)
 - i. Nupe Lokoja
 - ii. Nupe Egan
- 3. Dibo-Kupa (33-47%)
 - a. Dibo-Kami (48-54%)
 - i. Kami-Abawa (66-70%)
 - 1. Gupa-Abawa (78-80%)
 - a. Abawa (93%)
 - i. Abawa Etsu
 - ii. Abawa Abugi and Saka
 - b. Gupa
 - 2. Kami
 - ii. Dibo
 - b. Kupa
 - c. Kakanda (73%)
 - i. Kakanda M
 - ii. Kakanda B

Detailed correlations between archaeology and linguistically reconstructed culture, as noted above, offer the strongest basis for dating, if such materials existed.¹⁵⁹ But for many areas of the Nupoid- and Igala-speaking people, the kind of archaeological information needed is, as of yet, lacking for the Niger-Benue region. We have information from some sites close to the confluence region, such as the Nok culture, which has been dated to the last thousand years BCE,¹⁶⁰ and

¹⁵⁹ Ehret, *History and the Testimony of Language*, 154

¹⁶⁰ Jemkur, *Aspects of the Nok Culture*; J. F. Jemkur, Gert Chesi, Gerhard Merzeder, and Mark Rasmussen. *The Nok Culture: Art in Nigeria 2,500 Years Ago* (Prestel: Munich; New York, 2006)

from northern Yoruba areas west of the confluence, with sites dating to the most recent thousand years.¹⁶¹

Lacking archaeological correlations as yet, glottochronological estimates must be used here. They do not provide close dating but allow one to propose a rough sense of the time scales involved here.

1. With a median percentage around 17 percent, proto-West Benue-Congo divergence can be proposed to have fallen in the approximate range of about 6,000 years ago, or around 4000 BCE, give or take several centuries.
2. The succeeding proto-Ebira-Nupoid period, with a median of 21 percent, would best be dated to around 3000 BCE;
3. the proto-Macro-Nupoid era, with a median of 24/25 percent, to around the middle of the third millennium;
4. the proto-Nupoid age, with a median of 34 percent, to the early middle or middle second millennium; and
5. the proto-Dibo-Kupa era, with a median of around 40 percent, to the centuries around 1000 BCE;
6. the proto-Dibo-Kami era, with a median of around 50 percent, towards the end of the first millennium BCE; and
7. the proto-Gbagyi period, with a median of around 57 percent, to the first two or three centuries of the first millennium CE.

¹⁶¹ Usman, *State-Periphery Relations and Sociopolitical Development in Igbominaland*.

A further set of important stages in Nupoid history cluster in the later first millennium and early second millennium CE. These include the divergence of proto-Kami-Abawa and proto-Ebira into daughter societies in the second half of the first millennium. The divergence of proto-Nupe proper took place somewhat later, most probably around 1000-1200 CE. The timing of this latter development means that it may very possibly have been the linguistic outcome of the founding era of the Nupe kingdom.

3.2.5 Mapping Nupoid, Igala and Yoruba within the History of the Niger-Benue Confluence

The most probable location of the homeland of the West-Benue-Congo Branch, in view of the modern-day distributions of its subgroupings of Edo, Yoruba-Igala, Gade and Ebira-Nupoid, was around and to the west and southwest of the Niger-Benue confluence.¹⁶² Blench specifically suggests the homeland to have been west of the Niger-Benue confluence, but the overall distribution of languages of the group also includes primary branches spoken south and east of the confluence, so the more probable locations include areas all around the confluence itself. In tracing the history of earlier language locations, the principle of “fewest moves” is crucial. The most parsimonious, and therefore most probable history of language expansion is a history that does not unduly multiply the movements of peoples, à la Ockham’s razor, required to account for later locations of the languages in question. All the deep branches of the West Benue-Congo languages border each other in the areas surrounding the confluence,

¹⁶² Blench, “Nupoid”, 306.

making the probability that West Benue-Congo originated anywhere else vanishingly small. We know from detailed studies by other scholars that the Yoruba, the only West Benue-Congo peoples found today far west and southwest of the confluence, originated from right around the confluence.¹⁶³ Only the Gade and Ebira-Nupoid groups extend significantly eastward from the north side of the confluence. So, similarly, the Gade and the proto-Macro-Nupe must be understood as groups that diverged into separate peoples because they expanded into areas to the east and northeast of the core proto-West Benue-Congo lands.

The glottochronological data suggest that the movement of the early communities of the Ebira-Nupoid group northeastwards happened in the broad time frame of 4000-3000 BCE and that the separation of the Nupoid languages from Ebira, beginning around 3000 BCE, involved an only slightly wider expansion northeastward of the ancestral proto-Macro-Nupoid. In the case of all the Ebira-Nupoid groups, the later histories of divergence often would have involved only relatively short-distance expansions into immediately neighboring areas.

In many cases, what took place may have been the shifting of language boundaries rather than major ethnic and demographic movements. Interestingly, often oral traditions reveal different layers of historical change. In the case of the Ebira, the traditions place them as eastern outliers in the Igala kingdom and depict emigrations of Ebira from Igalaland as very recent—basically correlated with the

¹⁶³ See Saburi Biobaku, “An Historical Sketch of the Peoples of Western Nigeria”, *Odu* 6 (June 1958): 24-28.

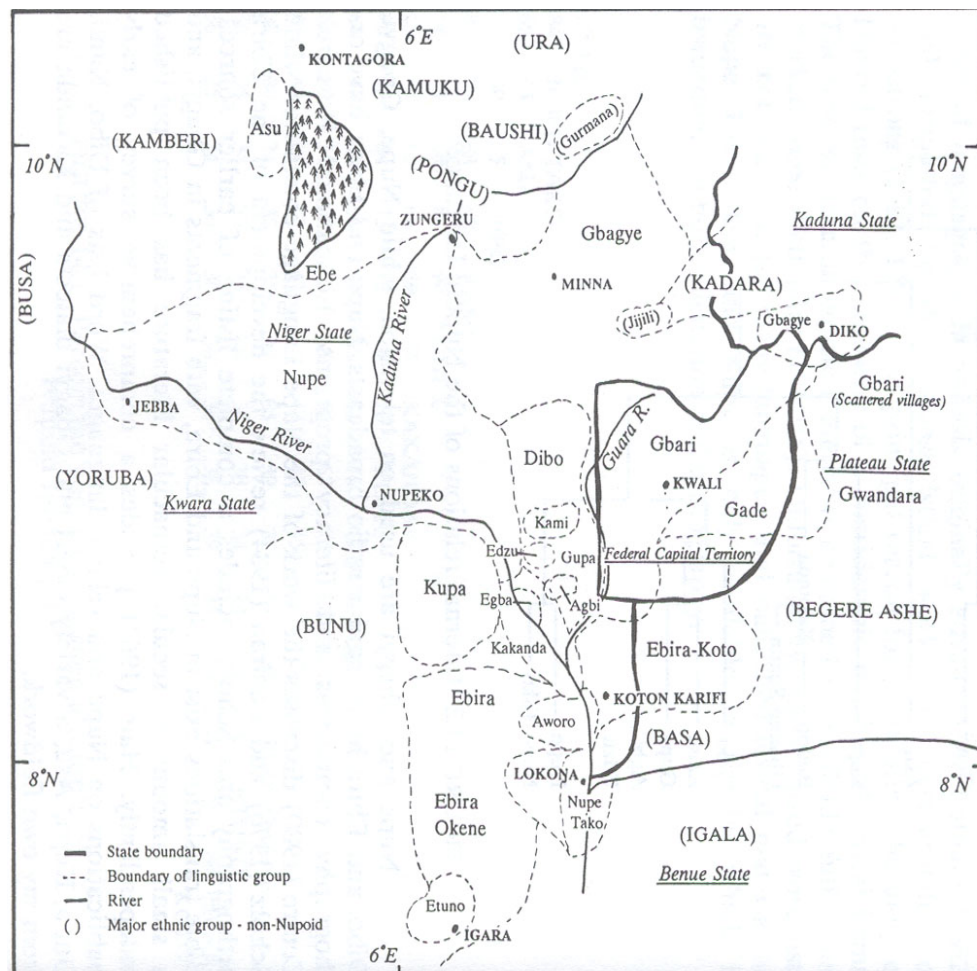
downfall of the Igala Empire.¹⁶⁴ Oral traditions of this kind, which we find in many parts of Africa, tend to reveal not the movement of the base community of speakers of a language, but rather, the in-movements of new people who brought with them prestigious historical associations and used those associations to gain key political and social roles in an existing set of speech communities. The linguistic evidence here reveals a long-term demographic continuity going back several millennia, whereas the oral traditions tell us about a historically recent political overlay.

The divergence of the proto-Nupoid language into its early daughter languages, as proposed above, most likely took place in the span of centuries around the first half or middle of the second millennium BCE. The ancestral Asu may have moved further north as part of this divergence. The Dibo-Kupa subgroup subsequently began its own divergence, with the communities speaking the daughter branches Kupa and Dibo-Kami initiating this process perhaps as early as 1000 BCE. Proto-Dibo-Kami then itself diverged possibly around or after 500 BCE. Kakanda diverged into two languages, but only much later, as recent as around 1000 CE.

The two deep Nupe dialects separated out of their mother language in the centuries around 1100 CE, at a time which may well coincide with the formation

¹⁶⁴ Femi J. Kolapo, "Post-Abolition Niger River Commerce and Nineteenth-Century Igala Political Crisis", *African Economic History* 27 (1999): 45-67; Ebere Nwaubani. "The Political Economy of Aboh, 1830-1857", *African Economic History* 27 (1999): 93-116. Other Ebira sources from Nigeria Magazine and others may be added herein to buttress this position, alongside the comments.

of the Nupe state and the spread of the Nupe language as the language of the empire in central Nupeland. The languages to the east of Nupe such as Dibo, Kami, Gupa and the Abawa dialects, Edzu, Saka and Abugi, which today have many fewer speakers than Nupe, probably remained more or less in situ over the past 2,000 years, and came under strong Nupe influence in the past 1,000 years, as Nupe loanwords in these languages indicate. Map 2 below shows the current distribution of the Nupoid languages.



Map 2: Geographical Distribution of Nupoid Language Groups¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Map in: Blench, “Nupoid,” 308.

3.3 The Ancient Cultural World of the Igala-, Yoruba- and Nupoid-Peoples

The Niger-Benue confluence region is characterized, as the name indicates, by the convergence of two major West African rivers, the Niger and its large tributary, the Benue. The course of the Niger in Nigeria is made up of stretches of broad open valleys separated, as at Bussa, before the construction of the Kainji Dam, by a narrow rocky stretch with rapids and falls. The Niger was, therefore, navigable through large parts of its course but not throughout its entire length in Nigeria. The Benue has a broad open valley throughout the part that lies in Nigeria. Falls or rapids do not interrupt it, so that during flooding it is navigable throughout its course in Cameroon, below Garoua.

The Niger River is the major river of western Africa, extending about 4,180 km (2,600 mi). Its source is in the Guinea Highlands in southeastern Guinea. It runs in a crescent through Mali, Nigeria, along the border with Benin, and then through Nigeria, discharging through the massive Niger Delta, into the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean. Apart from the river Niger, the principal rivers in the Nupoid- and Yoruba-speaking region are the Kaduna, the Ogun, the Osun and several smaller rivers, which mostly flow southwards into the Bight of Benin. The rivers have low banks and are important for hunting, fishing and farming.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Johnson, *History of the Yoruba*; Keith M. Buchanan and John Charles Pugh John Charles, eds., *Land and People in Nigeria: The Human Geography of Nigeria and Its Environmental Background* (London: University of London Press, 1955), 17.

The Benue River is approximately 1,400 km long and is almost entirely navigable during the summer months. As a result, it is an important transportation route in the regions through which it flows. It rises in the Adamawa Plateau of northern Cameroon from whence it flows west, through the town of Garoua into Nigeria south of the Mandara Mountains, and through Jimet, Ibi and Makurdi before meeting the Niger at Lokoja. The river's largest tributary is the Mayo Kebbi, which connects it with the Logone River (part of the Lake Chad system) during floods. Other tributaries are the Taraba River and the River Katsina Ala. The Niger-Benue valleys consist of older sedimentary rocks, although there are some small volcanic rocks between Makurdi and Yola.

The Benue Basin includes the main drainage features of the Benue, Gongola and lower Niger River systems and covers about 12,000 square kilometers. It contains three distinctive vegetation zones. To the south lies a broad forest belt with a high annual rainfall between 60 and 105 inches. The middle belt, of derived savanna, receives between 45 and 60 inches of rain per year. The northern or Sudanic zone experiences as little as 20 to 45 inches of rain during the wet months.

The variations in ecology, climate, topography and rainfall contributed to different agricultural practices, demographics and settlement patterns, stimulating internal economic developments as well as intra-regional commercial exchanges of ecologically specialized goods. Religious activities in the areas under consideration received major impulses from agricultural practices. The agricultural year structured the cycles of the cultivators and divided it according

to season and work to be done. The natural seasons are accentuated by systematic sequences of festivals, ceremonies, rites and sacrifices. The societies under consideration have developed a religious and cosmic understanding of the place of cultivated plants in their world and a reverence for the forces that influence success or failure of the food supply.¹⁶⁷

3.4 Correlating the Linguistic Findings with Archaeological, Ethnographic and Oral Data

The correlation of linguistic data and archaeology has proven to be very powerful for the writing of early African history, particularly in regions where migrations of different Bantu peoples took place.¹⁶⁸ In the Niger-Benue confluence region, archaeologists have still to undertake significant work in the Nupoid- and Igala-speaking regions. To date, only the Yoruba-speaking region has been the focus of excavation in some major historical places.¹⁶⁹ For a long time the excavations there have focused on Old Oyo and Ile-Ife, due to their pre-eminence in oral traditions and mythological accounts.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ Harlan, Jack R. "The Origins of Indigenous African Agriculture", in J. D. Clark, ed., *The Cambridge History of Africa; vol. I: From the earliest times to c. 500 B.C.* (Cambridge; London: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 654-657.

¹⁶⁸ Christine Saidi, *Women's Authority*, 40.

¹⁶⁹ Akin Ogundiran, "Chronology, Material Culture, and Pathways to the Cultural History of the Yoruba-Edo Region, 500 B.C.–A.D 1800", in Toyin Falola and Christian Jennings (eds.), *Sources and Methods in African History: Spoken, Written, Unearthed* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2002), 33 – 79.

¹⁷⁰ Frank Willett, *Ife in the History of West African Sculpture, New Aspects of Archaeology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967).

Recent excavations have started to encompass the Northern Yoruba area, especially the Igbomina section and the vicinity of Old Oyo.¹⁷¹ In particular, Aridibesi Usman has used archaeological tools to examine the interrelationship between the Yoruba Igbomina and the Nupe.¹⁷² However, his data analysis is more relevant for developments in the Northern Yoruba region and for Yoruba history during the late formative and classical period and only indirectly reveals information concerning Nupe history and the expansion of the Nupe Empire into these regions, a history we know about primarily from oral tradition.

As previously mentioned, there is no linguistic support for the pre-eminence of Ile-Ife as the founding Yoruba speech community. Therefore, as Ehret has pointed out, one has to look for other indications that would underscore the importance of Ife in the region's early history.¹⁷³ Shaw suggests its importance may have been related to Ife being a center of iron working, manufacturing and craft specialization, a conclusion in keeping with the significance given to such activities in Ife mythical consciousness.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Jonathan Oluyori Aleru, *Old Oyo and the Hinterland: History and Culture in Northern Yorubaland, Nigeria*, Ibadan Studies in Nigerian Past (Ibadan, Nigeria: Textflow, 2006).

¹⁷² Usman, *State-Periphery Relations and Sociopolitical Development in Igbominaland*; Usman, *The Yoruba Frontier*.

¹⁷³ Ehret, *Linguistics and Yoruba History*.

¹⁷⁴ Thurstan Shaw "The Prehistory of West Africa", in J. F. A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder, eds., *History of West Africa* (Ikeja, Ibadan, Owerri: Longman Nigeria Limited, 1985), 48-87.

3.4.1 Metallurgy and Iron Technology

Whether Africa's copper and iron metallurgy technology originated in or outside of the continent was long subjected to debate.¹⁷⁵ These debates were launched in the early 1950s in a paper by the French archaeologist Raymond Mauny.¹⁷⁶ The discussions soon expanded to questions such as how and when did metal production emerge, develop and expand in Africa. Mauny had argued for a diffusion of the technology from Carthage. Lhote, on the other hand, underscored an inner-African, local development, based on the ubiquity of iron ore.¹⁷⁷ Since the initial days of these discussions, many new data from all over Africa have been obtained, making a strong case for an inner-African emergence of iron metallurgy. The recent discoveries from Oboui in Central Africa and Leija in the Nsukka region, Nigeria, and in the southern vicinity to the Igala-Ibaji region, provide evidence for a possible late 3rd or early 2nd millennium BCE for the development of iron metallurgy along the northern margins of the equatorial forest.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ For a state of the research summary on the subject see for instance Stanley B. Alpern, "Did They or Didn't They Invent It? Iron in Sub-Saharan Africa", *History in Africa*, 32 (2005), 41-94; Bernhard Clist, "Vers un réduction des préjugés et la fontes des antagonismes: un bilan de l'expansion de la métallurgie du fer en Afrique sud-saharienne", *Journal of African Archaeology*, 10 (2012), 71-84; Ann Brower Stahl, "Political Economic Mosaics: Archaeology of the Last Two Millennia in Tropical Sub-Saharan Africa", *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33 (2004), 145-72.

¹⁷⁶ Raymond Mauny, "Essai sur l'histoire des métaux en Afrique occidentale", *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Afrique Noire.*, 14 (1952), 545-95.

¹⁷⁷ Henri Lhote, "La connaissance du fer en Afrique occidentale", in *Encyclopédie Mensuelle d'Outre-Mer*, I, fasciule 25 (September 1952), p. 272; Holl, *Early West African Metallurgies*, 416

¹⁷⁸ Edwin Eme Okafor, Edwin Eme, "New Evidence on Early Iron-Smelting from Southeastern Nigeria", in Thurstan Shaw, Paul Sinclair, Bassey Andah and Alex Ikechukwu Okpoko, eds., *Archaeology of Africa: Food, Metals, and Towns* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), 432-48;

Sites associated with the Nok culture in the vicinity of the northern Yoruba and Igala regions, such as Taruga, reveal metalworking with smelting furnaces, iron slag and items manufactured in iron and tin. Radiocarbon dates elicited in the late 1950s assessed the age of the findings and slotted them into the period between 1000 BCE and CE 200, with most of the finds dated at between 500-200 BCE.¹⁷⁹ Recent excavations at other sites that are associated with the “Nok Culture” confirm these dates. A terracotta sculpture excavated at Akura was dated to 892 BCE through the thermoluminescence method.¹⁸⁰ Charcoal dating of terracottas in museums or private collections has yielded dates prior to 800 BCE.¹⁸¹ These data are supported by charcoal excavated at the Nok site of Ido, which has a calibrated age of between 973 and 845 BCE.¹⁸² Rupp points out that even though exact radiocarbon dates cannot be obtained for the period 800-400 BCE because of the “Hallstatt-Plateau”¹⁸³ in the 14C-calibration curve, the above-

Edwin Eme Okafor, “Twenty-Five Centuries of Bloomery Iron Smelting in Nigeria”, *Origins of Iron Metallurgy in Africa: New Light on its Antiquity, West and Central Africa* (2004), 43-54; Edwin Eme Okafor and Patricia Phillip, “New ¹⁴C Ages from Nsukka, Nigeria, and the Origins of African Metallurgy”, *Antiquity*, 66 (1992), 686-88; Etienne Zangato, *Les Ateliers d'Ôbouï: Premières Communautés Métallurgistes Dans Le Nord-Ouest Du Centrafrique* (Paris: Éditions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 2008); Etienne Zangato and Augustin Holl, “On the Iron Front: New Evidence from North-Central Africa”, *Journal of African Archaeology*, 8 (2010), 7-23.

¹⁷⁹ Bernard Fagg, “The Nok Culture in Prehistory”, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 1, no. 4 (1959): 288-93.

¹⁸⁰ Nicole Rupp, “Beyond Art : Archaeological Studies on the Nok Culture, Central Nigeria” in P. Allsworth-Jones, ed., *West African Archaeology: New Developments, New Perspective* (Oxford Archaeopress, 2010), 77.

¹⁸¹ Claire Bouillier, Alain Person, Jean-François Saliège, and Polet Jean, “Bilan Chronologique de la Culture Nok et Nouvelles Datations sur des Sculptures”, *Afrique, Archéologie et Arts*, 2 (2002-2003): 9-28.

¹⁸² Rupp, *Beyond Art*, 77.

mentioned charcoal and thermoluminescence dates underline that the Nok culture already existed before the flat dating plateau began around 800. Connected to that is the question whether Nok can be considered as one of the earliest centers of iron production south of the Sahara and whether “this innovation was the basis of its flourishing appearance.”¹⁸⁴

Despite the absence of archaeological evidence as yet on the Nupoid- and Igala-speaking peoples, it can be surmised that some of these ancestral speech communities were familiar with iron technology. The earliest evidence for the adoption of iron technology in Yorubaland has come from the site of Ife-Ijumu at the southeastern edge of the Nok cultural area.¹⁸⁵ The advent of iron production in that region is dated to ca. 500-300 BCE. Ogundiran surmises that the technology was possibly first adopted in the northern Yoruba-Edo region through interaction networks that connected the diverse societies of the region with the Nok culture.¹⁸⁶

In the Nupoid-speaking region, one set of terms linked to iron (and including copper/brass) has a general distribution corresponding to the descendant

¹⁸³ This is a period at which the solar system passed through a part of the galaxy with wildly varying rates of gamma-ray bombardment, causing varying rates of carbon-14 creation on earth over those centuries. Often samples for laboratory testing from a earlier time span give more recent dates than samples from an actually later span in that overall period, and vice versa.

¹⁸⁴ Rupp, *Beyond Art*, 77.

¹⁸⁵ P.A. Oyelaran, *Archaeological and palaeoenvironmental investigations of Ife Ijumu area of Kwara State, Nigeria*, Ph.D thesis (University of Ibadan, Nigeria, 1991)

¹⁸⁶ Akinwumi Ogundiran, “Chronology, Material Culture, and Pathways to the Cultural History of Yoruba-Edo Region, 500 B.C.-A.D. 1800”, in Toyin Falola and Christian Jennings, eds., *Sources and Methods in African History: Spoken, Written, Unearthed* (Woodbridge (UK): University of Rochester Press, 2002), 38-40.

languages of proto-Nupoid, while Ebira, Gade and Gbagyi groups each have their own sets of terms. The two varieties of the term for "iron" in Nupoid—*nyankpa versus *nyankpere—are distributed such that one would argue that ironworking goes back early in the divergence history of the Nupoid group, but probably not until just after the proto-Nupoid era. Because the two variants of the old general Nupoid lexeme for "iron" each occur in languages of two of the three primary branches of Dibo-Kupa, it would appear that the period of diffusion and establishment of iron among the emerging Nupoid daughter sub-branches may belong to the era of the divergence of proto-Dibo-Kupa, namely, roughly 1000 BCE onward, in keeping with the current archaeological indications of its occurrence in this West African belt.

A common term for copper/brass, *era ~ *ira, appears in two of the three branches of Dibo-Kupa, with provisionally regular sound correspondences. Thus, a proto-Dibo-Kupa age for the knowledge of copper is also possible. The same term occurs in Nupe, but it applies there to lead. The term contains sounds that underwent few sound changes in the Nupoid group. The observed correspondences would not only allow reconstructing the term to proto-Nupoid, but also permit the alternative possibility that the term diffused later than proto-Nupoid or the proto-Diba-Kupa period, but still early, before any significant sound changes occurred in the particular sounds that happen in this root. Does that mean that copper knowledge goes back earlier than iron, with the term being switched over in recent centuries to "lead" in Nupe? This is a question that archaeological work will be essential to answering.

The early socio-political, economic and religious developments in the Niger-Benue confluence region are still poorly known due to the paucity of archaeological evidence. Ogundiran points out that even for the areas for which evidence exists, there remains an absence of any convincing interpretation of this evidence with regard to the impact of iron on demographic changes and on socio-political formations during the archaic period, 500 BCE-500 CE. In the Yoruba-Edo regions, myths, legends and other genres of oral traditions often associate the origins of societies with the advent of iron technology. Specialists with iron-using skills, such as hunters and blacksmiths, may have played a pivotal role in the process of economic specialization. Furthermore, access to iron resources seems to have been important in the defense of early settlements.¹⁸⁷

Rituals and mythologies associated with the spiritual world in the Nupoid, Igala and Yoruba-speaking regions attribute a formidable role to iron. The use of iron for ritual objects and the representations of iron in mythology, as well as in material culture and on shrine effigies of deities, provide ample evidence for cultural continuity and old cultural exchanges. Objects such as iron chains appear in both the Nupoid and Yoruba complexes in rituals as well as in mythology. These objects include the chain of Tsoede among the Nupe, the chain of judgment among the Kakanda and the iron chain on which the Yoruba god Obatala descended from heaven.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Ogundiran, *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Orisa'nla (The great divinity) also known as Obatala was the arch-divinity chosen by Olodumare, the supreme deity, to create solid land out of the primordial water that constituted the earth and populating the land with human beings. Obatala descended from

In contemporary ritual practices of the Nupoid, Igala and Yoruba-speaking peoples, iron is linked to the power of death and the ancestors. Residents of the spiritual world such as ancestors, gods and spirits are invoked by the clanging of iron bells and rattles in such ways as to produce an uncanny effect. During ritual performances, mediators—the diviners or priests—between the two spheres of the cosmos, the world of the living and the spiritual world, insert iron spikes into the ground to establish contact with the spiritual world.¹⁸⁹

Agriculture is another material arena where iron is utilized. Items such as hoes, machetes and other farm implements produced from iron facilitated agricultural and economic growth. Agriculture is equally drawn into the ritual focus. Principally, ethnic groups that emphasize ancestral veneration reckon their material successes with the propitious interventions of the ancestors and ancestresses through allusion to increased farm yields, fecundity and the fertility of both humans and other organic and ecological lives. The advent and utilization of iron implements within agriculture, and its evolving processing techniques, are evoked within the ritual sphere, along with the material dialectics and creative cultures that these foster. These ritual elements facilitated and helped influence and shape the material, cognitive, imaginative, structural, systemic and ideological universes of most, if not all, of these ancestral societies, especially those found within the Benue-Niger ambience.

heaven on an iron chain carrying a small snail shell full of earth, palm kernels, and a five-toed chicken. He was to empty the content of the snail shell on the water after placing some pieces of iron on it, and then to place the chicken on the earth to spread it over the primordial water.

¹⁸⁹ Constanze Weise, Fieldnotes, Nigeria, 2009.

3.4.2 Agriculture and Plant Domestication in the Niger-Benue Confluence

Like iron technology, agriculture and plant domestication provide a rich arena for understanding the historical tapestries of this vast and interesting region. Based on fruit and seed remains gained from various sites associated with the Nok culture, archaeobotanists have reconstructed a plant exploitation system for the region that encompassed mixed cropping of pearl millet (*Pennisetum glaucum*) and cowpeas (*Vigna unguiculata*). This system is also known from other West African sites that were dated to the same time period such as the Nigerian Chad Basin and might have been utilized by the Kintampo Culture of Ghana in the second millennium BCE as well.¹⁹⁰

Kahlheber, Hohn and Rupp surmise that the combination of mixed cropping systems based on cereals and pulses with oleaginous fruit exploitation seems to be characteristic for the prehistoric economy of the Sahel and Sudan zones of all over West Africa. Evidence of the exploitation of the oil palm tree (*Elaeis guineensis*) and the oil-bearing atili is similarly preserved.¹⁹¹ Kahlheber, Hohn and Rupp point out that the dominance of a cereal-based economy in central Nigeria seems to be confirmed by such archaeological assemblages as grinding equipment.¹⁹² Both fruit and seed findings confirm that the subsistence of people who inhabited the Nok sites depended on farming products. The presence of pearl

¹⁹⁰ S. Kahlheber, A. Hoehn, and N. Rupp. "Archaeobotanical Studies at Nok Sites: An Interim Report", *Nyame Akuma* 71, no. 1 (2009), 2.

¹⁹¹ Frank Willett, *Ife in the History of West African Sculpture*, 110-118.

¹⁹² Kahlheber, Hoehn, and Rupp, "Archaeobotanical Studies at Nok Sites", 12.

millet remains, a staple crop still part of the current rain-fed agrarian system of central Nigeria, grew also in the poor and stony soils at the slopes and on the hilltops of the Nok sites.

The archaeologists further suggest that findings underscore a subsistence practice, which reflected an environment in which woodland was at least partially present. The presence of savanna woodland in the vicinity of Nok is suggested by first initial results from charcoal from Nok sites. The authors presume, based on assemblages with wood from Fabaccae and Phyllantacea trees, together with typical Sudanian species like *Faidherbia albida* and *Anogeissus leiocarpa*, that wood was collected from the *Isobertia* woodland.¹⁹³

While the emergence of agriculture in West Africa is still subject to major archaeological debates, the Nok sites, and with them subsistence based on agriculture, have been dated to at least 800-1000 BCE. Until recently, one of the biggest problems in this regard has been the lack of representative basic data, as revealed in discussions during workshops and conferences on the subject.¹⁹⁴ Early research was preoccupied with the questions of whether African agriculture was an independent development, diffused or stimulated by migration groups from the Middle East.¹⁹⁵ The former assumption was that agriculture started with Near Eastern crops in the Nile Valley and northern Africa. During the Middle

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Katharina, Neumann, "The Romance of Farming: Plant Cultivation and Domestication in Africa" in Ann Browner Stahl, ed., *African Archaeology: A Critical Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005), 251.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 252.

Holocene, it was thought that people migrated into the Sahara due to climatic amelioration and took wheat and barley with them, moving south until they reached the ecological limits or the cultivation of winter rainfall cultigens. From these people, it was supposed that Africans farther south learned about farming and, unable to raise wheat and barley in their environments, started domesticating sorghum and various millet species.¹⁹⁶

Researchers no longer assume that the idea of agriculture diffused to Africans south of the Sahara, but rather that Africans most likely independently developed their own systems. Underscored by linguistic and botanical evidence, debates have, for instance, shifted towards the question of the geographical origin of African crops.¹⁹⁷ The work of J. R. Harlan and his colleagues set a milestone in the 1960s and early 1970s by localizing the cradle of thirty crops in Africa based on the distribution of wild relatives and on determining the distribution areas for their dispersion.¹⁹⁸ In the long savanna belt between the Senegal River and the Sudan, Harlan localized the origin of *Pennisetum glaucum*, *Brachiaria deflexa*, *Digitaria exilis*, *D. iburira*, *Oryza glaberrima*, *Sorghum bicolor* and the pulses *Vigna subterranea* (formerly *Voandzeia subterranea*) and *Kerstingiella geocarpa*. The hypothetical domestication area of yams (*Dioscorea rotundata*)

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 253.

¹⁹⁷ Neumann, Ibid., 254; A. Chevalier, “Le Sahara, Centre d'Origine de Plantes Cultivées”, *Mémoires de la Société de Biogéographie*, no. 6 (1938): 307-22.

¹⁹⁸ Neumann, Ibid., 254; Jack, R. Harlan, “Agricultural Origins: Centers and Noncenters”, *Science* (1971): 468-74; Harlan, “Indigenous African Agriculture”, in C. Wesley Cowan, Patty Jo Watson and Nancy L. Benson, eds., *The Origins of Agriculture: An International Perspective* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 59-70.

was located along the fringes of the rain forest between Ivory Coast and Cameroon.¹⁹⁹

Some archaeologists argue that a return to wetter conditions in the southern Sahara at around 2500 BCE stimulated the emergence of agriculture as it is represented by ceramic impressions of domesticated *Pennisetum*.²⁰⁰ Pearl millet and sorghum have been identified in archaeobotanical data in the southern part of the eastern Sahara and the adjacent Sahel between Lake Chad and the Nile Valley.²⁰¹ After 3000 BCE, with increasing desiccation of the lakes, seasonal migrations of pastoral populations increased. The spread of pearl millet from the southwestern Sahara to West Africa seems to have taken place no later than 2500 to 1800 BCE. For the latter date, pearl millet is recorded for the archaeological sites of Winde Kordjii (Mali), Ti-n-Akof (Burkina Faso) and Birimi (Ghana).²⁰² With respect to these findings, the Nok sites attest the continued use of pearl millet for substance as well as for the continuation of West African planting agriculture.

¹⁹⁹ Neumann, *ibid.*, 254

¹⁴³ Neumann, *ibid.*, 256; Jean Maley, “Middle to Late Holocene Changes in Tropical Africa and Other Continents: Palaeomonsoon and Sea Surface Temperature Variations”, in H. Nüzhet Dalfes, Kukla G. Weiss and Harvey North, eds., *Third Millennium BC Climate Change and Old World Collapse*, Nato Advanced Science Institut Series (Berlin; New York: Springer, 1997), 611-39; Robert Vernet, “Climate During the Late Holocene in the Sahara and the Sahel: Evolution and Consequences on Human Settlement”, in Fekri A. Hassan, ed., *Droughts, Food, and Culture: Ecological Change and Food Security in Africa's Later Prehistory* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2002), 47-63; Zhengtang Guo, Nicole Petit-Maire, and Stefan Kroepelin, “Holocene Non-Orbital Climatic Events in Present-Day Arid Areas of Northern Africa and China”, *Global and Planetary Change* 26, no. 1 (2000): 97-103.

²⁰¹ Neumann, *ibid.*, 259

²⁰² Neumann, *ibid.*, 261.

While no excavations have yet been performed in the Nupoid-speaking area, reconstructed cultigen lexicon for the Nupoid-speaking region and the Yoruba-Igala region includes terms for plants known from the archaeobotanical findings made at the Nok excavation sites. It suggests that future archaeological evidence derived from sites in these regions may reveal similar findings, as the Nupoid-speaking region is located in the same climate zone as the Nok sites, and the farthest western outreach of the Nok sites touches upon them as well.

Most notable is that the age of these terms in the Ebirá-Nupoid linguistic stratigraphy projects the utilization of the crops back much deeper in time than the archaeobotany can yet confirm. In disagreement with Roger Blench, who argued in 1986 that in the Nupe lexicon farming technologies cannot be reconstructed, my fieldwork elicitation revealed multiple positive results—not just one term diagnostic of cultivation, but at least three.²⁰³ It is possible to reconstruct a verb for “to cultivate” (*-nu) for the Nupoid-related languages back to the Proto-Macro-Nupoid level, which can be dated to about 2500 BCE.

Apart from this term, two other still older root words for “cultivation” or “cultivated field” appear in the evidence—*-gbe in Asu, Gbagyi, Kupa, and Kakanda and *-fa in Kupa, Gbagyi and Gupa. What is especially significant about these terms, diagnostic of cultivation, is that both can be reconstructed still farther back in Niger-Congo history. The first of them, *gbe, occurs in other sub-branches of the West Benue-Kwa branch—in those instances as a verb rather than a noun for cultivating—and in the more distantly related, as well as

²⁰³ Ibid.

geographically distant, Adamawa-Ubangi branch, where it also denotes a cultivated field. The second root turns up in Kwa, Adamawa-Ubangi and the Atlantic branches of Niger-Congo, consistently as a term for the field.²⁰⁴ Together these old roots suggest that the first steps towards deliberate tending of plant foods began long before the proto-Macro-Nupoid period, by 5000 or 6000 BCE and earlier.

The terms for crops that currently can be provisionally reconstructed to the proto-West Benue-Congo period, and often earlier to the proto-Benue-Congo era, include not just the crops noted for Nok culture by Neumann but others as well. In the Niger-Benue research region, two root words for yam species can be reconstructed. These plants would have been indigenous to the proto-Benue-Congo lands in the wetter climatic eras before 2500 BCE. Both terms go back to periods in the language family trees as early as 4000 BCE. Although one of the terms, *dum, often refers to the aerial yam today, it and the other old root word, *-kua, each probably originally referred to one of the two main types of Guinea yam, *Dioscorea rotundata*, the white yam, and *Dioscorea cayanaensis*, the yellow yam.

The yam is of less central importance in Nupoid areas than in regions farther south, but it is nevertheless a significant crop. Yams are, of course, an especially key tuber among the Yoruba and Igala people, where their significance

²⁰⁴ Interim findings of collaborative project on early Niger-Congo cultivating lexicon, undertaken at the University of California 2009-2011, under the direction of Christopher Ehret and with the support of grants from the Council on Research, Faculty Senate, UCLA. Results are currently being prepared for publication.

is highlighted in festivals, ceremonies and rituals.²⁰⁵ In Igalaland, the new yam celebration is performed in August during the royal Egwu festival.²⁰⁶ In fact, the New Yam Festival at some historical point converged and was integrated with the Egwu festival. Coursey points to the possibility that the Egwu festival was superimposed on a New Yam Festival by the Jukun ruling dynasty, which occupied the Igala kingdom for a time earlier in the second millennium CE.²⁰⁷

The terminologies of plants and organic life in general can provide us with vital resources for reconstructing the economies of the past. For instance, a reconstructed root term for the African groundnut (*Vigna subterranea*) can be traced back to the proto-West Benue-Congo period of around 4000 BCE. This, of course, is a crop for which we have evidence in the later Nok period. In addition, a root word for at least one kind of gourd or calabash, possibly the bottle gourd, reconstructs back to at least the proto-Ebira-Nupoid era.

Another early crop of the region, according to the lexical reconstructions, was sorghum. Archaeobotanical arguments favor the conclusion that sorghum was domesticated first south of the Sahara in the savanna zone stretching eastwards from Lake Chad. From these regions it would have spread west to the western Sudan belt. Sorghum already had been utilized for food by 7200 BCE by

²⁰⁵ Boston, *The Igala Kingdom*, 207.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ D. G. Coursey and Cecilia K. Coursey, "The New Yam Festivals of West Africa", *Anthropos* 66, no. 3/4 (1971), 457.

people in the eastern Sudan, although we as of yet lack determinative evidence of its being cultivated that early.²⁰⁸

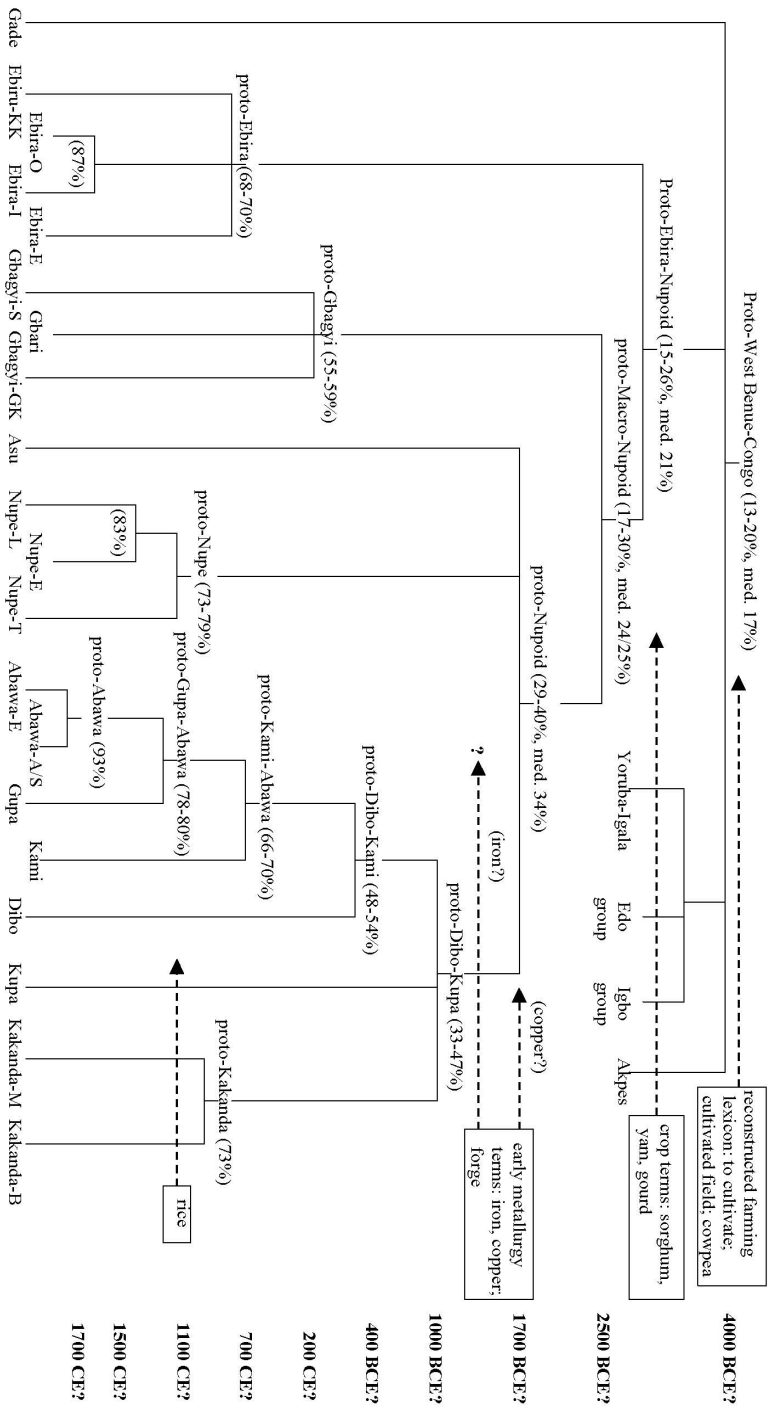
In our area of investigation, early archaeological attestation is currently lacking, but the reconstructed proto-Ebira-Nupoid root word *awi ‘sorghum’ suggests that sorghum is among the plants that were deliberately tended for food already by the proto-Ebira-Nupoid era. Harlan rightly notes that the introduction of maize during the Atlantic age has caused the cultivation of sorghum to decline or even disappear.²⁰⁹ This phenomenon finds indirect confirmation in the linguistic data in Nupoid languages, in which many of the terms for maize derive from the root *awi, compounding it with a second element. The meanings of the compounded elements remain to be studied.

Figure 7: Nupoid Stratigraphy

(See next page)

²⁰⁸ Fred Wendorf, Romuald Schild, and Kit Nelson, eds. *Holocene Settlement of the Egyptian Sahara* (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2001).

²⁰⁹ J. R. Harlan, “The Tropical African Cereals”, in T. Shaw, P. Sinclair, B. Andah and A. Okpoko, eds., *The Archaeology of Africa: Food, Metals and Towns*, 57.



Another grain, rice, grown in the Nupe regions today, is a puzzle. There is still little archaeological evidence regarding the earliest farming traditions of the rice zone.²¹⁰ While, as Harlan remarks, African rice is now grown as an upland crop well within the forest zone of West Africa, it had a savanna origin.²¹¹ In the Middle Niger region, at Jenno-Jeno, the archaeologists McIntosh have identified decrue farming systems based on African rice (*Oryza glaberima*) cultivation and utilizing the seasonal flood regime of the Niger, dating back to the first century CE.²¹² Techniques of floodwater cultivation of rice were developed very early in the Middle Niger region and subsequently extended to other valleys subject to seasonal flooding.²¹³ Early rice cultivation has been attested in the tidal swamps and inlets in Senegambia, and it is assumed that it spread from there to the southwestern coast.²¹⁴

²¹⁰ B. W. Andah, "Identifying Early Farming Traditions of West Africa", in T. Shaw, P Sinclair, B. Andah, and A. Okpoko *The archaeology of Africa: food, metals and towns*, 240-254.

²¹¹ Jack Harlan, "The Origins of Indigenous African Agriculture", in J.D. Clark, ed., *The Cambridge history of Africa; vol. I: From the earliest times to c. 500 B.C.* (Cambridge; London: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 640.

²¹² S. K. and S. R. McIntosh, "Cities without citadels: understanding urban origins along the middle Niger", in T. Shaw, P Sinclair, B. Andah, and A. Okpoko, eds., *The Archaeology of Africa: Food, Metals and Towns*, 622-641.

²¹³ Andah, "Identifying early Farming Traditions", 253

²¹⁴ Andah, *Ibid.* See also Judith Ann Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001); Carney, "African Rice in the Columbian Exchange", *Journal of African History* 42 (2001): 377-396.

Portères²¹⁵ demonstrated that African rice was native to the semi-arid interior from Cape Verde to the east of Lake Chad and has primary centers of variation in the areas of the upper Gambia and the Casamance rivers, extending up to the floodplain of the upper Niger between Segou and Timbuktu in Mali, where the Niger divides into several streams and lakes and floods regularly. He proposed that the cultivation of African rice as a “floating” rice began 3500 BCE in the inland Niger delta and subsequently diffused by way of the valleys of the upper Niger and Senegal to the secondary center of variation where “non-floating” rices were selected, From there African rice cultivation spread farther to Guinea and from there to Casamance and the coast regions of Western Africa, where techniques of cultivating rice in brackish water evolved.²¹⁶ Later it also spread eastward to Northern Nigeria and Lake Chad.²¹⁷

Due to the absence of archaeological evidence, there can be no solid conclusions drawn as of yet with regard to the age of rice domestication in the Niger-Benue confluence region. However, many of the Nupoid-speaking peoples, whose settlements are situated in the middle Niger region of the Nigerian Middle Belt, are rice cultivators today and probably were in the past as well. The occurrence of extensive swamps during the rainy season led to the expansion of rice culture in the region. Floodwater from the lower Kaduna valley often turns

²¹⁵ Roland Portères, “Primary Cradles of Agriculture in the African Continent”, in J. D. Fage and R. A. Oliver, eds., *Papers in African Pre-History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 43-58.

²¹⁶ Andah, “Identifying Early Farming Traditions”, 253.

²¹⁷ Harlan, “The Origins of Indigenous African Agriculture”, 640.

large areas into swamps.²¹⁸ The anthropologist Nadel, while studying the Nupe people in 1934 and 1936, remarked that Nupe grew two varieties of rice at that time—“the ‘sweet’ rice, a six-months’ crop, in the river marshes, and a variety which matures in ninety days, on the less well irrigated farms.”²¹⁹

The evidence currently available does not allow the reconstruction of a single early indigenous term for African rice (*Oryza glaberima*) among the languages in the research area. In most Nupoid languages,²²⁰ as well as in Igala, the term Nupe /cenkafa/, Gade /shinkapa/ or Igala /ochikapa/ is used and is a loanword from Hausa /shinkafa/. Given the importance of rice among the Nupoid-speaking settlers along the Niger and Kaduna rivers, this use of a Hausa term seems surprising because the implication of this term is that rice reached the Nupe from the north relatively recently. It is apparent that future archaeological work in the region will be necessary to establish further evidence for both the use of the indigenous African rice as well as to unveil how far back its cultivation goes in this region.

3.4.3 Foraging, Fishing and Hunting

We have looked so far at the linguistic historical data touching diverse aspects of economy and production. These data indicate that the peoples of the region already engaged in crop cultivation as early as 4000 BCE and that their plant food resources included sorghum, the African groundnut and two kinds of

²¹⁸ Reuben, *Geographical Regions of Nigeria*, 118.

²¹⁹ Nadel, *Black Byzantium*, 214.

²²⁰ The earliest attested Nupe term for rice, “cenkafa” can be found in A. W. Banfield, *Dictionary of the Nupe Language* (Shonga: The Niger Press, 1914/16).

yams. The proto-Ebira-Nupoid people were already possessors of ceramic technology 6,000 years ago, as their reconstructed term *-du for pot indicates. The linguistic evidence regarding the presence of metalworking and the use of iron correlate well with the archaeological indications that these elements of material culture had taken hold by 1000 BCE. The lexical evidence allows room for the possibilities as well that iron knowledge might go back somewhat earlier than 1000 BCE and that knowledge of copper might conceivably date earlier than the knowledge of iron.

The interpretation of the early foraging occupations among the peoples of the wider regions around the confluence is more difficult because less comparative material is available from other Niger-Congo or Benue-Congo languages than is now available, because of my field collections, for Ebira-Nupoid branch. Yet, there are certain areas that can assist us by establishing chronological order and linguistic linkages that reinforce our chronological postulations.

It seems that the use of the canoe (*Vkpa) and paddle (*oshe) can be reconstructed back to the proto-West Benue-Congo stage around 4000 BCE. This would not be very surprising since the homeland of this language family has been situated close to the Niger-Benue confluence, and the entire region is rich in small rivers and lakes. The Nupoid language groups developed their own term for “canoe” (*eya) when they diverged from the Ebira-Nupoid group around 3000 BCE, and the Nupoid-speaking people put into use a new term for “paddle” (*ete) around the early second millennium BCE.

Among the proto-Nupoid people of around the mid-second millennium BCE, who expanded in the riverine areas on the north of the Niger River—which are characterized by a high number of creeks—fishing appears to have been a significant occupation. Besides the general verb for “to fish” (*wan), a term for an item specifically indicative of regular reliance on fishing, the “fish fence” (*eshe), reconstructs to the proto-Nupoid language, while a second, still older term, *esa ~ *asa, “fishnet”, projects the importance of fishing back to the much earlier proto-Ebira-Nupoid period.

Lastly, it seems likely that hunting activities also still played a major role in the activities of the Proto-Ebira-Nupoid and in the later proto-Nupoid societies. Bows and arrows were probably the major tools of hunting, along with traps. The general proto-Ebira-Nupoid verbs for “to hunt”, *gbe, and for “to trap”, *-kpa, have been reconstructed, but fuller collections of the terminologies relating to kinds of traps, to different kinds of arrows and to the more technical aspects of hunting, will be important for learning more about the methods of hunting among the peoples of the those early eras.

3.4.4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the evidence of cultivation terminology indicates a significant role for food crops and cultivation in the diet of proto-Ebira-Nupoid people well before 3000 BCE, although fishing and hunting continued to contribute to subsistence. Fishing has widely remained a highly important contribution down to the present.

Overall, the language evidence relating to the period from 4000 BCE to the late second millennium BCE reveals a long-term history of relative cultural and social continuity. These data depict a region characterized by economies focused around agriculture with such important crops as African grains and yam. The peoples of the region supplemented cultivation with fishing and hunting. The practices of agriculture sustained numerous small-scale societies and would have supported a growing population.

One development of note was a succession of divergences of the early communities into daughter societies between the early third and late second millennium BCE. The earliest of these was a two-stage divergence of the ancestral Proto-Ebira-Nupe society around 3000-2500 BCE into three sets of communities, the proto-Ebira, the proto-Gbagyi and the proto-Nupoid. Then, in the centuries before and around 1500 BCE, a further divergence took place, with the proto-Nupoid society giving rise to the ancestral Asu, proto-Nupe and proto-Dibo-Kupe. Each divergence took place within the region. No indications exist of either major new economic or cultural impacts from outside the region during these times. The usual historical implication of this kind of recurring, in-situ language divergence is that an ongoing gradual growth of population was taking place.

Because the currently reconstructed cultural lexicon is heavily focused on economic developments and considers only a few terms from the political and social semantic fields, it will be important in future work to gather much more extensive lexical evidence for political and social history. Another major semantic

field in need of being explored in much greater detail is kinship. The wider comparative ethnographic evidence indicates that very small-scale social and political units would have characterized the earliest periods, with matrilineal clans forming the primary units of social allegiance in local villages and hamlets.²²¹

One of the major unanswered questions is when and why the shift from matrilineal to patrilineal descent happened. One possibility is that the later rise of state institutions might have favored this direction of cultural change, but that is a proposition that remains to be demonstrated.

These kin groups were headed by priest chiefs *cu from earlier *ku. This is the regular proto-Ebira-Nupoid reflex of the reconstructed Proto-Benue-Congo word for this office, *-kumo. A comparison with other data, derived through the historical and comparative linguistic method, indicates that the holders of this position have very likely presided in communal observances directed towards the ancestors.

A brief explanation of the shape of the history of proto-Ebira-Nupoid version of this root word is useful here. Proto-West Benue-Congo dropped second syllables in two-syllable words, with two effects: C_1VC_2V words shortened to $*CV_1$ if the second consonant was not a nasal; when C_2 was a nasal consonant, the root words shortened to $C_1\tilde{v}$, where \tilde{v} was a nasalized vowel.²²²

Two sound changes then took place in Proto-Ebira-Nupoid: first, Proto-Benue-

²²¹ C. Ehret, “Reconstructing Ancient Kinship in Africa”, in Nicholas J. Allen, Hilary Callan, Robin Dunbar, and Wendy James, eds., *Early Human Kinship: From Sex to Social Reproduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 200-231; 259-269.

²²² These are the preliminary findings of the collaborative project on Niger-Congo reconstruction, for which see footnote 84.

Congo *k became Proto-Ebira-Nupoid *c when it was followed by what was originally the Niger-Congo high back rounded vowel *u; second, nasal vowels lost their nasalization. As a result Proto-Benue-Congo *-kumo became proto-West Benue-Congo *-kũ; the two regular proto-Ebira-Nupoid sound changes then converted this to proto-Ebira-Nupoid *cu.²²³

Other early observances probably included masquerades of some kind and divination practices ancestral to those of more recent times. The widespread presence of ancestral masquerades, which resemble each other in form and function all across the Niger-Benue confluence region, underscores the first part of this proposal. Reconstructing the possible ancient historical forms of these masquerades is a project for future historical investigation. It will require additional comparative linguistic evidence and detailed comparative ethnographic investigations of all the varieties and features of the masquerades known from recent history. One ancient term, *epa or *ipa, for divination, reveals the existence of such practices, but reconstructing the paraphernalia and practices of early divination is also a project for future work.

The first era of major historical transition around and west of the confluence began around the late second millennium and early first millennium BCE. The linguistic evidence is indirect, but its implications are compelling. The evidence from the Nupoid group tracks the knowledge of iron and of iron forging back to at least 1000 BCE. Archaeology from the Nupoid-speaking regions is

²²³ The Ebira-Nupoid sound correspondences supporting this history appear in the appendices at the end of the dissertation.

entirely lacking as of yet. But iron was being worked in that period, as the archaeology shows, in the areas of the Nok culture immediately east of the proto-Nupoid peoples.

The possession of iron has two major implications. It suggests the emergence, by that time, of at least two occupational specializations, iron smelting and iron smithing. The second implication is that exchange relations over long distance would have also emerged. As iron deposits are scattered and not found everywhere, this is an important implication. Most people's access to iron would have come through trade with distant smelting communities. This kind of trade marks a qualitative difference; it would have entailed a great step upward in the distance over which at least one kind of trade good had to be carried.

We also saw evidence that a word for copper may possibly go back even earlier among the Nupoid speakers and related peoples. This possibility fits well with archaeological findings from a land not all that far away, the Air Mountains at the southern edges of the Sahara, where copper smelting is attested for the time period of 2000 to 1000 BCE.

Archaeology is available for a scattering of areas across the Sudan belts to the north of the Epira-Nupoid-speaking regions. In these areas, the emergence of towns and trade over distance had begun even before 1000 BCE. The peoples of the confluence region lived on the peripheries of these developments. They would have participated in some fashion, even if indirect, in these encounters and would have benefited at least to the extent of beginning to obtain metals. At least one occupational specialization, iron smithing, is likely to have come into being as

early as 1000 BCE as the existence of a proto-Nupoid verb *tswa for forging indicates.

The onset of a new period of societal divergences took place around that time, affecting the proto-Dibo-Kupa society. The divergence of proto-Dibo-Kupa into several daughter societies may be no more than a continuation of the earlier trend of population growth. But the coincidence in timing with the rise of metallurgy and new kinds of trade suggests that these developments may have had something to do with it. Again this is an issue that the available evidence cannot decide.

Did the first transitions from clan-based communities to territorial chiefdoms begin in this period around the beginning of the first millennium BCE? The Nok culture in the region north and east of the confluence seems surely to represent an even further political stage, the first rise of an actual state in that part of Africa and a society in which control over metal resources mediated access to wealth and power.²²⁴ For the Nupoid-speaking regions, however, the evidence does not yet allow conclusive answers to these questions. But, as the next chapter indicates, these early developments likely paved the way to the rise of kingdoms and city states in the region by the first millennium CE, as they provided the

²²⁴ Peter Breunig, Einleitug, in Peter Breunig, ed., *Nok: Ein Ursprung Afrikanischer Skulptur: Eine Ausstellung der Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung Frankfurt und der Goethe-Universität Frankfurt, in Kooperation mit der National Commission for Museums and Monuments Abuja, Nigeria, 30. Oktober 2013 Bis 23. Februar 2014* (Frankfurt am Main; Frankfurt [am Main]: Liebieghaus Skulpturensammlung; Africa Magna, 2013), 25-27.

material basis and the economic resources necessary for the governance of larger, more complex societies.

Linguistic data indicate a trend of ongoing population growth in the confluence region. Areal divergences of speech communities, often within the areas already occupied by the ancestral communities, out of which they diverged, took place recurrently from the late millennium BCE up to the middle of the first millennium CE, and attest the emergence of a succession of new small-scale societies. At the beginning of the first millennium the Proto-Dibo-Kami group separated into the Dibo and proto-Kami-Abawa societies, while the Proto-Gbagyi group broke up into three successor societies. Around 700-1000 CE, after a gap of about 500 years, about which not much can yet be said, a new era of societal divergences characterized developments in the areas west and northwest of the confluence. At around 700 CE Proto-Kami-Abawa diverged into ancestral Kami and Proto-Gupa-Abawa speech communities. This was followed closely by the divergence of the Proto-Ebira and Proto-Kakanda into several successor speech communities. Organization in small-scale chieftaincies was the probable predominant pattern of religio-political governance northeast and northwest of the confluence through most of this long era.

At the beginning of the second millennium another development is observable. This is the divergence of Proto-Nupe into at least three Nupe dialects between around 1000 and 1200 CE. While the previously described speech communities diverged close to their homeland and remained more or less in situ, the Nupe language, as a consequence of this divergence, spread over a wider

territory. This territorial language spread is a probable outcome of a new kind of development in the region—the beginning of the formation of the Nupe state in the early second millennium CE. One can surmise that the spread of the Nupe language was accompanied by Nupe hegemonial supremacy over many neighboring peoples of the region. While language is one indicator, as will be shown in the following chapter, oral traditions and rituals related to Nupe hegemony provide further indications that this kind of political development was indeed underway. During the same broad era the emergence of the Igala kingdom took place in areas immediately around the confluence. This was followed by the spread of the Igala language also into a wider territory.

Slightly earlier, at around 700 CE to 1000 CE, in the areas southwest of the confluence, the emergence of the Yoruba city-states began. A divergence into a wide dialect continuum of initially about 15 primary dialects indicates for a very different political history for the Yoruba, marked by migrations of numerous separate groups of Yoruba south and west out of the Niger-Benue confluence. At around 1000 CE a goodly number of independent city-states had emerged, spread across large parts of modern-day southeastern Nigeria.

The next chapter will discuss the provisionally reconstructed historical pathways of the ancestral speech communities of the Igala, Northern Yoruba and Nupoid-speaking peoples leading towards the foundation of the new kinds and scale of polities in the Niger-Benue confluence. It will also consider the reasons for the different settlement patterns of these societies, which varied from staying in situ to high mobility. Both locally specific changes and shared regional

communalities took shape during the formative centuries of cultural and political interaction that preceded the emergence of larger polities. These emerging polities were based on a duality of political control and ritual sovereignty, supported primarily by an agricultural material basis, which was supplemented by trade and often by fishing and hunting activities.

4 Ritual Sovereignty and Governance: Religion and State to 1600

4.1 Transformations at the Niger-Benue Confluence

At the onset of the second millennium CE, the emergence of new polities at the Niger-Benue confluence took place during a time of broad new cultural exchanges and movements of peoples, goods and ideas. The spread of ideas and rituals that accompanied these exchanges created lasting connections among the polities of the region that specifically impacted religio-political and economic institutions and led to the formation of a regional identity.²²⁵ I argue that, during the centuries leading up to the second millennium CE, it was the emergence of major politico-religious and ritual power players, whose jurisdictions extended beyond political boundaries, that shaped this regional, cultural and political sphere. These emerging polities were based on a duality of political control and ritual sovereignty, supported primarily by an agricultural material basis, which was often supplemented by trade and fishing and hunting activities.²²⁶

²²⁵ A. Afigbo, “Long- Distance Trade Routes”; Afigbo, “Southeastern Nigeria, the Niger-Benue Confluence, and the Benue in the Precolonial Period: Some Issues of Historiography”, *History in Africa*, 24 (1997): 1-8; also K. Dike, “Trade and Politics in the Niger-Delta”; Tom Miachi, “Masquerades as agents of social control”; Nwando Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), 68-76; E. J. Alagoa, “Long-Distance Trade and States in the Niger Delta”, *The Journal of African History* 11(3) 1970, 322.

²²⁶ Burton Stein coined the term ritual sovereignty. Burton Stein, “The Segmentary State in South Indian History”, in Richard G. Fox, ed., *Realm and Religion in Traditional India* (New Delhi: Vikas 1977), 10. For a historiography on the subject of ritual sovereignty see Hermann Kulke “Ritual Sovereignty and Ritual Policy: Some Historiographic Reflections”, in Margo Schneidmüller, Gerald Schwedler, Eleni Tounta, Hermann Kulke and Uwe Skoda, eds., *State, Power, and Violence* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 604-626.

The concepts of political sovereignty and ritual sovereignty were broached by two scholars, Aidan Southall and Burton Stein, and have also been taken up recently taken up by Hermann Kulke. Stein developed his idea of ritual sovereignty based on Aidan Southall's anthropological study of the Alur society in eastern Africa, who had applied it to the segmentary state. Stein remarks, "In a segmentary state sovereignty is dual. It consists of actual political sovereignty, or control, and what Southall terms 'ritual hegemony' or 'ritual sovereignty'."²²⁷

Kulke, following Ronald Inden's view, interprets Stein as distinguishing

between ritual sovereignty as a loose and custodial hegemony exercised by the king at the top of the pyramidal segmentary structure on the one hand, and political sovereignty, consisting of the direct rule or control exercised by local authorities and little kings in their immediate localities on the other.²²⁸

In this study I propose to extend the conception of dual spheres of political and ritual sovereignty to state forms, such as kingdom, city-state or empire. The idea of dual sovereignty, I would suggest, better explains these polities than does the older idea of sacred kingship. The latter concept focuses more on the persona of the ruler. In contrast, dual sovereignty emphasizes the encompassing politico-ritual system, which produces representatives acting as agents on its behalf.²²⁹

²²⁷ Kulke, "Ritual Sovereignty and Ritual Policy: Some Historiographic Reflections", 607.

²²⁸ Kulke, *Ibid.*, 608; Ronald Inden, "Ritual, Authority, and Cyclical Times in Hindu Kingship", in John F. Richards, ed., *Kingship and Authority in South Asia* (Delhi; New York, 1998), 28.

²²⁹ Gillian Feeley-Harnik, "Issues in Divine Kingship", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 14 (1985): 273-313; For a more detailed discussion about the term sovereignty see Adam T. Smith, "Archaeologies of Sovereignty", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40, no. 1 (2011): 415-32.

I propose too that in the historical developments of the polities at the Niger- Benue confluence, the emergence of a duality of political and ritual sovereignty is a general recognizable feature. A co-occurrence of vertical hierarchies with multiple, horizontally arrayed ritual associations, sometimes involving co-mingling and co-terminal relationships as well as particular notions of ritual power and leadership, characterized the often complex societies that arose during the early period of state formation in the Niger-Benue confluence.²³⁰ The cultural and oral memories of the various social groups inhabiting the region reflect a past that included shifting tributary relationships and varying economic and commercial exchanges as well as regional political and religious interactions.

The term sovereignty is understood here as a condition of holding the highest power within the sphere in which it operates. Contemporary academic use emphasizes a legalistic framework and political understanding that the “state is the political institution in which sovereignty is embodied” and refers to the meaning of sovereignty predominantly as the “supreme authority within a territory.” I am suggesting a different outlook involving sovereignty, which requires a multi-dimensional viewpoint and is not rooted merely in boundary and territorial space. I would widen the definition of the term sovereignty broadly, especially when applied to non-European understandings of statehood before the emergence of the nation state phenomenon. I concur with Tymowski’s

²³⁰ Carola Lentz, “Ethnizität und die Interpretation der Vergangenheit”, In *Geschichte in Afrika: Einführung in Probleme und Debatten*, edited by Jan-Georg Deutsch and Albert Wirz (Berlin: Das Arabische Buch, 1997), 149-74; McIntosh, Susan Keech. *Beyond Chiefdoms: Pathways to Complexity in Africa* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

understanding of the state as carrying the feature of the sovereignty of power and a monopoly of establishing the instrumentalities of the law and its enforcement.²³¹

Scholars agree upon historical variants of sovereignty that can be understood along three dimensions—the holder of sovereignty, the extent of the supremacy of the sovereignty and the internal and external dimensions of sovereignty.²³²

I suggest the usage of the term ritual sovereignty in addition to political sovereignty for the research area because rituals take on supreme power and can possess coercive control as well as legal authority, accounting for the convergence of rituals and political systems.²³³ Ritual and political sovereignties act dialectically and complementarily in reifying and reinforcing the other. In his study of Ayede, a northeastern city-state among the Ekiti Yoruba in Nigeria, Andrew Apter notes that rituals were used in strategizing political governance and domination. In Ayede, whose demographic constituents derived from both local and various immigrant groups, the Orisa cults of these groups imposed political influence upon Ayede's kingship governance.²³⁴ Similarly, the work by British anthropologist Edmund Leach on highland Burma (Myanmar) indicates the nature

²³¹ Michal Tymowski, *The Origins and Structures of Political Institutions in Pre-Colonial Black Africa: Dynastic Monarchy, Taxes and Tributes, War and Slavery, Kinship and Territory* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 6.

²³² Philpott, Dan, "Sovereignty", in Edward N. Zalta, ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2010 Edition), URL <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/sovereignty/>

²³³ Stein, "The Segmentary State",

²³⁴ Andrew Apter, *Black Critics and Kings: The Hermeneutics of Power in Yoruba Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 35-69.

of the interaction of politics and rituals in framing dialectical sovereignties through the interweaving of rituals and political idioms and control.²³⁵

In examining the framework through which ritual and political sovereignties are both displayed and acted out, we are mindful that “ritual action and beliefs are alike to be understood as forms of symbolic statement about the social order.”²³⁶ Ritual also “makes explicit the social structure”, for “ritual in its cultural context is a pattern of symbols” that evoke the structure and particulars of social relations.²³⁷ As Clifford Geertz asserts, ritual is “not just a pattern of meaning, it is also a form of social interaction.”²³⁸ These varying relations within a culture often transcend particular societies and boundaries, as individuals engage in commerce, intermarriage and religious and ritual activities, and as they interlink and forge expansive social relationships outside of their own territorial purviews or immediate political unit.²³⁹

Sandra T. Barnes paints a vivid picture of how women traders from the Yoruba and other hinterland communities helped to forge cogent commercial relationships in Lagos. Through their trading activities, intermarriages and

²³⁵ Edmund Ronald Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

²³⁶ Leach, *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²³⁷ Leach, *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²³⁸ Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 168.

²³⁹ For a good study of the concept of ritual as well as the relationship between ritual and power see Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992;) For a history of the field of ritual studies and the development of ritual as concept see Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

introduction of their ritual modalities, especially by incorporating and organizing worshippers in Lagos around their specific homeland *Orisa* cults, the women forged new and influential statuses and enhanced their power in Lagos. By cultivating these new identities, many transcended and transformed their outsider status and gained integration and respect within Lagos society. Through such means, the social networks of different migrants, not native to Lagos, saliently fostered and incorporated their rituals into the Lagos cultural milieu. By aligning their cultural identities, especially through their new wealth, power, knowledge—and also in the *Orisha* shrines—they brought and organized followers, gained and elaborated their social networks, and helped their achievement of integration as members of the Lagos political community.²⁴⁰

Similar occurrences of the integration of migrant communities—along with their belief systems into existing ritual observance and their political impact on governance—can be attested in the histories of the Igala, Northern Yoruba and Nupoid-speaking peoples, who are the focus of this study. Over the course of the centuries leading up to 1900 CE, the ancestral speech communities of the Igala, Northern Yoruba and Nupoid groups established polities, which were shaped both locally and by the continuous encounters with other groups in the Niger-Benue confluence. To easier follow the pathways of change and to account for attestable transformations in these communities, I propose three religio-political complexes as units of analysis, each of which is tied to the linguistic historical framework of

²⁴⁰ Sandra T. Barnes, “Ritual, Power, and Outside Knowledge”, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 20:3 (1990), pp. 248-268.

the speech communities under consideration: the Nupe- and Nupoid-speaking religio-political complex, the Igala-Igbo religio-political complex and the northern Yoruba religio-political complex. Each of these forms one of the pillars of this wider regional identity. Along with the broad historical developments in the region, I consider important institutions within these religio-political complexes, their significance within the emerging political entities, and their trans-local and regional encounters.

4.2 Unfolding the Historical Palimpsest

The central Sudan formed what Hunwick has called a geopolitical and economic union from the western reaches of the Middle Niger to the Lake Chad region.²⁴¹ A similar conceptualization applies to the long-term histories of the polities in the Niger-Benue confluence, which had established trading connections with the emerging trading networks along the Niger River towards the Senegambia and western Middle Niger regions (today's Mali). The Niger-Benue confluence peoples also founded trading relations with the Trans-Saharan trade networks towards north and northwest Africa, as well as with networks directed along the Benue towards central, north and north-eastern Africa, and also

²⁴¹ John O. Hunwick, "Songhay, Borno and the Hausa States, 1450 -1600", in *History of West Africa*, edited by J.F.A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder (New York: Longman 1985), 323.

southward into the rainforest areas of what is today southern and southeastern Nigeria.²⁴²

The time period up to ca. 1600 CE, with which this chapter is concerned, appears to have been an era of relative prosperity, stable political centers, economic growth, and imperial expansion. A climatological wet phase supported agricultural growth. Drought and famine had a limited effect on this era, unlike for the subsequent period starting in the seventeenth century. Additionally, as Sargent argues, the widespread pax Songhay (1490-1591) encouraged the trans-Saharan trade to reach heights never before achieved.²⁴³ The expanding commercial activities during this epoch in West Africa encouraged a new growth of the merchant class and a widening geographical scope for their enterprises. Already well-established farther west in Wagadu and Mali in the tenth to thirteenth centuries, and to the north of the Niger-Benue confluence in Hausaland, the long-distance trading activities of these merchants soon reached the confluence region and grew in significance during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.²⁴⁴

These merchants were typically Muslim in religion and frequently acted as the introducers of Islam into the regions where their activities penetrated. The

²⁴² Timothy Insoll, *Islam, Archaeology and History: Gao Region (Mali) Ca. AD 900-1250* (B.A.R International Series; Oxford: Tempus Reparatum, 1996), 668; Timothy Insoll and Thurstan Shaw, "Gao and Igbo-Ukwu: Beads, Inter-Regional Trade and Beyond" *African Archaeological Review* 14 (1997), 9-23.

²⁴³ Sargent, *Economics, Politics, and Social Change in the Benue Basin*.

²⁴⁴ Paul E. Lovejoy, "The Role of the Wangara in the Economic Transformation of the Central Sudan in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries", *The Journal of African History* 19, no. 2 (1978), 173-93.

subsequent appearance of European traders on the coast of West Africa, from the late fifteenth century onward, added new economic orientations and turned the hinterland of the Atlantic Coast into an even more complex contact-zone of long-distance trade than it had been before, by opening new markets and adding new kinds of market demands to the existing ones. A by-product of the early Islamic conversions was the production of chronicles and kings lists in Arabic and a few texts written in Ajami, that is to say, texts in indigenous languages using Arabic script. However, in the regions south of the Niger-Benue confluence, such as in the Yoruba region, Islam spread but did not lead to the conversion of ruling elites. This fostered a literacy divide between the more Islamized areas of the Sahel and the Sahel-savanna-rainforest transition zone.²⁴⁵

Robin Law has labeled the latter areas “the belt of ignorance”, by which he meant a zone about which outsiders tended to be ignorant due to the area’s geographical positioning between two historically much better-known zones—between the pre-seventeenth century empires and states of the Sahel, such as Mali, Songhay, Kanem-Bornu and the Hausa city-states, and the coastal regions of the Bights of Benin and Biafra, including such states as the Benin Empire. Consequently, the regions of the Nigerian hinterland—namely the eastern Middle Niger region and the Niger-Benue confluence region—remained mostly unknown to non-Africans until the middle of the nineteenth century.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵ Obayemi, *The Yoruba and Edo-speaking Peoples*, 258.

²⁴⁶ Robin Law, “The Northern Factor in Yoruba History”, in Ekemode Akinjogbin, ed., *Proceedings of the Conference on Yoruba Civilization* (Awolowo Obafemi University of Ile-Ife, Ile-Ife 1976), 103-132.

Despite the absence of written sources, and the scarce presence of archaeological data, the imperial expansion of several political power players in the Niger-Benue confluence left strong imprints in oral traditions, mythology, material culture and religio-political institutions, creating a layered palimpsest of historical memories expressed in oral recitations, in ritual performance and in the congealed temporalities of ritual representations and ritual objects. Debates on the early history revolve not only around the interpretations of these different historical layers and, to a lesser extent, around the deciphering of ritual meaning, but also around the overt oral claims and the more opaque ritual allusions to the expansionist endeavors of major political hegemonies and their effects on the socio-political fabric of the region. These debates are also often coupled to the questions of origin and spread of major religio-political institutions and their material and cognitive expressions.

Archaeological and historical linguistic evidence, in conjunction with oral tradition and ethnographic sources, shed light on what was taking place in this region at the frontiers of literate, written-documented societies. Due to the usual absence of tie-ins with absolute dated events, and with the sometimes insufficiently critical use of oral traditions and local histories written down during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, information about the region for the time period before the sixteenth century has consisted more of tantalizing hints than detailed knowledge, in particular with regard to the internal regional history and interaction.

Two major regionally spread oral traditions reflect upon state formations in the region. One of them is the Bayajidda tradition, which pertains specifically to Hausaland but makes claims for histories in the non-Hausa-speaking neighboring regions of the Niger-Benue confluence as well. The second tradition consists of orally expressed claims by the Idoma, Epira and Igala as having belonged to an Akpa/Apa (Kwararafa-Jukun) state, which dissolved in the eighteenth century.²⁴⁷

The Bayajidda myth establishes claims with specific regard to the origin of the Hausa states and the links between the Hausa states and the neighboring non-Hausa states. The myth derives from the royal palace traditions in the city state of Daura and underscores Daura's early preeminence among the Hausa states. In addition, this myth alludes to the founding hero of the Hausa-states as hailing from the east or, in some versions, the Middle East.

The Bayajidda myth tells the story of the foundation of the Seven Hausa (*Hausa bakwai*) and Seven "illegitimate" (*banza bakwai*) states in the central Sudan.²⁴⁸ It goes that the son of the king of Baghdad arrives in Daura via Bornu where he has married a local princess. Tensions with her father, the king of Bornu, force him to flee leaving his wife behind, who delivers him a son. Having arrived in Daura, he kills the snake that occupied the well and impeded the townspeople's access to the water. As a reward, Magajiya, the queen of Daura,

²⁴⁷ Obayemi, *The Yoruba and Edo-speaking Peoples*, 262.

²⁴⁸ According to the tradition the seven Hausa states are Daura, Katsina, Kano, Zaria, Gobir, Biram and Rano. The seven bastard states are Zamfara, Kebbo, Nupe, Gwari, Yauri, Yoruba and Kwarrafa (Jukun).

had promised half of the kingdom to whoever would kill the snake. Instead, Bayajidda requests that she marry him. Because of her age, she gives Bayajidda a slave-maid, Bagwariya, as a concubine. With Bagwariya, Bayajidda has a son. The slave-maid's son grows up to father seven sons, who then become the founders of the Seven Banza, or the "illegitimate" states.²⁴⁹ Soon after that the queen becomes jealous and decides to have children herself with Bayajidda. Together they also have a son. Their son Bawo is the progenitor of six sons, thereby founding six of the seven Hausa Bakwai or "legitimate" Hausa states—Daura, Katsina, Zazzau (Zaria), Gobir, Kano, and Rano. Bayajidda's son by his first wife, Magira (a Kanuri woman), founds Biram, the seventh state.

Historian Dierk Lange points out that during the annual Gani Festival, Daura's preeminence, as expressed in this oral tradition, is commemorated by and legitimized through a ritual re-enactment of the founding story of Daura. The Gani festival, he argues, previously was a New Year festival but is now equated with the Islamic *mawlud al-nabi*, the non-canonical feast celebrating the birthday of the prophet Mohammad. Lange states that the festival commemorates key episodes of the legend:

In view of the Bayajidda legend's re-enactment as a cultic drama the main office holders of the Daura city-state assume the roles of their legendary ancestors. Thus, Bayajidda is played by the king, Magajiya by the official queen mother bearing the name of her ancestral patroness as her title, Bagwariya by the second most important female title holder, Iya [the representative of the Azna, the non-Islamic Hausa and original inhabitants of Hausaland, CW], her title and Karbagari by Magagin Bayamadi, the

²⁴⁹ H. R. Palmer, *Sudanese Memoirs: Being Mainly Translations of a Number of Arabic Manuscripts Relating to the Central and Western Sudan* (London: Cass, 1928 (Reprint 1967), Volume III, 132-4; Lange, *Ancient Kingdoms*, 289-295.

senior official magician and the main title of the Maguzawa or Azna [the non-islamic Hausa] of Daura. First and foremost such close correspondence between the legend and the most important office holders of Daura guarantees the faithful transmission of the main features of the legend for a *longue durée*.²⁵⁰

According to Lange, it seems likely that, in former times, the Hausa kings, in addition to the king of Daura, all attended the celebration, visited the Magajiya during the major festival procession and were present at the ritual of deification, which was performed during the cultic enactment. The kings from the seven "illegitimate" Hausa states were present as well but greeted the Inna/Iya as representative/embodiment of the Bagwariya, the slave maid. Lange infers that the Bayajidda myth and its cult dramatic enactment depict the historical situation of an indigenous settler group represented by the Azna/Maguzawa and of an immigrant group represented by the royal institution of Daura.²⁵¹

The claims presented in the Bayajidda myth, such as the claims of immigration from the east, have sometimes also been implicated in situating the provenance of Nupe and Yoruba groups within their oral traditions.²⁵² The myth seems to further point to a time period during which hegemonic relationships between the Hausa states and their neighbors existed.

In addition, the Bayajidda myth displays a trope that we meet again and again in origin traditions among the peoples of the Niger-Benue confluence as

²⁵⁰ Dierk Lange, "The Bayajidda Legend and Hausa History", in Edith Pruder and Tudor Parfitt, eds., *African Zion and Studies in Black Judaism* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2012), 146 ff.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 149-150.

²⁵² Ibid.

well. The myth illustrates the ritual opposition between ritual specialists associated with the ruling elite and custodians of the land. This opposition is depicted as the relationship between first comers and latecomers, which is to say, between the custodians of the land and the immigrant groups that rose to political hegemony.²⁵³ In Hausaland the Azna are often referred to as embodying the non-Islamic ritual authority as the custodians of the land, while the members of the royal clans are labeled as an immigrant group. In some cases, groups from within the same group could also be represented as immigrants in the oral tradition.

The other trans-regional tradition of origin that one encounters in the confluence is the Apa/Jukun tradition. Some Ebira and Idoma groups trace their origin back to Wukari, the last capital of the Wapan or Jukun Kingship of Uka. The Igala of Idah similarly claim that their current ruling dynasty is of Jukun origin. These associations with the Jukun state and its powerful political structures may reflect a desire of groups in the region to construct a connection to powerful states during the medieval period. In their myths, the Igala, especially its present ruling class, as well as the Idoma and the Ebira, claim out-migration from the Jukun state. The Idoma and Ebira claim to have settled in Idah before each of these groups moved out of Idah due to certain crises.²⁵⁴

²⁵³ For a good discussion on the relationship between first comers and late comers see Carola Lentz, "First-Comers and Late-Comers: The Role of Narratives in Land Claims", in *Competing Jurisdictions: Settling Land Claims in Africa* *Competing Jurisdictions: Settling Land Claims in Africa*, edited by Sandra Evers, Marja Spierenburg and Harry Wels (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 157-80; Lentz, *Land, Mobility, and Belonging in West Africa* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press), 2013.

²⁵⁴ Erim, *Idoma Nationality*; Husaini, Alhaji Isa Husaini, *The History and Culture of the Egbira (Ebira)* (Lokoja: Olowu Printers & Stationers, 1986); Constanze Weise,

These myths, coupled with the Nupe myth of Tsoede, or Edegi, which links the Nupe Edegi dynasty to the ruling house of Idah,²⁵⁵ suggest that the Igala Kingdom of Idah could have been a regional successor regime to the declining and crises-laden Jukun Kingdom in Wukari. A declining state may have precipitated the migration of the Jukun that ended up in Idah. These Jukun migrants could have constituted a group that found and controlled the trade routes through the Benue River, interlinking with the Niger River in fostering trading relations with traders from the lower Niger and even the Niger Delta regions, where they were engaged in a thriving salt trade.²⁵⁶ Sargent suggests that the histories of certain merchant colonies in the vicinity of Idah show them to have originated as Jukun merchants.²⁵⁷

The whole collection of oral and ritual memories implies that Idah served as a strategic entrepot for various groups that utilized different trade routes running through the Igala territory farther south. It is possible that thriving Jukun merchants rebelled against the authorities of the Wukari Jukun hegemony by severing relationships and founding a new dynasty along the Benue, then eventually reaching Idah, where they aligned with other migrant groups to wrest control from the autochthonous ruling clans of the flourishing riverine trading

Fieldnotes, Ebiraland, Nigeria, September 2010. Conducted Interviews: EB-ETH-ET-M-1-5/24/2009; EB-ETH-ET-M-2-5/24/2009; EB-ETH-ET-M-3-5/24/2009

²⁵⁵ Nadel, *A Black Byzantium*; Ade Obayemi, "States and Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence Area", in Obaro Ikime, ed., *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan: Heinemann Education Books, 1980), 144-186.

²⁵⁶ E.J. Alagoa, "Peoples of the Cross River Valley and the Eastern Niger Delta", in Obaro Ikime, ed., *Groundwork of Nigerian*, 59; Clifford, "A Nigerian Chiefdom".

²⁵⁷ Sargent, *Economics, Politics and Social Change in the Benue Basin*.

activities on the Niger River, creating a strategic corridor by controlling and navigating upstream to the confluence area and beyond into Nupeland and then downstream into the lower Niger territories.²⁵⁸

Other interpretations include the possibility that the Jukun-Kwararafa confederacy extended up to the Niger River, encompassing the Idoma and Igala kingdom and the Ebira east of the Niger River. We can perhaps draw a comparison to the Roman Empire's relations with client rulers outside the direct areas of Roman rule. In that kind of historical context, the Jukun-Kwararafa state might have ritually confirmed client rulers in office, who, after the downfall of the Jukun confederacy, remained in dynastic positions, creating a memory among the Idoma, Igala and Ebira along the Benue River and east of the Niger River that the ruling lines themselves, and not just their claims to sovereignty, originated "from Wukari."

The British anthropologist Meek, who worked for the British colonial state in the 1920's, wrote possibly the most extensive ethnographic account of the Jukun. In Nigerian historiography the Jukun are identified as the descendants of the Kwararafa Empire, which exercised military supremacy towards the northern neighboring states of Kanem-Borno and the Hausa states in the seventeenth century.²⁵⁹ Kwararafa is the name that the Hausa, Nupe and Fulbe apply to the

²⁵⁸ Ibid. 197-201.

²⁵⁹ C. K. Meek, *A Sudanese Kingdom: An Ethnographical Study of the Jukun-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1931).

Jukun.²⁶⁰ References in the Kano Chronicle²⁶¹ place a major era of Kwararafa expansions in the seventeenth century, when Kwararafa armies invaded the Hausa states several times and, in the 1670s, launched a major campaign against Kanem-Bornu.²⁶² The geographical location of Kwararafa is shown in the map by d’Anville²⁶³ in 1749 as situated south of Bornu and Zamfara.²⁶⁴ A Franciscan manuscript from 1705,²⁶⁵ and also Mohammad Bello in his *Infaq al-Maysur* in 1813, both mention the attacks on Kanem-Bornu by the Kwararafa.²⁶⁶ These sources, together with the oral claims by several groups in the Niger-Benue confluence of having been part of the Jukun Empire in the past, are the principle

²⁶⁰ Renate Wente-Lukas and Adam Jones, *Handbook of Ethnic Units in Nigeria* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1985), 197-200.

²⁶¹ On chronology, authorship and content of the Kano Chronicle see John O. Hunwick, “A Historical Whodunit: The So-Called Kano Chronicle and its Place in the Historiography of Kano”, *History in Africa* 21 (1994), 127-146; M. G. Smith, “The Kano Chronicle as History”, in Bawuro M. Barkindo, ed., *Studies in the History of Kano* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria), 1983), 31-56; Murray Last, “Historical Metaphors in the Kano Chronicle”, *History in Africa* 7 (1980): 161-178.

²⁶² H.R. Palmer, H. R. *Sudanese Memoirs: Being Mainly Translations of a Number of Arabic Manuscripts Relating to the Central and Western Sudan* (London: Cass, 1928. Reprint, 1967).

²⁶³ Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon’ d’Anville (1697-1782) was an important French geographer and cartographer who became the first geographer of the king of France in 1773. Juliette Taton, s.v., “d’Anville, Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon”, *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), 175-176.

²⁶⁴ Roy Clive Abraham, *The Tiv People* (Lagos: Government Printer: 1933), 18; J. M. Freemantle, *Gazetteer of Muri Province [up to December 1919]* (S.I.: s.n., 1980), 33; F. H. Ruxton, “Notes on the Tribes of the Muri Province”, *Journal of the Royal African Society* 7, no. 28 (1908), 378.

²⁶⁵ Richard Gray, “Christian Traces and a Franciscan Mission in the Central Sudan, 1700-1711”, *The Journal of African History* 8, no. 3 (1967), 384.

²⁶⁶ Muhammad Bello and Arnett E. J, *The Rise of the Sokoto Fulan: Being a Paraphrase and in some parts a Translation of the Infaku'l Maisuri of Sultan Mohammed Bello* [Translated from the Arabic with the help of a Hausa version.] (Kano: Kano Emirate Printing Dept. 1922); Muhammad Bello, *The Infaq Al-Maysur of Sultan Muhammad Bello written 1227 A.H./1812/3 A.D* (Legon: Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, 1964).

references to the otherwise obscure, but once quite powerful, Kwararafa/Jukun Empire.

The idea of a Kwararafa confederacy prevails in current historiography, but this idea cannot be substantiated.²⁶⁷ It may be better to understand it as a multi-ethnic state. It remains unclear what the extent of Kwararafa may have been and how it was organized. From Meek's evidence it would seem that Kwararafa had a strong ritual kingship with centralized authority.²⁶⁸ Its last capital city, Wukari, was a major site, very much deserving of future archaeological investigations.²⁶⁹ Certain Igala, Idoma and Ebira elements claim to once have been part of the Kwararafa/Jukun Empire, and the Igala, as already noted, declare that the current ruling dynasty is a Jukun dynasty. What this entails exactly remains unclear, but there are indications in the material culture of the kingship institution, which link the Igala kingship to the Jukun.

For example, one of the royal masks, the so-called Helmet mask (Epe) is specifically claimed to have originated from the Jukun Empire. The Attah of Idah owns this mask. Boston argues that the full presentation of the mask originally included the *uloko* feather from the scarlet lovebird, which would be attached at the forehead, and an Abreus seed head covering. According to Boston, the *uloko*

²⁶⁷ Peter Rusch, *Die Identität Von 'Kwararafa' und 'Jukun': Zur Quellenproblematik und zur Geschichte des Westafrikanischen Staates Kwararafa und seiner Erben, den Jukun*, ms. MA thesis, University of Bayreuth, Germany, 1995, 113-115.

²⁶⁸ Meek, *Sudanese Kingdom*, 332-354.

²⁶⁹ J. de Ploey, "Note Préliminaire sur la stratigraphie du site protohistorique de Kororofa (Nigeria)", *Africa Tervuren* XVIII, no. 3/4 (1972), 120-122; J. de Meulemeester and J. Nenquin, "Voorlopig Bericht over Twee Seizoenen Protohistorisch Onderzoek in Het Gebied Van De Midden-Benue (Nigeria)", *Africa Tervuren* XVIII, (1972), 123-132.

feather worn by warriors throughout the Lower and Middle Benue ties in with a possible Kororofa origin. The feather of the same bird among the Ebira is called *aja*. My field research revealed that red feathers are used as head attire by leading figures of religio-political importance in both groups. I would argue that they indeed have a religio-political connotation.²⁷⁰

Other sets of oral traditions are sub-regional in character. For example, the Igala emphasize political connection to—and descent from—the Benin Empire. Additional traditions link the Igala political structure with the Yoruba. The picture gets further complicated by some traditions within Yorubaland, which emphasize the preeminence of Ile-Ife, from which many Yoruba states claim descent, but also depict kinship relationships established through intermarriage with the Nupe and Benin empires and symbolized through bonds between mythical ancestors and gods. The Nupe, on the other hand, claim a dynastic relationship with the Igala kingdom through the Tsoede tradition of origin.

This layering of historical memories—as it is represented particularly in oral traditions, material culture and rituals—has been addressed by several researchers, including Adiele Afigbo, Erim O. Erin, Robert Sargent, Ade Obayemi. Andrew Apter and Joseph Ukwedeh, among others, who have dealt with the regional history of the Niger-Benue confluence.²⁷¹ It is possible to infer

²⁷⁰ Kenneth C. Murray, “Idah Masks”, *Nigerian Field*. 14, (1947), 85-92; J.S. Boston, “Igala Masquerades and Figure Sculpture”, in *Central Nigeria Unmasked: Arts of the Benue River Valley*, 166 figure 5.2.

²⁷¹ A. E. Afigbo, “Oral Tradition and History in Eastern Nigeria: An Essay in Historical Methodology”, *African Notes*, 3 (1966), 12-20; Afigbo, “The Anthropology and Historiography of Central-South Nigeria before and since Igbo-Ukwu”, *History in Africa*

something of the developments' sequences that these traditions recount, but major questions of chronology remain unsolved and can probably only begin to be resolved once extended archaeological and historical linguistic research has been conducted among Yoruba, Igala, Nupoid and Edo-speaking peoples. A systematic analysis of terms for political and religious titles and institutions, for instance, is likely to shed light on the direction where the different elements of the regionally shared heritage have moved.

Furthermore, while the Bayajidda myth, as well as other traditions in the Niger-Benue confluence region, emphasize the role of women in shaping the

23 (1996), 1-15; Afigbo, "Southeastern Nigeria, the Niger-Benue Confluence, and the Benue in the Precolonial Period: Some Issues of Historiography", *History in Africa* 24, (1997), 1-8; Obayemi, "States and Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence Area", 144-165; Obayemi, "The Yoruba and Edo-Speaking Peoples and Their Neighbors before 1600", 255-322; Obayemi, "The Evolution of the Culture and Institutions of the Northern Yoruba, the Nupe and the Igala before A.D. 1800", *Image: Quarterly Journal of the Kwara State Council for Arts and Culture*, 1 (1974), 5-9; Andrew Apter, "The Historiography of Yoruba Myths and Rituals", *History in Africa* 14 (1987), 1-22; Andrew Apter, *Black Critics and Kings*, 5-70; Erim, *Idoma Nationality*; Sargent, *Economics, Politics, and Social Change in the Benue Basin*; Ukwedeh, *History of the Igala Kingdom*.

contours of royal and political fortunes, it still remains unclear how their roles functioned within the religio-political realm of the polities of the Niger-Benue confluence. For example, the Igala political structures present a vibrant illustration of male authority. While this is for the most part accurate, it is not the entire story. Igala females have played significant roles in shaping the contours of Igala royal and political fortunes. According to traditional legends, the Igala reckon their very first Igala Attah of the Jukun dynasty to be a female named Ebulejonu. Traditions avow that Ebulejonu led Abutu Eje, the first major leader of the Apa outmigration into the Benue area, into the present site of Idah, which was already settled by some nine autochthonous clans, known as the Igalamela. Ebulejonu, is remembered as dying unfortunately childless, leading to the succession and transfer of political sovereignty to her brother, Agenapoje.²⁷²

Even in the midst of what has been perceived as a male dominated system by many scholars, Igala women have featured prominently in the legends and historical literature in their active agencies as cultural mediators and political brokers. The journals of the 1832-34, 1841, and 1854-57 Niger expeditions reference an Igala royal woman of great influence and as gatekeeper to the Attah.

Laird and Oldfield referred to her as Amagdohby, and wrongfully as the Attah's

²⁷² Miles Clifford, "A Nigerian Chiefdom: Some Notes on the Igala Tribe in Nigeria and their "Divine King", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, LXVI, 1936, 395-397; Boston. *The Igala Kingdom*, 11, 16-17; Erim, *Idoma Nationality*, 64-67; Okwoli, *A Short History of the Igala Kingdom*, 177-178; Agenapoje is also referenced as a sky-god. See Clifford, "A Nigerian Chiefdom", 385. The depiction of Agenapoje as either the father or the brother of Ebulejonu, Ebele, or Ebeljawno (these are variants of the name of the same first Igala Attah) is problematic, given that little is known about Agenapoje and also whether this is a common name of more than one person. Boston discusses the tradition tracing Agenapoje as Ebulejonu's father, in Boston, "Notes on the Origin of Igala Kingship", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 2 (3), 1962, 373.

head wife. Subsequent expeditions referred to her as Amada Bue (probably Omada Abuh), as the gatekeeper to the commissioners and expeditors at various times during the several visits to Idah to gain access to the Attah. This woman was highly rated as influential in the various journals of the expeditioners. She was referred to as a sister to the Attah, thus a scion of the royal dynasty.²⁷³

Within the Igala political and royal arenas certain women distinguished themselves as overtly influential. This was the case of Princess Okwina Amocheje, daughter of the Attah Ameh Ocheje, who was alleged to have wielded enormous influence regarding the succession to the Attah throne in 1900, and again in 1903, when out of the qualified royal contenders, she ensured the emergence of Attah Oboni through her maneuverings. According to the Igala writer, Yusuf Etuh, “Her looming figure, as widely believed, could make or unmake an Ata.”²⁷⁴

Outside Idah, in Ogugu for instance, Omoka, a royal princess and “sister” (presumably a distant cousin) to the founder of Ogugu, Okwatobida (probably Okwa Attah Abo Idah—Okwa Attah of Idah aborigine), was also referenced as very powerful. And in Unyi-Ogugu (Ere-Ogwu), her prominence indicates the reason that a shrine is dedicated to her honor and memory, and ancestral sacrifices

²⁷³ Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa*, Volume 2, 187-191; Allen and Thomson, *A Narrative of the Expedition sent by Her Majesty's Governor*, 283-285, 290-292; Schön and Crowther, *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick* 78-82; Samuel Crowther and John Christopher Taylor, *The Gospel on the Bank of the Niger: Journals and Notices of the Native Missionaries accompanying the Niger Expedition of 1857-1859* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010 (1859)), 44-47, 49.

²⁷⁴ Yusuf Etuh, *Ameh Oboni (1946-1956)* (Lagos: Macmillan Nigeria, 1993), 2.

and veneration are held at this shrine.²⁷⁵ While, it is not historically verifiable, certain records and legends link Queen Amina to the Igala Kingdom of Idah, and even assume that the legendary Igala warrior, Onoja Oboni, was her biological child.²⁷⁶

Likewise, there are many examples of other influential women, most of royal descent in Igala history. Inikpi, referred to as the daughter of Attah Ayegba Idoko, is related within the legend to have sacrificed her life—buried alive with nine slaves, with the intention of saving her father’s kingdom from war defeat against the forces of the Benin Kingdom, which were at war with Idah. According to the legend, a fortune-teller or medicine man, had informed the Attah that the antidote against defeat was to sacrifice her beloved daughter, Inikpi. While the Attah was alleged to be adamant, Inikpi got wind of this situation and voluntarily offered to be sacrificed in defense of her father’s kingdom. A statue of Inikpi, probably a modern edifice, is a monument to her iconic sacrifice and bold courage, located at her shrine in the Idah Market, close to the Niger River. The Inikpi shrine represents a major royal holy place in Idah, where the Attah offers sacrifices annually during the anniversary ceremonies of his installation to the throne.

Similar to the Inikpi legend is a story referencing the courage of Oma Odoko, another female who was sacrificed and buried alive during the Idah-Jukun

²⁷⁵ Okwoli, *A Short History of Igala*, 187-188. Also Oral tradition related to and collected can be found in Anthony Attah Agbali, Fieldnotes, Unyi-Ogugu Ere Ogu July 1988. I am grateful to Anthony Agbali for sharing these notes with me.

²⁷⁶ Anonymous, “The Rise and Fall of the Igala Kingdom”, *Nigeria Magazine*, no. 80, 1964, 17.

war of Igala independence, around the Inachalo stream, which was a major battle site during this war. It is interesting that in the legend there is certain confusion between the Inikpi and Oma Odoko's story in terms of their details, with even interchanging the facts of the specific wars for which each was allegedly sacrificed. For instance, while certain legends correlate Inikpi with the Benin war, others connect her story with the Jukun war.²⁷⁷ However, if shrine locations and assumed burial sites are any indication, the Inikpi shrine around the Niger Benue points more in the direction of Benin and Agenbode, its closest Edo town across the river. Oma Odoko is buried and her shrine is located near a major site linked with the Idah-Jukun civil war.

Critically, the Inikpi and Oma Odoko legends privilege a gender bias regarding those buried to safeguard the fortunes of the Igala kingdom. While, it can be argued that such phenomena endorse a cultural abuse of and domination over women, within the Igala legends, these heroic acts raise these two royal women to the distinctive status of national heroines, whose stories still richly resonate in rituals, songs, stories, and other communicative and commemorative genres. With their heroine statuses, these women have earned a distinctive place within Igala cultural and historical memory that has transcended even the significance accorded to many important male actors within the broader purview of Igala nationalism.

There are other instances of Igala women who have risen to political prominence within the historical consciousness. In Egume, a female, Adebu, a

²⁷⁷ Okwoli, *A Short History of Igala*, 183.

contemporary and acquaintance of Queen Ebulejonu, is said to have strongly supported Ebulejonu in assuming and solidifying her leadership of the Jukun immigrants to Igalaland. As a reward, Ebulejonu reciprocated this favor by making her the first Onu of Egume. Thus, symbolically and actually, Adebu and the successive Onu of Egume do not prostrate while greeting the Attah, but only raise their hands. The Onu of Egume is also reckoned as the most important district governor of the Attah.²⁷⁸

In Itobe, in the twentieth century, an impressive female leader and businesswoman, a member of the royal clan of the Ocholi ruling lineage, Ochonia Apeh, ruled as the Onu of Itobe until her old age.²⁷⁹ Not only was Ochonia Apeh a distinguished royal and prosperous business woman, she was also associated with a colonial imposed chief of Dekina, Ahmadu, a Yoruba or Hausa man, whose arrogance led him to attempt claiming equality, and even superiority to the Attah in Idah, using royal paraphernalia of Igala royals.

This was considered both as an audacious affront and insult against the Igala traditional royalty, headed by the Attah. This situation led to the Igala rallying against Amodu and his forces, thus inciting the 1916 Mahionu war; a resistance war masterminded by the priest of the Mahionu shrine in Abocho. Ahmadu was routed. Ochonia rode at the head of the cavalry, dressed as a man and, when they were ambushed, declared her Igala identity and was spared, though her horse was killed. These circumstances, and other sporadic later acts of

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 201.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 197.

Igala anti-colonial resistance, lead to the colonial authorities' eventual decision to reunify Igalaland, which since 1900 had been divided into two spheres of colonial governing jurisdictions.²⁸⁰

In a larger cultural historical context, the Igala also in different kinship and ritual spheres, both at the royal and non-royal levels, give significant roles to the uterine members of their lineage. This entails that, though females are married out, their agnatic positions within the clan remain secure, affirming their membership and clan identity. Their children, especially their male children, could actively participate in the performances of key kinship and ritual functions within the ancestral ritual space and action.

Further, the significance accorded to the uterine side is reinforced within the Igala practice enjoining, within the exogamous marital and virilocal set-up that characterizes most Igala kinship relations, the return upon the death of a female member to her aboriginal clan and homestead for burial. This has both critical significance for the children in terms of political alliances and ritual implications that entail the ongoing connectivity between children and mother. These relations sustain memorial connections both at the spiritual and temporal and spatial levels, through various acts of presence, ritual performances, and remembrances.²⁸¹

Overall, there endure more questions than answers with regard to the early history of the Niger-Benue confluence region, its polities with their religio-

²⁸⁰ Okwoli, *Ibid.*, 197; Yusuf Etuh and Tom Miachi, "The Mahionu War", *Elaeis: Journal of Igalaland*, 2(2),1980, 34-38.

²⁸¹ Email Conversation with Anthony Attah Agbali, November 29, 2013.

political institutions, and the character of these institutions themselves. It remains a future task to better assess their hierarchy, composition, gender and ethnic ascendancy. The bigger regional picture of the history of the Niger-Benue confluence was very much dominated in the mid-second millennium by the Benin Empire, and, along the Benue, by a perhaps somewhat-less direct impact of the Jukun Empire. What the relationship between the people of the Niger-Benue confluence region and the people of the Hausa states was like politically is not clear. In addition to trans-regional traditions, each religio-political complex, as will be shown, further attributes preeminence to certain sacred sites and realms of memory.

4.3 The Emergence of States at the Confluence

The question of when and how states formed in the region, including the neighboring region of the Hausa, has been disputed for a long time, and scholars have not yet reached a consensus. The scholarly discussion is complicated by the presence of oral traditions, which seem to reflect later imperial developments, to the extent of sometimes overshadowing the question of origin. The most prominent tradition, as discussed above, is the Bayajidda legend which involves not only the Hausa states denoted as the Hausa bakwai, or seven true Hausa states (Biram, Daura, Gobir, Kano, Katsina, Rano, and Zaria [Zazzau]), but also states of peoples that are depicted as the seven outlying satellites, or Banza Bakwai (Zamfara, Kebbi, Yauri, Gwari, Nupe, Kororofa [Jukun], and Yoruba), who frequently participated in intercultural exchange with their northern

neighbors. Islamization and the expansion of the Sokoto Caliphate at the beginning of the nineteenth century, which involved some of the Banza Bakwai, complicated the confusing claims established by oral traditions.

In the Hausa case, as well as in the Niger-Benue confluence region, linguistic analysis provides a different view of state formation as well as expansionist endeavors and can both clarify and illuminate the stories oral traditions tell. For example, with regard to the Hausa state formation, the Bayajidda legend claims that the Bayajidda came from the East (in some cases the Middle East), passed through Kanem-Bornu and then arrived in Daura.

While in some scholarly works the Bayajidda legend has been taken as reflection of the sequence and influences behind state formations among the Hausa, linguistic research on the Hausa language tells a different story.²⁸² Linguist Russell Schuh shows that the Hausa homeland most likely lay in what is now the western area of the Hausa-speaking zone—Sokoto, Dogon Dutse (Niger), etc. Typical of original areas, this is the dialectally most diverse and linguistically the most conservative Hausa area. The language seems to have spread eastward from there, replacing other languages over a period of several centuries. Schuh contends that the reason why Hausa has no existing close relatives, except for the

²⁸² Mahdi Adamu, “The Hausa and Their Neighbors in the Central Sudan”, In *Unesco General History of Africa* edited by D. T. Niane, volume 4 (London and Los Angeles: UNESCO 1984), 266-300; Dierk Lange, “The Evolution of the Hausa Story: From Bawo to Bayajidda”, *Afrika und Ubersee: Sprachen, Kulturen Afrika und Ubersee* 70, no. 2 (1987), 195-209; Lange, “Die Hausa-Traditionen in Ihrer Abhangigkeit Von Kanem-Borno und Nubien”, *Anthropos* 88, no. 1/3 (1993): 47-76; D. Lange, “Hausa States”, in D. Lange, ed., *Ancient Kingdoms of West Africa: African-centered and Canaanite-Israelite perspectives: A collection of published and unpublished studies in English and French* (Dettelbach: Röhl, 2004), 155-305.

very closely related Gwandara dialect cluster spoken at the southwest edge of the Hausa speech areas, is that it displaced all the rest. Hausa is notable among African languages for the size of its speech territory and relative dialect uniformity, all of which points to a relatively recent spread, probably over the past thousand years at most.²⁸³

In the Niger-Benue confluence region, as the Nigerian historian Obayemi argued in 1983 and as I have shown in the previous chapter, population expansion and cultural differentiation likely started at the confluence itself. Claims in oral traditions that suggest the arrival of Nupe or Yoruba from the East very likely originally referred to the Niger-Benue confluence, rather than to Egypt or the Yemen. The late Nigerian historian Adiele Afigbo has come to a similar conclusion, as he considers the Niger-Benue confluence to be the sphere from which the Igbo likely derived from prior to moving southward into their present spatial domains in southeastern Nigeria.²⁸⁴ It is also important to point out that the rise of dynasties, as depicted in the oral traditions of the peoples of the Niger-Benue confluence, cannot always be equated with population movements, but rather, as I will show, reflect changing power dynamics, varying imperialist expansion schemes, and the forging of extensive social and economic networks and even complex systems and social structures. For example, based on the above-discussed oral traditions of the Ebira, Erim argued that the Ebira emigrated

²⁸³ Email conversation with Professor Russell Schuh, Department of Linguistics, UCLA, May 8, 2013.

²⁸⁴ A. E. Afigbo, "Precolonial Trade Links between Southeastern Nigeria and the Benue Valley", *Journal of African Studies* 4 (1977), 118-139.

from the Jukun/Kwararafa Empire and/or Igala kingdom. However, linguistic evidence, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, actually establishes the long-term settlement of Ebira speakers in their current place. Therefore, the claim made by oral traditions seems rather to reflect, as I will argue below, the later political impact of immigrant dynasties.²⁸⁵

Obayemi provides a model of interpretation for the formation of states in the confluence, which he breaks down into “mini-states” and “mega-states.” From this, he argues that the history of the region can be understood and contrasted within the dynamics of states with highly centralized political governments, large urban capitals, and centralized markets and those states that lack these characteristics but have been influenced by the former. He contends that mega-states evolved out of mini-states, and so they retained many features of the mini-states, such as kinship-based authority, age grade/age set organization and title associations that cut across lineage boundaries.²⁸⁶

Persistent representatives of mini-states exist in some areas of the Idoma, excluding the Alago kingdom of Doma and Keana; in some Edo-speaking regions, such as Akoko-Edo and Ishan; and in the regions along the Yoruba periphery, such as Owori, Ijumu, Abinu, Ikiri, Igbede, Yagba, and northeast

²⁸⁵ Erim, *Idoma Nationality*.

²⁸⁶ Obayemi, “The Yoruba and Edo-speaking peoples and their neighbors before 1600”, 265.

Akoko. Andrew Apter has also alluded to similar trends among the Ekiti, a Yoruba group in northeastern Yorubaland.²⁸⁷

Other states, which Obayemi calls mega-states, developed later, such as the empires of Benin Empire, Igala and Nupe. Representatives of mega-states include the Igala kingdom and the major Yoruba city-states.²⁸⁸ Obayemi shows that oral traditions contain strong indicators of the previous existence of pre-state societies all over the region. Some of the mini-states would have retained their autonomy and mini-state character but then later formed confederations to band together against larger neighboring polities. Such was the case, he argues, in the northeastern part of Yorubaland. In effect, Obayemi's mini-state formula covers both Yoruba city-states as well as a less urban territorial chiefdom. In some instances, such as among the Igala, he applies the term to even greater villages or village clusters, which would be autonomous within the bigger confederacies before, and sometimes even during, the existence of the Igala kingdom.

Among the polities in the Niger-Benue confluence region, it was, in particular, the Benin Empire to which traditions have attributed initial political and cultural supremacy at the beginning of the second millennium. This supremacy, Obayemi explains, has effectively obscured the identification of what, properly speaking, should have given us an insight into the steps forward towards the formation of the states or mini-states of the region. So spontaneous have been the narrations of the stories, which claim that founding ancestors came from

²⁸⁷ Andrew Apter, "Notes on the Orisha Cults of the Highland Ekiti: A Tribute to Pierre Verger", *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaine* 35 (138/9) (1995), 369-401.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 267.

Benin, that they have been accepted with little questioning, and eminent scholars have been led into taking them as fact or into using them as working hypotheses.²⁸⁹

It now appears that Benin, previously a small city-state, rose to political eminence in about the thirteenth century CE. It probably exercised certain political influences over the polities in the Niger-Benue confluence, and these influences led to the diffusion of cultural elements.²⁹⁰ What this political influence looked like and when it was exercised is a question of great dispute among scholars. In particular, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was a period of conquest and imperial expansion for the Benin Empire. At its height, the kingdom extended in the west to Lagos and beyond Whydah; in the northeast, to Ekiti and Owo; in the northwest, throughout most of the Ishan area; and in the east, up to the Niger River areas of the Igala kingdom.²⁹¹

In some regions, such as in the eastern Yoruba kingdom of Owo, recent research sheds light on this past relationship with Benin. Gabriele Weisser, who conducted extensive research in Owo, argues that the imperial domination of eastern Yorubaland by Benin was only periodically political but was, for the most part, economically motivated, because eastern and northeastern Yorubland constituted an important trade region and a transition point to the major trading

²⁸⁹ Obayemi, "The Yoruba and Edo-speaking Peoples", 300.

²⁹⁰ R. E. Bradbury, "Chronological Problems in the Study of Benin History", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 1 (1959): 263-287; Graham Connah, "Archaeology in Benin", *The Journal of African History* 13, no. 1 (1972), 32.

²⁹¹ R. E. Bradbury, *The Benin Kingdom and the Edo Speaking Peoples of South-Western Nigeria*, London: International African Institute, 1957, 21.

centers of the north.²⁹² Weisser contends that the dynastic relationships between Owo and Benin, as claimed in Owo oral traditions, were often interpreted as if they were traditions of descent from Benin, whereas in reality they depict a more recent period of political dominance that extended from the late fifteenth century into the seventeenth century.²⁹³

This period is commemorated as a time when the crown princes from Owo had to stay in seclusion at the Benin palace right before their installation as new king. Ancestral shrines in the palace courts would depict parallel structures and be given the same name. In fact, after the fifteenth century, the entire Owo court culture seems to have been influenced by Benin, while at the same time retaining the Owo palace organization and indigenous rituals. Weisser argues that the fifteenth century marked a period of decline for Owo, which may have been used by Benin to exercise imperial dominance. As a consequence of this imperial domination, certain elements of the Benin kingship system amalgamated with the Owo system, creating a new order.²⁹⁴

The admixture of the Benin kingship elements merging with the Owo system also finds an expression in the arts, especially in the style of the Jebba/Tada bronzes, which were found on the south banks of the Niger-River, and which oral traditions associate with the Nupe cultural hero Tsoede. Robert F.

²⁹² Gabriele Weisser, "Das Königtum Der Owo-Yoruba: Zwischen Geschichte Und Mythologie", (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovac, 2008) , 40; also Abiodun Adediran, "Pleasant Imperialism: Conjectures on Benin Hegemony in Ekiti Yoruba", *African Notes*, Ibadan, 15 (1-2), 1991, 87-92.

²⁹³ Weisser, *Das Königtum der Owo Yoruba*, 373.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

Thompson argues that some of the stylistic details, such as birds with coiled wings and the frontal face with serpents issuing from the nostrils, support connection to Benin art. In particular, the metal figure of the bowman, which was found at Jebba, near Tada, carries on its forehead a bird with coiled wings and has upward-bent legs. Art historians have come to the conclusion that this symbolizes the Benin king in a divine state.

These motifs, in particular the bird-over-the-frontal face, were important in the art of Yoruba regalia in the sixteenth century and may have entered the Yoruba art expression from Benin.²⁹⁵ Henry John Drewal has recently pointed out that the bird-over-the-frontal face has been identified as a bat and that similar images appear in the art of Benin, Ife, Ijebu-Yoruba, Owo and the Lower Niger region in ivory, bronze and terracotta. It has been suggested that bats are liminal, and because of their attributes, could have served as royal symbols, mediating between the cosmic realms.²⁹⁶ Given the expansionist endeavors of the Benin Empire into eastern Yorubaland, and the consequent convergence of Owo with Benin rituals and practices, one could surmise that these bronzes stylized a form, which these art historians have viewed as a transitional art form between Yoruba and Benin styles, and which certain art historians have specifically ascribed to

²⁹⁵ Robert F. Thompson, "The Sign of the Divine King: Yoruba Bead-Embroidered Crowns with Veil and Bord Motifs", in Douglas Fraser and Herbert M. Cole, eds., *African Art & Leadership* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972). 236.

²⁹⁶ Henry Drewal, "The Splendor of Ancient Ife: Art in an Early West African State", in Henry John Drewal and Enid Schildkrout, eds., *Dynasties and Divinity: Ife Art in Ancient Nigeria* (New York; Seattle, WA: Museum for African Art; Distributed by University of Washington Press, 2009), 70 -174.

Owo. This form may in fact represent the impact of Benin imperial domination upon Owo artistic impressions, which extended up to the Niger River.²⁹⁷

Support for the extension of the Benin Empire into eastern Yorubaland, and probably beyond, comes also from Magongo, a kingdom located near the Niger-Benue confluence within the vicinity to Owo. Here, oral traditions likewise claim political influence from Benin. The Ovia Osese festival, which celebrates the rites of passage for girls, is one of the most prominent festivals in both Owo and Magongo that can be traced back to Benin, where the river goddess Ovia is venerated and to whom dogs are sacrificed.²⁹⁸ In Magongo, and among the nearby Ebira in Okene, certain gods are associated with Benin or Yoruba influence as well. One of the major signifiers for these gods of Benin or Yoruba provenience is the sacrifice of dogs, which, according to my consultants, are associated with Benin and are not performed for “indigenous” gods. But these rites could also indicate, more indirectly, a relationship to Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron, whose preferred sacrifices also consist of dogs.²⁹⁹

How far the Benin influence extended eastward into the Igala region likewise has been a matter of contestation and interpretation. Oral accounts claim

²⁹⁷ Frank Willett, “Head, Yoruba, Ife; Mask Head, Yoruba, Ife; Figure of an Ooni, Yoruba; Seated Figure, Yoruba, Tada; Vessel, Yoruba; Throne, Yoruba; Throne Group, Yoruba; Stool, Yoruba; Head of a Queen, Yoruba; Woman Carrying Two Horns, Yoruba”, in Tom Phillips and R. Solomon, eds., *Africa, the Art of a Continent: 100 Works of Power and Beauty* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 1996), 404-411; Willett, “Seated Figure Yoruba, Tada, Nigeria, 13th-14th Century”, in Phillips and Solomon, *Africa: The Art of a Continent: 100 Works of Power and Beauty*, 124-125.

²⁹⁸ HRH Obin Anthony Olu Alao Iyelafe II, *A Brief History of Magongo*, Oloruntobi Press, Ilorin, Nigeria 2008; HRH Obin Anthony Olu Alao Iyelafe II, *Magongo Cultural Festivals*, 2010.

²⁹⁹ Personal Communication with Emma Ohinoy, Okene, Nigeria, June 23, 2009.

that the dynasty, which ruled before the current one, derived from Benin.³⁰⁰ Joseph Ukwedeh argues that these claims cannot be supported with evidence.³⁰¹ There is, however, a known war that took place between the Benin and the Igala in 1515-16.³⁰² The material culture associated with the Igala kingship system shows traces of Benin influence such as the royal pectoral brass mask, the Ejubej'ailo, which forms part of the Attah's regalia, and which is dated back to around the sixteenth century.³⁰³ Paula Ben Amos has shown that similar masks³⁰⁴ were sent to vassal rulers, while the Oba of Benin wore the ivory pendant at the waist.³⁰⁵ Other paraphernalia, such as a stool and an iron staff used in royal ancestor worship in Idah, but used for the god of medicine in Benin, are also associated with Benin's imperial domination. A former imperial domination of Benin over the Igala kingdom has been commemorated through gift exchanges between the two kingdoms, as Ukwedeh notes.³⁰⁶

In the past, the Bini used to send eight slaves to Idah to be made eunuchs whenever a new Oba was appointed in Benin. The Attah kept four slaves and sent the other four back to the Oba. The present Attah affirmed this and added that it

³⁰⁰ Okwoli, *A Short History of Igalal*, 17.

³⁰¹ Ukwedeh, *History of the Igala Kingdom C.1534-1854*, 72.

³⁰² Jacob U. Egharevba, *A Short History of Beni* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press: 1936, Reprint, 1968), 27.

³⁰³ Boston, *Igala kingdom*, 378-379; A photograph of the mask can be found in Ben-Amos, Paula, *The Art of Benin* (New York, N.Y.: Thames and Hudson, 1980), fig. 19.

³⁰⁴ Ben-Amos, *The Art of Benin*, 101, fig 80.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., fig 94; Amos describes this mask as worn by the Oba as part of his costume for the commemorative rites for his deceased mother Ugie Iyoba and for the Emobo ritual. Ben-Amos does not clarify if the same mask was part of everyday paraphernalia.

³⁰⁶ Boston, *The Igala kingdom*, 378-379; Ukwedeh, *History of the Igala kingdom*, 72.

was formerly customary for the Igala King to send a present of slaves, or eunuchs, whenever a new Oba was appointed. When a new Attah came to power, the Oba sent gifts of brass-work and other presents to Idah, including coconuts, which in Igala are called unoba, “Oba’s nuts.”³⁰⁷ The mutuality of these relations suggests that the assumption of a former Benin hegemony may be misplaced. Rather, these exchanges fit better within a history in which two states of relatively equal power faced off, and in the end, reached a mutual accommodation, signified by these gifts at the accession of a new king in either kingdom, and with some particular elements of ritual perhaps spreading from Benin due to the close relations between the two states.

The question of state formation and the history of the institutional content of these states is the subject of the next section. In examining the issue of political sovereignty, we also visualize some of the modes in which the various kingdoms within the Niger-Benue confluence groups developed ritual reciprocity, represented by the incorporation of royal icons such as masquerades, royal paraphernalia, and gods and cults as well as myths, which, as embodied memory, reflect the various layers of historical interaction and changing hegemonies.

4.4 Ritual Sovereignty and the State

In the Niger-Benue confluence region, ritual sovereignty served as the idiom through which governance was carried out and legitimated, using the

³⁰⁷ Ukwedeh, *History of the Igala Kingdom*, 73; Ukwedeh points out that coconuts and guns were brought to Benin by the Portuguese John Affonso d’Aveiro in 1485. See, Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin*, 90.

seemingly legal and political devices that were acted out symbolically and ritualistically. Rituals took differing forms in the modes and manners of the symbolic actions carried out, displayed, and reenacted through differing modalities of governance and cultic idioms, in particular during major annual royal festivals. In this sense, the symbols of power and governance followed certain displays and symbols and reenacted forms that reinforced hegemonic control, whether politically, religiously, morally, legally or economically.

Rituals generated symbolic capital, which governing institutions often deployed to wield and create political power. The state was almost always understood as embedded within a cosmic order. The political realm often depicted certain negotiations and trade-offs, which were reproduced, reenacted and sanctioned through rituals and other symbolic formations and were often bound to the ancestral world, a connection that served to legitimize rulership.

Andrew Apter has discussed a prime example of this relationship between state and rituals for the Ekiti city-state of Ayede in northeastern Yorubaland. In his historical ethnography of Ayede, he depicts the relationship between political and ritual power and argues that legitimacy and authority were often negotiated during key royal festivals, when priestesses mobilized the ritual power to depose kings, deconstructing the ritual power before reconstructing it back. This depiction shows that, while on the surface rituals regenerate kingship, they actually deconstruct kingly power in order to reconstitute or overturn it. He demonstrates that the *Orisa* cults were the strongest agents of historical change through their inherent dichotomy. They provided support for the king of Ayede in

public and obvious aspects, on the one hand, and generated alternative visions of authority through the secretly controlled knowledge of cult specialists in the deep structure, on the other hand. These Orisa cults were locally defined and were brought along with immigrant groups. They provided a unique identity for the sub-groups settling in different quarters of Ayede.³⁰⁸

Ritual action in ritualized formats can also depict the mode of negotiation and resolution between ritual authorities and immigrant groups within a state. As Pierre Bourdieu argues, it is in the “realm of symbolic production that the grip of the state is felt most powerfully.”³⁰⁹ A foremost example from the confluence region is the manner in which the Attah of Igala, in Idah through the Ane ritual, especially at the time of his installation, allies himself to an indigenous cultic shrine, the Ere Ane, the land shrine, which is controlled by the Igalamela chiefs, the assumed aboriginal Igala clans in Idah, represented by the Ashadu.³¹⁰ The same fact is also noted when the Fulbe conquerors of Nupe send a bullock at the beginning of their reign to the priests of Ketsa, a Yoruba remnant cult favored by the Nupe, to indicate the alignment of their rulership with the traditionally legitimated ritual interests.³¹¹

Ritual practice in the region, I would argue, sought to convey the cosmic understanding of the universe, mediating between the world of the living and the

³⁰⁸ Apter, *Black Critisc and Kings*.

³⁰⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, “Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic field”, in George Steinmetz, ed., *State/Culture: State-Formation after the Cultural Turn* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), 162.

³¹⁰ Boston, *The Igala Kingdom*, 100.

³¹¹ For a more detailed description of the Ketsa cult see chapter 6 in this dissertation.

supernatural or spiritual world. The religious concepts that informed rituals and legitimized and structured the social fabric in the polities of the Nupe- and Nupoid-speaking peoples, as well as in those of the Yoruba and the Igala, were deeply rooted in their ritual cosmologies and in understandings of the universe found more widely among Niger-Congo peoples. At its core, these supernatural perceptions posited three levels of spirits: behind all existence and outside it, the Creator God; the territorial spirits of various localities; and the ancestral spirits. Recurrent features of observance were a medico-religious reliance on diviners-doctors and the presence of ritual confederacies and/or secret societies, in addition to various politico-religious institutions.³¹²

Social scientists claimed for a long time that pre-colonial African states, in particular those that took on the form of empire, kingdom or chiefdom, were governed by sacred or divine rulers who would “justify and legitimate their power over the ruled by various operations in the sphere of religion, ideology, law, ceremony and propaganda.”³¹³ This focus on the figure of the ruler takes away attention from the understanding of the state as embedded in a cosmic order in which the ruler, albeit legitimated by his exceptional status, is just one of the major representatives of the state and one of the major mediators between the world of the living and the spiritual world. The reduction of our understandings of pre-colonial institutions in African kingdoms, empires and chiefdoms to “sacred”

³¹² Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*.

³¹³ Michael Tymowski. *The Origins and Structures of Political Institutions in Pre-Colonial Black Africa: Dynastic Monarchy, Taxes and Tributes, War and Slavery, Kinship and Territory* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009), 6.

or “divine” kingship equates African religio-political institutions with phenomena observed and interpreted as such in the Ancient Near East and Ancient Egypt.

Therefore, I am suggesting extending a different view of sovereignty to the polities of the Niger-Benue confluence, similar to what Andrew Apter has argued for the Ekiti Yoruba state of Ayede:

The Yoruba ritual system thus contains the contradictions of Yoruba government: within the town, ritual mediates between the king and his chiefs; within complex kingdoms, it mediates between the center and the periphery. From this principle of mediation emerges a model of the Yoruba ritual system, which accounts for the heterogeneity of Yoruba founding myths. For every capital town and its subordinate towns, the rituals of the king—his royal installation ceremony and annual òriṣà festivals—celebrate and objectify the unity of the kingdom as a whole. Conversely, rituals of the subordinate towns—the commemoration of local rulers (baálè) and the worship of their òriṣà —implicitly challenge the unity of the kingdom by expressing the corporate autonomy of its parts. Whereas rituals of the metropole generate and sustain a unified body of official mythic traditions, rituals of the periphery generate and sustain an alternative corpus of their own distinctive founding myths. The strength of this model ... is that it encompasses relationships between kingdoms as well as within them.³¹⁴

Based on Apter’s depiction of the relationship between ritual and politics, one can see that it is the ritual system that embodies the principles of government. In this type of state, which can be observed in all three religio-political complexes—of the northern Yoruba, Igala and Nupoid-speaking people—executive and judiciary were strongly bound to the spiritual world and acted in accord with the principles of government established by the ritual system. If maleficence inflicted the society, the cosmic law was to be consulted and

³¹⁴ Apter, *Black Critics and Kings*, 23.

executed by professionals who, by virtue of their calling and training, were considered mediators between the spiritual world and the world of the living. Clan-based secret societies played a particular role as agents of social control. Ancestral masquerades often represented the collective spirits of the dead of a particular clan and were understood as custodians of the eternal judgment, fulfilling a policing function with coercive power in the society. The spirits of the dead could travel between the realms of the living and the other world and “influence” judicial and executive function within the state through their mediators, such as priests or diviners and the masquerade agents. The best-known secret societies bound to the ancestral belief were the Ndakogboya/Igunnu among the Nupe people, the Egungun and Ogboni among the Yoruba, and the custodians of the Egwu Afia among the Igala.

Communication with the other world was fundamental in maintaining the equilibrium between the world of the living and the spirit world. Divination, regularly performed sacrifices and annual commemorative festivals were important means to guarantee the unity with the spiritual world. Functionaries, who had the power to communicate with the other world, were kings and queens, clan chiefs, priests, diviner-doctors or specific members of secret societies. In turn, the ritual practice provided them with an accumulated social capital that also enhanced their socio-economic status.

Installation rituals of chiefs and kings would re-enact the return of the mythical founding hero of the chiefdom or kingdom in the newly installed ruler, who, upon his enthronement and ritual consecration, would embody the mythical

royal ancestor. The exceptional status of the ruler was often symbolized and legitimized by rituals and the traditions of origin, which would invoke the myth about the beginning of the ruling dynasty and the kingdom, chiefdom or empire. Agamben has argued that this understanding of the nature of sovereignty inscribes the idea of exclusion, the external and the exceptional.³¹⁵ In a sense, there is something to be said about the external and excluding nature of the royal and ritual experts, who seemingly stand *outside* the normative and juridical dynamics of everyday living but *within* the cosmic order established by the governing principles of the ritual system.

Royalty was often distributed among several dynasties, which rotated in succession and from which kingmakers chose rulers. The kingmakers are a special institution in the polities of the Niger-Benue confluence. Their designations most likely stemmed from earlier historical layers and functions as ritual authorities and custodians of the land.³¹⁶ Divination results—in particular those originating from important oracles linked to the ancestral world or major cult centers denoting the earth shrine—ultimately sanctioned the kingmakers' choice.

Ritual sovereignty often persisted through time—in many instances surviving the decline of the polities it was once part of—and remained inscribed in oral traditions, embodied in palimpsest memories and expressed in ritual practice, festivals, commemorative performances and in *lieux de memoire* as well

³¹⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 17-18.

³¹⁶ Finn Fuglestad, "Earth-Priests, Priest-Chiefs and Sacred Kings in Ancient Norway", *Journal of Scandinavian History*, 4, 1979, 47-74; See also Lentz, *Land, Mobility and Belonging*.

as in ritual effigies. Ritual sovereignty enabled the legitimation of rituals and symbolic practices, which, as constituents of social structures, produced what Bourdieu called *habitus*—“systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is as principles of generation and structuring of practices and representations...”³¹⁷ Habitus schemes, such as ritual practices and dispositions, acquired significant value and are to the present day entrenched in the social structures of the traditional institutions in the Niger-Benue confluence. These habitus schemes are the fundamental elements fostering a shared regional identity.

After the discussion of the broad historical developments in the region, I now consider the important institutions within these religio-political complexes, their significance within the emerging political entities and their trans-local and regional encounters.

4.4. The Nupe- and Nupoid-Speaking Religio-Political Complex

The linguistic data from the Nupe- and Nupoid-speaking areas, as previously shown, imply a long-term historical and primary agricultural component in the economies in the Niger-Benue confluence region going back to the various ancestral speech communities as early as around the fourth or fifth millennium BCE. Faunal, linguistic and archaeobotanical evidence indicate that hunting and fishing nevertheless long remained significant contributors to the people’s basic subsistence. Ceramic wares were present during the earliest

³¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72.

periods, in keeping with the archaeological evidence for the presence of ceramic technology in West Africa back to before 9400 BCE.³¹⁸ Correspondingly, linguistic data and archeological evidence indicate that metalworking practices with iron and copper in the region originate back to at least the period around 1000 BCE.

At the beginning of the period from 1000 BCE to about 1600 CE, a number of distinct Nupoid-speaking peoples inhabited the areas immediately north and east of the confluence itself: the proto-Ebira, the proto-Gbagyi, the ancestral Asu, the proto-Dibo-Kupa and the forebears of the proto-Nupe (see Proto-West Benue Congo family tree), with the ancestral Gade as their neighbors. Over the next two thousand years, major linguistic divergences took place, out of which emerged the various later Nupe, Asu, Dibo, Kami and Gupa-Abawa, Kupa and Kakanda societies. The Dibo, Kami and Gupa-Abawa groups became distinct societies through a succession of divergences beginning in the late first millennium BCE and extending down to the late first millennium CE. The proto-Gbagyi society began to diverge not long after the beginning of the breakup of the proto-Dibo-Kami, probably early in the first millennium CE. The divergence of the proto-Ebira language into its dialects most likely began just two or three centuries 1000 CE and marks the close of preceding historical period, while the proto-Nupe period, dating to around 1000-1200, marks the beginning of a new

³¹⁸ E. Huysecom, M. Rasse, L. Lespez, et al. (2009), “The Emergence of Pottery in Africa during the tenth Millennium cal BCE: New Evidence from Ounjougou (Mali)”, *Antiquity* 83: 322: 905-917.

period, broadly coincident with the founding era of the Nupe kingdom. The map below shows the current distribution of the language groups.

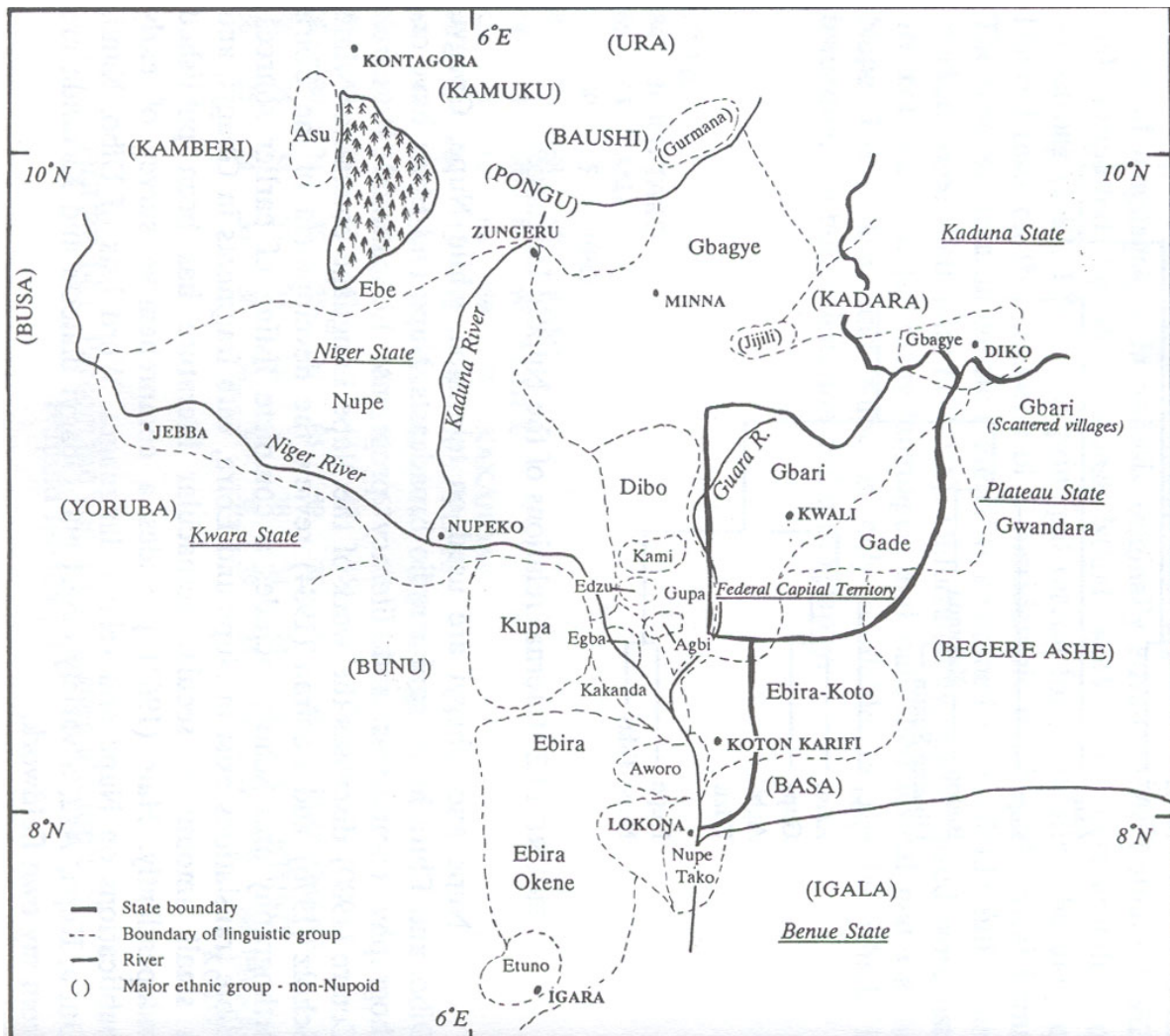


Figure 8: Geographical Distribution of Nupoid Language Groups

Comparative cultural and linguistic evidence indicates that, in the pre-chieftdom and pre-state eras of histories, the lineage priest-chiefs had major responsibilities for dealing with malfesance and misfortune, and, more particularly, in mediating between the world of the living and the outer world—that is, between the spiritual world and the living. An ancient root word of pre-

proto-Benue-Congo origin, *-kumo, names this role of priest-chief.³¹⁹ The old Macro-Nupoid root term for chief, *-cu, is a regular reflex of this root; *etsu* is Nupe version of this word. The reason for this conclusion is that *-cu shows the regular Macro-Nupoid sound changes: deletion of second stem consonants and the resulting contraction of an original consonant-vowel-consonant-vowel root to only the first consonant and vowel of the longer original root shape (-kumo > -ku) and the Proto-Ebira-Nupoid sound law, *k > *c before the vowel *u.³²⁰ Additional early positions of ritual authority would have been the medical specialists, the doctor-diviners and the priests who mediated between people and territorial spirits. These early findings of the presence of ritual authority underscore the hypotheses that rituals played a pivotal role in reproducing political authority.

Within the Obayemi model, we grasp how certain aspects of these societies developed. What appears to have happened, with increasing social stratification and hierarchy, was a split in function and performance between the political and religious leadership. The political leaders, the chiefs and kings, whose positions evolved out of earlier clan priest-chief roles—as indicated by the shift in meaning of *-cu from clan priest to chief in the Ebira-Nupoid languages that preserve this root word—retained significant priestly functions due to their special position within the cosmological understanding of the world and would have performed such functions in the context of special community-wide

³¹⁹ As Ehret, *op. cit.*, chapter 5, argues at some length.

³²⁰ See footnote 102 in chapter 3 above.

occasions, such as New Year festivals, enthronement or harvest or planting ceremonies. Such perspectives provide us with a valuable picture, even if it is not totally complete, with regard to the intermediate processes leading toward state formation in early Niger-Benue confluence societies.

For the history of the most recent thousand years, the oral traditions—both those collected by other scholars and observers over the past two centuries, and those gathered in my own field studies and interviews conducted among the Nupe, the Asu, the Dibo and the Gupa-Abawa group, as well as with the Kakanda and Ebira—are of prime importance. These oral traditions are valuable in providing cogent perspectives for mapping the historical contours of state formation among these groups. Particularly for the Nupe, Ebira and Kakanda, a good deal is known, while much less can be said about the other groups. No oral historical data are as yet available for the Kupa, Gwari and Gade.

In examining the process of state formation within the Niger-Benue confluence societies, highlighting the Nupe instance provides illuminating perspectives. The emergence of the Nupe Empire is linked in the oral tradition to the mythical ancestor Tsoede, who also, according to this tradition, founded the Edegi ruling dynasty. The Edegi dynasty was the last ruling dynasty of the Nupe Empire, which collapsed in 1805 due to throne succession disputes. During my field research, the Nupe kings on the throne confirmed that, according to the tradition, when a king in Nupeland is enthroned he is not an ordinary person

anymore.³²¹ Rather, he enters into the line of the ancestral rulers who reigned before him, of whom the founder of the kingdom in Nupeland, Tsoede is seen as the first ancestor and is understood to be re-embodied in the present king.

In a sense, political sovereignty is aligned with sacral leadership founded upon both the mythical and ritualized symbolic referents and hegemonic repertoire. The Nupe king of Patigi, whom I interviewed regarding his relationship to Tsoede, declared: “I am Tsoede.”³²² This link to the ancestral world is established over and over again after the enthronement in oral traditions, in rituals and during festivals where specific re-enactments of the traditions of origin are dramatized and ritualized. When a king dies, he will be included in the line of ancestors, who are representatives and embodiments of Tsoede in a vertical-chronological line. Because of these features, rituals and oral traditions, these happenings serve as repositories of past historical power and knowledge.³²³

Oral traditions also link the arrival of Tsoede to the Ndakogboya, or Gunnu secret societies, which served as judiciary and executive agents all over Nupeland up to their prohibition during the British colonial era in the twentieth century. In one of the oral traditions collected by Leo Frobenius in 1911, Tsoede carries the ancestral masquerades of the Ndakogboya secret society to Nupeland in his bronze boat as he travels back from Idah. It is conceivable that the

³²¹ Constanze Weise, Fieldnotes, Patigi, Nigeria, 2000.

³²² Ibid.

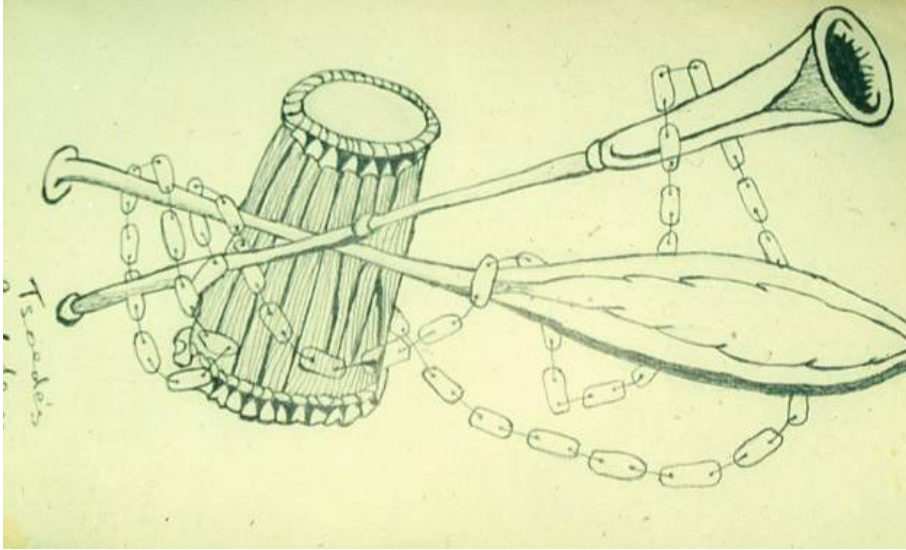
³²³ I have discussed this further in Constanze Weise “Kingship and the Mediators of the Past: Oral Traditions and Ritual Performance in Nupeland, Nigeria”, In *Sources and Methods in African History: Spoken, Written, Unearthed*, edited by Toyin and Jennings Falola, Christian (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003), 268-94.

Ndakogboya ritual gained its connection to the kingship subsequent to the founding of the state, but the intricacy with which the Ndakogboya masquerades are tied into royal legitimacy makes it entirely reasonable that the relation goes back to the founding era. The priests of the Ndakogboya may well be the modern heirs of the old custodians of the land, since, as told in the Tsoede myth, Tsoede shares the sacred chain, which symbolizes ritual authority with the clan chiefs whom he meets in Nupeland upon his arrival.

A strong tie continues to exist among oral tradition, ritual performance and chieftaincy, as well as the kingship institutions, in Nupeland even today, long after the prohibition of the Ndakogboya's actions in public.³²⁴ Picture 1 shows a painting, kept by the Etsu Nupe Patigi, which depicts the sacred chain of Tsoede as linked to other royal paraphernalia. However, the kings of Patigi not only relate themselves to Tsoede traditionally, but also the Tsoede myth serves to legitimize current political actions. In picture 2 one can see a flag, which alludes to one of the royal paraphernalia associated with Tsoede. This flag symbolizes an imagined Nupe state called Ndaduma, father Niger River, within the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The councils of traditional rulers of Kwara State, headed by the Etsu Nupe Patigi and by the Etsu Nupe Bida of Niger State, fight for this ethnic minority state, which they claim should include the territory of the pre-colonial Nupe Empire at its greatest extension.³²⁵

³²⁴ Weise, *Mediators of the Past*.

³²⁵ Constanze Weise, *Fieldnotes, Patigi, Nigeria, 2000*.



Picture 1: The Emblem of Tsoede (Foto C. Weise)



Picture 2: The Ndaduma Flag of the Movement for a Nupe State with Tsoede Emblem (Foto C. Weise)



Picture 3: The Chain of Tsoede demonstrated by the Etsu Zugurma, King of the Nupe successor Dynasty of the Gwagbazhi



Picture 4: Etsu Nupe Patigi, King of the Yissazhi Successor Dynasty with Palace Guard

The Tsoede oral tradition is widespread in Nupeland and beyond but is particularly associated with sacred places, ritual objects and ritual performances in regions that were part of the Nupe Empire before its decline in 1805. The anthropologist Nadel, who conducted his field research among the Nupe in 1934 and 1936, noted that certain Nupoid-speaking groups consider themselves Nupe subgroups even though they linguistically form a different branch from the Nupe language. He mentions in particular the Ebe (another name for the Asu), Kede,

Gwari and Kupa.³²⁶ He also cites the Benu, who are descendants of Kanuri-speaking immigrants who migrated into Nupeland during the seventeenth century from the Kanem-Bornu Empire.³²⁷ More will be said about them in Chapter 5.

The Asu and Abawa retain an active historical memory of their membership in the Nupe Empire, while the Dibo claim that they have never been part of the Nupe Empire.³²⁸ The Asu remember that they were ritually bound to the Nupe Empire through the reception of an iron chain, which, according to oral tradition, Tsoede distributed among chiefs and priests upon his arrival in Nupeland to demarcate them as belonging to the empire.³²⁹

In 1936 Siegfried Nadel collected from the Etsu Nupe Patigi this oral tradition that links Tsoede to the Nupe Empire:³³⁰

It happened that the son of the Atta Gara came hunting to Nku in Nupe country. Here he met the daughter of the chief of Nku and fell in love with her. When the death of his father recalled him to his country, to succeed to the throne of the Gara, this woman was pregnant. He left her a charm and a ring to give to their child when it was born. This child was Tsoede. Then the old chief of Nku died, his son became chief, and when Tsoede was 30 years of age the new chief sent him, as his sister's son, as slave to Eda. The Atta Gara recognized his son in the new slave by the charm and ring, which he was wearing, and kept him near his person, treating him almost like his legitimate sons. Tsoede stayed for thirty years at his father's court. Once the king fell victim to a mysterious illness which nobody could

³²⁶ While Asu, Dibo and Kupa have been established as related to Nupe, but forming their own language branch, the Kede and Ebagi have not yet been classified because of a lack of data.

³²⁷ Nadel, *A Black Byzantium*, 19.

³²⁸ Nadel, *A Black Byzantium*, 76. Weise, *Fieldnotes, Asu, Nigeria*, 2009.

³²⁹ Interviews with Asu chief Alhaji Adamu Haruna Mazankuka, Mashegu Local Government, Mazankuka, 7/22/2009 and Dibo chief Adamu M. H. Ishiaku, Evuti, August, 9, 2009.

³³⁰ Nadel, *A Black Byzantium*, 73.

cure . . . Thus, when the Atta felt his death coming, he advised his son to flee, and to return to his own country, the rule of which he bestowed on him as a parting gift. He assisted him in his flight, he gave him riches of all kinds, and bestowed on him various insignia of kingship: a bronze canoe “as only kings have”, manned with twelve Nupe slaves; the bronze kakati, the long trumpets which are still the insignia of kings in the whole of Northern Nigeria; state drums hung with brass bells; and the heavy iron chains and fetters which, endowed with strong magic, have become the emblems of the king’s judicial power, and are known today as *egba Tsoede*, Chain of Tsoede. . . Tsoede then went to Nupeko, killed the chief, and made himself the chief of the place. He conquered Nku, the town of his maternal uncle, made himself the ruler of all Beni . . . and assumed the title Etsu, king. He made the twelve men who had accompanied him from Eda the chiefs of the twelve towns of Beni and bestowed on them the sacred insignia of chieftainship, brass bangles and magic chains . . . Tsoede carried out big and victorious wars against many tribes and kingdoms, conquering in the south the countries of Yagbam Bunu, [and] Kakanda, as far as Akoko, and in the north the countries of Ebe, Kamberi, and Kamuku.

I collected a similar tradition.³³¹ What lends value to this tradition is that the chief who narrated it to me was unaware of Nadel’s publications. In Leamfa Kusa, a village in the Niger River creeks, the chiefs tell an additional story about Tsoede’s flight from Idah with the soldiers of the Igala Empire and the angry princes following him. According to the tradition, Tsoede was hiding in the creeks, and his boat sank there. He then embarked to Nupeland, later crossing over to Nupeku and Nku, which are situated on the opposite riverbank. The chiefs of Leamfa Kusa pride themselves that they received the most sacred insignia for the special help their ancestors rendered to Tsoede. This story is commemorated

³³¹ This tradition can be found in the Appendix.

annually in a festival, which also involves the River Niger.³³² This tradition seems widespread and recurrent, showing a *longue durée* attempt to interlink hegemonic hierarchies, along with an attempt to channel intercultural relationships in ways that favored regional hegemonic institutions. Such cultural alignment and realignment reflects the processes by which mini-states could ally themselves with mega-states by subsuming their own local hegemonic hierarchies and sovereignties to those of a more robust political entity. The mini-states gained prestige and most likely protection from that relationship, as well as peaceful entrée into the wider commercial connections of the larger state.

³³² Constanze Weise, Fieldnotes, Leamfa Kuso 8/20/2009. Field Interviews: NUP-ETH-LKS-M-3-6/28/2009; NUP-ETH-LKS-M-3-8/20/2009; NUP-ETH-LKS-M-3-8/20/2009; NUP-ETH-LKS-M-3-8/20/2009.



Picture 5: The Creeks near Leamfa Kusa where Tsoede's boat supposed to have sunk



Picture 6: Etsu Nyankpa, Chief of Leamfa Kuso with Tsoede's Royal Paraphernalia (Photo C. Weise)



Picture 7: Tsoede's Sacred Harpoon (Photo C. Weise)



Picture 8: Tsoede's Bronze Ring (C. Weise)

4.6 The Northern Yoruba Religio-Political Complex

Most state formation accounts about the Yoruba emphasize the preeminence of Ile-Ife. The situation is no different among the northern Yoruba groups. In the Yoruba understanding of the universe, it is in Ile-Ife where the world was created (nibiti ojumu ti mo wa)³³³ and where the head or nucleus of the entire universe (ori aye gbogbo) is situated. Samuel Johnson wrote down the oral traditions related to Ile-Ife, which states that the Yoruba nation began in Ile-Ife with the Yoruba being the descendants of Oduduwa. All succeeding Yoruba kings were expected to perform acts of worship at the grave of Oduduwa upon their succession and before their coronation and were to receive the benediction of the priest. Upon their coronation, the sword of justice, *Ida Oranyan* (*Oranyan's sword*) was placed ceremonially into the hands of the new kings. Without this ceremony the king had no authority to perform executions. Johnson also notes that the term for king, "Owoni" signified the high priests of Ife.³³⁴

Scholars have widely discussed the historical implications of Johnson's collected tradition, as well as of other oral traditions, which proclaim Ife's preeminence and but have not yet reached a consensus. In fact, the discourse about the meaning of Ile-Ife's preeminence reveals one of the most enduring debates about Yoruba history. Why oral traditions refer to Ile-Ife as the cradle of the Yoruba and give the town such a specific position within Yoruba history may be related to Ile-Ife's economic power, which it had achieved during the medieval

³³³ "Nibiti Ojumu ti mo wa" can be translated as "It is from {Ife-}Ijumu that I came."

³³⁴ Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 12.

period. Located on a major connecting trade route to the Niger River, Ile-Ife served as a manufacturing center for both iron goods and glass beads and as a trade entrepot where forest products, ivory, pepper and kola nuts were exchanged for Saharan and Sudanese Salt, cloth and copper alloys.³³⁵ There are some indications that gold may also have been traded since gold-bearing deposits exist just ten kilometers north of the city near Itagunmode, a town from the fourteenth century.³³⁶

Ile-Ife's political power may have derived from its being an early centralized territorial state, as Robin Horton has argued, which later on retained its preeminence in Yorubaland as "elder-statesman."³³⁷ Obayemi suggests that Ife's preeminence may further stem from its impressive culture and plastic art. He doubts, however, that "there was a single center from which people dispersed or kings were sent to rule."³³⁸ Other scholars, such as Abiodun Adediran and Andrew Apter, argue that the claim of Ife origin may have evolved during the nineteenth century. Adediran suggests that the assertion of deriving from Ile-Ife could have served as protection against insurgencies during the Yoruba wars. He further sees the incorporation of the rituals of these kingdoms into the Ife system

³³⁵ Robin Horton, "Ancient Ife: A Reassessment.", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 9, no. 4 (1979): 69-149.

³³⁶ Babatunde Agbaje-Williams, Akinwumi Ogundiran, Ijesa Cultural Foundation, *Cultural Resources in Ijesaland, Western Nigeria* (Ilesa: Ijesa Cultural Foundation, 1992); Babatunde Gbaje-Williams, *Archeological Investigation of Itagunmodi Potsherd Pavement Site, Ijesaland, Osun State, Nigeria, 1991-1992 Season* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, 1995).

³³⁷ Horton, Ancient Ife.

³³⁸ Obayemi, "The Yoruba and Edo speaking peoples and their neighbors before 1600", 273.

as related to the desire of their dynasties to receive a beaded crown from Ife and thus receive legitimization.³³⁹ Andrew Apter contends that many Yoruba-city states, including those emerging during the nineteenth century, such as Ayede, kept their founding myths and dynastic traditions connected to Ife due to the political opposition to Oyo's hegemonic claims. In his notion of a "ritual field theory", Apter reasons, "Ife centric traditions were preserved by rituals, which emphasized the autonomy of Ife's successor states vis-à-vis Oyo's imperial interests." According to his analysis, Ife's importance as a "ritual center" or "spiritual capital" intensified at the height of the Oyo Empire. Apter argues:

Ife remained an ideological foil to Oyo revisionism, a foil which grounded subversive traditions in the cosmographic center of a pan-Yoruba cosmology. The Ife-centric character of Ifa divination relates not to Ife's hypothetical role as political mediator, but to the ritually sanctioned association between cosmological origins and Ifa's "true", explicitly antirevisionist, "history" (itan).[...] Ifa's "historical" claims are ideologically meaningful in their opposition to emerging Oyo-centrism. They may or may not be historically accurate.

If the ritual-field theory is correct, we would expect Ife's importance as a "ritual center" or "spiritual capital" to intensify at the height of the Oyo empire. ... Ife *was* politically important, not for what it did, but for what, in the ritual domain it came to represent."³⁴⁰

Despite the above-mentioned scholarly interpretations, we still lack concrete evidence, which, apart from an economic advantage, supports Ife's ritual sovereignty. As previously shown, the claim of Ife's priority cannot be supported through linguistic data. Ehret has demonstrated that linguistic findings do not identify any particular preeminence for Ife as the nucleus, from which the Yoruba

³³⁹ Biodun Adediran, "In Search of Identity? The Eastern Yoruba and the Oduduwa Tradition", *Odu N.S.*, no. 36 (1989), 128-136.

³⁴⁰ Apter, *Black Critics and Kings*, 33-34.

ancestral speech communities diverged. Rather, the Proto-Ife-Ilesha dialect was just one among fifteen or sixteen others that emerged in the second half of the first millennium.³⁴¹

Interestingly, however, Ehret's findings fit well with other Yoruba traditions, which recount the formation of Yoruba societies as beginning with a first era that is involved with the founding of sixteen separate Yoruba cities. In fact, Obayemi argues that northeast Yoruba presents a greater internal geographic dialectal diversity than other Yoruba and Igala groups.³⁴² This argument agrees with the linguistic assessment that the greatest linguistic diversity of a language often points to the source of linguistic divergence. The question then is to see if one can correlate the linguistic findings with archaeological data and oral traditions.

These sites also provide evidence for ironworking locations dating back to the first millennium BCE. As Akin Ogundiran notes, even though the broad settlement history and sociopolitical developments of Ile-Ife are not yet delineated, Ile-Ife remains the best-excavated Yoruba town. Archaeological findings indicate that that Ile-Ife was a densely nucleated settlement with 70,000-105,000 inhabitants at its peak in the fourteenth and fifteenth century. Rich burial gifts for the elite indicate a highly stratified society. Life-size naturalistic sculptures of deceased members of the elite are additional indications of an intensive religious activity in cult centers and shrines. Ogundiran further surmises

³⁴¹ Ehret/Ogundiran, op. cit.

³⁴² Ade Obayemi, "Ancient Ile-Ife: Another Cultural Reinterpretation", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 9:4, 61-185.

that this ritual activity legitimized political rule, authority, inheritance and group identity.³⁴³

One of the enigmatic archaeological discoveries is the locally produced, cylindrical stone beads, which were discovered in the Olokun grove near Ile-Ife.³⁴⁴ These findings date back to the fourteenth century CE. To the present day, these beads form part of the crowns (ade) of Yoruba kings (oba). The beaded crowns are a key element of the Oba's regalia, and oral traditions underscore that only the legitimate Obas of the sixteen original Yoruba city-states have the right to obtain such a crown. Obayemi points out that it is uncertain "whether these crowns and other objects of the Oba's regalia were obtained by trade or awarded by a patron in Ile-Ife."³⁴⁵ The act of obtaining crowns from the Ife could, however, underscore its ritual sovereignty as a spiritual and religious center of the early Yoruba period, and that relation may also be expressed in the oral traditions of several northern Yoruba peoples by the idiom of Ife origin. Ogundiran argues, "With glass beads serving as the most important paraphernalia of Yoruba kingship and social ranking, the evidence of primary glass production in the Olukun grove shows the centrality of Ile-Ife to the institutionalization of kingship ideology in the Yoruba-Edo region".³⁴⁶

³⁴³ Akin Ogundiran, "Towns and States of the West African Forest Belt", in Peter Mitchell and Paul Lane, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of African Archaeology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 865ff.

³⁴⁴ Lankton et al., "Early Primary Glass Production in Southern Nigeria", *Journal of African Archaeology*, 4, 2006, 111-138.

³⁴⁵ Usman, *The Yoruba frontier*, 275.

³⁴⁶ Horton, *Ancient Ife*; 132; Akinwumi Ogundiran, "Chronology, Material Culture, and Pathways to the Cultural History of Yoruba-Edo Region, 500 B.C.-A.D. 1800", in Toyin

Another possible reason for Ife's preeminence could be found in the production and working of iron, which may have helped its military power and political expansion. Horton points out that Ogun, the god of iron, had a special relationship to the Ile-Ife royal dynasty. A pear-shaped hundredweight wrought of iron can be found in the palace of the Ooni of Ife down to the present day. It serves as the shrine of Ogunladin, the blacksmith of Ododuwa. Iron is used in the staffs of Osun and Opa Orere and in the cults of Ifa, Ogun and Osayin. Only in Ile-Ife is Ogun the epithet of the god of iron but also of the god of war. The annual festival in honor of Ogun, Olojo, is the only occasion at which the Ooni appears publicly in full royal regalia.³⁴⁷

Usman underscores that there are rich oral traditions about the mythologies of Ogun and its association with the earth tradition and ironworking in northern Yorubaland as well. He follows Armstrong's proposition,³⁴⁸ which denied that Ogun arose out of Africa's iron revolution and its accompanying sacred iron complex, but instead proposed that themes of the time period before the last two thousand years—such as hunting, killing, and the resultant disorder that killings brought—were more likely the concepts out of which the deity Ogun

Falola and Christian Jennings, eds., *Sources and Methods in African History: Spoken, Written, Unearthed*, 33-79. Woodbridge (UK): University of Rochester Press, 2002; Akinwumi Ogundiran, "Frontier Migrations and Cultural Transformations in the Yoruba Hinterland, Ca. 1575 - 1700. The Case of Upper Osun", in *Movements, Borders, and Identities in Africa*, edited by Toyin Falola and Aribidesi Adisa Usman, 37-52. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2009; Akinwumi Ogundiran, "The End of Prehistory? An Africanist Comment", *The American Historical Review* 3, no. 118 (2013): 788-801.

³⁴⁷ Horton, Ife, 109 f.

³⁴⁸ Robert G. Armstrong, "The Etymology of the word 'Ogun', in Sandra T. Barnes, ed., *Africa's Ogun Old World and New*, 34 ff.

derived.³⁴⁹

Lacking extensive archaeological excavations in the Niger-Benue confluence, the significant fact about the term Ogun itself is that its phonology shows it most likely had an origin in proto-Yoruba or in its earlier ancestor proto-Yoruba-Igala. This dates its initial spread to the period since the beginning of the first millennium CE and thus to well after ironworking was already established. The great civic Ogun festivals are to be found in the “forest regions, the centers of iron mining and smelting—the real seat of iron technology.” These locations run in an arc “from Awori west of Lagos up to into Egbado, to a large area of north-central Yoruba between Ibadan, Iseyin and Ogbomosho, possibly to Ilorin.”³⁵⁰ Many of the sites I visited among the people of the Niger-Benue confluence reveal correlations between iron paraphernalia and rituals. Ogun’s original connections in the first millennium may go back to hunting and war activities, as Armstrong proposes, but that earlier idea was supplemented by new iron ritual connections for Ogun, which seem likely to have spread from the major ironworking areas, from Awori to Ilorin, possibly early in the second millennium CE, to the northeastern towns and other areas around the confluence.

Ogun, as the god of iron, is likewise important for the early history of Ila Orangun, which, according to Afolayan, reflects a cohabitation of Nupe settlers with Yoruba settlers in northern Yorubaland. Oriki (praise songs), similar to the

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ John Peel “A Comparative Analysis of Ogun in Precolonial Yorubaland”, in Sandra T. Barnes, ed., *Africa's Ogun Old World and New*, 263-90.

one I collected in Ila Orangun from the blacksmiths, pinpoint the Nupe presence in the town, which, according to oral traditions, predates the arrival of ancestors of the current Orangun dynasty of Ila in the sixteenth century.³⁵¹ Pemberton also underscores the importance of this annual festival for Ogun, which he characterizes as the second most important festival after the Egungun ancestral festival in terms of position and public involvement.³⁵²

The questions of the significance of origin traditions from Ife among the northern Yoruba may indeed reflect immigration influx into the region and could also indicate a hegemonic relationship between Ile-Ife and the northern Yoruba regions. Usman argues that some pavements and potsherds found in northern Yorubaland have stylistic resemblance to those of Ife and could have been brought to the region by either trade or immigration. However, some of the pavements may also be related to Nupe immigrants, he states, and the evidence therefore proves inconclusive.³⁵³

Archaeological investigations at Ife-Ijumu in the Okun Yoruba region indicate a continuous stratified sequence of occupation from the Late Stone Age deposits, ca. fourth century BCE, into the Iron Age period, ninth century CE. Based on archaeological data, Usman argues that the northern Yoruba region became gradually occupied at an earlier date than the better-known sites of Ile-Ife or Old Oyo, forming a frontier region in the north. He further underscores

³⁵¹ Constanze Weise, Fieldnotes, Ila-Orangun, Nigeria, 2009.

³⁵² John III Pemberton, "A Cluster of Sacred Symbols: Oriṣa Worship among the Igbomina Yoruba of Ila-Orangun", *History of Religions* 17, no. 1 (1977), 18.

³⁵³ Usman, *The Northern Yoruba Frontier*.

Oyelaran's proposition that the Okun and Igbomina regions were initially inhabited by an autochthonous population and not, as the oral traditions suggest, by immigrants from Ife or Old Oyo.³⁵⁴

Afolayan, who conducted field research on the history of the pre-colonial Igbomina, states that many oral traditions point to Nupe settlements in the Igbomina region such as Ila, Omido, Igbaja, Oro Ago or Ile Ire.³⁵⁵ There is also general agreement that Nupe expansions southwards, from across the Niger into the Osun area in the fifteenth century, resulted in the conquest and destruction of Oyo Ile early in the sixteenth century.³⁵⁶ The advent of a wave of migrant groups out of Ife at the same time may have resulted in a pushback of Nupe groups beyond the River Niger.

Today there are still descendants of Nupe, or Tapa settlers—as the Nupe are called by the Yoruba—in the Igbomina region, who keep an active memory of their origin. I interviewed two such people. One was the chief of the ward Isedo in Ila-Orangun, which is associated with early Nupe settlers. An oriki orile commemorates the relationship of the settlers to the Nupe in Ila-Orangun. An oriki orile is a praise song of people who claim the same place of origin. It affirms and negotiates group identities.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴ Usman, *The Yoruba Frontier*, 73.

³⁵⁵ Funsho Stephen Afolayan, *External Relations and Socio-Political Transformations in Pre-Colonial Igbomina*, Ph Thesis (Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife: 1991), 70.

³⁵⁶ Nadel, *Black Byzantium*, 72-6; Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, 35-38; Law, *Oyo Empire*, 37-39.

³⁵⁷ Karin Barber, *I Could Speak until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women, and the Past in a Yoruba Town* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), 135-172.

*The Orile of Tapa*³⁵⁸

People of Tapa,
Oh, descendants of Tapa,
You cover your head as fashion.
You are difficult to please.
It is difficult to bury a Tapa corpse.
The day a Tapa man dies
We must make sacrifices,
We must sacrifice honey.
Honey³⁵⁹ becomes very expensive.
At the river bank I walk smartly;
Help me with my luggage;
Whoever helps Tapa causes trouble for himself.

It remains unclear what exactly the Nupe-Yoruba relationship entailed before the sixteenth century. In 1908 during his stay in Nupeland, Leo Frobenius collected a kinglist of the Nupe rulers, which differs from other existing kinglists, as it demarcates four dynastic phases that prevailed in Nupeland, the second being a Yoruba dynasty.³⁶⁰ Frobenius' collection is likely to have great probative value for future work on Nupe history and dynastic change, considering that it was recorded from people who would have acquired their information from forebears alive early in the nineteenth century, who themselves would have learned their history from people who belonged to the united and powerful Nupe kingdom that existed before 1805. The intervening eras of tradition preservation in exiled

³⁵⁸ Interview IGB-ETH-ILA-M-1-3/31/2009

³⁵⁹ Honey is a metaphor for Oya, the deity of the river Niger that according to the mythology was first married to Ogun before she married Sango, the royal god of the uprising Oyo Empire.

³⁶⁰ Frobenius, *Und Africa sprach*.

remnants of the kingdom would, if anything, have led to a smoothing out of the record and the loss of information on dynastic change.

Many questions still remain unanswered from the material record, as excavations in Nupeland have not yet been conducted. Archaeological studies would surely add, for example, to our understanding of the commercial relations between Nupe and the Hausa states, referenced in the Kano Chronicle for at least the fifteenth century, if not earlier, and of the better-attested developments of the Atlantic Age as well.³⁶¹

4.7. The Igala-Igbo Religio-Political Complex

From the archaeological data that have been examined for the West African savanna and the West African rainforest zone in general, it appears that, by the late first millennium BCE and early first millennium CE, a growing social stratification, based on the control of trade resources and of agricultural surpluses, had arisen in many regions in West Africa. Dike alluded to this situation as also having been at the core of the early state formation processes among the Igala of the Niger-Benue confluence region.³⁶² In fact, in the first millennium CE, as Timothy Insoll has shown, the rainforest was already linked with the savanna in wide-ranging, regional trading networks.³⁶³

³⁶¹ H R. Palmer, "The Kano Chronicle", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* (1908), 58-98.

³⁶² Dike, P. Chike. "Origins of the Pre-Colonial States of Africa: The Case of Igala", *African Notes*, 9 (1982), 15-26.

³⁶³ Timothy Insoll, *Islam, Archaeology and History: Gao Region (Mali) Ca. Ad 900-1250*, Bar International Series; Oxford: Tempus Reparatum, 1996, 668; Timothy Insoll and Thurstan Shaw, "Gao and Igbo-Ukwu: Beads, Inter-Regional Trade and Beyond",

Trade routes linking this vast area are well documented. Afigbo, for instance, details the pre-colonial trade routes linking the Igala, the Idoma and Igbo. Other similar long-distance trade routes are well known within the Niger-Benue region, linking both the north and the southern part of Nigeria, and in some cases trade centers within the Niger-Benue served as important trade termini for commerce with subsequent impact upon cultural crosscurrents and social diffusions.³⁶⁴ The appearance of the European traders on the coast of West Africa, from the late fifteenth century onward, added new economic orientations and turned the hinterland into an even greater contact zone of long-distance trade than it had been previously.

Following accidental discoveries in the 1950s, excavations conducted by Thurstan Shaw, starting in 1958, uncovered three related sites in the Nigerian town of Igbo-Ukwu that were situated at the edge of the rainforest to the east of the Niger River and a little north of the Niger Delta. These sites contained a burial chamber of an important individual, a repository of sophisticated regalia and a

African Archaeological Review 14 (1997), 9-23.

³⁶⁴ Afigbo, "Long-Distance Trade Routes"; Afigbo, "Southeastern Nigeria, the Niger-Benue Confluence, and the Benue in the Precolonial Period: Some Issues of Historiography", *History in Africa*, 24 (1997), 1-8; also Dike, "Trade and Politics in the Niger-Delta"; Miachi, "Masquerades as Agents of Social Control"; Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*, 68-76. In fact in November 1832 when the Landers and Laird McGregor reached Idah (which they wrongly called "Attah"), they found two Bonny merchants in that city's market exchanging merchandise for slaves for King Peppel (probably King Dappa Pepple cf. Macgregor and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa*, Volume 1, 124; see also *ibid.*, Volume 2, 134, regarding one of this trader whose name is given as Aherry. This fact proves the vast network of trading relations that existed in this region, but equally interconnecting other regions to the south, and of course, to the north. Alagoa also indicated the extensive trade contact and exchanges between the utmost southern reaches with the Nigerian Middle Belt hinterland, especially the Igala. See E. J. Alagoa, "Long-Distance Trade and States in the Niger Delta", *The Journal of African History* 11(3) 1970, 322.

ritual disposal pit.³⁶⁵ The great importance of these sites for the civilizations of the Niger-Benue confluence lies not only in the unearthed 685 copper and bronze objects, of which many were produced through highly ornamented lost-wax castings—and the 165,000 stone and glass beads they contained—but also in the possible relationship of these sites to religiously legitimized governance in general and to later emergent empires specific to the region. Christopher Ehret argues that these findings imply a legitimized rulership, which “was rooted in the kind of authority exerted by the old ritual clan chiefs of the Niger-Congo civilization and in a mastery of the realm of the territorial spirits as well.”³⁶⁶

On the basis of radiocarbon dates, the complex was assigned to the end of the first millennium CE.³⁶⁷ Situated not far away from the region south of the Niger-Benue confluence associated with the cradle of proto-societies of Igala, Igbo, Yoruba and Nupoid-speaking peoples, the findings point toward the existence of a civilization that precedes all other available evidence associated with state formation processes east of the lower River Niger. Yet, these findings coincide chronologically with the era of emergence of states in what is today known as Yorubaland, west of the Niger River. However, due to the absence of written sources and the rather still isolated research sites not yet connected to settlement archaeology, the civilization associated with Igbo-Ukwu remains

³⁶⁵ Thurstan Shaw, *Igbo-Ukwu: An Account of Archaeological Discoveries in Eastern Nigeria* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970).

³⁶⁶ Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa*, 315.

³⁶⁷ Graham Connah, “Holocene Africa”, in Christopher Scarre, ed., *The Human Past: World Prehistory & the Development of Human Societies* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 390.

enigmatic in many respects. The archaeologist Ogundiran points out that the metallurgical analysis of copper and lead ores used in the Igbo-Ukwu bronzes and copper artifacts revealed that they were mined about sixty-two miles to the east at what is today Abakaliki, Ishiagu, Enyingba and Ameri. Ogundiran surmises that these sources possibly extend to the Benue trough and the north-central plateau of Nigeria, where early iron metallurgy is attested for the region around Nok as early as the tenth century BCE.³⁶⁸

The glass beads found in Igbo-Ukwu are assumed to be of possible Egyptian or Mediterranean provenance and indicate that the region today associated with Igboland was part of transcontinental trading networks that led to the Mediterranean via the Nile Valley.³⁶⁹ J. E. G. Sutton suggested that the beads ended up in Igbo-Ukwu via trading routes passing through the Christian states of Nubia, the Chad-Basin and in particular the Kanem-Bornu empire, and then through the Benue and Niger Valley, linking Igboland with the Nile Valley and the Mediterranean world.³⁷⁰

With new information that was not available to Sutton, Timothy Insoll has been able to propose more specifically that the beads entered Igbo-Ukwu from an entirely different direction, from the northwest via Gao in the Middle Niger region, and that trade links oriented north-south along the River Niger brought the

³⁶⁸ Ogundiran, "Four Millenia of Cultural History in Nigeria", *Journal of World Prehistory*, 2005, 19, 148.

³⁶⁹ Timothy Insoll and Shaw Thurstan, "Gao and Igbo-Ukwu: Beads, Interregional Trade, and Beyond", *The African Archaeological Review* 14, no. 1 (1997): 9-23.

³⁷⁰ John Sutton, "The International Factor at Igbo-Ukwu", *African Archaeological Review*, 9, 1991, 145-160.

beads into the confluence.³⁷¹ Of course, we also know now that glass beads were being locally manufactured almost this early at Ife,³⁷² providing an additional regional source for this valued item.

The presence of cowry shells—before Europeans began to import them—used as a currency and known as *igo* in Benin already during the sixteenth century, is a further indicator of the importance of the Sudanic trade connections of the preceding centuries. Afigbo points out that cowries as currency were in use among the Igbo, at this time known as *mkpuru ego* (seed of money), which underscores that cowries as currency arrived before the Europeans via trade routes that linked the forest regions and the Sudan with North Africa. Afigbo suggests land routes through the central Sahara as the medium of transmission,³⁷³ and this proposal is backed up by the history of the words for cowrie, *wuri*, in northern Nigeria, which came from the Kanem-Bornu Empire,³⁷⁴ which lay at the southern terminus of the most important central Saharan trade route. Language evidence, based on the example of the introduction of maize in the sixteenth century, underscores that trade routes of the Sahel and savanna regions in Northern Nigeria remained oriented towards Egypt. This evidence suggests an even more

³⁷¹ Timothy Insoll and Thurstan Shaw, “Gao and Igbo-Ukwu: Beads, Interregional Trade and Beyond”, *African Archaeological Review*, 14,1, 1997, 9.

³⁷² Peter Robertshaw, Constanze Weise, Laure Dussubieux, James W. Lankton, Rachel S. Populka-Filcoff, and Michael Glascock, “Chemical Analysis of Glass from Nupe, Nigeria”, *Tribus*. 58 (2009): 83-95.

³⁷³ Afigbo, “Southeastern Nigeria, the Niger-Benue Confluence, and the Benue in the precolonial period: some issues of historiography”, *History in Africa*, 24, 1997, 5

³⁷⁴ Christopher Ehret, *Historical-Comparative Reconstruction of Nilo-Saharan* (Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2001), 591, root 1458.

prominent use of these routes during the medieval period and the high tide of trans-Saharan trade.

While the findings clearly establish the importation of goods via long distance trade, the unsolved question still remains of what the people of Igbo-Ukwu exchanged for the imported product. Shaw suggested ivory in the form of elephant tusks, slaves and perhaps kola nuts.³⁷⁵ Insoll proposed that some of the ivory was carried up the River Niger to Gao and entered the Saharan trade from there. This would be a plausible explanation for the excavated beads found in Igbo-Ukwu, which resemble those found in Gao.³⁷⁶

Sutton has a different explanation. He points out that both elephants and slaves were common commodities south of the Sahara a thousand years ago, and he has argued that, to generate so much wealth at such a southern latitude as Igbo-Ukwu, there must have been some other valued commodity specific to that place.” According to Sutton, the special commodity that the people of Igbo-Ukwu might have been trading could have been silver.³⁷⁷ Connah underscores that silver occurs in small quantities in copper ore in southeastern Nigeria, and traces of it have been found in the copper-alloy objects from Igbo-Ukwu. He points out that

³⁷⁵ Thurstan Shaw, *Igbo-Ukwu: an Account of Archaeological Discoveries in Eastern Nigeria* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970), vol. 1, 284-5. 1

³⁷⁶ Timothy Insoll, *Islam, Archaeology and History: Gao region (Mali) ca. CE 900-1250*, *Cambridge Monographs in African Archaeology* 39, BAR International Series 647 (Oxford:Tempus Reparatum, Oxford, 1996) 80; Timothy Insoll and Thurstan Shaw, “Gao and Igbo-Ukwu: Beads, Interregional Trade, and Beyond”, *The African Archaeological Review* 14, no. 1 (1997), 9-23.

³⁷⁷ J. E. G. Sutton, “The international factor at Igbo-Ukwu”, *African Archaeological Review* 9, 1991, 154.

this hypothesis is plausible because silver was a sought-after commodity for the currencies of both the Islamic and Christian worlds at that time.³⁷⁸

Since the beginning of the excavations, research related to this early civilization at the Niger-Benue confluence has been subject to nationalist-driven historiography rooted in Igbo versus Igala ethnic identity discourses about the ownership and origin of Igbo-Ukwu. Due to the absence of other comparable excavations sites in either Igbo or Igalaland, these discourses are shaped by claims based on a variety of contradictory oral traditions. Igbo historians, in particular, proposed that the sites were a reflection of the Kingdom of Nri, whose descendants still live in the vicinity of the sites.³⁷⁹ Other historians have countered these claims because Igbo historiography of the last two hundred years has focused on the so-called acephalous character of the Igbo societies. These communities were known for the absence of centralized politics, leading British colonial powers to create “warrant chiefs” in order to fit the Igbo into the system of “indirect rule.”

Graham Connah has argued for caution in interpreting the findings:

Clearly there was an early participation in both local and long-distance trade by people living in the Igbo-Ukwu area, and clearly there was some sort of local authority capable of concentrating a considerable quantity of the products of this trade on one individual. Elsewhere, such archaeological evidence would probably be thought suggestive of the sort of social stratification indicative of an emergent state or at least of a ranked chiefdom. In the case of Igbo-Ukwu the ethnohistorical evidence would require considerable qualification of such an interpretation. Until we know

³⁷⁸ Graham Connah, *African Civilizations*, 177.

³⁷⁹ A. E. Afigbo, “Southeastern Nigeria, the Niger-Benue Confluence, and the Benue in the Precolonial Period: Some Issues of Historiography”, *History in Africa* 24, (1997), 1-8.

far more about the late first millennium CE in this part of Nigeria, there are three tentative conclusions that suggest themselves. First, that we should be very careful when deducing socio-political organization from such archaeological evidence as 'rich burials'. Second, that the social and political organization observed in any area during the last two centuries does not necessarily indicate the situation a thousand years ago: societies are dynamic not static and change exists in forms other than unilinear evolution. Third, that Iboland raises fundamental questions about the nature of West African urbanism. In 1955 this area had one of the densest populations in Nigeria, with estimates of some areas of 'well over 1000 per square mile [259 hectares]'[...] Perhaps for mainly socio-economic reasons, Ibo settlement was dispersed rather than nucleated like that of the Yoruba, each Ibo farmingstead lying in the middle of its own cultivated area near a road or a bush path. Given such population densities, it seems pointless to ask questions about the 'absence' of urbanism.³⁸⁰

The current scholarly consensus is that the Igala kingdom arose around the Niger and Benue Rivers in the thirteenth century. Conflicting oral traditions claim some connection to the civilization that is associated with Igbo-Ukwu and Nri. In the absence of further archaeological findings that would parallel those at Igbo-Ukwu, it remains a future task for researchers to find supporting evidence. What is interesting so far is that the burial practices of the Attah of Igalaland, as described by colonial administrators at the beginning of the twentieth century, do not accord with the findings made in Igbo-Ukwu, where the person to whom a certain status can be attributed was buried in a seating position. In contrast, the Attah was buried lying down in a coffin that had the form of a canoe.³⁸¹ Moreover, it seems that no servants or other humans were buried together with the deceased noble man at Igbo-Ukwu. For the Attah of Igalaland, the records

³⁸⁰ Graham Connah, *African Civilizations*, 166.

³⁸¹ Afigbo, *Southeastern Nigeria*.

confirm that some of the court personal had to be buried together with the diseased Attah in order to guarantee the continuation of royal existence in the afterlife.³⁸²

According to Philip Adigwe Oguagha, oral traditions and material culture establish that some of the groups today associated with the Igbo ethnic group had early contact with groups today associated with the Igala ethnic group. Among these are the Umueri towns. This group of related towns situated to the northeast of Onitsha trace their descent from an ancestral founder called Eri. According to these traditions, which were recorded by colonial administrators in the 1930s, Eri had four sons: Nri, Aguleri, Igbariam and Amanue, who founded the various towns bearing their names. These four towns are today collectively known as the Umueri (the children of Eri). Oral traditions claim that that Nri, the eldest son of Eri, also fathered four sons named Agukwu, Ukabi, Osunagidi and Osuoba. Agukwu founded Agukwu-Nri, Ukabi's two sons established Enugu-Ukwu and Nawfia, Osunagidi founded Enugwu-Agidi and the descendants of Osuoba scattered into various other towns. These towns are known as Umunri (the children of Nri) and are considered a sub-clan of the Umueri. The only daughter of Nri was named Iguedo, and she had four sons who founded Akuzu, Umuleri, Nando and Ogbunike, which together were known as Umuigwedo and form another sub-clan within the Umueri clan. The towns of Nteje, Nsugbe and

³⁸² Ibid.

Umunya are also associated with the Umueri clan, but their genealogical connection to Eri is not clear.³⁸³

Connections to the Igala in particular are established by oral traditions collected by M. D. W. Jeffreys, who was stationed as District officer in the Akwa Division in Onitsha province in the 1930s.³⁸⁴ He recorded the traditions of the Umueri clan at Agukwu-Nri. These traditions, which were more of a cosmogonist nature, state that Chukwu, the creator god, sent Eri together with his wife Namaku from the sky to Umueri. Eri had a second wife whose son Idah left Umueri and founded the town of Idah farther northwest. The eldest son of Idah was Onojo Ogboni, who grew up as a giant and a great warrior.³⁸⁵

Jeffrey obtained this information from the Adama priests, who are the custodians of the royal regalia and the masters of ceremony,³⁸⁶ and from the royal family at Aguwku, from which the Nri “divine king may be selected of the gods.”³⁸⁷ Jeffrey states that this oral tradition was passed down from generation to generation within the royal family of Aguwku. “This tradition”, he writes, “is part of the paraphernalia of the royal cult. It is the duty of the seniors in these royal

³⁸³ N.A.I. / C.S.O. 26/28323. B.G. Stone, *Intelligence Report on Umueri Villages, Akwa and Onitsha Division, Onitsha Province (1932)*; N.A.I./ C.S.O. 26/30986, J. S. Clark and P.P. Grey, *Intelligence Report on the Umundri Group, Akwa Division, Onitsha Province (1935)*; N.A.I./C.S.O. 26/28280, A.F. B. Bridges, *Umuigwedo clan of Akwa and Onitshah Divisions, Onitsha Province (1932)*.

³⁸⁴ M. D. W. Jeffreys, “The Umundri tradition of origin”, *African Studies*, 15,3, 1956, 119-131.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 121.

³⁸⁶ M. D. W. Jeffreys, "The Divine Umundri King", *Africa*, 8, 1935, 347.

³⁸⁷ Jeffreys, “Umundri tradition of origin”, 120.

families to learn the tradition and to hand it on.”³⁸⁸ He also describes that, while he was collecting the traditions, his consultants broke out into a dispute, claiming these other towns that came and settled around us are not colonies of Ndri but subjects of Ndri. They were not, in the beginning, of Umundri stock. However, part of Enugu (Akwa) and Akampesi assert that this entire great field is theirs.³⁸⁹

According to Jeffreys, sacred prayers act as ritual markers of group identity and distinction, amply indicative of the manner by which the Umunri distinguished themselves from the Igbo, and by the fact that the Igbo do not tell the above-mentioned oral traditions.³⁹⁰ He writes that the Umunri “declare that they are not Igbo but settled amongst a people whom they call Igbo.”³⁹¹ M. A. Onwuejeogwu argues for a cultural continuity between Igbo-Ukwu and the more recent Nri culture. The artifacts found in the burial chamber have been associated with the present paraphernalia of the Eze Nri institution that exists in the towns of Agukwu-Nri and Orieri, which are geographically situated nine miles and one mile away respectively from the excavation sites at Igbo-Ukwu. The relationship to the Igala is not only stated in the local tradition of origin, but also is indicated ritually.

Jeffrey points out that the installation rituals of the Attah of Idah are deeply connected to those of Nri. He writes:

When an eze of Idah is crowned it was stated that a Ndri man has to be there to put the crown on his head. Nnalua, Jacob, Ongwure, are Ndri men alive today who have done this. They were not available

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 130.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 124.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 126.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 350.

for cross-examination, and in view of the Atta of Adah's claim to bestow nobility upon the Igbo towns around Idah it is unlikely that today he dons his crown only in the presence of an Umundri man.³⁹²

Jeffreys concludes that these oral traditions refer to Idah as having been founded by a younger son of Eri, and he therefore proposed that Umundri and the Igala share a common origin, which is ritually validated by the seniority of Eri and the crowning of the Attah by a Nri man. This kind of ritual authority held by Nri in relation to Igala could further reflect that the Nri priests who hold the "earth priest" position represent an autochthonous group conquered by an immigrant group, who established a ruling dynasty.³⁹³ The fact that the Attah of Idah also bestows titles on the neighboring Igbo may reveal former Igala political hegemony over this frontier zone, at a subsequent period, as indicated by Oguagha and Okpoko, of rising fortunes and expanding power of the Igala during the middle second millennium CE.³⁹⁴

The question of Igala-Igbo relationships, particularly with regard to the rise of the Igala kingdom, has generated lively debate in Nigerian historiography. The necessary reliance at this point by historians on oral traditions and the absence of datable hard evidence for the early history of the Igala kingdom means that most of issues in this debate remain unresolved. Future archaeological work in the Igbo frontier and Igala region may shed some new light on this debate. The

³⁹² Ibid., 124.

³⁹³ Finn Fuglestad, "Earthpriests, Priestchiefs and Sacred Kings in Ancient Norway, Iceland and West Africa", *Scandinavian Journal of History* *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 4 (1979), 47-74.

³⁹⁴ Philip Adigwe Oguagha and Alex Ikechukwu Okpoko, *History and Ethnoarchaeology in Eastern Nigeria: A Study of Igbo-Igala Relations with Special Reference to the Anambra Valley* (Oxford, England: B.A.R., 1984), 215.

discussion has been useful, however, in highlighting what is clear about this history, namely the ongoing story of intercultural exchange in the region, and hence provides insights on the shifting balances over the long term in intercommunal relations and the intertwining of different hierarchies and hegemonic sovereignties in the affairs of these two groups.

Many competing oral traditions exist about the Igala kingdom, its origin and progression towards the present. Dike argues, regarding the emergence and furtherance of the state system among the Igala specifically and the Niger-Benue confluence area more broadly, that the elevation of agriculture and the surpluses it created helped the continued development of commerce beyond the immediate spatial spheres of these societies to territories beyond its borders. It can be surmised from oral traditions that these interconnections also advanced interactions among the political ruling classes of these diverse societies.

Indeed, among the Igala, the myth of the marriage between the assumed first queen, Ebulejonu to Omeppa, the apical ancestor of the Ashadu clan, represents such an instance within the myth. Later on, there are instances of such as that of Attah Ocheje Onakpa, whose mother came from Igboland. Austin Shelton provides more instances of collateral relationships affecting priestly institutions, chieftaincies and, of course, patterns of intermarriage in the Nsukka area of Igboland. Furthermore, the historical traditions of many Igbo localities, as shown by Elizabeth Isichie, reveal the commonness of intermarriage of Igbo with Igala in those areas.

Written records from the nineteenth century indicate that the Igala state had retained its overlordship in the Niger-Benue confluence region. These accounts give an idea about the interaction of nearby societies with the Igala kingdom and its governing institutions. Even though we cannot assume that these institutions have remained unchanged since the foundation of the Igala kingdom, the descriptions about them as they were in the nineteenth century provide some insight into internal affairs and institutional interconnections to go back earlier in time.

Members of the 1832 Niger expedition noted, upon reaching Aboh on the Niger River, that its king, Aja, had gone to Idah to consult with the Attah of Igala, regarding commercial disputes that endangered trade relations among different Igala groups and possibly Aboh and other traders.³⁹⁵ The importance of these relations for all the polities of the region is also underlined by the military action wrought by the Nupe king, Masaba (Dasaba), in retaliation for the death of Mr. Carr, an official of the British expedition who was killed in the Delta. In 1845 Masaba told Richards,³⁹⁶ who had accompanied Beecroft³⁹⁷ to Rabba:

³⁹⁵ T.J. Hutchinson, *Narrative of the Niger, Tshadda, and Binue Exploration, including a Report on the Position and Prospects of Trade up those Rivers* (London: Frank Cass, 1966).

³⁹⁶ Thomas Richards, a Yoruba from Sierra Leone, served as the pilot of the steam vessel *Pleiades*. He used to accompany John Beecroft on his trips up the river Niger, being knowledgeable about the Atlantic coast as well as the Niger River locations. Samuel Crowther, *Journal of an Expedition of the Niger and Tshadda Rivers: Undertaken by Macgregor Laird in connection with the British Government in 1854*, Second Edition (London: Frank Cass, [1855] 1970), 8.

³⁹⁷ John Beecroft (1790-1854) was an explorer, governor of Fernando Po and British Consul of the Bight of Benin and Biafra. In 1849 the British appointed him Consul of the Bights of Benin and Biafra, a position he held (along with his governorship of Fernando Po) until his death in 1854. Beecroft was preparing for another expedition to the Niger

that king Obi of Aboh had sent to inform the Atta[h] of Igara [Igalá] of the conduct of the inhabitant of the Delta, who had killed the white man coming to establish trade with the upper country, and that something must be done to keep the road open for free communication between them and the white men: that the Atta[h] having no sufficient power to do this, sent to him as one concerned in the matter, and powerful enough to keep the road open; and that he promised to bring a large force of horse and foot, provided the Atta[h] would furnish canoes to take them across the creeks and rivers.³⁹⁸

These diplomatic and inter-state missions and communications indicate the key interests of the ruling actors in continuing their commercially advantageous interests during the nineteenth century. They provide an insight into the complexities of inter-state relationships in the Niger-Benue confluence region during the nineteenth century, which were surely equally complex during the preceding centuries. Further, these events also point to the crucial nature of commerce in supporting the positions and identities of these various states around the confluence and along the river. The maintenance of law and order on the Niger was critical not only in enhancing trading relations, but also embodied the

River when he died on 10 June 1854. William Balfour took his place on the expedition. Howard Temperley (rev. Elizabeth Baigent), s.v. 'Beecroft, John (1790-1854)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004). K. O. Dike, "John Beecroft", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1/1 (1956), 5-14.; Dike, "Trade and politics in the Niger Delta", Ajayi, J. F. A. *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841 -91: The Making of a New Elite*. Longman, 1965.; Stafford, Robert A. *Scientist of Empire: Sir Roderick Murchison, Scientific Exploration and Victorian Imperialism* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

J. B. King, "Details of explorations of the Old Calabar River in 1841 and 1842", *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 14 (1844), 260-83.

³⁹⁸ Samuel Crowther, *Journal of an Expedition of the Niger and Tshadda Rivers*, 39.

systemic and structural dependency of the states on commerce for their ongoing self-definition.³⁹⁹

Almost immediately after the signing of the treaty between the British and the Attah in 1841, the Attah set to work decreeing and proclaiming to his subjects his disavowal of the slave trade and legitimating his acceptance of the trade as illegal. His subjects proclaimed this order through a large span of territories and began its enforcement. Such acts are indicative of the extent of regulated control and exercise of state power within even a spread-out kingdom like the Igala.⁴⁰⁰

The power to govern was also linked to the ritual arena as the source of sovereignty. In September 1841, when the British Commissioners of the Niger expedition arrived in Idah and sought an audience with the Attah of that time, Ame Ocheje, Ame Ocheje uttered the following statement affirming his “divine authority”:

The river belongs to me, a long way up and down, on both sides, and I am King. The Queen of the white men has sent a friend to see me. I have also just now seen a present, which is not worthy to be offered to me—it is only fit for a servant. God made me after His image; I am all the same as God; and He appointed me as King.

You ask me to go on board of a ship. A king in this country never goes on board of a ship. He never puts foot in a canoe. When white people were here before, the King never went on board. If anyone desires to see me, he must come to me. If to speak privately, I will

³⁹⁹ T.J. Hutchinson, *Narrative of the Niger, Tshadda, and Binue Exploration, including a Report on the Position and Prospects of Trade up those Rivers* (London: Frank Cass, 1966), 41, 49, 50.

⁴⁰⁰ Schön and Crowther, *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schon and Mr. Samuel Crowther*, 145-48, 207.

dismiss my people, if it were a public matter, then I shall allow them to remain; but the King never goes on board of a ship.⁴⁰¹

This statement attests to the Attah's self-understanding of his authority with regard to his conception of divine power and its ties to the domain of the power reserved in the monarchical order to ensure regulated order and supremacy of action. In response to this statement, Rev. James Frederick Schoen remarked, "Was this not a kingly answer?"⁴⁰²

As far as this assertion can be understood as a statement of dignity, it can also conceptually link the political-monarchical arena with that of the ritual order. Boston notes, "the Ata [Attah] is not regarded by the Igala as being divine in the sense of incarnating a god or deity in his own person."⁴⁰³ In reference to the above highlighted statement rendered by the Attah Ameh Ocheje to the officers of the 1841 Niger expedition, Boston says that it

has been quoted by several writers to prove that the Ata regarded himself as divine. He said, "God made me after his own image; I am all the same as God; and he appointed me a King... 'I am all the same as'... implies comparison and not identification. However, one interprets this statement, and as Frazer himself saw, it is equivocal as it stands, and can be read to mean that the Ata accepts no higher authority than that of the creator. It is also possible that the king was using an alien conception of the nature of God to demonstrate the nature of Igala social order. In many proverbs and ritual sayings the Igala introduce concepts from other languages to portray their own ideals metaphorically."⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰¹ Allen and Thompson, *A Narrative of the Expedition sent by Her Majesty's Government to the River Niger in 1841*, 288; Schön and Crowther, *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr. Samuel Crowther*, 85-86.

⁴⁰² Schön and Crowther, *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr. Samuel Crowther*, 86.

⁴⁰³ Boston, *The Igala Kingdom*, 194.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 194.

It is not clear what languages Schoen and Crowther refer to and whether these are archaisms in the Igala language or contemporary languages of other groups. However, in the nineteenth century, Idah was a rather cosmopolitan town with its inhabitants reflecting the global connections of the traffic along the Niger River, and its inhabitants probably spoke a variety of different languages. In 1832, an agent of King Pepple of the Niger Delta was found in the Idah market looking for slaves. We know that Igbo metal smiths traveled and had settlements within Igalaland. Nupe traders were, as noted by Crowther, found in Idah. Moreover, also according to Crowther, a prince of Zaria had stayed in Idah for about four years as a Mallam. Through intermarriage, Attah Ayegba Idoko was noted to have brought his maternal kin from among the Era to settle in Idah. During the nineteenth century, Idah was a major political and commercial center that drew diverse groups. It was an entrepot of plural influences.

In the Igala kingdom, the symbiotic relationship between the political and ritual arena formed the very basis of governance, aimed at securing the welfare of the Igala. It was important that the Attah represented the embodiment of the royal ancestors. As a result the Attah had the responsibility to ensure the effective working order of Igala society. Such responsibilities behooved the Attah to ritually celebrate the royal ancestors. But even more, the Attah aligned himself with the regional land shrine Erane, which represented the symbolic fabric of

Igala moral and spiritual consciousness and welfare, of which the Attah was the ultimate custodian.⁴⁰⁵

To the present day the Attah symbolically leads the annual hunting ceremony of the Ocho festival to ensure the success of the annual hunting expeditions. One of the major ritual dramas performed during Ocho is a hunting expedition, during which the Attah marks his reign and shows his skills as head hunter, possibly a reenactment of rituals referring to an earlier time period. These ritual ceremonies were (and are) vitally important, as they were intended to secure the social basis upon which Igala spiritual and material survival relied. Ane, the Erane shrine embodying Igalaland, comprised both the spiritual and material base of subsistence, human fecundity, agricultural fertility and bounteous harvests. This same element of prosperity was expressed within the Ocho and Inikpi rituals.⁴⁰⁶

Material and physical prosperity deriving from agricultural surpluses, either from the products of the land or hunts that sustained human existence, was fundamental to the survival of Igala society on many levels. The material base, typified and embodied within the ritual order, was conceptually integrated into a spiritual and moralistic perception that focally legitimated the Attah institution as functioning responsibly toward enhancing the material prospects of Igala society. This material base also empowered the spiritual and moral frameworks, upon which the Attah royal institution rested. The Attah institution utilized a dialectic

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.,193.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid. 202-227; Boston, "Igala Political Organization", 29.

power scheme embedded within the ritual and a spiritual template of understanding, which was believed to affect the material base of Igala society. Such efforts, to the extent that they were positively validated and purposefully relevant in ensuring the collective prosperity of the Igala, in turn further legitimated the spiritual and moral position of the Attah kingship.

Ritual reenactments proactively and manifestly interacted in depicting the functional relevance and nature of the Attahship. The Attah deployed and combined two different realms of ritual: namely, those deriving from the royal ancestral sphere and those of the indigenous landowning aborigines, as represented by the Attah's participation at Erane, the regional land shrine. Boston notes that,

in Igala at least, the King's religious duties are congruent in every respect with those of clan and lineage heads in the society as a whole. And it is only as a symbol of the interdependence of parts in the whole system of ritual and political offices that the king is responsible for the welfare of the nation.⁴⁰⁷

Furthermore, within this symbolic and ritual arena, masquerades have a significant place reflect essential elements of governance. Masquerades express a level of ritual superstructure that links the ancestral realm to the other institutions of Igala society. According to Igala, traditional and cultural thinking, masquerades incarnate the royal and non-royal ancestors in their collectivity. Among the Igala, the ancestors are actively involved within the affairs of their kin and the entire Igala society through their presence and engagement with the living. The moral base of Igala society is regulated by the ancestors through the

⁴⁰⁷ Boston, *The Igala Kingdom*, 193.

assurance of good fortunes for the various clans, which in turn continue to esteem and ritually propitiate the ancestors through invocations, ritual sacrifices, and food and drink oblations and through sharing of the material wealth at the clan or lineage ancestral shrine. The invocation of the ancestors through the ritual order, especially during the annual Okwula or Ib'Egwu (people of the Egwu spirit) into the affairs of the living, sought to ensure the individual and collective fortunes of the various clans, as well as the overall societal welfare, progress, prosperity and fertility of both humans and crops.⁴⁰⁸

Tom Miachi, in an elaborate study of Igala masquerades, depicts their importance for the maintenance of the royal and non-royal spheres of Igala social existence. In this study, he notes the dynamic roles Igala masquerades played in ensuring social control, in a world without an organized police force, therefore helping to positively regulate the moral fabric and processes, as well as the structural and systemic orders of Igala social existence. The royal masquerades in Idah actually dignified and entrenched the ancestral and sacral nature of the Attah ruling dynasty and the entire royal groups. The actions and stories conveyed in the masquerades aimed at reinforcing the structural and institutional frameworks that defined and gave purposeful meaning to the aspirations of Igala social advancement, the protection of the political and social order, the enforcement of

⁴⁰⁸ Tom Miachi, "Masquerade"; Anthony Agbali, "African Inculturation of the Christian Eucharistic Celebration", Unpublished thesis submitted to the Pontifical Urban University, Rome, Italy-St. Augustine's Major Seminary, Jos, Nigeria, 1994.

the social norms and the validation of the ancestral basis of authority and behavior in Igala society.⁴⁰⁹

The Ekwe masquerade, as the chief royal masquerade in Idah, is closely aligned with the executive and ritual powers of the Attah. The Ekwe symbolically beats the Attah three times with a cane before Ekwe makes his public outings, as a mark of the Ekwe's ancestral superiority, while concurrently underlining, through its mutual relationship with the Attah, that this ancestral identity was tied to the Attah's role and function in ensuring the prosperity of the Igala. According to Boston, "Ekwe disciplines the king himself, in the sense that he maintains the ritual purity of the palace and of the king's own person. Ekwe also symbolizes the ritual sanction behind the king's authority over his own clansmen."⁴¹⁰ This mutually engaging and even dialectical understanding of masquerading aligned the royal masquerades to the executive functions of the Attah, which were grounded in the royal ancestral authority and in the land shrine of the apical ancestors, as represented in Erane.

Other Igala masquerades could express an *ebo*, or nature spirit. In this role the masquerade scouted for and uncovered witchcraft. One of these masquerades was Obajadaka. It was identified with the Achadu ancestral clan and performed the funeral rituals of any dying clan member. Obajadaka would also perform

⁴⁰⁹ Tom A. Miachi, *The Incarnate Being Phenomenon in African Culture: Anthropological Perspectives on the Igala of North-Central Nigeria* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2012).

⁴¹⁰ Miachi, Masquerades as Agents of Social Control; J.S. Boston, *The Igala Kingdom*, 210-211: "Obajadaka seeks out witchcraft in the manner of an *ebo*, and is not concerned only with the welfare of a particular clan, but with preventing the action of witchcraft in society at large."

during the Ocho festival in order to ensure an ambience of social prosperity. This performance would be done on behalf of the king in order to purge the land of witchcraft (*ochu*) and all evil magic (*inachá*).⁴¹¹

For the non-royals, the ancestral clan masquerades the Egwu Afia, which were (and are) performed specifically during the annual Okwula or Ib'egwu (Ote Ib'egwu) festival, where the ancestors and their kin were reunited spiritually and materially. The Egwu Afia masquerades also functioned to ensure, maintain and repair or restore the moral, spiritual and material goodness and prosperity of the clan. Other masquerades were the Abule, or the Ukpokwu, which predominated around the Anka area. These masquerades proactively sought to ensure the moral restoration of the land, acting on behalf of the clan in order to bring renewal and social regeneration, especially in the face of ethical lapses or deliberate harmful acts capable of stunting the social growth of the society.

Igala masquerades were also involved in lawmaking for the welfare of the group, and they helped to enforce such rules, especially in pre-colonial society where there were no police forces, as such.⁴¹² The Orumarú masquerade around the Igala area of Okpo, for example, has been specifically noted to carry out enforcement roles within its jurisdiction.⁴¹³

The next two chapters consider the new forces of change among the Northern Yoruba, Igala and Nupoid-speaking peoples, as well as their responses

⁴¹¹ Boston, *Ibid.*, 223-224.

⁴¹² Interview with Chief Egwume, Idah, August 2010.

⁴¹³ Miachi, "Masquerades as Agents of Social Control".

to the new challenges over the period from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries. Rituals and ritually-founded relationships nevertheless continued to hold preeminent place in influencing, legitimizing and reproducing politics and in powering historical change in the confluence region

5 Crossroads of Power I: Ritual, Kingship and Trade in the Middle Atlantic Period (1600-1800)

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the global and regional historical forces and their impact on the hinterland communities of the Niger-Benue confluence during the Middle Atlantic Age. In doing so, it continues the histories of the societies and communities that were the subject of the previous chapters. A closer look will be taken at the Nupe- and Nupoid-speaking religio-political complex, the Igala-Igbo religio-political complex and the northern Yoruba religio-political complex and how internal and external transformations during the Atlantic Age impacted religious and political institutions in these complexes.

With respect to this topic, what makes the writing about this period in regional history different is the growing links of this region to the larger global historical processes of the age and, according to the evidence, the increasing availability of external and internal written sources, especially from the European encounters. Oral traditions, oral histories and ethnographic accounts collected in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including my own field research findings, greatly expand the range of what we can say about the societies in question. In addition, new correlations can be established with communities in the Americas and Sierra Leone, many of whose members came originally from within the

Nigerian hinterland and entered these historical spaces through the trans-Atlantic slave trade.⁴¹⁴

The Atlantic Age was an era of structural changes in economic organization, as well as an era of political and social transformations among African polities, both along the Atlantic coast and in the Nigerian hinterland. It was a period of expanding interconnected commercial systems, with the Atlantic Basin at the center, linking together Western Europe, the Americas, the littorals of the Indian Ocean and much of West and Central Africa. From the sixteenth through the nineteenth century, the volume and variety of commerce grew ever greater at both the regional and global levels.⁴¹⁵

As a result, a new period of the expansion and consolidation of inland markets and production centers ensued, leading further to the strengthening of the powers of political and economic entrepreneurs, polities and dynasties across the entire hinterland region. What evidence we have from the polities of the region suggests that, as trade routes and market centers proliferated, their major concern was to protect their core territories and their boundaries and to expand them, if possible. Local trade networks linked to regional ones, and a whole range of new economic items grew in prominence. New crops were integrated into cultivation cycles and divisions of labor, marketed products became more diversified,

⁴¹⁴ There is vast literature on the African Diaspora, but only few of it deals actually with specific ethnic groups or regions. For the Yoruba as one of the major groups of the Niger-Benue confluence see for instance: Susan Cooksey, Robin Poynor, Hein Vanhee, and Charlee S. Forbes, eds., *Kongo across the Waters* (Gainesville University of Florida, 201)

⁴¹⁵ Philip Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

European commodities became incorporated into daily life cycles of hinterland communities, and new trading diasporas developed.⁴¹⁶

Initially, the presence of Europeans, and the impact of new kinds of economic changes that came along with them, were felt most strongly among the polities along the Atlantic Ocean coast and immediately inland, while the impact was experienced mostly to a lesser degree and often only to a lesser extent within the interior. The global economic changes did have growing effects in the interior as time passed. But, for a long time, political and social changes continued to be driven primarily by regional and local factors that intersected with the global economic transformations only partially and indirectly.

For example, the opening of the Atlantic trade coincided with the beginning of a long-term ecological shift toward aridity in the whole of the Sahelian region. According to Gregory Maddox, this environmental change led to a dramatic transformation in the Sahel after 1600, to the extent that what constitutes the Sahel may have shifted about 150 miles southward between 1600 and 1850 CE.⁴¹⁷ With this southward shift of the “desert frontier” also came a reconfiguration of different societies on both sides of the frontier. Thus, the turn of the Niger-Benue societies towards the Atlantic took place not only in an era of

⁴¹⁶ Nwokeji, G. Ugo. *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra: An African Society in the Atlantic World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Jane I. Guyer, *Marginal Gains: Monetary Transactions in Atlantic Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004)

⁴¹⁷ Maddox, Gregory, *Sub-Saharan Africa: An Environmental History* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 177.

increasing impact from the south, but also in an era of changing patterns of trade flow with areas to the north.

Another consequence of this climatic change was population movements from the Sahel into the Savanna and rainforest areas of the Niger-Benue confluence. A well-attested case of internal migration due to environmental changes is the emigration of a group of Kanuri-speaking traders and pastoralists who left the Kanem-Bornu Empire, located on the desert edge, in the second half of the seventeenth century, to escape a long-lasting drought and to eventually settle down in Nupeland, forming the kingdom of Kutigi.⁴¹⁸

The volume of commercial activity rose in the second half of the seventeenth century, with the Western African portion of that interconnected commerce becoming increasingly dominated by the exporting of African captives across the Atlantic.⁴¹⁹ The seaborne exports of the Guinea Coast and its hinterlands consisted of slaves and other commercial commodities, such as ivory, gum, palm oil, cocoa, coffee and groundnuts. The demand must have greatly increased, as evident from the full establishment of cowrie shells as local currency, and from the introductions of major new commodities, such as tobacco, with clay pipes for smoking, both of local manufacture and imported from Europe. Further imported commodities were textiles, arms and ammunition,

⁴¹⁸ Constanze Weise, "Celebrating the Hybridity of Cultures in Kutigi", in Toyin Falola and Steven J. Salm, eds., *Urbanization and African Cultures* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), 357-84.

⁴¹⁹ David Eltis, Stephen Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-Rom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); David Eltis and David Richardson, eds., *Extending the Frontiers Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

spirits, and—to a lesser extent—salt, hats, candles, sugar and ceramic. Other items included imported copper and brass objects, iron bars, cooking pots, chinaware, glass beads and exotic stone manufacture.⁴²⁰ All of these factors indicate a leap in the impact of the Atlantic commerce for the daily lives of the people of the region.⁴²¹ Additionally, cowries, as well as tobacco and imported metals, became incorporated into aspects of everyday life.

The imported manufactured goods often competed with or supplanted products of West Africa's manufacturing sectors. At the same time, semi-luxury food, alcoholic drinks and tobacco influenced taste and changed consumption patterns.⁴²² Furthermore, crops such as maize or sweet potato, which were imported from the Americas, altered the agricultural fabric of the coastal and hinterland societies with long-lasting effects.

The impact of the Atlantic commercial relations on the hinterland in the sixteenth century impinged, at most, only indirectly upon the Nupe and their neighbors in the Niger-Benue confluence. However, the hinterland states—such

⁴²⁰ Akinwumi Ogundiran, "Of Small Things Remembered: Beads, Cowries, and Cultural Translations of the Atlantic Experience in Yorubaland", *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35, 2/3 (2002), 442; Norma Rosen, "Chalk Iconography in Olokun Worship", *African Arts* 22, 3 (1989), 44.

⁴²¹ On the use and importance of different types of currencies during the Atlantic Age see A. G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 67-70.

⁴²² Joseph E. Inikori, "West Africa's Seaborne Trade, 1750-1850: Volume, Structure and Implications", in G. Liesegang, H. Pasch and A. Jones, eds., *Figuring African trade: proceedings of the Symposium on the quantification and structure of the import and export and long distance trade in Africa, 1800-1913 [St. Augustin, 3-6 January, 1983]*, 1986), 53, 63-65; Akinwumi Ogundiran, "Living in the Shadow of the Atlantic World: History and Material Life in a Yoruba-Edo Hinterland, Ca. 1600 - 1750", in Akinwumi Ogundiran and Toyin Falola, eds., *Archaeology of Atlantic Africa and the African Diaspora* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007), 77-99.

as the Northern Yoruba, Nupe and, to a certain extent, the Igala—had to negotiate their boundaries with the rising Oyo Empire as it emerged in the middle of the sixteenth century. Oyo reached its highest expansion between 1726 and 1730 extending its political influence into the Kingdom of Dahomey, which became a tributary state to Oyo. By 1750 Oyo incorporated a territory that included the whole of Egba and Egbado, some parts of the Igbomina, the kingdoms of Ajase and Weme and parts of the Nupe and Borgu states.⁴²³

Throughout its period of hegemonic dominance, Oyo continued to pay reverence to Ile-Ife, the spiritual center of Yorubaland. In addition, Oyo continually sent embassies and gifts to propitiate the spirits of the ancestors and to obtain the sword of conquest, *Ida Ajase*, from Ife for the purpose of the installation of each new Alafin, as the Oyo rulers were titled.⁴²⁴

Oyo's rule over the towns in the kingdom involved the payment of annual tributes, which *oba* and *bale* of the vassal or outlying territories were required to bring in person during the annual Bere festival, during which they followed the chiefs of the capital in paying their homage and tribute to the Alafin. Next to the symbolic Bere grass, the towns paid additional tributes in money and kind.⁴²⁵ Items introduced through the Atlantic economy, such as cowry shells, gunpowder, flints and tobacco, featured very prominently among the payments.⁴²⁶

⁴²³ Law, Robin, *The Oyo Empire*, 90, Akinjogbin, I. A. and E. A. Ayandele, "Yorubaland up to 1800", in Obaro Ikeme, ed., *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nig) Ltd., 1984), 135.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 99-100.

⁴²⁶ Ibid. 100.

Eventually, the rise of the Oyo Empire in the seventeenth century immersed the region increasingly into developments at the Atlantic coast, including participation in the trade that led south to the new outlets. Although concrete evidence about pre-nineteenth century Nupe slave export is scanty, slaves were certainly transported north to the Sahel during the era of Oyo hegemony, and this may have been a much older trade. At the same time, there is a great deal of circumstantial evidence that the Nupe and other peoples from the hinterland did indeed sell slaves southward through the Atlantic trade in what must have been significant numbers before the nineteenth century.⁴²⁷

From the time that Oyo began expanding its economic presence and political influence into the Nupe and Borgu kingdoms during the seventeenth century, it engaged in slave acquisition from both states, partially in exchange for goods traded from the coast, but also through periodic invasions and raiding of the territories of its neighbors. The Oyo traders obtained a variety of goods of European and American origin, such as firearms, cloth, earthenware, beads (especially coral), rum, tobacco, iron bars and cowry shells, which served as currency. Through these same periods—and through giving us some idea of just how complex these relationships were—Oyo maintained consistent market relations with Nupe and regularly sold slaves, as well as kola⁴²⁸, both acquired in

⁴²⁷ Kolapo, *Military Turbulances*; Mason, *Bida kingdom*, 17; and footnote 53.

⁴²⁸ Paul Lovejoy, *Kola Nuts, The 'coffee' of the central Sudan*, 98-100. Lovejoy points out that there were several varieties of Kola known in precolonial Africa though their production was restricted to certain areas and from there exported. Among these were *Cola nitida* and *Cola acuminata*. *Cola nitida* was the only kola exported from the producing areas in the forests of West Africa comprising today regions such as southern

the northern Yoruba regions, to Nupe merchants in exchange for horses regularly needed by the Oyo cavalry forces.⁴²⁹ The Nupe acquired these horses from their northern neighbors, the Hausa, as we glimpse from the Kano Chronicle, written in the Hausa city-state of Kano.⁴³⁰

However, even with the growing significance, from the late fifteenth century onward, of the new trading orientation towards the Atlantic, the Eastern Middle Niger regions—in particular the Nupe- and Nupoid-speaking areas—continued to have elaborate trading ties with the Western Sudan and with the trans-Saharan trade termini of the Niger bend area in the Western Middle Niger regions. This orientation lasted past the demise of the Songhay Empire in the 1590s and into the seventeenth century.⁴³¹

5.3 Atlantic Societies in Dialogue: Pre-colonial Niger-Benue Regional Contact Zones in Flux

Recent archaeological studies in some parts of the confluence region, in particular the northern Yoruba areas, confirm the permeation of the Atlantic world

Ghana, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau. *Cola acuminata* on the other hand grew only east of the Volta River, especially in the Yoruba and Igbo parts of modern Nigeria. Lovejoy further points out that small amounts of *Cola nitida* also grew in the riverine districts of Nupeland, introduced latest in the eighteenth century where local conditions allowed for the planting of cola nut trees despite the geographical location of Nupeland in the Savanna.

⁴²⁹Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 183.

⁴³⁰Palmer, “The Kano Chronicle”, 58-98.

⁴³¹M. Tymowsky, “L’conomie et al societe dans le basin du Moyen-Niger fin du 16e-18e siècle”, *Africana Bulletin* 18, 1973, 9-64; See also Paul Lovejoy, “The Role of the Wangara in the Economic Transformation of the Central Sudan in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Century”, *Journal of African History* 19, 2 (1978), 173-93. For example, the below discussed Kutigi immigrants followed an established trade route from Kanem-Bornu to the Niger-Benue confluence.

system into the Nigerian hinterland. These studies show that this impact contributed over time to the reshaping of economic and social relations with visible effects on material culture and on ritual practices, in particular the ideologies expressed in those practices. It also influenced ruling structures and organizations that determined legitimacy based on those ritual spheres. As a result, many hinterland shrines integrated sacrificial items deriving from the Atlantic contacts into their ritual paraphernalia. Even ritual icons related to the slave trade were appropriated and embedded within existing ritual cosmologies and observances. Some items, such as the exchange and possession of guns that characterized the market transactions and material exchanges for slaves, became transvalued into novel material forms and expressions of value.

Andrew Apter argues that transvaluation can be understood as a synthesis that arises out of cultural exchange and through which “new icons and new identities emerge.”⁴³² This notion can also relate to the sense in which an object is revalued and renamed or assigned new significations and/or interpretation within an existential and temporal context. Additionally, it can entail the re-signification of an object from its practical, everyday context. By inserting the object into a ritual field, one can bestow upon it an *extra*-ordinary meaning and relevance.⁴³³ While seemingly unchanged in its external or material features, the item, when used in rituals, takes on a symbolic or interpretive representation, giving ritual

⁴³² Andrew Apter, *The Pan-African Nation Oil and the Spectacle of Culture in Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 139.

⁴³³ Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1970), 27-28.

expression to how one masters and copes with the historical or social contexts out of which the item came or how it was used.⁴³⁴ Apter has vividly shown, based on the example of the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC), which took place in Nigeria 1977, how money was transposed into the spectacle of the cultural representation of wealth during the oilboom years in Nigeria.⁴³⁵

Another example from the confluence region shows how guns and gunpowder were incorporated into rituals that reinforced economic and political hegemonies.⁴³⁶ They mainly derived from the Atlantic exchanges and swiftly acquired both economic and symbolic as well as ritual values. As they became integrated into the cycle of exchange, they were valued both for hunting elephants and for capturing human beings. Furthermore, guns were discharged ritually, for example, to honor dead rulers.⁴³⁷

Another prominent ritual relation was noted in the 1832 Niger expedition journals of Macgregor Laird and Richard Oldfield. In Adamugu, the southernmost Igala port and town, they observed that elephant hunters kept guns that “were hung with charms enclosed in leather, and one was literally covered with small studs of lead about the size of a nail's head.”⁴³⁸ These hunters operated under the

⁴³⁴ Arnold van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*; Apter, *The Pan African Nation*, 139.

⁴³⁵ Apter, *Ibid.*

⁴³⁶ Allen and Thompson, *A Narrative of the Expedition sent by Her Majesty's Government to the River Niger in 1841*, 230; Guyer, *Marginal Gains*.

⁴³⁷ Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa by the River Niger*, Vol. 2, 78.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.* 184-85.

aegis of the Abokko, one of the leading Igala merchants along the Niger River trade routes, by paying a half-yearly tribute through selling the game they had killed, ivory and slaves.⁴³⁹ The integration of guns into ritual observances took place in parts of Yorubaland as well. For instance, in northern Yorubaland, such as in Ekiti and Ila Orangun, guns were considered ritual objects in the shrine of Ogun, the god of iron.⁴⁴⁰ Until the present day, gunpowder forms one of the magical ingredients of diviners among peoples in the Niger-Benue confluence, notably among the Kakanda.⁴⁴¹

Other items of Atlantic origin that confluence peoples added early on to their shrines were rum, European textiles and iron bars. Imported textiles replaced older indigenous types of cloth partially within ritual ambience and usage in many areas, even though locally woven cloth continued to retain its cultural importance for funerals, chieftaincy installations, bride wealth payments and ancestral masquerades.⁴⁴² In the Niger-Delta, manilas served not only as currency and means of accumulating wealth, but also as status symbols. For example, among the Obolo in the Niger Delta, manilas were placed in ancestral shrines where they served to “concentrate” requisite “spiritual forces”. Manilas were also worn or carried in funerary processions and buried with prominent elders. The Obolo

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Weise, Fieldnotes, Ila Orangun, April 2009.

⁴⁴¹ Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa by the River Niger*, Vol. 2, p. 78; Weise, Fieldnotes, Budon, March 2009.

⁴⁴² Renne, Elisha P. *Cloth That Does Not Die: The Meaning of Cloth in Bunu Social Life* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 13; A. F. C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans, 1485-1897* [New York: Humanities Press, 1969].

ancestral shrine served as a mediation ground that would bring wealth to holders of high office. It was also here that the annual festival was performed in honor of the national deity Ewke-Yok-Obolo, when sacred manilas would be displayed and paraded. Peek and Nicklin argue that these ritual practices most likely originated during the early establishment of trade with the Portuguese and the seaboard Obolo settlements.⁴⁴³

Directly connected to the advent of trans-Atlantic commerce was the politicization and social revaluation of cowries, which poured into the Bight of Benin after the sixteenth century. Cowries originally reached the Sudan region from the north as early as the thirteenth century.⁴⁴⁴ Originally taken by merchants from the Maldives Islands to India and the Middle East, cowries were carried in trade onward to North Africa and from there across the Sahara to northern Nigeria.⁴⁴⁵ Word evidence in the languages of northern Nigeria shows that cowries came first into these regions through the Kanem-Bornu Empire.⁴⁴⁶

After 1500 an additional route of introduction of cowries arose at the Atlantic coast through the Portuguese, and later the Dutch, traveling directly from

⁴⁴³ Peek and Keith Nicklin, Nicklin Keith. "Lower Niger Bronze Industries and the Archaeology of the Niger Delta", in Martha G. Anderson and Philip M. Peek, eds., *Ways of the River: Arts and Environment of the Niger Delta* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 2002), 38-59.

⁴⁴⁴ Paul E. Lovejoy, "Interregional Monetary Flows in the Pre-colonial Trade of Nigeria", *The Journal of African History* 15, 4 (1974), 562-85; Marion Johnson, "The Cowrie Currencies of West Africa, Part 1", *The Journal of African History* 11, 1 (1970), 17-49.

⁴⁴⁵ Eve De Negri, "Small Currency: Blue Shells and Manillas", *Nigeria Magazine*, 508-09; Lovejoy, "Interregional Monetary Flows"; Marion Johnson, "The Cowrie Currencies of West Africa"; Jan S. Ogendorn and Marion Johnson, *The Shell Money of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁴⁴⁶ See Chapter 4, footnote 153.

the East Indies. This source soon far surpassed the trans-Saharan sources of the currency. Old cowry-decorated items are remarkable from this time period and are protected and preserved up to the present by ritual specialists. Furthermore, the historical significance of cowries is evident from oral tradition and in its incorporation into ritual during this era. Akin Ogundiran has shown that cowries symbolized political power and thus acquired new meanings in Yoruba cosmology and ritual practices.⁴⁴⁷ As harbingers of all good things, in particular prosperity and wealth, cowries acquired the epithet “money of the gods”.⁴⁴⁸

Material objects, incorporated into the ritual arena, served to support the social structures of everyday life and to legitimate certain life activities and tasks, as well as class structures and interest.⁴⁴⁹ As part of the divination paraphernalia, cowries served as an interface between the temporal and spiritual forces, not only in Yorubaland but also equally widespread in the areas immediately to the north, such as in Ebiraland.⁴⁵⁰ The Igala also adopted cowries into their divination practices.⁴⁵¹ Cowries form an important part of the outer decoration of the Attah’s traditional crown, the *Onunuere*. The crown is a sacred ritual object in its own

⁴⁴⁷ Akinwumi Ogundiran, “Of Small Things Remembered: Beads, Cowries, and Cultural Translations of the Atlantic Experience in Yorubaland”, *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 35, 2/3 (2002): 427-57.

⁴⁴⁸ James Lorand Matory, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yoruba Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 210.

⁴⁴⁹ Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1992); Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967(1990)).

⁴⁵⁰ Weise, fieldnotes, Ebiraland, 2010

⁴⁵¹ Weise, fieldnotes, Ebiraland, 2010.

right. Cowries, along with red cloth and leather, wrap around the brass staff, Ajibo, which symbolizes ritual authority.⁴⁵²

The elaborate cultural repertoire of wealth accumulation, storage, distribution and credit that developed, as a result of the institutionalizing of cowries as the unit of currency and economic exchange, accompanied major changes in interpersonal and social relationships and in ideological definitions of commerce and mobilization. These changes even led to the recognition of new deities and to reconfiguring the powers and significance of older deities. Yoruba gods, such as Aje, Obatala and Esu, were among the deities that were redefined as patrons of commerce, wealth, profit and markets. These gods and their paraphernalia took on new meanings within the context of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the wealth that grew out of it.⁴⁵³

Among the northern Yoruba, the restructuring of the religious pantheons took place, realigning Yoruba cosmology in response to changing economic conditions.⁴⁵⁴ Notable changes affected observances directed towards the god Olokun, who “in addition to being the divinity of the ocean and patron-deity of fishermen, became the god/goddess of wealth, keeper of the rich storehouse of beads, giver of children, owner of a palace of cowries (riches) beneath the ocean and the patron-deity of traders and potentates involved in direct trade with

⁴⁵² P. Chike Dike, “Some Items of Igala Regalia”, *African Arts* 17, 2 (Feb. 1984), 70-71.

⁴⁵³ Bernard I. Belasco, *The Entrepreneur as Culture Hero: Preadaptations in Nigerian Economic Development* (New York: Praeger, 1980); Norma Rosen, “Chalk Iconography in Olokun Worship”, *African Arts* 22,3, 3 (1989), 44-53.

⁴⁵⁴ Ogundiran, “Of Small Things Remembered”, 442.

European factors.”⁴⁵⁵ Ogundiran points out that the materials central to the iconographic representation of Olokun were items that were imported into the Bight of Benin, and these items “were crucial to the process of social distinction in the regions.”⁴⁵⁶

One other important component of change in the inland regions, with heavy influences from the Atlantic world, was agricultural. The Niger-Benue area was, and remains, a place of mostly agrarian population. The people of the confluence region cultivated a wide range of crops, including sorghum, different kinds of yams, black-eyed peas, African groundnuts, rice and plantains. They also raised poultry and fish and then sold all their products in the various markets on the Niger and Benue Rivers. The observations of Richard Lander give a vivid idea of the scale and variety of market activities:

He informed us that the fair was attended by more than six thousand people; and that it was held on a sandbank; and that horses, tobies, goats, sheep, rice, and etc. were exposed for sale. From the canoes going down we obtained about one hundred weight of rice for a few gun flints. All the large trading canoes had a pony on board, about thirteen hands high....⁴⁵⁷

Relations of the Atlantic Age had a long-term and widespread impact on African farming through the introduction of American crops to the continent. Historians and archaeologists are still at the beginning of identifying the crucial and verifiable changes that can be associated with the incorporation of these crops into

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Peek and Nicklin, “Lower Niger Bronze Industries and the Archaeology of the Niger Delta”, 54-55.

⁴⁵⁷ Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa by the River Niger in the Steam Vessels Quorra and Alburkah in 1832, 1833 and 1834*, 1, pp. 132-133.

the local agricultural systems and their impact upon the organization and methods of agricultural production and socio-cultural reproductions. Among these crops were tobacco, peanuts, maize, cassava and several kinds of beans, which were all domesticated thousands of years earlier by Native Americans in the New World.

Local trade networks linked up to regional ones and brought new materials and crops into the different hinterland locales. For most parts of central Yorubaland, the Atlantic coast became the focal point of the long-distance trade networks in the sixteenth century. Not only did the realms of politics and religion in the hinterland provide indications for an increasing influence of the Atlantic economy, but also archaeological and linguistic evidence from Northern Yorubaland reveals that maize entered Yorubaland from the Atlantic Ocean side.⁴⁵⁸

Nevertheless, the older trade routes that linked the confluence to the Sudan belt and the trans-Saharan trade, and the forest societies to the south, continued to maintain their importance as well. The economic orientation towards the Atlantic did not obliterate other important trade routes in the hinterland, but rather served to enhance existing routes of economic exchange with other regions, such as the routes between the Igala from Ejule through Nsukka to Igboland, where Igala, Idoma (Akpoto) and Igbo traded in slaves, horses and cotton.⁴⁵⁹ Similarly, the

⁴⁵⁸ Roger Blench, "The Evolution of the Cultigen Repertoire of the Nupe of West-Central Nigeria", *Azania: the Journal of the British Institute of History and Archaeology in East Africa* 24 (1989), 51-63; Roger Blench, Kay Williamson, and B. Connell, "The Diffusion of Maize in Nigeria: a Historical and Linguistic Investigation", *SUGIA*, XIV, 19-46.

⁴⁵⁹ Afigbo, "Long Distance Trade between the Igbo and Igala."

new trade enhanced the importance of the centuries-old route from Kano to Nupe and onward to Salaga in the Akan-speaking interior of the Gold Coast.⁴⁶⁰

The diffusion of terms for maize is a powerful linguistic indicator of the continued importance of older trade networks. A closer look at this evidence for the Nupoid-speaking peoples shows the extent to which a trade orientation towards the Western Sudan and the Middle Niger region lasted well into the early parts of the Atlantic age. The most widespread term for maize among these speech communities originated from peoples living farther west and northwest in Mali and Senegal. The term for maize is used in different languages with various skewed pronunciations—kamaba, karaba, kaba, etc.— that are indicative of a relatively rapid diffusion of the crop. Other forms of this term occur in Dyula in Mali and in Tukulor and in the Fulbe spoken in Guinea and Senegambia. Dyula traders very likely brought this crop to the Middle Niger region.⁴⁶¹ In contrast, the words used in the Hausa states to the north and northeast of the Nupoid-speaking peoples reveal an additional trade orientation northward. The Hausa and other peoples east and north of them applied the term for the country of Egypt, *masar*, to maize, revealing that knowledge of the plant reached them from the north across the Sahara. The growing number of Muslim pilgrims on the *Hajj* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, who traveled east across the Sudan to the Red Sea or took routes north across the Sahara, may have contributed to why new

⁴⁶⁰ Paul Lovejoy, *The Salaga Kolanut Trade*; R. A. Adeleye, *Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria*,

⁴⁶¹ Blench, Williamson and Connell, “The Diffusion of Maize in Nigeria”.

crops like maize, which was ultimately from the New World, might have come in from the north.⁴⁶²

Arabic loanwords show that the Yoruba-speaking neighbors of the Nupe, before the seventeenth century, like the Nupe, also had mainly northwestward orientations in their long-distance trade relations. These loanwords reached the Niger-Benue confluence region and the northern Yoruba dialects by way of the Songhay language during the seventeenth century.⁴⁶³ It seems probable that Wangara traders, who spoke a Songhay dialect and came from the Western Sudan region, were responsible for spreading Islam to the Yoruba Oyo Empire. It is also well recognized that Yoruba traders actively participated in the Saharan trade around Borgu and other commercial outlets to the northwest.⁴⁶⁴

The semantic fields covered by these loanwords specifically include reading, writing, Islamic education and religious practices, along with emotion and intellect. One of many examples that reveal this history is the Yoruba word *alufa* for Koranic teacher. It derives from Arabic *al-faqīh*, which in popular usage can mean reciter of the Koran or schoolmaster of Koranic schools or in more formal usage legislator, jurist or expert of *fiqh* (jurisprudence).⁴⁶⁵ We can tell

⁴⁶² A. E. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture* (Ibadan: Published for University Press in association with Oxford University Press, 1981).

⁴⁶³ Stefan Reichmuth, "Songhay Lehnwörter im Yoruba und ihr historischer Kontext", *SUGIA*, 9, 269-99.

⁴⁶⁴ Paul Lovejoy, "The Role of the Wangara in the Economic Transformation of the Central Sudan in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries", *Journal of African History* 9 (1978), pp. 173-93.

⁴⁶⁵ See for instance, Hans Wehr and Milton J. Cowan and J. Milton, s.v. *فقيه*. *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic: (Arabic-English)*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Spoken Language Services, 1994).

that it entered Yoruba from the west via the Songhay influences because the Yoruba form of the word contains two regular Songhay consonant sound changes, the loss of /q/ and the loss of word-final /h/. In addition, Yoruba syllable structure is always consonant-vowel. That means that when Yoruba borrows a word with two consonants next to each other, it has to insert a vowel between the two consonant sounds /l/ and /f/, in this instance, changing Songhay *alfa* into Yoruba *alufa*.⁴⁶⁶

The emerging commercial orientation towards the Atlantic did not happen in just a few places, but rather within the context of regional developments. For example, the Yoruba had long pursued extensive commercial relationships with the Nupe and the Borgu. The Igala related and traded with diverse ethnic groups and communities, such as Bonny at the coast, the Igbo towns in the intervening interior regions, and the Nupe and the Kakanda to their west. The Igala facilitated commercial relations and even cultural incorporation through intermarriages and other forms of social encounters. At the same time, though, they were ready to engage in warfare in targeted and limited fashions to support and expand their commercial activities from the Niger-Benue confluence well into the Lower Niger region.

A variety of both overland and river routes connected the Niger-Benue confluence with the Bight of Benin during the nineteenth century, and these routes may very well have existed since the beginning of the Atlantic period. The

⁴⁶⁶ Stefan Reichmuth, "Songhay Lehnwörter im Yoruba und ihr historischer Kontext", 272.

1841 expedition reported the existence of a river slave-trading route that connected the Benin branch of the Niger River with the Lagos creeks and then followed the lagoons westward to Lagos and onward to Whydah.⁴⁶⁷ The members of the expedition noted that King Obi Ossai of Aboh was married to a daughter of the royal house of Ashanti,⁴⁶⁸ while King Boy of Bonny at the eastern side of the Delta had married King Ossai's daughter. These marriages were diplomatic moves aimed at securing and maintaining mutual trading and diplomatic relations.⁴⁶⁹ In my own fieldwork among the Ebira in Igarra, while researching their history and culture, the Oba of the Ebira recounted that the ancestors of the Igarra used to travel to the capital of the Asante empire, which they called "Atakara", to trade in beads by using certain shortcut routes that were no longer known.⁴⁷⁰

In the eastern part of Nigeria, using diverse land routes and later the riverine routes of the Niger, the Igala traded extensively with the Igbo in slaves, horses, cotton and other products. Ijo traders from Nembe navigated their boats upstream to Aboh, and occasionally farther to Idah, specifically purchasing dogs from the Igala.⁴⁷¹ Several centuries previously, it appears, various Igala communities were founded on the lower Niger as a result of trading relationships

⁴⁶⁷ Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa by the River Niger*, Vol. 1, Ibid. 102-04; Allen and Thompson, *A Narrative of the Expedition sent by Her Majesty's Government to the River Niger in 1841*, 239.

⁴⁶⁸ Allen and Thompson, Ibid., 240.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid. 237-38.

⁴⁷⁰ Interview EB-ETH-ET-M-1-5/24/2009

⁴⁷¹ E. J. Alagoa, "Long-Distance Trade and States in the Niger Delta", *The Journal of African History* 11, 3 (1970): 319-29.

along the river. Conquests contributed to this expansion, especially those associated with the Igala legendary leader Onoja Oboni, whose campaigns extended from his Ogurugu base to the Niger River. Towns in eastern Nigeria and on the lower Niger, such as Osomari, Oko, Nteje, Anam, Nzam and Aguleri, have associations with the Igala through descent, settlement, intermarriages and conquests. The Igala who settled in these towns have left cultural and identifiable imprints on the institutions of chieftaincy, in masquerades and in other cultural emblems and artifacts. In some instances, notably those of the Ebu of the present Delta State, the people maintain close cultural and linguistic affinities with Igala, which is indicative of a not-too-distant relationship.⁴⁷² As the seventeenth century progressed, these outward economic orientations of the peoples of the Niger-Benue confluence began to undergo some sweeping shifts. In general, one can argue that the growing encounters of the region with the Atlantic economy, beginning from the early 1600s, created new forms of material accumulation, wealth and exchanges.

Although the Benin and Oyo hegemonies robustly shaped the political topography of this region in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, historians have to look beyond these polities and specifically towards the states of the Niger-Benue region, namely the northern Yoruba city-states and the Nupe and Igala kingdoms, to see how these developments played out. These polities, farther away

⁴⁷² Elizabeth Isichei, "Historical Change in an Ibo Polity: Asaba to 1885", *The Journal of African History* 10, 3 (1969): 421-38; Dike, K. Onwuka. *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885; an Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956).

from the coast, and more indirectly connected to the trans-Atlantic commerce, give us the opportunity to study what took place on the trading peripheries. They provide a historical contrast to their southern neighbors, such as Oyo, whose socio-economic institutions came to be more directly oriented to the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

5.4 Nupe and Nupoid-Speaking Areas: Shifting Imperial Centers and Peripheries

There is very little known to date about the internal history of the Nupe before the nineteenth century. No datable primary sources are available, and unlike in northern Yorubaland, no excavations have been undertaken in Nupeland itself. Nupe appears first on a map by the French cartographer d'Isle in 1772 as Nouffy alongside "Bousa", "Borgu", "Yaorry", "Gabi" and "Couroufa", all of them located in the Benue Valley.⁴⁷³

The late Ade Obayemi identified former ruling centers and capitals in Nupeland based on either oral traditions or still visible ruins at Kpaki, Nupeko, Zhima, Gbara and Ragada, and had intended to initiate excavations there. Due to lack of support, though, these initiatives were not followed up.⁴⁷⁴ It seems that within Nupeland, capitals changed quite often and altered the dynamics between shifting centers and peripheries. However, it remains unclear what triggered these

⁴⁷³ Guillaume del' Isle, *Carte de la Barbarie, de la Nigritie, et de la Guinee*, in British Museum Map collection, K.117-114, reproduced in Ronald Vere Tooley, *Collectors' Guide to Maps of the African Continent and Southern Africa* (London: Carte Pr., 1969). 68, Plate 52; Mason, *Bida kingdom*, 9.

⁴⁷⁴ Ade M. Obayemi, "Tsoede, Etsuzhi and Nupe History before 1800", *Studies in the History of Central Nigeria area* (2002), 167-96.

relocations: internal, political reasons, such as dynastic shifts? military reasons, where mobility would have served as a defense strategy? or economic reasons, which determined the relocation of capitals closer to major trading routes or food supply networks?⁴⁷⁵ It seems remarkable that most of the cities that became known as capitals of the Nupe Empire were located on rivers, many of them along the river Niger and one of its tributaries, the Kaduna river.

Idris Sha'aba Jimada suggests that the movement of the Nupe capitals from Gbara, Jima or Nupeko to Mokwa as an early trading center was triggered by the movement of the Oyo capital from Oko to Oyo-Ile, farther away from the Niger.⁴⁷⁶ He argues that the transfer of the Nupe capital to Mokwa, closer to Yorubaland may also have placed considerable pressure on the frontier groups of Oyo, Igbomina, Ibolo, Ijesha, Bunu, Owe and Yagba from Nupe cavalry forces.⁴⁷⁷ Nadel refers to traditions, which indicate the influence of the Nupe Empire in northern Yoruba areas such as Bunu and Yagba, as well as farther down to the Ede along the river Osun and across the river Osun into the Ijesha territory.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁵ For an excellent discussion of causes for shifting capitals in Africa see Horvath, Ronald J. "The Wandering Capitals of Ethiopia", *The Journal of African History* 10, 2 (1969): 205-219.

⁴⁷⁶ Idris Sha'aba Jimada, *The Nupe and the origins and evolution of the Yoruba*, 44; cf. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, p. 12, 144, 150; Obayemi, "States and Peoples", 145-156.

⁴⁷⁷ Jimada, *Nupe origins and evolution of the Yoruba*, 44; NAK BIDDIV 2/1, B. 375; M. Mason, *The Nupe Kingdom*, p. 39, fn. 4; Nadel, *A Black Byzantium*, p. 74; E. A. Olunlade and E. A. Beier Ulli, *Ede, a Short History* [Ibadan: General Publications Section, Ministry of Education, 1961], p. 2-3; J. D. E. Abiola, J. A. Babafemi and Sam O. Ataiyero, eds., *Iwe Itan Ijesa-Obokun Ile-Owuro Ti a Se Lati Owo Awon Omo Ibile* (Ilesa, Nigeria: CMS, 1932) 44-8.

⁴⁷⁸ Abiola, Babafemi and Ataiyero *Iwe Itan Ijesa-Obokun Ile-Owuro*, 44-45, 47-48; Jimada, *The Nupe and the Origins and Evolution of the Yoruba*, 46.

Several groups who settled along these areas claim Nupe origin but acknowledged the authority of Oyo later on.⁴⁷⁹ Other oral traditions assert Nupe settlements and incursions into the Ibarapa, where towns such as Oke-Tapa attribute their foundation to Nupe settlers.⁴⁸⁰ Samuel Johnson also reports that the town of Ogudo used to be of Nupe origin but was later predominantly populated by the Yoruba.⁴⁸¹ Mason states that the town became predominantly Nupe again in the twentieth century.⁴⁸²

There are indications that the Nupe military forces were initially superior to Oyo's, in particular due to their cavalry. Jimada argues that, following Robin Law's suggestion, the sack of Oyo-Ile by Nupe military must have occurred closer to 1500, taking the military superiority into account as well. When Oyo introduced cavalry, this balance of power soon shifted farther south, which accounted for Oyo's success.⁴⁸³ Jimada points out that oral traditions indicate that Nupe actually served in Oyo's military by performing cavalry functions, and this seems to be confirmed by the travellers Clapperton and Lander.⁴⁸⁴ Nupe slaves

⁴⁷⁹ S. O. Babayemi, "Upper Ogun: An Historical Sketch", *African Notes*. 6 (1971), 72-84.

⁴⁸⁰ Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 92; Law refers here to colonial reports that probably contain oral traditions which underscore these claims. I did not see the file myself. NAI, IBAPROF, 3/4 H. Childs, 'A Report on the Western District of the Ibadan Division of Oyo Province, 1934 § 89.

⁴⁸¹ Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 217.

⁴⁸² Mason, *Bida Kingdom*, 1.1

⁴⁸³ Jimada, *The Nupe and the Origins and Evolution of the Yoruba*, 45.

⁴⁸⁴ Jimada, *the Nupe and the Origins and Evolution of the Yoruba*, 49; Clapperton, *Journal of a Second Expedition*, 24 and 28; R. and J. Lander, *Records of Captain Clapperton's last expedition*, vol. 1, 81 and 87.

also served in the Oyo army during Oyo's expansion.⁴⁸⁵ Johnson also reports that Nupe served under leading chiefs, such as the Alafin Obalokun, who is said to have appointed a Nupe as the first ajele of Ijana.⁴⁸⁶

Early on, both the Oyo Yoruba and the Nupe had contact with Islamized groups. Islam had spread largely along the trade routes from two directions. One came from the east and spread Islam to Hausaland via the Kanuri as Islamic loanwords attest⁴⁸⁷, while the other direction came from the west from the Songhay Empire and spread from there into Hausaland and likely also the Nupe and Yoruba states.⁴⁸⁸ According to Lovejoy, early trade relationships between Wangara traders, who operated from Borgu and extended their activities into the Oyo and Nupe region, were very likely.⁴⁸⁹ These were Muslim traders who also traversed along the coast of Dahomey in the seventeenth century and who appeared in travelers' accounts as "Malais".⁴⁹⁰ Many traces in northern Yorubaland point to the introduction of Islam through Mande people, and until the present day, a Muslim quarter in Igboho, an old town in the northwestern part

⁴⁸⁵ Jimada, *The Nupe and the Origins and Evolution of the Yoruba*, 50; Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 57-67; 149, 166-8;

⁴⁸⁶ Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 168.

⁴⁸⁷ Joseph H. Greenberg, "Linguistic evidence for the influence of the Kanuri on the Hausa", *Journal of African History*, 1, 1960, 205-12.

⁴⁸⁸ Stefan Reichmuth, "Songhay Lehnwörter im Yoruba und ihr historischer Kontext", 269-99.

⁴⁸⁹ Paul Lovejoy, The Role of the Wangara in the Economic Transformation of the Central Sudan in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries, *Journal of African History*, 19, 173-193

⁴⁹⁰ Paul Lovejoy, *Caravans of Kola: The Hausa Kola Trade, 1700-1900*, Zaria 1980, 34; Paul Lovejoy, The internal Trade of West Africa to 1800, in: J. F. A. Ajayi and M. Crowder, eds., *History of West Africa*, Bd. 1, 1985 (Third Edition), 678.

of the Oyo Empire, is called Molaba/Molawa, relating to the term *imale* or *malaise* that indicates this influence.⁴⁹¹

When exactly Islam gained influence among the Nupe before the integration of Nupeland into the Sokoto Caliphate, which necessarily caused a stronger Islamization, is difficult to determine due to the absence of datable evidence. Even during early colonial times, a census undertaken in 1921 by the administration of the Northern Provinces characterized forty-six percent of the population of the Nupe province still as “animists”.⁴⁹² It is known that Islam was present during the early eighteenth century in some regions within Nupeland along major trade routes. One of the towns that had a known Muslim population was Kutigi, which was located near the Kola forest region of Kusopa. In 1859 Baikie had characterized this part of the Nupe country as one of the strongest Islamized countries in Nupeland and its center Labozhi as one of the oldest kola-producing towns in Nupe.⁴⁹³ Kola was transported over the road, which passed through Kutigi and then northwards via Dabban, another town with Islamic

⁴⁹¹ T. G. O. Gbadamosi, *The Growth of Islam among the Yoruba, 1841-1908*, London 1978, 5.

⁴⁹² The following numbers derive from Meek: population by Religion each Province and Township of Nupe province: 536 Protestants, 112 Roman Catholics, 194, 404 Muhammadans, 167, 009 Animists. Cf. K. Meek, *The Northern Tribes of Nigeria. An Ethnographical Account of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria together with a Report on the 1921 Decennial Census* (1925; reprint Oxford: Frank Cass, 1971), 2: 246, Table 49; On the problem of Islamization among the Nupe see for instance Roger Blench, in R. V. Weeks, *Muslim Peoples. A World Ethnographic Survey* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984), 565-569.

⁴⁹³ Michael Mason, *Foundations of the Bida Kingdom*, Zaria 1981, 15; Fo 2/31; Baikie in a letter to Lord Malmsbury, January 7, 1859.

traditions, into Hausaland.⁴⁹⁴ Local oral traditions remember that the Nupe king Jibril (1733-1746), who became famous for his propagation of Islam, went into exile at Kutigi after his deposition.⁴⁹⁵

The town of Kutigi attracted Kanuri immigrants from the Lake Chad region, who left Kanem-Bornu during the time of the Sayfuwa ruler, Mai ‘Ali b. al-Hadj Dunama (1747-1792) and arrived at Kutigi during the reign of the Nupe king Etsu Muazu (1759-1767). The immigrants, who became known as Benu among the Nupe, consisted of wealthy traders, farmers and pastoralists who were looking for fertile land and green pastures. The emigration out of Kanem-Bornu appears to have coincided with a prolonged period of famine stemming from a major drought in the region. This drought was possibly a result of the long-term ecological shift towards aridity in the whole of the Sahelian region, during which the Sahara shifted 150 miles southwards into the Sahel.⁴⁹⁶ In the Lake Chad region, which is today northeastern Nigeria, this period is associated with famine and droughts, which are also attested in local chronicles.⁴⁹⁷ In a recent study titled "A New Climatic Periodization of the Gold and Guinea Coasts in West Africa, 1750-1798" Norwegian historian Stefan Norrgard underscores that the period shows a significant correlation with El Nino and other climatic aberrations on

⁴⁹⁴ Michael Mason, *Foundations of the Bida Kingdom*, 15; Nadel, *A Black Byzantium*, 143.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid, 14; 65 f.f

⁴⁹⁶ Gregory Madodox, *Sub-Saharan Africa, An Environmental History*, 177;

⁴⁹⁷ Dierk Lange, *Le Diwan des Sultan du (Kanem-)- Bornu: Chronologie et histoire d'un royaume africain (de la fin du Xe siècle jusqu' a 1808)*(Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner, 1977).

other continents in the world.⁴⁹⁸ He argues that especially the cluster of droughts that occurred during the mid 1760s and mid 1770s had an impact on the trans-Atlantic slave trade in that higher numbers of slaves embarked from the coast.

The immigrants established a small kingdom within Nupeland, whose traditions were, on the one hand, very much derived from Kanem-Bornu and whose Muslim rulers were installed by Borno kings. These Muslim rulers had to travel to Birni Ngazargamo in order to be turbaned by the Mais of Borno. Later on the Kutigi rulers were turbaned by the Nupe kings, and after the establishment of the Bida Emirate by the Fulbe rulers at Bida, they always swore on the Koran they had brought with them in the eighteenth century.⁴⁹⁹ One of the cultural traditions they brought with them from Bornu was the Gani festival, which is celebrated until the present day in Kutigi during *mawlid*, the non-canonical Islamic festival designating the birthday of the prophet Mohammad. However, over time the Gani festival merged with the local Nupe *gunnu* traditions of coming of age celebrations and rituals that designate the renewal of the fertility of the land and the veneration of the ancestors, embodied by the Ndakogboya masquerades that represent the ancestors in their collectivity.⁵⁰⁰ Other cultural elements that can be traced back to Kanem-Bornu are the titles used in the kingship system, which,

⁴⁹⁸ Stefan Norrgard, *A New Climatic Periodization of the Gold and Guinea Coasts in West Africa, 1750-1798* (Abo, Finland: Abo Akademie University Press, 2013).

⁴⁹⁹ Constanze Weise, *Celebrating the Hybridity of Cultures*, 362.

⁵⁰⁰ For a detailed description of the Gunnu festival in Kutigi see Nadel, S. F. Nadel. "Gunnu, a Fertility Cult of the Nupe in Northern Nigeria", *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 67 (1937): 91-130. For a contemporary description of the Gani festival in Kutigi see, Constanze Weise, *Celebrating the Hybridity of Cultures*.

although having undergone morphophonological adjustments to the Nupe language, are still recognizable as Bornu titles, such as the title Ezanuwa, which is derived, interestingly, via a Hausa version of the original title Zanna. This title can be traced back to the Maghumi dynasty, which had ruled in Bornu since the fifteenth century, and which today in the town of Damask, 150 km north of Maiduguri, designates a district head.⁵⁰¹

From the documentation of the Kanuri immigrants—who kept a written chronicle and maintained some of the traditions from Kanem-Bornu while merging with local traditions—it is interesting to note that the non-Islamic traditions, such as the Gunnu cult and the Ndakogboya ancestral veneration, can be documented back to the middle of the eighteenth century. The earliest written mention of the Ndakogboya by a European is in the records of Clapperton, who came to Nupeland almost one hundred years after the Kanuri immigrants arrived there. We also get the impression that the introduction of Islam was rather gradual. As in many other central and western Sudanic regions traders and clerics were very influential in spreading Islam. Another important factor for emergence of Islam in Nupeland was the vicinity to major trade routes, as was the case for Kutigi.

Lastly, the frontiers between the rising Oyo Empire and the Nupe Empire seem to have fluctuated, and the associated uncertainties caused a lot of unrest among the settlers in these areas. At the very beginning of the period, the Nupe and the Oyo Yoruba shifted capitals for both politico-economic and strategic

⁵⁰¹ Weise, *Celebrating the Hybridity of Cultures*, 363f..

reasons. Descendants of settlers in the frontier regions keep an active memory of these shifting center-periphery relations in the oral traditions. Future collections of oral traditions in these frontier regions and excavations, in particular on the Nupe side, will surely add new insights into this still scarcely documented time period of the beginning Atlantic Age in the Nigerian hinterland.

5.5 Northern Yoruba: City States, Shifting Currents and Zones of Transition

The rising Oyo Empire was an important political entity with which the Yoruba and other people in the northern and northeastern frontier zones negotiated their boundaries. By 1750 Oyo had incorporated some parts of the Igbomina and parts of the Nupe and Borgu states.⁵⁰² Oyo-Ile, the capital of the Oyo Empire, was located in a fertile grassland zone, which supported agricultural activities. It was located south of the Niger River on a main route that connected Yorubaland with the polities north of the Niger.⁵⁰³ The Oyo Yoruba, located south and west of the confluence, had longstanding trade relationships with the Nupe and Borgu states farther west, as well as relations of war and conquest, as evident in ritual mythologies and artifacts. Robert Smith narrates how the Oyo moved from old Oyo, settling closer to the vicinity of Borgu as a result of differing war

⁵⁰² I. A. Akinjogbin, and E. A. Ayandele, "Yorubaland up to 1800", in Obaro Ikeme, *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, 135.

⁵⁰³ Aribidesi Adisa Usman, "Empires and Their Peripheries: A Case of Oyo and Northern Yoruba", In: Robin Law, Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs, eds., *The Changing Worlds of Atlantic Africa: Essays in Honor of Robin Law* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 2009), 32.

threats from both the Nupe and Borgu armies, and then finally resettled back in New Oyo, closer to their aboriginal homeland.⁵⁰⁴

Samuel Johnson's posthumously published *History of the Yorubas*, which is based on oral traditions, was told at the end of the nineteenth century by the Arokin, the professional praise singers of the Alaafin of New Oyo, and details the so-called Igboho period of the Oyo Empire. He states that the ninth king of Oyo, Onigbigi, was driven by the king of the Tapa (Nupe) from his new capital Oyo Ile:

“The king (Onigboni) fled to Gbere in the Bariba county, and there he died not being used to the hardship incidental to the life of an exile; leaving his son Ofinran a refugee in a strange land. (...) The Oyo refugees were first received with open arms by the King Eleduwe and his Balogun Bokoye because Ofinrans mother was a Bariba woman.⁵⁰⁵

Richard Kuba and Olayemi Akinwumi argue that the “Igboho period” in Oyo history “provides concrete evidence for the exercise of Borgu’s political influence over the nascent Yoruba Empire.”⁵⁰⁶ According to Johnson, the Oyo people, under Ofinran’s leadership, returned to Yorubaland, stopping first over in Kusu, where the Alaafin finally died, and continuing later to Igboho, where four Alaafin ruled in succession and where the fourteenth Alaafin, Abipa, retook Oyo

⁵⁰⁴ Robert Smith, “The Alafin in Exile”, R.C. Law, “Contemporary Written Sources”, in: S. O. Biobaku, *Sources of Yoruba History* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1973), 9-24; Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 1977, 33.

⁵⁰⁵ Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 159

⁵⁰⁶ Richard Kuba and Olayemi Akinwumi, “Pre-Colonial Borgu: Its History and Culture”, in Akin Ogundiran, ed., *Pre-Colonial Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Toyin Falola* (Trenton/Asmara: Africa World Press, 2005), 341.

Ile, thus ending the exile period.⁵⁰⁷ Other independent traditions seem to confirm Johnson's account.⁵⁰⁸ The Lander brothers recount in 1830, "Bohoo [Igboho] was formerly the metropolis of the Yarriba [Yoruba]."⁵⁰⁹ Four royal tombs are ascribed to the exiled Alaafin in Igboho as well.⁵¹⁰ There exist different interpretations within the historiography today, in which some favor a literal interpretation of Johnson's account and others support the idea that oral traditions refer to the presence of a Borgu dynasty, who took over control in Oyo.⁵¹¹ Support for a Borgu presence in Oyo comes from regions in the northern part of the Oyo kingdom where frontier polities such as Igboho, Kishi and Shaki claim descent from Borgu.⁵¹²

Even if the exact chronology of these events is not established, these events belong broadly to the seventeenth century, which constituted a turbulent

⁵⁰⁷ Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 159-167.

⁵⁰⁸ George, J. O. *Historical Notes on the Yoruba Country and Its Tribes* (Lahr; Baden: Kaufmann, 1895), 23.

Robin Law, "How Truly Traditional Is Our Traditional History? The Case of Samuel Johnson and the Recording of Yoruba Oral Tradition", *History in Africa* 11 (1984), 195-221; Law, "How Many Times Can History Repeat Itself? Some Problems in the Traditional History of Oyo", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 18, 1 (1985), 33-51.

⁵⁰⁹ Lander, *Journal*, vol. 1, 78; Bowen, T. J. *Adventures and Missionary Labours in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa from 1849 to 1856* (London: Cass, 1968.), 267 and George, *Historical Notes*, 23); cf. Law, "How many times", 42.

⁵¹⁰ Kuba and Akinwumi, "Pre-colonial Borgu", 341.

⁵¹¹ Kuba and Akinyemi, *Ibid.*; Smith, Robert. "The Alaafin in Exile: A Study of the Igboho Period in Oyo History", *The Journal of African History* 6, 1 (1965): 57-77; Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 40-42.

⁵¹² With regards to Igboho and Kishi, see Lander, *Journal*, vol.II, 208; R.S. Smith, *Alaafin in exile*, 64, 71; Babayemi, S. O. "Upper Ogun: An Historical Sketch", *African Notes* 6 (1971), 76. Regarding Shaki, see Oloye Ojo, *History of Shaki* (1977), 8 f., 98; Babayemi, "Yoruba, Nupe and Borgu", 9.

period with expansions and population migrations in both directions south-north and north-south.⁵¹³ And while the above-mentioned accounts refer to the Oyo-Borgu frontier, other oral traditions of northern, and northeastern Yoruba, such as the Okun-Yoruba (in particular the Yagba and Bunu), as well as the Igbomina and Ibolu, recall intrusions from the Nupe Empire.⁵¹⁴ In Yoruba history and ritual mythology, their relationships with the Nupe (Tapa) surfaces in numerous accounts.

Archaeologist Aridibidesi Usman asserts that the seventeenth century witnessed changes in settlement patterns (aggregation and large site-size) and material culture, the emergence of new scales of chiefly authority, and increased regional interactions. He states:

It appears that the competitive milieu between Oyo and Nupe, which led to the consolidation of Igbomina under the Oyo, may have stimulated a rapid settlement growth in the area. The emergence of large sites such as Okegi, Gbagede, Igbo-Ejimogun, and Ila-Iyara in Igbominaland relate to complex demographic, economic, and political developments of this period.

He further points out that archeological evidence underscores the emergence of larger polities in northern Yorubaland, which were characterized by walls or ramparts that were built around settlements following the large-scale population movement into the hinterland. He stresses that the etymology of place names itself indicates the construction of enclosing, concentric walls, such as the place name of Ila-Iyara indicates. Iyara, or “Yara”, means trench or ditch behind the

⁵¹³ Kuba/Akinyemi, Pre-colonial Borgu, 342.

⁵¹⁴ Nadel, *A Black Byzantium*, 74; Obayemi, 144; Aridibidesi Usman, *Yoruba frontier*, 33.

walls of a town.⁵¹⁵ It remains unclear, however, whether these walls were just prestige constructions of major political centers or served as protection against outside attacks from Nupe and Borgu intrusions.⁵¹⁶

Usman argues that Oyo's expansion into the Igbomina region may have taken land away from Nupe settlers. This expansion would have caused warfare, reflected in archaeological findings, such as iron arrows, which were found in sites at Gbagede, Olupefon, Obaloyan and Apere and dated between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵¹⁷ Oyo's expansion into Igbomina is further underscored through pottery findings in excavation sites, which are clearly linked in style and decoration to Oyo ceramics of the sixteenth century.⁵¹⁸ The Oyo's hegemony over Igbomina is retained in memory and was enacted during the annual *bere* festival when local paramount chiefs paid tribute and personal homage to the Alaafin.⁵¹⁹

One interesting fact is that, even though Oyo expanded into the Igbomina region, it was never able to seize Ila Orangun, the capital of the Igbomina kingdom. Neighboring empires, such as the Ilesa and the Benin Empire, had attempted to occupy the Igbomina region and met resistance from Oyo. Afolayan states that Oyo responded to the Ijesa threat by establishing a military post in Ede

⁵¹⁵ Usman, *Empires and their Peripheries*, 39.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ Usman, *ibid*, 42; Kenyo, E. A. *Founder of the Yoruba Nation* (Lagos: Self published, 1959), 51.

⁵¹⁸ Usman, "Empires and Peripheries", 42.

⁵¹⁹ Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 107.

to guard the southern frontier.⁵²⁰ The Ijesa in turn established the town of Osogbo as a shield against the Oyo military presence in Ede. Later on, the town of Otun was recognized as the boundary between the Benin Empire and the Oyo Empire.

Archaeologist Akin Ogundiran argues that the expansion of Oyo into Ede Ile is visible in ceramic ware that can be traced back in style to Oyo and dated to the seventeenth century.⁵²¹ He points out that “historical narratives of the founding of Ede-Ile unambiguously state that the process of migration and settlement involved military activities sponsored by the Oyo metropolis.” To the present day, the people of Ede Ile and their contemporary descendants are praised as “children of the flaming arrows”, which, according to Ogundiran, “emphasizes the duties of Ede-Ile as the vanguard of the empire.” Horse remains in the excavation findings indicate further that Oyo-Ile invested into the military support of the frontier town Ede.⁵²² Ogundiran moreover states that the presence of cowries, glass beads and tobacco pipes found in the excavations reveal that Ede-Ile was “well-integrated into the circuit of cowry currency, diverse market spheres, and region wide adoption of new taste and consumption patterns in Yoruba hinterlands during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.”⁵²³

⁵²⁰ Funso S. Afolayan, “External Relations and Socio-Political Transformation in Pre-Colonial Igbomina”, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, 1991.

⁵²¹ Akin Ogundiran, “The Formation of Oyo Imperial Colony during the Atlantic Age, in J. Cameron Monroe and Akinwumi Ogundiran, eds., *Power and Landscape in Atlantic West Africa: Archaeological Perspectives*, 231.

⁵²² Ogundiran, “The Formation of an Oyo Imperial Colony during the Atlantic Age”, 238.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, 239 ff.; Ogundiran, “Of small things remembered”; Ogundiran, “Living in the shadow of the Atlantic World”.

Diplomatic arrangement led to Oyo's formal acceptance of Benin's imperial control of the eastern Yoruba groups, the Akoko and the Ekiti, while Oyo would establish and consolidate power over the Igbomina groups in the north.⁵²⁴ In the sixteenth century, the Asa River remained the common boundary between Ila Orangun and Oyo.

Oyo's rule in the Igbomina region left its imprint not only politically, in that it led to a redefinition of authority and power relations, but also socio-culturally. Politically, some rulers had their status enhanced, while others had it reduced. Socio-culturally, it was particularly the introduction of the ascendance of the god Shango, who became the most important religious cult in Igbomina as well as in the entire region, which reveals the influence of the Oyo Empire.⁵²⁵ Prior to the Oyo occupation, the cults of Oduduwa, Obatala, Obalufon and Oramfe dominated the Igbomina universe, most importantly in Ila, Omu, Isanlu and Eku Apa, all of which were later overshadowed by cults of Oyo origin.⁵²⁶ One of the major religious masquerades introduced during Oyo's presence were the *egungun elewe*. The *elewe* take their name from the brass bells or *ewe* tied around the wrist and ankles of the *egungun*. It also had the characteristics of leaving only the right hand and both feet uncovered in its dress. The *elewe* are associated with

⁵²⁴ I. A. Akinjogbin, "The expansion of Oyo and the rise of Dahomye, 1600-1800", in J. F. A. Ajayi and M. Crowther, eds., *History of West Africa*, vol. 1 (London, Longman, 1971, 385). Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, 41; Law, *The Oyo Empire*, 128-9.

⁵²⁵ Schiltz, Marc. "Yoruba Thunder Deities and Sovereignty: Ara Versus Sango", *Anthropos* 80, 1/3 (1985), 78. IGB-ETH-ILA-F-1-3/31/2009; IGB-ETH-ILA-F-2-3/31/2009.

⁵²⁶ Afolayan, *External Relations and Socio-Political Transformation in Pre-Colonial Igbomina*, 268.

the Nupe wars, during which they were supposed to scare away the Nupe attackers by the sight and noise made by the masquerades. As part of the ancestral masquerades, but in particular attached to the ruling clans, the *elewe* also act as praise singers to the kings today.



Picture 9: Egungun Elewe during the Egungun Festival in Ila-Orangun (C. Weise)



Picture 10: Elewe during Final Performance (C. Weise)



Picture 11: Chiefs of Ila Orangun during the Egungun Festival (C. Weise)



Picture 12: The Orangun of Ila with two of his wives (C. Weise)

5.6 Igala: Commercial Activities, Opportunities and Challenges

Among the kingdoms in the Niger-Benue region, the Nupe Kingdom and the Igala Kingdom of Idah seem to have held the predominant position before the nineteenth century. The Igala in particular developed extensive commercial networks and political influence along the Niger-Benue. Strategically located around the confluence of the Niger and Benue, this network harnessed its advantageous trading relations across the region. It also dominated several aspects of these trading activities, especially the trades in ivory, slaves and possibly horses. Essential to Igala's trading power were its relations with the other influential Niger-Benue states—Nupe, Aboh, Idoma, Jukun and Epira—and with city-states and small polities as far south as Nembe and Bonny in the Niger Delta and also along the land routes connecting with the Igbo and Idoma to the south and southeast.⁵²⁷

P. Dike has argued that the formation of the Igala state within this region was tied to increased agricultural surpluses and the resulting emergent trade and commercial relationships that such processes precipitated. Dike argues that the agricultural surpluses, and the commercial events produced new class structures and elite groups, as well as reformatted the internal ruling framework of Igala

⁵²⁷ Alagoa, "Long-Distance Trade", 222-23; Allen and Thompson, pp. 377-78; Hutchinson, *Narrative of the Niger, Tshadda and Binue Exploration*, pp. 48-50; Afigbo, "Long Distance Routes"; Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior*, Vol. 2, pp. 124, 127, 135.

society, thus both enhancing its polity, yet also decidedly sowing the seeds for its declining fortunes by the nineteenth century.⁵²⁸

To some extent, though, Dike may be confusing cause and effect. The high-value products passing through the region in the early trade included horses and cowries from the north and kola from the south, and it was normally from control over the movement of high-value goods, not over agricultural productivity, that kings accumulated wealth and built their authority and power. The growth of new kinds of demand by the Atlantic trade such as ivory, along with new high-value manufactures entering the region from the Atlantic, would have enhanced these factors. In turn, increasing agricultural productivity is typically encouraged by trade expansion, because it provides a means for everyday people to connect to these changes by providing food products to the ruling, more urban centers and to the merchants and traders who carry goods through the region. Growth in agricultural demand would have provided a historical context that made people more ready to accept new crops, such as maize, coming into the region either across the Sudan or from the Atlantic coast.

At the level of ritual, the Attah's of Igalaland still perform today two distinct festivals of long-ago historical origin, the Ocho and Erane festivals. These rituals present the Attah as the embodiment of Igala material prosperity and fertility. Through his independent ritual performances of each of these two festivals, the Attah establishes his presiding presence at the Erane land shrine,

⁵²⁸ P. Chike Dike, "Origins of the Pre-colonial States of Africa: The Case of Igala", *African Notes* 9, 1 (1982), 15-26.

which is otherwise under the tutelage of the landowning Igalamela chiefs. By combining his power as representative of the royal ancestors with the ritual expression of his authority over the landowning Igalamela, the Attah places himself at the apex of the material successes and organic fecundity of his domain.⁵²⁹ This is even further expressed during the Inikpi ritual. During this ritual act, the Attah goes to the River Niger, touches its water with his bare foot and then touches the land as a sign and symbol of Igala material and spiritual success, prosperity and fecundity of the kingdom and his subjects.⁵³⁰

The historical effect of these rituals is that they make the Attah the emblem of Igala material and social progress. This progress relates to material success, prosperity and fertility. During the Ocho festival the Attah is blindfolded and made to shoot at a goat. His hitting the appropriate target is ritually interpreted as indicative of the material and spiritual well-being of the Attah, his subjects, and his domains. The ritual at the Erane shrine conveys a similar viewpoint. The Attah's participation, under the tutelage of the Igalamela chiefs, unifies not only the two ritual spheres but also symbolically legitimates a mutually beneficial relationship with his subjects.⁵³¹ The well-being of the Attah and the royal clan is conceptualized not in terms of its concentration in the hands of any particular group but ideally as corporately shared and symbolically

⁵²⁹ J. S. Boston, *The Igala Kingdom*, 93.

⁵³⁰ R.S. Seton, "Installation of An Attah of Idah (Nigeria)", *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 66, 267; R. Sydney Seton, "Notes on the Igala Tribe, Northern Nigeria-Part II", *Journal of the African Society*, 4 no, 29 (1929/30), 157-58.

⁵³¹ Seton, "Installation of An Attah" 265-67.

distributed. The Igala abhor concentration of hegemony within any particular group or class and in any form that assumes tyrannical display or utility. It is in this sense that the Igala assert their social contract; “*Onu n’Oja, k’Oja n’Onuh*” (It is the king who owns the commonweal, and the commonweal equally owns the king).

The extent to which political sovereignty was and still is tied to the ritual and symbolic order is reflected in the statement of the Attah of Igala to members of the 1841 expedition, asserting his sovereign authority and legitimacy:

You come to make me a friend: the King has no friend. If any one comes from distant countries, like you, to see me, he ought to bring a present worthy of a king: this is only fit for my servants to wear. The king and God are something alike, and the present ought to be worthy of the king and of God...I am a king and king never puts his foot into a canoe...If the captain of the canoes wishes to see me, he must march on shore, or not see me at all: the king follows nobody. God made the King to be like himself: and ever since God made the king, it was never heard that the king went into a canoe. The king before me never went into the canoe of those white people who were here before. All people who have any business ought to come to me; and if the captain has any thing to say, which is good for me and for him, he will come. If he wishes to speak to me privately, I will drive all my people away; and if it is fit for every body to hear, then shall everybody hear it.⁵³²

In this manner, sovereignty is linked with the sense of the divine as a source of the governing legitimation that underlines the Attah’s own claim of sovereignty, which is rooted within the succession order that emanates from the ancestral line of royal descent. Although historians have sometimes taken this

⁵³² Schön and Crowther, *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr. Samuel Crowther who accompanied the Expedition up the Niger in 1841*, 85-86; also Allen and Thompson, *A Narrative of the Expedition sent by Her Majesty Government to the River Niger*, vol. 1, pp. 287-88.

statement as an assertion of divine kingship, it seems instead to reflect the Attah's self-understanding and public portrayal of the sources of sovereignty and legitimation in a manner that highlights his robust authority and his enlarging domain of interests at that time period. In this exchange, the Attah, by using specific ritual and religious language, sums up his power as divinely, ancestrally, institutionally and legally rooted, thus depicting his governance as embodying the various clusters of human and social relations—moral, judicial, legislative and executive. Despite the changes that have occurred in the 180 years since the Niger expedition participants, this view of the authority of the Attah has persisted, as is evident in ethnographic descriptions from the beginning of the twentieth century by the British colonial administrators turned scholars or observers of Igala cultural phenomena, such as Charles Patridge, R. Seton and Miles Cliffords, as well as in descriptions in the 1950s by John Boston.⁵³³

The ethnographic evidence presented by an Igala anthropologist, Thomas Miachi, provides relevant data⁵³⁴ attesting to the continuity of this idea, as indicated within the royal masquerade structure. In the most senior royal masquerade, the Ekwe beats the Attah three times, prior to the Ekwe's public outing, to denote the transference of ritual sovereignty and power mimetically from the Attah to the Ekwe, which is embedded within the royal ancestral cult. Such symbolic transference and endorsement of the Ekwe, as the spiritual and

⁵³³ R. S. Seton, "Notes on the Igala Tribe"; Charles Patridge, "Burial of an Attah of Igala", *Blackwood Magazine*, 1904; Miles Clifford, "A Nigerian Chieftdom".

⁵³⁴ Miachi, "The Masquerade Phenomenon in Igala Culture;" Miachi, "Masquerades as Agents of Social Control 18-28; Seton, "Notes on the Igala Tribe".

symbolic embodiment of the Attah, is crucial towards understanding the traditional Igala systems of state institutions. The transference of spiritual or symbolic representation also emphasizes that the royal masquerades, in their linkage with the Attah, are equally allied with the royal ancestral cultic realm, whose highest manifestation is vested in the Attah.

The three beatings of the Attah by the Ekwe also reveal the sacredness of the institution of the Attah, embodying the mediator between the living, the ancestors and the gods. It is also characteristic of a servant-leadership relationship, displaying, to some extent, the qualities that mark the institution of the Attah as in pursuit of hegemonic sovereignty for the good of the Igala commonwealth. Therefore, outside of the purely ancestral realm, as rooted within the political and popular consciousness, such qualitative dimension of leadership functions in furthering the legitimacy of the Attah institution.⁵³⁵

No major religious shifts seemed to have occurred in the heart of the confluence region during the early and middle parts of the Atlantic age. Influences from the Atlantic did not seem to have reshaped the Igala religious pantheon. Instead, the impact was superficial. Items such as gin were substituted for local brews for ancestral rituals without changing the rituals themselves, and other individual products from the Atlantic were also incorporated into the ritual arena. The outside influences were domesticated and fitted into existing ritual.

⁵³⁵ Miachi, “The Masquerade Phenomenon in Igala Culture”; Miachi, “Masquerades as Agents of Social Control”, 18-28.

6 Crossroads of Power II: Commerce, Politics and Ritual in the Late Atlantic Period c. 1800 – 1900

6.1 Introduction

The nineteenth century brought many changes to the Niger-Benue confluence region, which had far-reaching and long-lasting impacts. This chapter argues that non-Islamic rituals continued to play a major role in legitimizing political rule, despite the stronger presence of Islam in governance in the aftermath of the jihads, and despite the continued expansion of the Sokoto Caliphate, initially in Hausaland and then into the Niger-Benue confluence region, northern Yorubaland and beyond.⁵³⁶ Migrations, both voluntary and forced, led to demographic and social changes. An increasing penetration of the Nigerian hinterland by Europeans, and a growing participation in international trade, as well as the availability of new weaponry, instigated transformations in the African polities in the region. African leaders began to dramatically change their calculations of how to broadcast power within the new power constellations, both in respect to the control over the Niger River trade as well as the encounter with Europeans.⁵³⁷

⁵³⁶ There is an extensive literature on both the jihads and the establishment and expansion of the Sokoto Caliphate throughout the nineteenth century. The Nupe and northern Yoruba regions with regard to this subject have been explored by Michael Mason, *The Jihad in the South*; Mason, *The Bida Emirate*; Obayemi, "The jihad in the south"; Mohammed, Sule. *History of the Emirate of Bida to 1899 AD* (Zaria, Keduna State: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 2011); A. Adeleye, *Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria 1804-1906: The Sokoto Caliphate and its Enemies*. (New York: Humanities Press, 1971) and of course Last, *The Sokoto Caliphate*.

⁵³⁷ Jeffrey Ira Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*(Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 57.

The Niger River trade, which was divided into segments that were each dominated by various groups, played a major role in the economic, political and socio-cultural history of the Niger-Benue confluence region throughout the nineteenth century.⁵³⁸ Increasing Islamization in the polities along the confluence and the spread of Christian missionary enterprise altered the religio-political dynamics in the region. One of the effects of a stronger Islamization of the region was that the new evolving political power among the Nupe was legitimized through a “new socio-political and religious ideology based on Islam and led by non-Nupe immigrants.”⁵³⁹ However, the Muslim Fulbe rulers initially associated themselves with the ritual sovereignty of the Ketsa cult of the Nupe around the Jebba/Rabba/Mokwa axis—one of the last major ruling centers of a unified Nupe empire—in order to built on a local religio-political legitimacy, which at the time an Islamic theocracy could not have provided. Despite the adaptation of local customs and Nupe titles in the administration, the Fulbe have continued to retain their alien status among the Nupe population until the present day. The two Edegi successor dynasties, the Gwaghbazhi and the Yissazhi, retained their ritual sovereignty throughout the nineteenth century—albeit exerting a rather shadowy presence in exile—that was legitimized through descent and kinship as well as through their rituals, which invoked the reincarnation of the mythical ancestor Tsoede.

⁵³⁸ Lovejoy, “Interregional Monetary Flows”, 563-585.

⁵³⁹ Kolappo, *Military Turbulences*, 8.

The impact of both Christianity and Western education was felt more strongly in the Yoruba and Igala regions than in Nupe. Literacy advanced along with Western education and Christianity in particular among the Yoruba and led to the development of a standardized, written form of Yoruba. The emergence of a literate Yoruba elite helped bring into being a pan-Yoruba consciousness and identity as “Yoruba”, eventually leading to Yoruba nationalism.⁵⁴⁰ One of the major consequences of this literacy movement was also the creation of texts written in both Yoruba and English, many of which contain religious and historical content.⁵⁴¹

The downfall of the Nupe kingdom and the Yoruba Empire of Oyo in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the succeeding Yoruba wars and the establishment and expansion of the Sokoto Caliphate into the Nupe and northern Yoruba areas at the beginning of the nineteenth century all led to great population movements across the confluence region. Furthermore, the areas where previous centers of power had collapsed became targets for slave raids that resulted in the enslavement of a large part of the population. Yoruba from the Oyo

⁵⁴⁰ Toyin Falola, *The Political Economy of a Pre-Colonial African State: Ibadan, 1830-1900* (Ile-Ife, Nigeria: University of Ife Press, 1984); J. Lorand Matory, “The English Professors of Brazil: On the Diasporic Roots of the Yoruba Nation“, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 1 (1999), 72-103; Toyin Falola, “The Yoruba Nation“, in Toyin Falola and Ann Geneva, eds., *Yoruba Identity and Power Politics*, (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006), 29-48; Michael Doortmont, “The Invention of the Yorubas: Regional and Pan-Nationalism Versus Ethnic Provincialism,” in P. F. de Moraes Farias and Barber Karin, eds., *Self-Assertion and Brokerage: Early Cultural Nationalism in West Africa* (Birmingham, UK: Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham, 1990), 101 -108.

⁵⁴¹ S. A. Akintoye, *A History of the Yoruba People* (Dakar, Senegal: Amalion Publishing, 2010), 362-3.

Empire emigrated out of Yorubaland in various directions, many of them fleeing from the slave raiders of the Sokoto caliphate.

One example of an emigration out of central Nupeland was that of the Nupe Bassa-Nge (Nupe Tako), who established settlements east of the Niger-Benue confluence in what was to become Lokoja, the first capital of the British colonial state. Many people in settlements north of the Benue River sought to escape from the slave trading endeavors of the caliphate by fleeing south. Those that were not able to escape ended up either in one of the slave markets along the Niger River or in the Caliphate's plantations. A side effect of these population movements was the transfer of religious concepts and practices to regions far away from their original homelands. For example, new emerging cities in Yorubaland took in Yoruba immigrants from Oyo, as well as people who emigrated from other Yoruba areas, and received with them a wide spectrum of Orisa cults and practices.

Moreover, Yoruba masquerades and associated religious practices traveled along with migrants, not only to the African Diaspora in the Americas and later to Sierra Leone and Lagos, but also to closer regions, such as the neighboring Nupe areas. Likewise, Ebira of Koton Karifi, which was sacked by Fulbe invaders in 1834, escaped to regions south and southwest of the Benue River, taking with them the social memory of their place of origin. Other groups, such as the Ebira of Okene and Etuno,⁵⁴² who settled near the Niger River, as well as small groups from along the Benue River area, escaped the jihadists' cavalry attacks by moving

⁵⁴² Fieldnotes, Constanze Weise, Ebiraland, 2009 and 2010.

high into the hills and escarpments or by crossing the Niger or Benue Rivers.⁵⁴³ A consequence of these developments, as noted by art historian Sidney Kasfir, was that ethnic identities became “fluid and situational, and the objects associated with them equally so.”⁵⁴⁴

Femi Kolapo argues that the socio-political crisis in the Nupe areas was similar to other crises that broke out in the early nineteenth century in regions such as the Niger Delta and the Yoruba states nearer the Atlantic seaboard. An increase and extension of slave societies and an intensified use of slave labor were some of the consequences. However, as previously shown, the slave trade and the Atlantic economy had impinged on the hinterland societies often only indirectly and in different ways than on the coastal societies. One of the major differences in the Nupe areas, for instance, was that the economic dependency on the trans-Atlantic slave trade was not as strong as it was in the coastal societies. It is therefore also not surprising that, when the Atlantic market declined, the revenue of the economic elite in Nupeland did not decline as it did in other societies in which the elite’s revenue was built on Atlantic commerce.⁵⁴⁵

The issue of slavery and slave supply for the Atlantic economy stemming from Igalaland is still understudied. Sargent argues that the kings of Igalaland “turned energetically to the development of slave trading, and [Igala] became a

⁵⁴³ Sidney Kasfir, “Introduction”, In: Marla Berns, Richard Fardon, Sidney Littlefield Kasfir, and Jörg Adelberger, eds., *Central Nigeria Unmasked: Arts of the Benue River Valley* (Los Angeles: Fowler Museum at UCLA, 2011), 45.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁵ Kolappo, *Military Turbulences*, 2-3.

major supplier to the Niger River markets and the Aro overland system,” starting with the late eighteenth century.⁵⁴⁶ The Aro established settlements near the main Idah market in Igalaland, which enabled them to participate in the Niger riverine trade.⁵⁴⁷

Compared to Northern Yorubaland and the Nupe area, the Igala experienced early direct contact with Europeans. The first formally recorded encounter of the Igala with the Europeans occurred in 1832 with the British members of the 1832 Niger expedition.⁵⁴⁸ The first phase of this encounter was not very friendly, as the Attah initially announced a ban against his subjects’ trading with the expeditors on the Niger. Later, Attah Ekalaga welcomed members of the expedition into his territories and even entered into a negotiation of collaboration between the British Empire and the Igala Kingdom. This negotiation led to the proposal for a treaty of mutual agreement by the British expeditors, which was never signed because of Richard Lander’s premature death in Fernando Po, prior to obtaining the necessary signatures. This mutual collaboration rested upon agreeable terms of safe trade on the Niger and the quid pro quo of British exchange against the protection of the Igala state, especially Idah, against the then-raging Fulbe invasion.

⁵⁴⁶ Sargent, Economics, Politics and Social Change in the Benue Basin, 61; Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra*, 50;

⁵⁴⁷ Dike, Onwuka Ekejiuba and Felicia Ifeoma, *The Aro of South-Eastern Nigeria, 1650-1980: A Study of Socio-Economic Formation and Transformation in Nigeria* (Ibadan: University Press, 1990), 50; Nwokeji, *Slave Trade*, 54.

⁵⁴⁸ Laird, *Journal of Expedition* 1833.

6.2 Nupe: Expansion of Commercial Activities along the Niger River

6.2.1 The Downfall of the Nupe Empire

At the close of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the ruling Edegi dynasty of the Nupe Kingdom had faced internal challenges and external shifts that decimated its traditional order of succession. The subsequent throne succession wars between the two dynastic successor groups, the Yissazhi and the Gwagbazhi, had led to a weakening of the Nupe empire's frontiers after the death of the last king of a unified Nupe kingdom in 1805.⁵⁴⁹ The resulting power vacuum had enabled Fulbe coming from the neighboring northern Hausa states, which had just been turned into emirates, to take up political power in Nupeland. The establishment of emirates and the integration of large parts of Nupeland followed the military occupation by the Sokoto Caliphate. Soon large parts of Nupeland were divided into emirates and formed part of the Sokoto Caliphate. The subsection emirates, which emerged, were those of Lafiagi (1824), Lapai (1825), Agaie (1835), Tsonga/Shonga (1854) and Bida (1857).

The Nupe successor dynasties maintained their autonomy to some extent in exile kingdoms in Nupeland throughout the nineteenth century until the British occupation of the region in 1898. The Gwagbazhi continued initially to stay in Raba and later relocated to the close-by Zugurma region. The Yissazhi moved first to Ragada south of the Niger River and later relocated to Gbara, where they stayed until the British occupation. Both dynasties continued to maintain royal traditions and traditional Nupe religious practices in addition to increasing Islamic

⁵⁴⁹ Idrees, *Political Change and Continuity in Nupeland*.

observance until the British recalled them from exile in 1898. For both, the founders of their dynasties—Majiya for the Gwagbazhi and Jimada for the Yissazhi—became exalted as heroes, and their tombs were turned into *lieux de memoire*, which were included into commemoration ceremonies during enthronement rituals and annual festivals, such as the big Islamic festivals.⁵⁵⁰

Between 1898 and 1902 the dynastic branch of the Yissazhi, which had resided in exile at Gbara near the Kaduna River, relocated to Patigi south of the river Niger, where it established the Emirate of Patigi. Collaboration with British officials in a war against the Sokoto Caliphate had given the Yissazhi a favorable advantage over the Gwagbazhi. The Zugurma area, which stood under the authority of the Gwagbazhi, was constituted into a district in 1906 and became integrated into the Fulbe Emirate of Kontagora. This resulted into the official downgrading of the king of Zugurma to a *hakimi*, a district head, within the colonial administration of the Northern Emirates of Nigeria.

Nupe historiography has focused on the Fulbe Emirates of Bida and on the Nupe Emirate of Patigi, understanding the latter as the “last living descendants of the old dynasty of Nupe kings.”⁵⁵¹ The favorable treatment of the Yissazhi and the elevation of their kingdom to an emirate, in addition to the promotion of the Etsu Patigi to a first class chief, seem to have influenced colonial as well as postcolonial representations and claims in Nupe historiography. However, the available primary sources are very disparate on the matter of the throne

⁵⁵⁰ Constanze Weise, Fieldnotes, Patigi and Zugurma, 2000. Interviews: NUP-ETH-ZUG-M-1-9/7/2000; NUP-ETH-ZUG-M-2-9/7/2000; NUP-ETH-ZUG-M-3-9/7/2000;

⁵⁵¹ Nadel, *A Black Byzantium*, IX.

succession disputes, leading to the demise of a unified empire as one of the key elements in Nupe history.

Different circulating versions, in regard to the reasons of the throne succession disputes, are not only presented by the descendants of the two ruling houses until the present day but were also collected by the German anthropologist Leo Frobenius in 1912 and by the British colonial administration shortly after that. Frobenius collected the oral traditions from a Nupe functionary, the Lille of Mokwa, who declared that throne succession was matrilineal, following the “male maternal side.”⁵⁵² Frobenius narrates the oral tradition, which was told to him by the Lille, and also quotes a manuscript “preserved in Kabba” that seems to contain historical information:

...the era of misfortune of the last hundred years had to commence in this breach of the law of succession and ended in the final suppression of the venerable matriarchate. In 1785 Jimada was the last of the Edsu in Nupe. He reigned till 1799, and mostly in the city of Ragada, near Patigi. His eldest sister was married to one Umoru, a noble of Edegian stock. She bore him a son, Madjia, who according to the Edegi law was the real heir to the throne. But eleven years after he had been King, Jimada did not name Madjia, but his own very youthful son Issa (the Fulbe pronounce it Edirissu), as Saba[crown prince]. Thereupon Madjia declared war against his uncle. In 1802 Madjia finally got the better of Edsu Jimada, whom he is said to have killed with his own hand. He was then called to the throne and acknowledged as king by all with the exception, of course, of the adherents of the deceased Jimada. These choose to attach themselves to Issa, Etsu Jimada's infant son, by him officially nominated as Saba and then they took the boy to Adamalelu where he was kept in concealment lest the king, with a reputation for cruelty, should kill him as well. This episode would, like many others of old, have passed over without after effects if another quiet and insignificant company had not

⁵⁵² Frobenius, *Voice of Africa*, 576.

meanwhile arrived in Nupeland, which set fresh currents flowing. These were the Fulbe.⁵⁵³

Even though there is a mixing up of names and dates in the story, what makes this narrative interesting is that Frobenius had collected it from the Lille of Mokwa in 1912, about one hundred years after the downfall of the Nupe empire. Before the downfall of the Nupe Empire, the Lille's were titleholders, who were in charge of specific regions of the empire. They therefore fulfilled major regional political and religious chiefly functions. The painter Carl Ariens, who travelled with Frobenius, provides us with a portrait of the Lille of Mokwa who, judging from the painting, may have been in his fifties at the time of the interview. It is very likely that the Lille had learned the history of the Nupe Empire from his predecessors who lived at the time of the throne succession wars, as the Lilles are appointed from within the same lineage. And even though a certain mixing up of names and dates, in particular in regard to Jimada's reign, seems to have happened in the tradition, the claimed shift from matrilineality to patrilineality as one of the key changes that seemingly caused the rupture deserves further investigation.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.



Picture 13: Lille of Mokwa on the left with unknown man as painted by Carl Ariens (© Frobenius Institute Frankfurt am Main)

Despite the changes, which happened after the downfall of the Nupe Empire in Nupeland itself, the fact that the successor dynasties retained the Nupe title system, to a certain extent, helped also to maintain the continuity with regard to the institution of the Lille. The Lilles of Mokwa have kept their position as regional and ritually legitimized titleholders until the present day. During my field research in 2000 I was able to witness a performance of certain local masquerades, the Elo masquerades of Mokwa. During the performance, the Lille of Mokwa and the Hakimi of Mokwa, the latter bearing the title of district head, which was introduced by the British colonial administration, sat next to each other to witness the performance. Upon entering, the masqueraders paid reverence to

the Lille but ignored the Hakimi completely as shown in picture 14. The Lille is seen as the custodian of traditional Nupe religion and customs in Mokwa until the present day. This tradition goes back to the ancient Nupe Empire.



Picture 14: Elo Mask Greeting Lille of Mokwa (Photo C. Weise)

In general, all versions of oral traditions agree that, with both factions claiming the throne, the Edegi dynasty broke up into two successor dynasties, the Gwaghbazi and the Yissazhi. Both maintained their own oral traditions and explanations of the throne succession disputes and the claims to the right to the throne. An analysis of the oral traditions and manuscripts, which were collected by European travellers and anthropologists, has to take into account who produced them and in which part of Nupeland they were collected. The oral traditions, which Frobenius collected, seem to stem from the Mokwa region, which is closer to the Gwaghbazhi dynastic branch and most likely stood under

their authority. Unfortunately, Frobenius does not disclose the provenance of the Kabba manuscript he mentions nor does he provide details of its storage. It is therefore not possible to attribute it to any of the two branches. It seems, however, to legitimize Majiya as the rightful ruler.

Other traditions, which were collected by William Baikie and Hugh Clapperton during the first half of the nineteenth century, claim what also historian Aliyu Idrees prefers—himself part of the Yizzazhi branch of Patigi—as the correct interpretation. They tell the story that Majiya tried to usurp the throne because he was not chosen due to his descent from the maternal line. Idrees suggests, giving here also a different date than Frobenius, that in 1805 when the nineteenth Etsu Nupe died, there was no crown prince available, and the office of Shaaba was vacant. Idrees infers:

Perhaps there were no eligible candidates from amongst whom a crown could have been appointed. His son, Jimada, is said to be young even at the time his father died. He was thirty-three years old. The most capable prince around was Majiya who held the rank of Nakorji; a royal council title. He was not considered for the crown prince title Shaaba because he was related to the royal family only matrilineally, his mother being Etsu Mohammad's sister.

Both conflicting traditions are still told by the two successor dynasties, the one at Zurgurma and the one at Patigi, differing only in their claim to the throne. In one of the interviews the Etsu Zurgurma, Usman al-Haji Isah, who ruled Zurgurma in 2000, was asked by the author: "The Yissazhi branch in Patigi claims that they are the real heirs to the throne.

What is the claim of your branch, the Gwaghbazhi?" He replied:

We hear these historic claims, but the Patigi branch is still the same as the one here in Zugurma, because the Etsu Patigi moved from the house in Zugurma to settle in Patigi. Therefore Zugurma is the senior to Patigi. [...] Still today, Patigi comes to pay homage to us and asks for some gifts of money from us. The late Etsu Idrisi Patigi did not come but his late father came and had sent his men to us for gifts of money. Also, unless a new Etsu Patigi comes here first to pay homage, he cannot be on the throne in Patigi. We have to stamp the selection of the Etsu Patigi.

Shortly afterwards, the Etsu Zugurma added:

We were pushed back and not recognized with any flag by the British, that is why we are in this inferior situation now. Otherwise we are the seniors to Patigi. Because of the wars, both of us [the dynastic branches, CW] went into different directions to settle down. Patigi and Zugurma had the same father and the same mother.

Idrees argues that:

Majiya assumed leadership probably through the use of force. Hence, proper traditional investiture for the new Etsu might not have been carried out. What is certain is the fact that he was able to seize the insignia of royalty, which include trumpets, royal hat and a silver saddle.⁵⁵⁴

Jimada and his supporters built a fortified town at Ragada near Pategi on the west bank of the Niger River. Both Ragada and Raba served as initial capitals for the newly formed dynastic branches—the former as the capital of the Yissazhi, the latter as the capital of the Gwaghbazhi.⁵⁵⁵ Today, the mausoleums for Majiya, located between Zugurma and Raba, and for Jimada at Ragada,

⁵⁵⁴ Idrees, *Political Change and Continuity in Nupeland*, 22.

⁵⁵⁵ Constanze Weise, Fieldnotes, Patigi and Zugurma, 2000. NUP-ETH-ZUG-M-3-9/7/2000; NUP-ETH-ZUG-M-4-9/7/2000; NUP-ETH-PAT-M-1-6/29/2000; NUP-ETH-PAT-M-2-6/29/2000; NUP-ETH-PAT-M-3-6/29/2000; NUP-ETH-PAT-M-4-6/29/2000; NUPETH-PAT-M-5-6/29/2000; NUP-ETH-PAT-M-6-6/29/2000; NUPETH-PAT-M-7-6/29/2000; NUP-ETH-PAT-M-8-6/29/2000.

located near Patigi, serve as *lieux de memoire*, commemorating the founders of the successor dynasties annually during the big Islamic festivals as well as during special occasions, such as the installation of a new king. Tomb guards and their families, who as custodians of the graveyard take care of the gravesites and maintain their history, inhabit both locations. The custodian at Zugurma carries the title Maiyaki, designating the commander in chief of the army, a titleholder who had to ride in front of the king in war situations in order to protect him.

When asked what the history of the tomb is, he declared:

When Etsu Majiya became king in Zugurma, which is a long history, God had made him so great and popular that his name could not be forgotten. Throughout Nupeland this place, Zugurma, is the origin of all Nupes. In modern times some places and towns in Nupe are so great and popular that they don't know that Zugurma is their traditional origin. This place here is called Zugurma Yayi. It was the prison house for offenders, criminals and others in those days before the coming of the white man.

He also pointed out that he is the village head, Etsu Nyankpa, and that his family had been designated by the kings of Zugurma to take care of Majiya's grave.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁶ Constanze Weise, Fieldnotes, Zugurma 2000;.



Picture 15: Majiya's tomb near Zugurma, (Photo C. Weise, 2000).



Picture 16: Maiyaki of Zugurma, Tomb Guard of Majiya's tomb, (Photo C. Weise, 2000)

During the time in exile throughout the nineteenth century, both successor dynasties continued to maintain certain features of the Nupe state, such as the

governmental organization, in particular the military, titled chiefs and other state officials. For both successor dynasties the ritual legitimization of rulership through the symbolic reincarnation of Tsoede in the incumbent plays a central role. Furthermore, both of them kept and involve certain royal paraphernalia associated with the mythical ancestor in enthronement rituals and commemorative ceremonies.

Despite the increasing presence of Islam in both dynasties, the non-Islamic rituals referring to Tsoede continued to serve not only to legitimize rulership but also to link historical memory to the present. Both dynasties retain kings' lists and chronicles, some of them written in Arabic, which establish the link to Tsoede. The expected divergence in these lists is visible, and from the moment of the split, both dynastic branches continue to record rulers and reign length within their own line of succession.⁵⁵⁷ However, when asked to present the major insignia of royalty, the chain of Tsoede, only the Zugurma dynasty was able to present it. The Patigi dynasty declared that the chain had been taken away by the British and carried to London “for repair.”⁵⁵⁸

6.2.2 Transfer of Ritual Sovereignty and Fulbe Domination in Nupeland

The succession disputes of the Edegi dynastic branches provided an opportunity for the Fulbe, under the leadership of Mallam Dendo, to interfere and

⁵⁵⁷ Weise, “Mediators of the Past”, 270-280.

⁵⁵⁸ Weise, Fieldnotes, Patigi, 2000.

eventually to eclipse both successor dynasties.⁵⁵⁹ Similar to the ascendancy of a Fulbe dynasty as governing power in several of the Hausa states, the Fulbe had to gain legitimacy through the incorporation of features from the local religio-political landscape and to claim ritual sovereignty.⁵⁶⁰ While it proved impossible and was also not intended to claim the entire sovereignty of the royal rituals, in particular those associated with Tsoede, including the installation rituals, the Fulbe did associate themselves with other relevant rituals in Nupeland. They further borrowed the Nupe title Etsu, which is the title of the king, and retained some other Nupe institutions.

Interestingly, since the invasion into the Nupe area followed these in the Hausa north, the Fulbe ruling elite, which came to Nupeland via Hausaland, also installed new titles in the emerging Emirate systems which originated in Hausaland. In all instances however, as M. G. Smith pointed out for the Hausa states, and as might equally apply to the Nupe Emirates, even though governmental structures and titles were taken over from previous politico-religious governments, their function and meaning underwent changes under the new rulership:

Inevitably, being imperfectly aware of their situation and especially of the implications of their own actions, the new rulers risked becoming captives of the structure they had overthrown [...]. Nonetheless, though many units of the old regime persisted more or

⁵⁵⁹ For a detailed history of the nineteenth century and the Fulbe-Nupe wars see for instance Idrees, *Political Change and Continuity in Nupeland*; Mason, *Bida Kingdom*; Muhammadu, *Emirate of Bida*.

⁵⁶⁰ For the overtaking of the title system from the former Hausa governments see for instance M. G. Smith, *Government in Kano, 1350-1950* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997), 202-210.

less intact, others had lapsed, and the traditional Hausa system of relations between politically relevant social categories was initially erased.⁵⁶¹

In Nupeland, the Fulbe connected at the very beginning to the god Ketsa from the Mokwa-Raba-Jebba region when taking over power. Later, after the move of the capital to Bida and the foundation of the Bida emirate in 1857, they also relocated some of the Ndakogboya masquerades to Kusogi, a village near Bida, in order to gain control over this policing force, which acted as a witch-hunting institution all over Nupeland, already attested by early travelers such as Clapperton and Lander. Having access to the ritual sovereignty of the Ndakogboya allowed the Fulbe to use the masquerades for their own interests and to intimidate the Nupe population. It also seems that the revenue gained from the witch-hunts, often consisting of cowries that were paid by accused witches as sacrifices, was not unimportant economically for the Bida emirate.⁵⁶²

It becomes clear that, also in the nineteenth century, ritual sovereignty was expressed through certain social frameworks, symbolisms and references to historical memories. These structures conveyed legitimacy in the political realm. The political center accreted power and social control and established its rule through access to the ritual symbols of authority and through its sponsorship of ritual displays, which assisted in overcoming popular resistance.

Samuel Crowther, a member of the 1857 expedition and of previous expeditions, and an Anglican churchman, depicts in his journal how precisely

⁵⁶¹ Smith, *Government in Kano*, 207.

⁵⁶² Constanze Weise, "Mediators of the Past", 284; Nadel, *Nupe Religion*, 193.

among the Nupe of the Niger-Benue confluence, ritual sovereignty was aligned with political sovereignty at various levels. At the time, their vessel, the Dayspring, was grounded around Jebba in the Nupe-Yoruba borderland. On this occasion, Crowther recorded the significance of the Nupe divinity Ketsa. Though Ketsa seemingly derived from Yoruba inhabitants of the area, it was held in utmost esteem and considered with awe and as a very powerful and significant deity among all the people of the area. The priests of the god Ketsa used the Yoruba language in worship and ritual performance, in keeping with its Yoruba origin.⁵⁶³ Crowther reports that the Ketsa priest confirmed that

the portion of the country on the left bank of the river, where we now encamp, occupied by a division of Nupe called *Gbedegi*, was formerly inhabited by the Yoruba nation, but they were driven away by the king of Nupe to the opposite shore behind the hills, which are called Yoruba hills; and that the remnant of the Yoruba families, which remained behind, composed the tribe of Nupe, called *Gbedegi*; *gbede*, being a Yoruba word, which means to understand a language, with the Nupe termination *gi*, which means little *Gbedegi*, then was applied to a people who understood the (Nupe) language a little.⁵⁶⁴

Nadel verified the Yoruba origin during his field research in 1934-36 and learned that the title of the priest of this god was *Ndadoro*.⁵⁶⁵ The Kede people of this region governed a small chiefdom within the Nupe Empire and were in charge of the Niger River trade. Their role in the Nupe Empire is, however, not

⁵⁶³ Crowther and Taylor, *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger*, 117-118, 216.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁵⁶⁵ Nadel records the name of the Ketsa priest as *Ndadoro*, “father of the doro”, which was supposed to be another name for the cult. Nadel, *Nupe Religion*, 87.

always portrayed as being supportive or favorable to the Nupe kings. The story Nadel collected goes as follows:

Once a disastrous flood of the Niger destroyed all houses and farms and brought famine to the river valley. The Kuta at Muregi, the chief of the “Downstream” Kede, had learnt from Tsoede how to combat floods and prevent their recurrence. Following this advice, the Kuta send a white cow to Jebba, instructing the island people to add a white cock, and some honey, and to sacrifice all these at the foot of the Ketsa rock.

Nadel described these rituals as still being observed during his visits whenever there was a flood or a new Kede chief installed. The god also seemed to be considered a source of healing as well as of wealth. Kings, chiefs and commoners from all over Nupeland would send gifts for sacrifices to the shrine. For example, in 1936 Nadel observed that the Etsu Patigi sent a fowl, requesting it to be sacrificed for the general well-being of the community. A Hausa man offered a goat for good fishing and a Kakanda man a goat for good health. Two Nupe men offered fowls to secure the birth of their children. Nadel himself was advised by his Jebba friends to send a fowl as a sacrifice and to request healing from a bout of severe dysentery.⁵⁶⁶

My own field researches in 2000 add more information. The Etsu Zugurma told me that the Ketsa god used to be worshipped in the region, but this religion is not observed anymore today due to the advance of Islam and Christianity. Ketsa used to be venerated in order to guarantee the wellbeing of the community, to prevent flooding and drought, and thus to also have the function of

⁵⁶⁶ Nadel, *Nupe Religion*, 88.

a rain god. Every two or three years, worshippers would carry a big keg of locally brewed beer called *eze dzuru* to the Niger River, which would be buried inside the riverbed. After that, someone, who did not know where the keg was buried, would be asked to locate it and dig it out during the next big sacrifice after two or three years had passed. A male goat would be taken to the place of burial of the pot, and a long piece of white cloth would be tied around a baobab tree. The people would then congregate around the tree and say the following prayers:

Soko u lafiya u be ezhi o
May God bring good health to your town

Soko u la ezhi dokun
May God increase our population

Soko u la edunfe lafiya u be ezhi
May God bring peaceful living to our town

Soko u la nyandondo u be nya aliheri
May God bring good things to us

Egi na dokun na to bayetin nya ezhi
Also for many children and a bright future

After the prayers, the male goat would be killed, its skin removed and its meat cut, cooked and eaten. The person who located the keg would be celebrated as the embodiment of Ketsa on that day and keep the title for the rest of his life. Ketsa worshippers would also always obey the Etsu Zugurma during and after sacrificial performances.⁵⁶⁷

Among the taboos of Ketsa was that its priests could not wear clothing when performing the cultic worship. Red was considered as a sacred color to

⁵⁶⁷ Interview: NUP-ETH-ZUG-M-3-9/7/2000.

Ketsa, and hence, red clothing or adornment was prohibited around its territory of influence. For instance, women who were traveling by canoe and wearing red headbands were obliged to remove them while passing the area and for a long distance afterwards. In his description, Reverend Crowther noted as well that only the priests had access to the shrine, and no one else was allowed to enter.

The ties that existed between the god and the ruling Nupe Etsus, including the Fulbe dynasty that emerged after the collapse of the Nupe monarchy, are significant. The priests of Ketsa informed Crowther and Baikie that, for a long time, Nupe kings made presents of bullocks to Ketsa and its priests as a mechanism for ritual and spiritual assurance of their rule. The priests also informed Crowther that the Fulbe hegemony and Islamic jihadists who usurped the throne from the aboriginal Nupe Etsus continued this practice of esteeming the power of Ketsa and its priests, thus validating the older indigenous ritual authority even though the new kind of rulers were Muslims.⁵⁶⁸ Crowther asserts:

To this god sacrifices of bullocks are made which are sent by different chiefs according to their rank, especially by the kings of Nupe at the beginning of their reign; and I have been told that Sumo [Usman] Zaki and Dasaba (Masaba C.W), perhaps from policy to keep the people quiet, have contributed their shares also; sheep are also sacrificed.⁵⁶⁹

In aligning with Ketsa, the new ruling elite engaged in a symbolic and political coalition with their subjects, drawing upon the older icons, symbols and

⁵⁶⁸ Samuel Crowther and John Christopher Taylor, *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger*, 114-118, 215-216.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

traditional pre-Fulbe order that had long-legitimated royal rule. Furthermore, these ritual practices, in the context of political rule, were deeply rooted in the concepts of exchange and reciprocity; key social precepts that were valued by the people of this region and that were also vitally embedded in commercial relations. Within this perspective, the kings exchanged material gifts of bullocks for the prosperity of their reign and for governing success. These ritual performances, which entailed acts of sacrificial exchange, benefitted both reign and acquisition of political capital in the form of popular legitimation.

Through their practice, ritual schemes, such as those surrounding Ketsa, translate history into the realm of nature and into an integral constitutive consciousness as part of the social corpus. In this context, the attempt of the Fulbe newcomers to assimilate into an indigenous ritual paradigm has great historical meaning. By coopting various elements of the older ritual sovereignty—to the extent to which they were able—the Fulbe sought to gain governing success and popular legitimation. Bourdieu notes that such practices,

always tending to reproduce the objective structures of which they are the product, ... are determined by the past conditions which have produced the principle of their production, that is, by the actual outcome of identical or interchangeable past practice which coincides with their own outcome to the extent (and only to the extent) that the objective structures of which they are the product are prolonged in the structures within which they function.⁵⁷⁰

The reigns of the Nupe Etsus were historically encrypted in time and space with nascent memory, while the historicity of the Ketsa cult had seemingly

⁵⁷⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72-73.

become mythical and incorporated into the dynamics of everyday life as part of the natural state of Nupe existence and accepted ritual dominance. Therefore, for the political realm to gain legitimacy, it must be seen as part and parcel of Nupe traditional institutions, aligned and embedded within this ritual scheme. That was what propelled the gifts by the Nupe Etsus, including the alien reign of the Fulbe dynasty. In fact, it seems that after the Fulbe had achieved the goal of cultural embedding and legitimation they abandoned the rituals. At the time of Crowther's visit, the Ketsa priest was complaining about the break by the ruling Fulbe dynasty in sending gifts to Ketsa, as they had been previously engaged.

6.2.3 Commercial Activities and Niger River trade

During the Fulbe domination of Nupeland, their military and economic power was greatly enhanced by the relations of the emirates in Nupeland with the Europeans on the Atlantic coast, in particular through their involvement with the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which reached its high tide in the Nigerian hinterland during the first half of the nineteenth century. Many slaves were acquired during the war campaigns that the Fulbe military extended into the non-Islamic neighboring regions of the Sokoto Caliphate. Most expansionist endeavors involved campaigns directed southward. Slave raids as well as tax and tribute payments put great pressure on the peoples immediately south of the Sokoto Caliphate, such as the Igbira of Kabba or the Okun Yoruba.

Apart from effective army defense, migration seemed to have been a response to the military challenge. This tack was chosen by the Nupe Bassa Nge—who crossed the east bank of the Niger, opposite Lokoja—and the Yagba—

who moved southwards into Bunu territory, while the Akoko people fled to Kukurku.⁵⁷¹ The Bassa-Nge took along with them a version of the Ndakogboya ancestral masquerade, *ebunu*, which has retained the features with which the Ndakogboya were once associated, and other Nupe customs and rituals that they practice, up to the present.

Gboloko, near the confluence of the Niger and Benue River, became the seat of the major *ebunu* priest, Nomba, of Bassa land. The masquerade *ebunu* would appear to warn the public if a witch endangered the society and would reveal the name of the witch.⁵⁷² The witch would hence be put in front of the court, *kutimba*, which consists of the *ebunu* priest and other members of the secret society, *ebunu* and the ancestors. The court is a shrine where the ancestors reside. “*Ebunu* does not dance,” I was told.⁵⁷³ “Those that dance its dance steps are the *ebunu* children.” The *ebunu* children are boys organized in age grades that are guarded by the *ebunu* spirit. They are disguised by white and red color dots on their body when they perform the dance steps of *ebunu*. Today *ebunu* still performs a special role during coming of age ceremonies as Nadel had described it for the Gani festival in Kutigi in central Nupeland.⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷¹ Michael Mason, “Population Density and 'Slave Raiding'-the Case of the Middle Belt of Nigeria“, *The Journal of African History* 10, no. 4 (1969), 555; See the archival records SNP 393 P 1918 on the Bassa Nge migration; NAK SNP 17/2 3965; the Kukuruku, NAK SNP 3875/1912.

⁵⁷² Interview: NUP-ETH-GBL-M-2-3/12/2009 NUP-ETH-GBL-M-3-6/28/2009.

⁵⁷³ Interview: NUP-ETH-GBL-M-4-6/28/2009.

⁵⁷⁴ S. F. Nadel, “The “Gani” Ritual of Nupe: A Study in Social Symbiosis.” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 19, no. 3 (1949), 177-86.

Under Emir Masaba (1859-1873) and his successor Emir Majigi (1873-1884), the number of slave settlements (*tungazi*) established for the purpose of building an indigenous plantation economy increased tremendously. The *tungazi* were composed of slaves from different ethnic backgrounds and often organized according to ethnicity.⁵⁷⁵ Slaves and clients in the *tungazi* were largely responsible for the production of a wide range of agricultural produce, textiles, vegetable oil and shea butter oil.⁵⁷⁶ Michael Mason confirms that 1103 *tungazi* were founded between the rivers Kaduna and Gbako, in the Jima and Lemu districts, during Fulbe rule.⁵⁷⁷ 694 alone were founded under the rulership of Masaba.⁵⁷⁸ The Lemu District book suggests that many of the settlers on the *tungazi* in Lemu district were clients and slaves recruited decades before 1859, when the first ruler of Bida Emirate, Usman Zaki, died. Of them, seventy-five percent were from other parts of Nupleand, while many others came from the Yagba, Kamberi and Hausa areas.

These *tungazi* can be traced up to the present. During an interview with the Asu people in the Ebe region, the chiefs pointed out particular Hausa settlements to me that seem to have been derived from Hausa *tungazi*.⁵⁷⁹ In Badeggi, across the Gbako River from Bida, 197 *tungazi* were founded, and in

⁵⁷⁵ Michael Mason, "Captive and Client Labour and the Economy of the Bida Emirate: 1857-1901", *The Journal of African History* 14, no. 3 (1973.), 467.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid. 465.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid. 468.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid. 463.

⁵⁷⁹ Constanze Weise, Fieldnotes, Mazan Kuka, 2009; AS-ETH-MAZ-M-1-7/22/2009 AS-ETH-MAZ-M-2-7/22/2009; AS-ETH-MAZ-M-3-7/23/2009

Kachia, a district south of Bida, there were ninety-one. In Kutigi, west of the Kaduna River, 198 were sited.⁵⁸⁰ Mason states that Kutigi was also a special case as it was, in his words, “a frequent battleground.” He surmises that the *tungazi* settlers in Kutigi may have been prisoners of war.⁵⁸¹ Nadel pointed out another such group, the “Konu”, or “Prisoners of War” in Kutigi, who were freed slaves of Yoruba origin and who were brought to Kutigi by the Fulbe kings in order to introduce into Nupe the Yoruba art of weaving.⁵⁸² The descendants of these freed Yoruba slaves still live today in Kutigi, even though they are completely Nupe-ized as already Nadel noticed. Their presence is particularly visible during the annual Gani festival, during which they bring out some of their masquerades, which differ greatly from those known in Nupeland. Hence, the Nupe call these Yoruba descendants with the name Guguyagi, the same name that they assign to their masquerades.⁵⁸³

The author was able to enjoy an elaborate performance of “Gugu” masquerades in Kutigi during her field research in 2000. Many of them present the enduring power of embodied memory, depicting a palimpsest of representations, among them figures of the colonial state such as military officers and Europeans, but also showing masks that seemed more similar to other

⁵⁸⁰ Mason, “Captive and Client Labour”, 469.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 470.

⁵⁸² Nadel, S. F. “85. Social Symbiosis and Tribal Organization.” *Man* 38 (1938), 86.

⁵⁸³ Nadel, *Nupe Religion*, 208. With regard to their religious practices he points out, “Though today wholly “Nupe-ized” in language and mode of life, they still publically perform one of their masked ceremonies, the egungun, known as gugu to the Nupe, which serves both as a funeral rite and as annual ritual safeguarding fertility and well-being.”

egungun in Yorubaland. The head of the Gugu secret society explained that his ancestors came from Oyo and were prisoners of war captured during the time of Masaba. Masaba brought them first to Lade and later to Kutigi, where he freed them due to their weaving skills and magical powers, in particular those related to the Egungun masquerades, which he used in wars against other northern Yoruba people.⁵⁸⁴

Masquerades were often used in Yoruba wars as spiritual weapons. J. A.

Adefila and S.M. Opeola state:

Egungun masquerades were effectively used in wars as spiritual weapons. Primarily, they were used to mimic ancestors coming from heaven to help bail their living children out of trouble. Many important Egungun are associated with warfare.⁵⁸⁵

Historically known examples of important Egungun associated with warfare are Alapansanpa of Ibadan, Abiobiakuro of Edunabon and Onimogala of Moro.

According to Adefila and Opeola, these *egungun* usually incorporate into their *ago* or *eeku* (costumes) dangerous charms like *afose* or *awise*, normally carried in an antelope horn, and also *aruka ere* (poisoned ring) and *epe* (curse), both of which are carried in *apo* (cylindrical wooden containers).⁵⁸⁶

The military strength of the emirate of Bida was augmented by King Masaba's acquisition of European weapons for the army in exchange for slaves,

⁵⁸⁴ Constanze Weise, Fieldnotes, Kutigi, 2000. NUP-ETH-KUT-M-1-7/30/2000
NUP-ETH-KUT-M-2-7/30/2000

⁵⁸⁵ A. Adefila, and S.M. Opeola. "Supernatural and Herbal Weapons in 19th Century Yoruba Warfare." In *War and Peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893*, edited by I. A. Akinjogbin, 219-32. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria), 1998.,222

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid.

ivory and shea butter.⁵⁸⁷ Masaba used the opportunity of the European effort to establish trading relations with the peoples along the River Niger to acquire weapons from them. Masaba sent a letter to the queen of England, stating his desire to establish trading relations with England and to grant English traders protection along the parts of the River Niger in his jurisdiction.⁵⁸⁸ He also bought European weapons from places outside his jurisdiction, such as Igalaland, the Niger Delta and Lagos.⁵⁸⁹ Whitford witnessed the selling of slaves from Masaba's jurisdiction to the Attah of Igaland for gunpowder.⁵⁹⁰ By 1871, the army of the Bida Emirate is reported to have had two thousand cavalymen armed with European rifles, eight canons, rockets, artillery and muskets, while Europeans trained the artillery how to use the weapons.⁵⁹¹ These transactions imply a wide-ranging internal and inter-regional market network.

The Bida Emirate not only enhanced its economic power through the selling of slaves and other products into the Atlantic economy, but also collected tribute from subdued polities, which were not integrated into the Caliphate system. Masaba subjugated the Kede and Kakanda in order to control the traffic

⁵⁸⁷ John E. Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 24-25.

⁵⁸⁸ Charles William James, Orr, *The Making of Northern Nigeria* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1965), 15

⁵⁸⁹ John Whitford, *Trading Life in Western and Central Africa* (London: Cass, 1967), 219.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ Joseph P. Smaldone, *Warfare in the Sokoto Caliphate: Historical and Sociological Perspectives* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977)105.

along the River Niger for military and economic purposes. Kede canoes were used for the transport of Nupe trade goods downriver. The goods changed boats at Eggan to the Kakanda canoes, and this allowed the flow of goods to pass very far down the River Niger. The Emirate of Bida managed to govern the trade along the River Niger through the control of major transshipment centers and central markets such as Eggan, Lokoja and Gbebe. The last of these was situated about one mile below Lokoja but served as the major distribution center between the markets from the Atlantic economy and those in Nupeland as well as the Niger-Benue confluence.

Crowther and his expedition arrived in the Nupe area at around the time when Masaba established his central rule in Bida. They visited various commercial centers, such as Rabba, realizing it was on the major trade routes between Kano and Ilorin and onward to the coast in Lagos.⁵⁹² It became increasingly clear that the area of the Niger-Benue was an epicenter of cultural crosscurrents. Such trends functioned in the spread of Islam within the Niger-Benue confluence region. In fact, by 1857, there was a recorded increase of Arabic schooling.⁵⁹³ While stranded following the grounding of the Dayspring, Crowther's expedition met traders from Busa, who were coming in from Ilorin and from even farther away. These traders were also carrying out trading relationships as far west as Ghana and were fluent in the Ashanti language. Crowther and his party also met an Egyptian Arab merchant who lived in Ilorin

⁵⁹² Ibid., 95.

⁵⁹³ Ibid., 56.

and had traveled widely within the region and owned much capital and property in Kano and Ilorin. These incidences and interactions were seemingly at the root of the diffusion of goods that came from far afield into the Niger-Benue and passed through the ongoing commercial relationships within and beyond this region southward to Igbo and Bonny locales.⁵⁹⁴

6.3 Northern Yoruba: Zones of Contested Power and Culture Contact

6.3.1 The Jihad in Northern Yorubaland

Like other areas adjacent to the Niger-Benue confluence, Yorubaland also faced sweeping political, economic and cultural changes during the nineteenth century. Constitutional and socio-economic transformations led to an initial weakening and eventual breakdown of the central administration of the Oyo Empire. Following its downfall, Yorubaland experienced a century of wars that led to the destruction and relocating of numerous cities, towns and villages. In particular, the Oyo, Egba and Owu Yoruba were strongly affected by these wars. By the middle of the 1830s, the whole of Yorubaland was swept up in civil wars. New evolving centers of power—Ibadan, new Oyo, Ijaye, Abeokuta, Owo, Illorin, Ayede and Warri—contested control of the trade routes and sought access to slave supplies. At the same time, Yorubaland underwent great structural changes.⁵⁹⁵

By 1859 Ibadan had created an empire comprising most of the kingdoms of Ibarapa, Osun, Ife, Ijesa, Igbomina, Ibolo, Ekiti and Akoko. The kingdoms of Owo, Ondo, Ijebu and Awori in the south, as well as the towns and cities in the

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., 102-103.

⁵⁹⁵ Akintoye, *History of the Yoruba*, 300.

north such as those of the Yagba, Owe, Ijumu, and Oworo Yoruba near the confluence, remained out of the reach of Ibadan.⁵⁹⁶ Illorin was consolidated as the new Illorin kingdom. The upper Ogun region, and the country west of it, came under Ijaye's influence. From 1870 Ibadan extended its hegemonic ambitions into the areas of the Okun Yoruba, to such towns as those of the Yagba, Owe, Jumu, Bunu, Ikiri and Oworo. But beyond those areas, Ibadan faced the military power of the Fulbe Emirate of Bida under Masaba.⁵⁹⁷

The wars and accompanying raids resulted in the enslavement of many Yoruba, most of whom, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, came from Oyo and Igbomina areas. When in 1807 the slave trade was officially abolished, the British began to blockade the coast. The blockade required some adjustments in the slave trade along the lagoons that stretched outward from Lagos, while the domestic market for slaves—used here as farm laborers and as porters to carry commodities to markets—easily absorbed the many captives that were a product of the nineteenth century wars in Yorubaland.

When the center of the Yoruba wars shifted to Owu (1817-22), many slaves came from central Yorubaland such as Ife, Owu, Egba and northern Ijebu. Akintoye argues that the years of the highest numbers of Yoruba enslavement were between 1817 and 1830, which extended the intensification of the slave raids into central and western Yorubaland. After 1850 the campaigns of Illorin Emirate and Ibadan into Igbomina, Ekiti, Ijesa and Akoko led not only to the

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid. 305

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., 313.

enslavement of a large amount of Yoruba people from these regions but also to the increase of interior slave markets, in particular in Ibadan.

Between 1840 and 1850, large parts of Okun Yorubaland, such as the regions of the Bunu and Owe, were invaded and taken by the Fulbe Emir Usman Zaki, while Etsu Masaba brought Yagba, Oworo and Gbeddeland under his rule. Etsu Magjigi (1873-82) extended his campaigns into Ijumuland. From the 1870's Ibadan's Fulbe Emirate's forces from Nupeland, and Illorin's campaigns affected the northeastern Yoruba areas of the Okun Yoruba, such as the Yagba, Oworo, Owe, Ijumu, Gbede, Ikiri and Abunu, and most strongly, Ekiti and Ijesa. Some of the northern Yoruba and other neighboring groups paid large sums in tribute collected by agents in the service of the Sokoto caliphate, such as by the *ajele* or *ogba* in Yorubaland, or by the *azeni* in Afenmai.⁵⁹⁸ According to Mason, these were often Nupe or Hausa clients (*barazhi*) of the important titleholders of Bida, returned slaves of proven loyalty or local notables.⁵⁹⁹ While initially this tribute was often paid in cowries or agricultural products, its nature changed increasingly to children and slaves. In cases where tributes were not met, Caliphate forces conducted slave raids and carried slaves away.⁶⁰⁰

Olayemi Akinwumi argues that the Owe of Kabba initially played a great role in the conquest of Okun Yorubaland by Caliphate forces. Upon their defeat, Owe's political leaders began to collaborate and support the Caliphate's military

⁵⁹⁸ Mason discusses this for the Yagba, see Mason, "The Jihad in the South", 200.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid. 205.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid. 206.

in other conquests, such as the Ijumu, as oral sources seem to confirm as well. Consequently, many Owe Yoruba were appointed as *ajele* over other Okun-Yoruba, and the Obaro, the paramount chief of the Owe, was made the paramount ruler of the whole region. This meant a loss of political sovereignty of the Ijumu and became a source of rivalry between the two groups.

The Okun Yoruba experienced a great expansion and intensification of Nupe raids and Nupe control during the era of the Kirji wars (1876-1893) when powerful confederate armies of mainly western Yoruba (Ibadan and its allies) and eastern Yoruba, in particular Ijesha and Ekiti, were caught up in a civil war.⁶⁰¹ Akintoye underlines that the Okun Yoruba, having been subject to slave raids by Fulbe Emirate forces throughout the nineteenth century, had generated an intense anti-Nupe hostility, which was shared by Afenmai and Ebira as well.⁶⁰² Mason states that, in particular, the Yagba recall that the demand of excessive taxes had led to widespread abandonment of long-established settlements.⁶⁰³ Many people affected by the slave raids of the Sokoto Caliphate escaped into less accessible sites in more remote areas or on hilltops. These escapes happened among the Yagba, the Ijumu and the Igbomina, as well as the Ebira of Okene and Etuno.⁶⁰⁴

⁶⁰¹ Akintoye, *History of the Yoruba*, 325; Olayemi Akinwumu, The Imposition of Colonial Rule and its Impact on Owe/Ijumu Relations, 1900-1937, in Ayodeji Lukoju., Z. O. Apata, and Akinwumi Olayemi, eds., *Northeast Yorubaland: Studies in the History and Culture of a Frontier Zone* (Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria: Rex Charles Publication in association with Connel Publications, 2003), 26-27.

⁶⁰² Akintoye, *Ibid.* 322.

⁶⁰³ Mason, *The Jihad in the South*, 200.

⁶⁰⁴ Mason, *Ibid.*; Akintoye, *Ibid.*, 325; Akinwumu, *Ibid.*; Constanze Weise, Fieldnotes, Ebiraland, 2009; Interviews: EB-ETH-OK-M-1-4/26/2009; EB-ETH-OK-M-2-4/26/2009; EB-ETH-OK-M-3-4/28/2009; EB-ETH-OK-M-4-5/20/2009

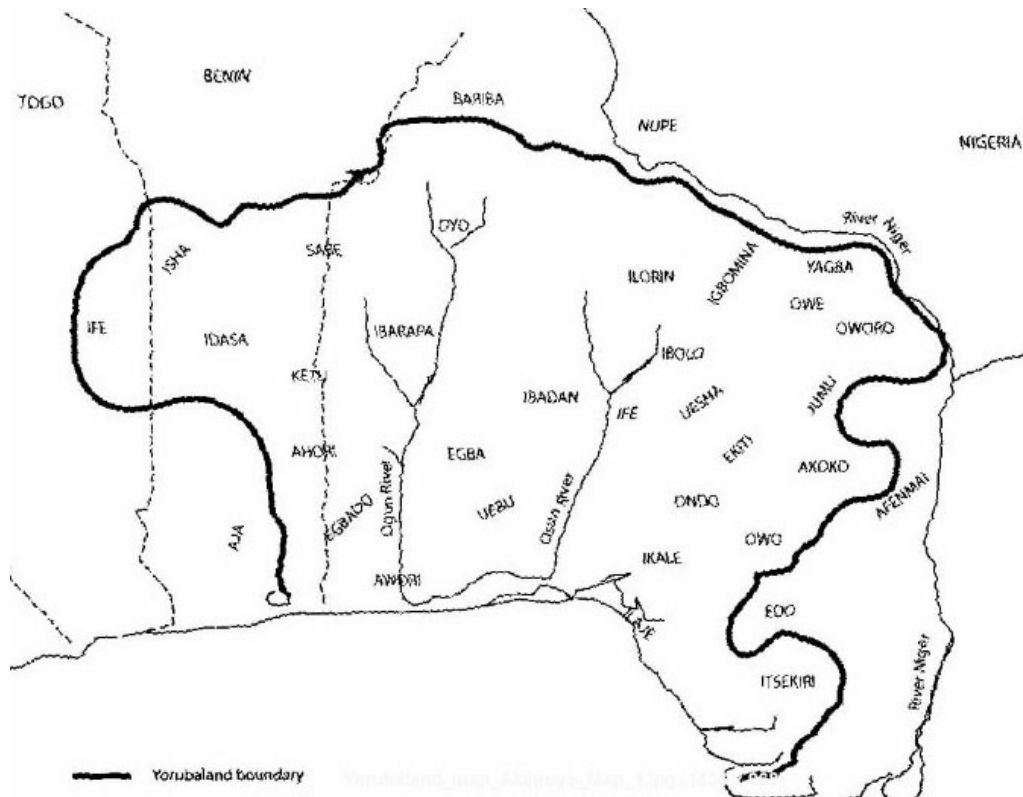
Archaeologist Aribidesi Usman points out that archaeological findings of fortifications, as well as walls and ditches in the Igbomina region that date back to the nineteenth century, underscore the defensive response of northern Yoruba people to slave raiding, warfare or military threats.⁶⁰⁵

The Ogidi Alliance was formed in 1894, and its goal was to liberate the people under Fulbe oppression. Ijumu, Yagba, Oworo, Owe, Ikiri, and Bunu, as well as some Akoko, Ekiti Yoruba and Ebira, all joined this alliance. Soon after, the Ogidi Alliance joined forces with the Royal Niger Company against the Fulbe hegemony, which resulted in the capitulation of Bida on January 1897. Subsequently, the Ogidi Alliance was disbanded, refugee settlements in the northeastern Yorubaland were shuttered and crowds of liberated slaves returned home from Nupeland.⁶⁰⁶

EB-ETH-OK-F- 5-4/20/2009. For the Igbomina see, Usman, *The Yoruba frontier*, 146.

⁶⁰⁵ Usman, *Ibid.*, 148.

⁶⁰⁶ Akintoye, *Ibid.*, 323



Map 3: Yoruba Subgroups from Akintoye, page 86.

6.3.2 Population Shifts, New Alliances and the Impact on Rituals

As Akintoye has shown, the nineteenth century wars led to population shifts and emigration out of the area of Oyo-Ile. While at the beginning of the nineteenth century the northwestern part of Yorubaland was more populated, especially in Oyo country, it was now central Yorubaland which was heavier populated. The northern Ijesa towns like Igbajo, Iree, Ada and Otan, as well as

northern Ekiti towns like Otun or Ayede, received immigration influx from Oyo and other areas.⁶⁰⁷

Andrew Apter has vividly shown how these population movements left an imprint in the fabric of the new Ekiti city-state of Ayede, established in 1850. In his analysis of this northeastern Yoruba town, which played an important military role in the devastating wars of the nineteenth century, Apter shows how immigrants started to settle in Ayede, in wards and local quarters according to their places of origin. Eshubiyi, the founder of Ayede, was himself a refugee from a northern part of Ekiti, and many of the earliest citizens of Ayede were not just Ekiti, but in particular Yagba, Oworo, Jumu and Oyo Yoruba. These immigrant-communities reestablished socio-political and cultural patterns incorporated the material and symbolic resources maintained in oral traditions and re-enacted the history of their place of origin in annual festivals and rituals at the level of the deep structure of embodied memory.

Apter argues that rituals of kingship legitimize the exercise of established authority. While on the surface rituals regenerate kingship, they actually deconstruct kingly power in order to reconstitute or overturn it. Apter demonstrates that the orisa cults were the strongest agents of historical change through their inherent dichotomy: providing support for the king of Ayede in public and obvious aspects, on the one hand, and generating alternative visions of authority through the secretly controlled knowledge of cult specialists in the deep structure on the other. These orisa cults were locally defined, brought along with

⁶⁰⁷ Akintoye, *History of the Yoruba*, 327.

immigrant groups and provided a unique identity for the sub-groups settling in different quarters of Ayede. Ayede is a prime example of other communities which emerged as a consequence of the turbulences of the nineteenth century. Eventually, these demographic movements of the nineteenth century, in particular into the Ekiti, Ondo, Ife, Mahin and Akoko regions, resulted in the development of new ethnic identities, which heightened group rivalries and political instability and contributed to the development of a new, pan-Yoruba identity.⁶⁰⁸

6.4 Igala: European Encounter and the Transformation of the Igala State

6.4.1 Transforming the Igala Kingdom

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the trends of changes underway in the previous three centuries began to accelerate and intensify. Crucially, contacts of the peoples of the confluence with the Atlantic and Sudanic commercial and cultural worlds, previously mediated through other societies, shifted to direct, firsthand encounters. The Fulbe campaigns from the 1810s onward in Nupe, and in other areas around the confluence strongly affected—and, in the case of Nupe, fundamentally altered, as shown above—the political order. Soon after, the British Niger expeditions brought a leap upward in the scale and volume of commercial activity along the rivers and in the states of the confluence. Offering alternative outlets for trade and direct access to imported goods, the British presence specifically allowed towns and chiefs along the river to challenge or sidestep the control of the Attah of the Igala kingdom over commerce.

⁶⁰⁸ Olatunji Ojo, “Warfare, Slavery and the Transformation of Eastern Yorubaland, C. 1820-1900”, PhD thesis (Toronto: York University 2003).

Nineteenth century military intrusions—first by the Fulbe in the north and later by the Europeans from the south—bookended this era. Missionaries and travelers provided first-hand eyewitness accounts of the areas of the interior and reports on major slave raids. Laird, who visited Panda in 1833, was told that it had long been a major trading center but had become now a major trans-shipment point “where Arabs and Felatahs [Fula] exchanged European goods for slaves.”⁶⁰⁹ At this time the extension of the Fulbe Empire and the Fulbe raids were visible to the outside visitors. Crowther provides an eyewitness account of the destruction of Panda in 1853,⁶¹⁰ and Allen offers an interesting description of what might be considered the older type of slave raids, which he witnessed at the confluence in 1833. At the time of the Laird and Oldfield expedition, there were, in addition to Idah, two important Igala markets on the left bank of the Niger: Adamugu on the northern tip of an island about fifteen miles south of Idah, and Ikiri, or Boqueh, about twenty-four river miles above Idah. Both were important centers of the slave trade. The Landers in 1830 met both Nupe and Bonny (Niger Delta) slave traders at Adamugu.⁶¹¹

By 1854 the Fulbe had become a really serious threat to the entire range of Niger-Benue communities and especially to the good fortunes of the Igala state. They had raided all the way down to the Delta along the west bank of the Niger,

⁶⁰⁹ Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa by the River Niger*, 232.

⁶¹⁰ Samuel Crowther, *Journal of an Expedition up the Niger and Tschadda Rive,r157-8.*

⁶¹¹ Lander, Richard and John Lander ,*Journal of an Expedition to Explore the Course and Termination of the Niger: With a Narrative of a Voyage Down That River to Its Termination; in Three Volumes, Illustrated with Engravings and Maps* (1832) 1-3 (London: Murray, 1832), III, 96.

burning and pillaging towns and taking large numbers of slaves. North of the Benue, the situation was even worse.⁶¹² In 1853 Panda was finally destroyed, and the Emirate of Nassarawa was founded. The districts along the Benue River became massively flooded with refugees.

Fulbe and Nupe forces conjoined to ravage the Niger-Benue societies. The northeastern Yoruba communities of Kabba, Bunu, Mokwa and others were severely affected and ransacked by the combined agency of these two dominant and allied powers in the region. The Ebira were also greatly affected. The Ebira Panda, including Koton Karfi, were thoroughly ravaged, and their communities were ransacked by the Fulbe military forces, who sold their captives into trans-Atlantic slavery by using diverse river routes to either the Bight of Biafra or the Bight of Benin. Another route was the overland route from Nupe through Ilorin and Oyo and eventually to Lagos.

The Fulbe Jihadists, benefiting from dynastic intrigues and factional strife over the succession, additionally exploited cleavages within Nupe society. Nupe captives were also possibly sold into the rest of the Sokoto caliphate, via Kano, and presumably into connected trans-Saharan societies.⁶¹³ The Bida emirate, under Fulbe hegemony, had more success invading the areas around the

⁶¹² Kolappo, *Military Turbulances*, 2-3.

⁶¹³ Paul Lovejoy, "The Plantations in the Economy of the Sokoto Caliphate", *Journal of African History* 19, no. 3 (1978), 341-68; see also Ann O'Hear, "Elite Slaves in Ilorin, in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries", *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 39, no. 2 (2006), 247-93.

confluence, northeastern Yorubaland, and, to an extent, Edo, especially Afenmai territory, and after that, the Ebira and Igala territories.⁶¹⁴

The Ebira Okene successfully fought the Fulbe Jihadists between 1865 and 1880. This phenomenon was denoted as the *Ajinomoh* since the Ebira Okene took to hilly settlements that were inaccessible to cavalry and thus avoided subjugation as a vassal state to the Sokoto Fulbe Jihadists.⁶¹⁵

Both sets of intruders affected the religious and ritual frameworks of these societies—though the Fulbe at first more so than the British—as socio-economic relations were altered, and new classes, such as merchants and warriors, were consolidated. More fundamental religious changes gradually appeared following the jihads on the Niger-Benue territories, as Islam began to be embraced as a new religion by indigenous people. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Muslim *mallams* were present in Idah and other towns along the Niger, such as Eggan, Pandah, and Rabbah, and were beginning to make their influence felt.⁶¹⁶

In the Igala kingdom, the Fulbe intrusion particularly affected the dynamic relationship between the Attah of Idah and his vassal states Eggan, Pandah and

⁶¹⁴ Seymour Vandeleur, “Nupe and Ilorin”, *The Geographical Journal* 10, no. 4 (October 1897), 352-64; Ade Obayemi, “The Sokoto Jihad and the “O-kun” Yoruba: A Review”, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 9, no. 2 (June 1978), 61-88; Michael Mason, “The Jihad in the South: An Outline of the Nineteenth Century Nupe Hegemony in North-Eastern Yorubaland and Afenmai”, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 5, no. 2 (June 1970), 193-209; Michael Mason, “Population Density and ‘Slave Raiding’- The Case of the Middle Belt of Nigeria”, *Journal of African History* 10, no. 4 (1969), pp. 551-64;

⁶¹⁵ Okene, “Colonial Conquests and Resistance“, 13-36.

⁶¹⁶ Allen and Thomson, *A Narrative of the Expedition sent by Her Majesty Government to the River Niger* Vol. 1, 327-329, 381, 382-384; Schön and Crowther, *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr. Samuel Crowther who accompanied the Expedition up the Niger in 1841* 99-100, 153-54, 161-63, 184, 192.

Koton Karfi. The tributes that the vassals previously paid to the Attah were often now paid to the Fulbe and, in some cases, Nupe authorities. Such tendencies reduced the power and authority of the Attah, and this resulted in turn into new ways of conceptualizing his authority and power and his role in the religious and ritual spheres.

As the political powers of the Attah weakened in the second quarter of the nineteenth century—as he lost his influence and control of the Atlantic commerce to riverine merchants—his authority became symbolically and ritually reframed. The rites and ritual status that had previously supported the kingship were transformed from supporting to defining features of his authority. The Attah’s sons, his mother’s kindred and his titleholders increasingly isolated him, making him inaccessible to everyday contact. The fact of his inaccessibility came to be seen as expressing the new degree of sacredness that he was believed to embody. In recognition of his sacred status, from all over Idoma and from other nearby polities, newly chosen chiefs made their pilgrimage to Idah to receive their bead bracelet of office from the Attah. The Attah became the region’s final arbiter of chiefly disputes. Armstrong argues that the “cult of the Ata, it would appear, was a profitable one”⁶¹⁷ as well. It engendered new political relationships and helped reimpose his authority across the region, albeit in a rather different fashion, while at the same time drawing in economic benefits to him and his court.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁷ Robert Armstrong, “The Igala”, 82.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

From the historian's point of view, the nineteenth century Niger expeditions provide new information, which was previously not available, on the nature of such political sovereignties, on the roles of ritual tools and performance in furthering sovereignty and wealth and on the kinds and nature of the economic activities that allied the local markets of the Niger to the global networks of exchange of the Atlantic Age.

6.4.2 The Igala Civil War of 1833-1835

In 1834 and 1835, the Igala engaged in a civil war, which led to the killing of Attah Ekalaga, who Lander, Laird McGregor, and other members of the 1832-34 expedition had met. The details are unknown, but it appears that Attah Ekalaga was killed in the course of intrigues initiated by certain disgruntled elements of the non-royal kingmakers, the Igalamela chiefs and one or more lineage segments of the royal ruling clan, who felt deprived of ascending to the throne due to the longevity of Ekalaga. These groups, collaborating with certain royal officials, eliminated Attah Ekalaga by suffocating him.⁶¹⁹

The oral records allege that the Igalamela chiefs were angered that the reigning Attah, together with his favored royal and non-royal allies, was gaining and overtly enjoying robust fortunes accruing from the expanding commercial activities on the Niger, to the detriment of the rest of society. The stories lay charges of piracy on the Niger against the Attah's sons and relatives, directed at

⁶¹⁹ Miles Clifford, "The Igala Chiefdom", 404; P. E. Okwoli, *Adoru District of the Igala Kingdom (A Historical Survey)* (Ankpa, Nigeria: A and A Classical Press, 1984), 18-19; Robert Armstrong, "The Igala", 82-85.

times against Igala subjects, and accompanied, it is claimed, by public insults of the Achadu, Abutu Ejibo and the other Igalamela chiefs.

A side effect of this conflict was the dispersion of many Igala from Idah into other adjoining areas. The Igala local historian Philip Okwoli argues that this conflict was responsible for the Igala settlement in the Adoru area. The Achadu of that period, Abutu Ejibo, advised his sons, led by Ogala Abutu, to set up residence there as a safe haven away from the turbulence of the civil strife.⁶²⁰

The Igalamela perceived this disadvantageous imbalance of power as endangering their political status as kingmakers. They also perceived the rising fortune of the Attah ruling class and royal houses as a direct threat to their sphere of influence, seeing in these developments an effort to undercut their historically recognized roles in keeping royal excesses in check. This tension culminated in the 1834-35 civil war that engulfed Idah and its outlying areas, following the assassination of Attah Ekalaga.

The royal reading of this history was that the Igalamela chiefs connived, with some segments of the opposing royal lineages and in alliance with certain palace officials, to kill Ekalaga, ending his long reign and leading to the emergence of Attah Ameh Ocheje at the end of the civil turbulence, with Ocheje's installation coming in 1835. The tense ambience preceding the emergence of Attah Ameh Ocheje pitted different lineages or branches of the ruling clan against each other and the royal clan against the Igalamela non-royal hereditary chiefs. To avoid similar problems in the future and to sustain his hegemony, Attah Ocheje

⁶²⁰ Okwoli, *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

responded stringently against any further whittling of the royal spheres of authority and access to wealth.⁶²¹

It is conceivable that these lingering internal dynamics and heightening pressures of external forces motivated Ameh Ocheje to sign away Lokoja (Addakuddu or Adokodo) and cede it in the signed treaty of September 6, 1841, to the British commissioners. The British's stated purpose was to establish a model farm but with the veiled interest of ensuring their own ability at the confluence to halt the further downstream progression of the Fulbe marauding forces.

Ameh Ocheje may have had similar considerations in mind. Though the terms of the 1841 treaty had a potentially weighty impact—especially in its requirement of the abolishment within his domain of the slave trade, which was a major source of revenue—a far greater issue would have been the recurrent Fulbe attacks, often unexpected and swift, which had ransacked many of the Niger-Benue communities and created anxiety and fear among yet-to-be-attacked communities. The relations of the Attah with the riverine merchants were already in crisis.⁶²² Confronted with the external menace of a Fulbe invasion, which in 1841 would have been an even more real possibility than in 1832, it looks as though ceding Lokoja as a British post became a strategic consideration. Ameh Ocheje's predecessor, Attah Ekalaga, had entered into a treaty with the African Inland Company, sponsor of the 1832 expedition, with the apparent intention of brokering British protection against the possible threat of the Fulbe against the

⁶²¹ Boston, *The Igala Kingdom*, 57-64.

⁶²² Femi Kolapo, "Post Abolition Niger River Commerce and the Nineteenth Century Igala Political Crises", *African Economic History* 27 (1999), 45-67.

Igala Kingdom, especially against its Idah capital. Even the inhabitants of the confluence region welcomed the British presence along these terms by providing a protective shield against the Fulbe.⁶²³ Ameh Ocheje appears to have been aware of the content of 1832 treaty signed and was therefore willing to part with Lokoja as a strategic preemptive ploy towards rebuffing an upsurge in Fulbe marauding activities.

6.4.3 Social Networks, Commercial Confluences and Convergent Sites: Wealth and Power Dominance and Contestation among the Igala

The Niger-Benue confluence ports of Ikiri, Otuturu and Gbebe had thriving markets, as Femi Kolapo has shown.⁶²⁴ These ports facilitated the import and export transactions of several polities in the interior of Niger-Benue confluence. They served as convenient access points for imported European products and Niger Delta salt, as well as for the export of slaves, ivory, foodstuffs and other local produce. They serviced not only the Igala but also the Ebira Igu, Ebira Panda, Bassa, Eki, Yagba, Illorin and Nupe.

Different inland markets on the Niger also served as slave entrepôts. For instance, the market towns of Egga and Rabba were significant sites of trading

⁶²³ Allen and Thomson, *A Narrative of the Expedition to the River Niger*, 1841, Vol. 1, 347-48, 356-57; Schön and Crowther, *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr. Samuel Crowther who accompanied the Expedition up the Niger in 1841*; 111, 117-118; Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa by the River Niger*, Vol. 2, 123-24; 234-35.

⁶²⁴ Femi James Kolapo, "Trading Ports of the Niger-Benue Confluence Area, c.1830-1873", in R. C. Law and Silke Strickrod, eds., *Ports of the Slave Trade (Bights of Benin and Biafra: Papers from a Conference of the Centre of Commonwealth Studies, University of Stirling, June 1998)* (Stirling, UK: Centre of Commonwealth Studies, University of Stirling, 1999), 96-121.

activities, including slaves on the Niger. Eggan was a polyglot, culturally diverse town where Yoruba, Hausa, Fulbe, Kakanda, Igala, Bornu and several other ethnic groups lived and interacted.⁶²⁵ In 1850 the market at Gbebe was drawing traders not just from around the Igala state but from Ilorin, Nupe and other interior states. Eki and Bunu settlers and traders also moved into the city, where they occupied their own quarters; the women of these quarters were popular cloth weavers. The city also had Ebira and Nupe wards. Situated close to the Niger-Benue confluence, Gbebe was also frequented by enterprising merchants of the Igbo-Aro trading network, which controlled the entire lower Niger River upward to Aboh, as well as an emergent Igala merchant class from the confluence stretches of the Niger River.

Reports from the 1832-34 and the later 1841 expeditions bear witness to an elaborate network of merchants and politically controlled market systems along the Niger River. In 1854, Samuel Ajayi Crowther noted that the various states on the Niger had put into place mechanisms and policies aimed at ensuring safe routes for commerce to follow between the markets along the river. The killing of a British trader provides a case study of how these mechanisms could be brought to bear. Crowther recounts that

King Obi of Aboh had sent to inform the Atta of Igara [Igala] of the conduct of the inhabitants of the Delta, who had killed the white man coming to establish trade with the upper country, and that something

⁶²⁵ Schön and Crowther, *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr. Samuel Crowther, Who, with the Sanction of Her Majesty's Government, Accompanied the Expedition up the Niger*, 154, 160-162; 166-80; Allen and Thomson, *A Narrative of the Expedition sent by Her Majesty Government to the River Niger* Vol. 2, pp. 102-109.

must be done to keep the road open for free communication between them and the white man....⁶²⁶

The Attah, lacking sufficient forces of his own, called on Dasaba (Masaba), the Nupe-Fulbe leader and warlord, “as one concerned in the matter, and powerful enough to keep the road open,” to provide those forces. Dasaba “promised to bring a large force of horse and foot, provided the Atta would furnish canoes to take them across the creeks and Rivers.”⁶²⁷

Long-distance trade between the coast and the Niger-Benue confluence region was already long in existence by that period. Before the Atlantic Age, various land and riverine trade routes interlinked the Igbo and Niger Delta areas in southern Nigeria with the Confluence.⁶²⁸ Specifically, we know that “Nembe trade canoes went up the Niger to the Ibo Kingdom of Aboh, to Onitsha, and even beyond, to the Igala kingdom of Idah.” There is evidence that the Nembe may also have traded in dogs from the Igala Kingdom.⁶²⁹ In 1832, members of the expedition met in Idah an agent of King Peppel of Nembe, named Aggary, who traded in slaves in the Idah market.⁶³⁰ Apart from the river route, a land route ran from Idah southeastward through Igboland to Bonny.⁶³¹ Free passage for the

⁶²⁶ Samuel Crowther, *Journal of an Expedition up the Niger and Tshadda Rivers, Undertaken by Maegregor Laird in Connection with the British Government in 1854* (London: Cass, 1970) 39.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., 38-39.

⁶²⁸ E. J. Alagoa, “Long Distance Trade”, 319-329.

⁶²⁹ Alagoa, “Long Distance Trade”, 322.

⁶³⁰ Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa by the River Niger*, Vol.2, 121, 124 , 135.

⁶³¹ Allen and Thomson, *A Narrative of the Expedition of the Niger, 1841*, pp. 377-78.

conduct of mercantile activities was maintained, often even during times of war. We have examples from among the Okengwe (Okene) district of the Ebira in the later 1800s in which trade carried on, under certain protections, even during wartime.⁶³²

Some of the Igala merchants managed to rise prominently within the social and political hierarchy during the Atlantic period, to found communes and domains of political influence and to acquire chieftaincy and titles, based upon the wealth and influence that accrued to them from the slave trade, as well as other commercial items such as ivory and, much later, from “legitimate trade.”⁶³³ The hereditary prince of the royal family from Ofante in the kingdom of Ogugu, for example, confirmed in his interview with me this kind of historical involvement of his great-great-grandfathers in the slave trade.⁶³⁴

Nwando Achebe’s story of Ahebi Ugabe underscores the Ogugu involvement in the slave trade. She tells of Stephen Ahebi, who was considered a son of Ahebi Ugbabe, but who was actually sold to her as a slave. Upon learning of his origin, she returned him to his aboriginal homeland in Ofante after Ahebi Ugbabe’s death in 1948. What this example shows is that slavery was still common practice in the area almost a hundred years after the British outlawed it in Igala territory in 1841. It appears that slavery went much further into the heart

⁶³² Okene, “Colonial Conquest and Resistance”, 30.

⁶³³ Allen and Thomson, *A Narrative of the Expedition sent by Her Majesty Government to the River Niger*, Vol. 1, 270.

⁶³⁴ IGL-ETH-IBAJ-M-2-08/24/2010; IGL-ETH-IBAJ-M-3-08/25/2010.

of the twentieth century for Ahebi Ugbabe to be able to purchase Stephen. In fact, at the time of Stephen's investigation at Ogrute in 1948, his parents were still alive and recalled the name they gave him as Akogu Inyamu. It seems that the area around Ofante and the Nsukka Igbo had continued to enslave people even as late as the mid-twentieth century.⁶³⁵

The Igala participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade is a major theme in the records of the Niger expeditions, beginning in 1832 when Richard Lander, Denham Lander, Richard Oldfield and Macgregor Laird ventured into the area. It is surprising that it has not received any attention in scholarship so far. The expedition reached Idah, which in some of their journals was called "Attah", in the month of June 1832. They met with the Igala King, Attah Ekalaga, and with him they formulated the basic outlines of a treaty. The treaty was never formally concluded and signed, but it did serve as a basic verbal agreement to the protection of European travelers and their commercial enterprise in his territory.⁶³⁶

Among the members of the 1841 expedition was an Igala ex-slave, William Johnson. He had been recaptured from a Spanish ship and had settled in Sierra Leone by the British anti-slavery naval squadron. At the time of returning to Idah, to act as an interpreter for the expedition, he had spent close to two

⁶³⁵ Nwando Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe* (Bloomington, In: Indiana University Press, 2011), 144-146.

⁶³⁶ Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa by the River Niger Vol. 2*, 234-35.

decades in Sierra Leone.⁶³⁷ He himself came from a particular chiefly family and apparently had been enslaved by political rivals. At the Igala court at Idah, Attah Ocheje remembered William Johnson and directed these words to him: “You must thank God that your own family is now on the throne.”⁶³⁸ Another such story from this period is that of James Macaulay, originally from the Kakanda region Budun, who encountered the woman who sold him into slavery in Rabbah,⁶³⁹ and who was reunited with his sister after two decades of absence.⁶⁴⁰

In 1832, the Igala king still had the monopoly over some part of the Niger River trade. Idah, Macgregor Laird commented that he

... commands at present the whole trade of the interior; which trade, although trifling at the present requires no prophet to foresee will at some time hereafter be immense. The inhabitants of Attah are enterprising traders and monopolize in a great measure the trade above the town.

Laird goes on to say that "Notwithstanding this, we had been lying at our anchorage for ten days, and could see no prospect of opening any trade with

⁶³⁷ Allen and Thomson, *A Narrative of the Expedition sent by Her Majesty Government to the River Niger*, Vol.1, 330; C. C. Ifemesia, “The 'Civilizing' Mission of 1841: Aspects of an Episode in Anglo-Nigerian Relations.” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 2, no. 3 (1962), 302; Schön and Crowther, *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr. Samuel Crowther who accompanied the Expedition up the Niger in 1841*, 95-96.

⁶³⁸ Schön and Crowther, *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr. Samuel Crowther who accompanied the Expedition up the Niger in 1841*, 85.

⁶³⁹ Schön and Crowther, 210-11; also Allen and Thomson, *A Narrative of the Expedition sent by Her Majesty Government to the River Niger*, Vol. 2, p. 118.

⁶⁴⁰ Schön and Crowther, 204-205; also Allen and Thomson, *A Narrative*, Vol. 2, p.109.

them...Perhaps another reason might be, that, with the exception of slaves, they have little to trade with".⁶⁴¹

A degree of instability was built into the Igala system. Trading activities supported the powers of the Attah ruling houses and the royals and privileged classes allied to them. But when an Attah died, the members of his ruling house left the palace, often out-migrating from Idah itself, and were replaced by the members and supporters of the house of the next Attah. These processes engendered coalitions and alliances among the differing segments of the ruling lineages as a way of furthering their ruling coalition interests outside of authority until their eventual return to power and favor in a later generation. As a result of such spatial dispossessions wired into Igala royal ruling clan dynamics, members of the royal families, when out of power, would seek to maintain their spheres of social and political influence by investing in commercial activities. J. S. Boston describes how these relations worked:

...politically and socially the four branches of the ruling houses combine on many occasions in pairs, following the lines of the original genealogical split between the Akumabi descendants and the members of the other two lineages...The first pair, comprising the Itodo Aduga and Amacho lineages has the collective name of Ajaku, an abbreviation of *aju Akumabi*. The second pair, comprising Aju Ocholi and Aj'akogu has no special name, but its members often describe the close connexion of the two lineages by the term *omaye*, which denotes children who have both parents in common. The complementary term for their relationship with the Ajaku moiety is *omora* or *omata*, implying that in this direction they are related through the father only. These terms are, of

⁶⁴¹ Laird and Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa by the River Niger*, Vol. I, 124-26.

course, used figuratively and do not imply an actual kinship relationship...⁶⁴²

Often, such coalitions were at the basis of intra-royal clan group clashes.

This was seemingly the case when Ameh Abokko, who controlled the trade on the Niger at the time of the 1832 expedition, was out of favor and estranged from the ruling Attah. These sorts of tensions appear to have been a recurrent factor in how the succession rotation between the royal lineages played out upon the death of the ruling Attah. One particular lineage of the ruling house, Ajaku, as Boston noted, tended "to act in concert against the other two lineages, who regard each other as natural allies in struggles over the succession or the allocation of political power." Intertwined with the struggles over power at the center were local quarrels over slave raiding and pillaging and territorial trespassing into the domains of rival allied lineages.⁶⁴³

The murder of Attah Ekalaga around 1834, after an "exceptionally long reign by members of the next lineage in the line of succession,

is perhaps the extreme example. His supporters, belonging to the Akogu lineage, were expelled from the capital [Idah] by the incoming Attah, Amocheje, and formed a coalition against the king with the Ocholi lineage by mobilizing local adherents of each group throughout the metropolitan area. This coalition was defeated in a major fight near the outskirts of Idah and in other skirmishes near the capital.⁶⁴⁴

This tension between the Abokko clan, as a non-ruling royal group, and the Attah of that time was behind the kidnapping of Bishop Samuel Ajayi

⁶⁴² J. Boston, *The Igala Kingdom*, 57.

⁶⁴³ Boston, *The Igala Kingdom*, 58.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

Crowther by the Abokko in Gbebe in 1857, an action leading to the death of Captain Fell, who was shot dead after rescuing Bishop Crowther, his son, and another CMS agent. The chief of the Abokko was upset that Crowther and the British were paying the Attah tributes and presenting him with gifts when he was the hegemon on the river and the one who controlled the trade. In recompense, the chief requested a ransom to release Crowther and his allies. The British consul did not accede but sent a force to retake Crowther and his party.⁶⁴⁵

Perceived thus, the Igala state formation can be understood as both the product and the outcome of a growth in trade and the elaboration of commercial relations. Beginning with trade of agricultural surpluses and local manufactures, such as iron goods as early as the beginning of the first millennium BCE, the broadening commerce in slaves, ivory and other materials in the first and early second millennium CE led to the emergence of new political institutions and relations that sought to control and benefit from the wealth that came out of trade. The founding of the Igala kingdom in the first half of the second millennium CE, with the Attah as the ruling institution, was one notable outcome of these developments.⁶⁴⁶

In the early nineteenth century, the Attah and the Igala court dominated the areas at the confluence. In 1841 Okenyi, the chief judge (ogbe) of Idah and the son and successor of the late Abokko, told the British visitors in no uncertain terms that the Kiri (Ikiri) “market belongs to the Attah, and that his word there is

⁶⁴⁵ E. Ayandele, *The Missionary Enterprise*, 222.

⁶⁴⁶ Dike, “Origin of the State”, 18-24; Kolapo, “Political Abolition”.

law.”⁶⁴⁷ This was not just an Igala claim; the Fulbe also acknowledged the preeminence of the Attah and of the Igala in the trade and politics of this region.⁶⁴⁸

Influence and affluence also had its costs and consequences. Political and economic expansions do not proceed without challenges to the institutions and practices through which these processes operate. For the Igala Kingdom, its successes became its burden. The institutional oppositions and competition built into the Igala political structures were difficult to damp down in the face of rapid growth in the access, now often, to new kinds. When the slave trade was officially abolished in 1807, the British withdrew officials and began to blockade the coast. The blockade required some adjustments in the slave trade along the lagoons that stretched outward from Lagos, while the domestic market for slaves to be used as farm laborers and as porters to carry commodities to markets easily absorbed the many captives who were a product of the nineteenth century wars in Yorubaland—captives coming directly from new historical actors who stood outside the older, established channels of competition and cooperation.

As the economic growth took place, the Attah royal house sought to use the new economic forces to enhance its power vis-a-vis other governing alliances, especially the non-royal Igalamela land-owning groups. Immediately following the civil war of 1834, between the death of Attah Ekalaga and his installation as Attah, king Ocheje set about putting in place far-reaching political reforms. These

⁶⁴⁷ Allen and Thomson, *A Narrative of the Expedition sent by Her Majesty Government to the River Niger* Vol. 1, 313.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 375.

reforms, on one hand, curtailed the powers of the Igalamela chiefs.⁶⁴⁹ On the other hand, the reforms also sought to restrict the roles of certain royal interests—palace officials and servants—because of their perceived connivance in the death of Ekalaga, his predecessor. While waging war and eventually exiling from Idah some of these royal lineages and collaborators in his successors' death, Ocheje also removed the Igalamela from the royal governing central council, although he retained one such official, the Achadu, as the head of the Igalamela.⁶⁵⁰

In eliminating the Igalamela chiefs from conciliar participation within the Idah central administration, the Attah tipped the balance of power in favor of the royal clan.⁶⁵¹ He bestowed titles on members of the royal clan, whom he raised to the ranks of royal counselors (the Amomata), with the sole purpose of serving on the royal central administration in Idah. The members he chose derived principally from among his own ruling lineage and age cohort.⁶⁵² These royal councilors in principle served at the pleasure of the reigning Attah, relinquishing

⁶⁴⁹ Miles Clifford, "A Nigerian Chiefdom", pp. 404-405; "The Rise and Fall of Igala State", 27-29.

⁶⁵⁰ Clifford, *Ibid.*, "The Rise and Fall of Igala State"; Okwoli, *A Short History of Igala*, 47-50.

⁶⁵¹ Boston, "Igala Political Organization", 24. Yet, it is instructive to note that J. S. Boston in his book, *The Igala Kingdom*, disavowed the argument that the Igalamela were involved in Ekalaga's assassination, and that this was not the cause for their demotion from the Idah central administration (see Boston, *The Igala Kingdom*, pp. 91-92, 97-98). The Igala historian Philip Okwoli holds a completely contrasting viewpoint that inserts the Igalamela into the fabric of Igala central administration, and also noted their excision by Attah Amocheje following his ascension to the throne, due to the Ekalaga incident; see Okwoli, *A Short History of Igala*, 47-48; J. S. Boston, *The Igala Kingdom*, 81-92.

⁶⁵² Boston, *The Igala Kingdom*, 83.

their political functions, though not their titles, at the installation of a new Attah.⁶⁵³

However, these changes had an opposite effect to what was intended. The Igalamela chiefs, and other groups averse to the Attah's new assertions of power, actively attempted to scuttle these developments. They viewed the Attah's mode of acting as upsetting against the long historically established arrangements that provided checks on the Attah's powers. These discontents hastened the conditions for the decline of the Attah hegemony as a strong political institution. Other factors coming from outside the kingdom further exacerbated the already tenuous internal political situation of the state in the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

While these last exogenous factors are indeed significant, they actually operated in conjunction with internal contradictions within Igala society. Acheje's reforms in the 1830s that aimed at creating a more unified state had the opposite effect in the end because they bred mutual distrust between the hereditary royal and non-royal groups and undermined the roles of the landowning Igalamela non-royal chiefs.⁶⁵⁴ The old oral traditional view of the royals as immigrants, originally a positive feature of the traditions that justified their rule, was turned against them, making them into ruling usurpers. In the second half of the century, an endemic, off-and-on condition of civil conflict persisted within the kingdom

⁶⁵³ Boston, *The Igala Kingdom*, 64-81; Boston, "The Igala Political Organization", 20-23.

⁶⁵⁴ Okwoli, *A Short History of Igala*.

among different groups in Idah town, the outlying territories and the commercial centers.⁶⁵⁵

The incursions of Fulbe Jihadists into Igala territory contributed a further element of disorder even as the commercial upsurge along the rivers grew.⁶⁵⁶ At the same time, the British intrusion from the coast reshaped the calculations of economic self-interest and unsettled the older trading relations. For instance, at the time of the British arrival on the scene, the Bassa Komo, a refugee group granted asylum by the Attah, tried to appropriate authority into their hands and extend themselves into areas far beyond the territories that the Attah had allotted to them. As a result, they precipitated military skirmishes with the Attah.⁶⁵⁷

In addition, deprived of revenues by the Fulbe incursions, the Attahs endorsed piracy on the Niger, sometimes carried out by royal princes, who even pillaged the warehouses of the Royal Niger Company, in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The company retaliated by sending British naval warships to bombard Idah in 1879, 1882 and 1896. By the time of the establishment of British colonial rule in the 1890s, and the incorporation of the Igala Kingdom into the territories of what would become known as Nigeria, the once-thriving Igala kingdom had passed its apogee and was in fast decline.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁵ Kolapo, "Political Abolition."

⁶⁵⁶ Miles Clifford, "A Nigerian Chiefdom", 404-405;

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁸ Anthony Agbali, "The Destabilization and Fragmentation of Igala", in Toyin Falola (ed), *The Dark Web of Colonialism*, Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2005, 99-137.

6.5 Repercussions and Prelude to a New Era

The main legacy the impact and extension of the Sokoto Caliphate left behind was undoubtedly a strong Islamization of many ethnic groups north and south of the Niger-Benue confluence through traders, missionary activities and forceful conversion through enslavement. Lander noted already in the first decade of the nineteenth century while traveling through the Nupe area that "We found several Falatah [Fulbe] Mallams... who have been sent by the Chief of Rabba for the purpose of instructing the natives in the Mohammedan faith... Whenever they become masters, the Mohammedan religion follows."⁶⁵⁹

Population displacement, abandonments, fortifications and hill top settlements in many regions were the consequence of slave raids. The imprints of the slave trade in memory, social and cultural spheres are less elaborated for the regions in the Niger-Benue confluence than for areas closer to the coast, such as the Niger Delta or even Igboland.⁶⁶⁰ However, memories of the slave trade and its repercussions are maintained in the oral traditions of the people of the Nigerian

⁶⁵⁹ Lander, Richard, and John Lander. *Journal of an Expedition to Explore the Course and Termination of the Niger: With a Narrative of a Voyage Down That River to Its Termination*. New York: Harper & Bros., 1854.

⁶⁶⁰ See, for instance, E.J. Alagoa, "The Slave Trade in Niger Delta Oral Traditions and History", in Paul Lovejoy, ed., *Africans in Bondage* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1986), 125-13; Dike, K. Onwuka Ekejiuba, and Felicia Ifeoma Ekejiuba. *The Aro of South-Eastern Nigeria, 1650-1980: A Study of Socio-Economic Formation and Transformation in Nigeria*. Ibadan: University Press, 1990, Ekejiuba, Felicia Ifeoma. "Igba Ndu: An Igbo Mechanism of Social Control and Adjustment." *African notes*. 7 (1972): 9-24), emesia, C. C. *Southeastern Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century: An Introductory Analysis* (New York: NOK Publishers, 1978); J. Okoro Njoku Onwuka N. Ijoma, "High Points of Igbo Civilisation: The Arochukwu Period", in Afigbo, ed., *Groundwork of Igbo history* (1992): 198-312; Adele Afigbo, Trade and Trade Routes in Nineteenth Century Nsukka", *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 7,1, 1973, 77-90; Nwokeji, *The Slave Trade and Culture in the Bight of Biafra*.

hinterland, embodied in rituals and festivals and inscribed in the landscape, material culture and language.

The locus of political and economic power in the region clearly shifted to the Sokoto Caliphate and to the Igala kingdom, which gained advantage from trade contacts with Europeans. In September 1841, the British-parliament-commissioned Niger Expedition had reached Idah. Macgregor and others who had been already with the 1832 expedition, and were now revisiting Idah, joined this expedition. They met a new Attah, Ameh Ocheje, on the throne. The new Attah entered into a treaty with the commissioners, with an Igala ex-slave, a member of the then-ruling Igala clan, acting as interpreter. Among the expedition members was Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a Sierra Leonean, ex-Yoruba slave, who would later become an Anglican priest and eventually a bishop. The treaty sanctioned the conveyance of the area of the Niger confluence (then designated as Addu Kudu, Adokodo and Mount Stearling, now known as Lokoja) to the British commissioners to be used for a model farm settlement and a British Fort settlement. Importantly, the treaty urged to end slavery, especially on the Niger, and sought protection for European travelers, merchants and Christian missionaries' travels and free trade on the Niger and throughout the Attah's territory.⁶⁶¹

⁶⁶¹ Allen and Thomson, *A Narrative of the Expedition sent by Her Majesty Government to the River Niger* Narratives of the Niger Expedition, p. 330.

Various other British expeditions followed them.⁶⁶² In particular, the expedition of 1854 through 1858 led to the formation of British imperial commercial and political posts at Lokoja and in the lands of the Nupe and others within the Niger-Benue confluence.⁶⁶³ In the late 1870s, as aspirations to empire began to take off among continental Europeans, French and even some German traders, they began to make their way into the confluence region, seeking permission from the different rulers of the region to operate within their territories and to tap into the commercial opportunities there.⁶⁶⁴ Local rulers saw these events as opportunities to gain better terms by playing the European commercial interests against the other and thus adding to their wealth and consolidating to their political powers.

French commercial activities on the Upper Niger began in 1878 when Comte de Semelle visited Lokoja and the Benue. Again in June 1880, he received the permission of Umar, Emir of Nupe, to trade freely in his territory. In that year, the French had trading stations along the Niger in Gbebe, Lokoja, Egga, Shonga and Rabba, as well as on the Benue in Loko and Demsa. In 1882, another French Company, the *Compagnie de Senegal et de la Cote Occidentale d'Afrique*, moved into the Niger confluence region and began business there. Towards the end of 1881, Flegel hoisted the German flag on the Benue, claiming to have been given a letter of recommendation from the Caliph of Sokoto that allowed him to carry on

⁶⁶² Samuel Crowther and V. Taylor, *Gospel on the Bank of the Niger*.

⁶⁶³ Ibid.,

⁶⁶⁴ R. A. Adeleye, *Power and Diplomacy in Northern Nigeria 1804-1906: The Sokoto Caliphate and its Enemies*. (New York: Humanities Press, 1971), 123-30.

business there. He was forced out of Loko 1882 by other European traders but continued to operate elsewhere on the Benue.⁶⁶⁵ The rulers of the states along the rivers benefited greatly from the rivalry, as these companies offered them lavish goods in return for trading rights. The Africans gained an increased access to desired European goods and strengthened their military along with their wealth.⁶⁶⁶

The successes of these expeditions paved the way to ensuring the British pursuit of colonization of Nigeria, including the Niger-Benue confluence region, following the 1885 Berlin conference convoked by Bismarck on the question of European colonization interests and schemes in Africa. At the time, British imperial interests were conjoined to the commercial instrumentality and organization, the Royal Niger Company. The Royal Niger Company clashed with some members of the Attah ruling houses, following what they assumed was the Attah's endorsement of piracy on the Niger and Benue. The ruling house supported this endorsement in seeking to enhance its diminishing revenues following the decline of its fortunes due to the Fulbe invasion on its territories around the Benue and the British imperial intrusion, which greatly affected trading activities.⁶⁶⁷ In 1898, British direct colonial rule led to the sidelining of the Royal Niger Company in political governance. Following this, in 1900 the Northern and Southern Protectorate, including the colony of Lagos, were

⁶⁶⁵ Adeleye, *Power and Diplomacy 1804-1906*, 123-26.

⁶⁶⁶ Adeleye, *Power and Diplomacy*, pp. 126-27.

⁶⁶⁷ Miles Clifford, "A Nigerian Chieftdom"; Armstrong, "The Igala"

combined under one central administration under the Colonial Office and were eventually amalgamated into a new state named Nigeria in 1914.⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶⁸ Michael Crowder, *A Short History of Nigeria* (New York: F. A. Praeger, 1966).

Conclusion

A regional history over the *longue durée* for a region allows for insights into long-term historical processes and the dynamics of change over wide time spans, as has characterized the Niger-Benue confluence. This region formed a key contact zone in the history of West Africa as it linked important crossroads of power and trade. As political, cultural and social history, and first of its kind for West Africa, this thesis lays the very deep time historical foundations of the Niger-Benue confluence region and its peoples, among whom the Igala, Northern Yoruba and Nupoid-speaking people are the main focus. It contributes to an important new body of studies on early African history, all of them previously written for central and eastern Africa.

This work differs from other early social histories for West Africa in that it is the first exploration into understanding the dynamics of religious and political power in the early history of the Niger-Benue confluence region over the *longue durée*, applying in particular the method of historical and comparative linguistics to interpret linguistic data. These were correlated with written sources as well as with oral traditions, ethnographic data and, where available, archaeological findings. To date, archaeological research is uneven for the Niger-Benue confluence, with most areas, such as the Nupe region, not covered at all. Thus the thesis proposes a probable past, whose validity will hopefully be tested with increasing excavations in the region.

Linguistic evidence shows that agriculture became established much earlier than yet attested by archaeological and archaeobotanical evidence from such

sites as those in the Nok area. If agriculture were attested archaeologically for the suggested age by the linguistic data as well, this would constitute a revolutionary finding. As Christopher Ehret proposes, pre-domestication cultivation of African grains in West Africa may go back to 8000 BCE.⁶⁶⁹ The reconstructions of the Ebirá-Nupoid agricultural lexicon suggest that these practices go back to 4000 BCE in the regions around the Niger-Benue confluence, as well as east and west of it. Among the earliest attested crops are sorghum and yams.

Linguistic evidence in conjunction with comparative ethnography surmises further that between 1000 BCE and 1000 CE the social habitat of the Ebirá-Nupoid, and probably also Igala-Yoruba, peoples consisted of village-based societies, which were governed by ritual clan priest-chiefs. The Nok culture northeast of the confluence may be an exception to this development as it represents an already stratified society.

Little is known overall about the Nok people. It was a Neolithic or New Stone Age culture that made the transition to the Iron Age. Based on the small amounts of evidence so far examined for this period, scholars have inferred that the Nok society developed in tandem with agricultural production and early iron technology. By the time Nok culture reached its peak in about 500 BCE, its metalworking technology included smelting furnaces and tin as well as iron manufacturing. Control of iron and tin trade may have provided the basis for the political power of Nok. Since 2005 a team of archaeologists, archaeobotanists and

⁶⁶⁹ C. Ehret, "Africa in World History before 1440", in E. Akyeampong, R. Bates, and N. Nunn, eds., forthcoming, Oxford University Press.

geographers of the German Universities of Frankfurt am Main and Tuebingen, and African partners from Nigeria and Cameroon, have taken up new excavations focusing on the settlements of the Nok Culture. The program further aims to place the terracotta art in its economic, environmental and social context.

Archaeobotanical research will further explore the economic and ecological conditions of the Nok Culture and investigate whether climatic changes and overexploitation of resources could have caused the downfall of the Nok state. It is to be hoped that these new archaeological endeavors will shed light not only on the Nok state itself, but also on the interaction with regions in close vicinity, such as the ancestral speech communities of the Igala, Yoruba and Nupoid-speaking people. It is probable that Ebira, Nupoid and early Yoruba-Igala societies remained smaller-scale societies operating on the fringes of the economic sphere of Nok well into the first millennium CE.

A new era of state formation processes appears to have begun in the second half of the first millennium CE in the regions west of the confluence. In particular, the establishment of the early Yoruba city-states, which were situated across the southwestern and western regions of the confluence, seems to have taken place during the rough span 700-1000 CE. Following on these developments, ca. 1000-1200 CE, the Nupe kingdom arose in the areas across the Niger and north of the confluence. Early contact between Nupe and Yoruba regions finds reflection in mythology and shared oral traditions. The Igala state, on the other hand, came into being probably a little later by around the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Its institutions were probably shaped by or arose out of

the earlier Nri state, whose capital at Igbo-Ukwu just east of the lower Niger flourished in the centuries just before and around 1000 CE.

The Niger-Benue confluence was peripheral to the urban commercial world of the Sudan belt to the north since ca. 1000 BCE. There are indications in archaeological evidence from Igbo-Ukwu that the commercial relations with areas to the north reached new importance in the period between 500 and 1500 CE, when volume and variety of this trade both along the Niger river and overland from the Sudan belt to the north increased. These increased trading activities may have had a great deal to do with why a new era of emerging states in the confluence region took shape from around 700 onward. Further archaeological studies are much needed to shed more light on this proposition.

Between around 1000 and 1500 CE in this region, there arose a variety of territorial kingdoms and city-states whose legitimacy was based upon ownership and control over rituals of power linking the world of the living with the spiritual world of deities and ancestors. These expressions of ritual sovereignty greatly enhanced political sovereignty and often extended over wider regions, while shaping the local and regional power dynamics.

In the late sixteenth century the Niger-Benue confluence experienced another commercial impact, this time spreading inland from the Atlantic coast. The confluence region, in particular the areas of the Igala, Northern Yoruba and Nupoid-speaking peoples, became the hub of the encounter between the Sudanic and Atlantic commercial spheres. Societies in the hinterland adopted not only new crops stemming from the Americas into their agricultural schemes, but, in

particular, local shrines integrated sacrificial items and ritual paraphernalia from the Atlantic world, along with icons of the slave trade, into the existing ritual observances, which had taken shape during the first half of the second millennium.

States profiting from the new trade avenues, such as Yoruba empire of Oyo, expanded their commercial relationships with the Nupe kingdom in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Nupe played an important role in the horse trade from the central Sudan, supplying the Oyo Empire with the horses for its cavalry forces. Oyo in turn was the source notably of kola nuts, which were highly valued in the trade north to the Nupe and Hausa states. Some primary sources indicate that slaves were traded both ways as well, but there is still much to learn for the time period before the eighteenth century.

The nineteenth century marked new developments. It also presents a leap upwards in the availability of written external sources, such as travelers' accounts and written internal sources, in particular those coming from the leaders of the Sokoto caliphate. The Niger-Benue confluence region experienced the ruptures caused by the Sokoto Caliphate, Fulbe invasions and slave raiding campaigns. One of the major political realignments connected with the Sokoto Caliphate was the imposition of a Muslim sultanate over much of the area of the Nupe kingdom, as well as parts of northern Yorubaland. Marked by the final collapse of the Oyo Empire, this was a time of internecine strife among Yoruba city-states. Also the Igala kingdom struggled internally as well as externally with the new commercial pressures stemming from the Fulbe raids and later from the European encounter.

European travellers and commercial activities along the Niger River became a predominant factor in the second half of the nineteenth century as the British Empire sought to expand its own commercial interests. The consequence of these new developments in the region was a shift in the nature of the trade and the products that were traded. The upshot of these developments was the end of the independence of the older states in the confluence region, which at the beginning of the twentieth century became part of the British colonial state. Nevertheless, the older cultural and political traditions lived on in new guises throughout the colonial period, into the post-colonial era and into the present.

Traditional rulers and traditional institutions continue to play an important part in Nigeria's social and political life at the grassroots level. As custodians of traditions and customs, traditional chieftaincy councils decide about the performance and content of local traditional festivals and are consulted for legal issues in the community.⁶⁷⁰ Local chiefs place themselves next to government officials, governing in a sort of parallel social and political dispensation, and are seen as the link between the people, in particular in villages, and Nigerian government institutions.

Finally, among the Northern Yoruba, Igala, Nupe and Nupoid-speaking peoples of central Nigeria, traditional rituals have retained a kind of cultural sovereignty. They are, as Jean and John Comaroff state, "a vehicle of history-in-the-making" which at times conduce to "sustain and legitimize the world in

⁶⁷⁰ Weise, Fieldnotes, Nigeria 2009 and 2009

place,” at times have the effect of “changing more-or-less pervasive features of that world” and at times “do both simultaneously.”⁶⁷¹

⁶⁷¹ Comaroff, Jean and Comaroff John L., eds., *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa* (Chicago, 1993), xxix

Appendices

Appendix I

Oral Traditions

Tsoede Tradition of Origin collected in Leamfa Kuso⁶⁷²

Interview at Lemfa Kusa, Kwara State, Nigeria on August 20, 2009

At the Palace of the Zàáki of Lèmfá Kúsò

Eyapìdò Lèmfá Kúsò

Introduction of the Village Head and Titled Chiefs

1. Muhammad Etsu Yànkpa: Zitsu Lèmfá Kúsò
2. Abdullahi: Shàábà Lèmfá Kúsò
3. Musa: Nákodí Lèmfá Kúsò
4. Muhammadu: Ndèéji Lèmfá Kúsò
5. Muhammadu: Rúgbà Lèmfá Kúsò
6. Isa: Kpòtun Lèmfá Kúsò
7. Ahmed Muhammed: Son of village head
8. Muhammadu: Brother of village head

When Tsòèdè left Idáh. (Who left Idáh?) Edègi, Tsòèdè. When Tsòèdè left Idáh those pursuing him, when he got to a pen (for animals), he entered. That is where the pen received him, and that is how the salutation of the chief of Lèmfá Kúsò came to be “Eyapìdò tsi a lo ga.” When he arrived Lèmfá Kúsò, he came down.

The people of Lèmfá assisted him in fighting off his pursuers for seven days.

After seven days his pursuers retreated. It was then that he settled down in Lèmfá Kúsò. When he settled down here he gave us a lot of cultural relics. There was an idol that he left for us. It was the first. The idol is celebrated for seven days. When

⁶⁷² Translation: Ahmadu Kawu Ndanusa

the idol is being celebrated the village head would enter his room and stay there for seven days. It is usually in the evenings that the spirits (jinns) will come out. When the celebration starts, every resident of Lèmfá Kúsò will not come out at night for the duration of the celebration. At the end of the seven days it would be announced that the masquerade was going to come out that day, the masquerade that Tsòèdè gave them. Everyone would attend. And that has been ongoing. When Tsòèdè arrived here the canoe he brought here is the canoe that the masquerade is going to use to paddle around the village. The canoe is now where it is. The canoe that he gave us is now at Dàágí. It is in this village. The paddle is hidden in a hole. The anchor is in the farmlands/swamp. The bowl that is used to remove water from it is also there. That is that was. Those are the things he left for us. The canoe is lying in Dàágí. We know where the canoe is even now, where he left the canoe.

Now, the masquerade that he left for us. That cultural relic, we had been practicing it. Our forefathers had been practicing it. Then they stopped. They eventually stopped, and now we're free from all that. That is why we say the salutation of the chief of Lèmfá is Eyapindò. When he was done with this town, he bade them goodbye and left. He didn't die here. This is what he left for us in this town. And he said we shouldn't let it go. That is how ours is. Yes he left that tradition for us. We celebrated that room masquerade for seven days. And he said we should not abandon it. (But you did abandon it.) Right, it became a thing of fear for us. (We blacks have our own customs. What is bad about our customs we throw away. And so we and our children don't know anything about our

origins/cultural origins. Instead of fixing what is bad we just discard them.) The reason we abandoned those practices is that they make us associate something with worshipping God. Our forefathers discarded everything. They could have held on to the good things and discarded the bad ones. But they didn't do that. Therefore that is what he left us, what he left in this town. There is a canoe; it is lying in this town. The water scooping bowl is there too. The paddle is there. What else is there? There is the anchor. There is also gbàràgbà. But we don't have these anymore. Or do we? Not really. It is only the canoe that we can find where it is lying. There is also the staff of Tsòèdè that he left for us, just like the one that Etsu Pátígi holds now. That was Tsòèdè's staff, and that is why his salutation is Zàákì. Tsòèdè was the first chief of Lèmfá. All of us came later. That is how it was.

Tsòèdè left from Idah. But it was from Nupekó that he left for Idah. Nupekó was his origin. That was his origin, Nkù and Nupekó. That was the town of his parents. Nkù and Nupekó were his parents' towns. It was from there that he went to Idah. When he arrived Idah, back then the chief of Idah had dominion over this area. The chief of Idah ruled over all of Nupeland. They were sending people to Idah, and Tsòèdè was sent there. And the reason they called him Tsòèdè? Well, the chief that he went to meet, God had bestowed blessings on him (Tsòèdè). The chief was ill. When he was ill, it was said that someone had to climb the palm tree. When they climbed and cut the palm tree, anyone who was able to catch it would inherit the chief. All the chief's children didn't think it was possible to catch the falling palm tree. But Tsòèdè said he could. When he said he

could do it, he went there. They climbed the palm tree and cut it. He stretched out his hands to catch the palm tree. The palm grazed him here and there and his lips cut/parted like this. That is the reason they called him Tsòèdè. That was how the chief bequeathed all cultural/traditional relics to him (Tsòèdè.). Because of what he did he gave them to him. He didn't give them to the children. He told him that as promised, there was a canoe on the banks of the river and those things were already there. Once he died he should just go ahead and take the canoe, he wouldn't know who would paddle it. Even the person who would paddle it was already on it. Once the chief died, Tsòèdè left and went upriver. That was it. That was the reason for his departure.

They call Idah Edah in Nupe language. The chief of Idah ruled over Nupeland. Then there was no Etsu Pátígi, there was Gbara. Bida was yet to be established. There was not Etsu Bida then. Bida had not settled then as to have a king. The Idah people were Igbirra (Igala, I believe). (The relics that Tsòèdè brought along, what did he do with them? Like the chain.) Well, as for what he brought us, it is what I already mentioned: the canoe, the water scooping bowl, the paddle, and anchor. But before he arrived here he had distributed things to other settlements, things like gbàràgbà that we mentioned, things like masquerades, he gave them to some other towns before he arrived in this town. Because he went as far as where the Niger River reached Jébbà. He gave things to people at Tàdá, like that separately. It was the same way that he gave things to us here that he gave to other people. And then he came ashore, but he didn't die here. (When he left the canoe here, what did he use to travel?) Well, he stayed here till

his wife gave birth. His child died here. It was the people of Lèmfá who buried his child. Where they buried his child, he asked the chief of Lèmfá to provide someone that would take care of his child's grave. That is the origin Tsówa of Tsòèdè in this town. That is still there. Tsówa of Tsòèdè has been a title ever since. That was the person that the chief of Lèmfá gave to Tsòèdè to take care of his child's grave.

When he left here, he went to Dàágí. It was there that he left the canoe and bade farewell to the chief of Lèmfá. Then he took a horse and went straight to Gbara. That was where he met the Etsu of Pátígi. So what he would give to Etsu Pátígi he gave him. It was when he left Gbara that he went to Táfin. Since he left Idah, he met some towns along the banks of the river Niger, Ngwa and Nupekó. But it was from Nkù that he was sent to Idah. But when he left the canoe with the things that the chief of Idah gave him, he left stones/statues at Nupekó. Till today those stones/statues are still there. When he arrived here he went up the first and he gathered hyenas, large birds, pythons, and different things, he gave them to Tàádá. They built a house for him and the animals. These things remain there till today. When he left Tàádá he went to Ràbah. There he took the chain for the canoe and gave it to them. The chain is still in Ràbah. He looked for a place to hide the canoe because the river could not contain the canoe. When he tried to bury it, it would come back to the surface. It was then he turned back down river here. He then entered the creek/a barn. He put people in front of the barn and asked them to tell anyone who asked if anyone was hiding in it that they had not seen anyone. Those were the people who gave away the information that he was

hiding in the barn. The origin of those people that he brought from there now bear the title Kútá. (Kútá?) Yes, Tsòèdè brought them, the people that he made to guard the barn but gave him away. There is somewhere near the river, you would have passed it, there is a small canoe there. It was there the people of Lèmfá went to set up a camp and did battle for seven days to defend Tsòèdè. As Mallam Musa said, God answered the prayers of the people of Lèmfá and Tsòèdè's pursuers retreated. The people who betrayed/snitched on him, their origin is in Mùregi. They have the title of Lwàákwàdzwa, that used to be their title. He told them that each year this masquerade that I have given you, whenever the time came to worship it, you should offer a person as sacrifice. When the time came the Lwàákwàdzwa who was the chief would be offered as sacrifice. Each year whoever was Lwàákwàdzwa would be used to worship the barn. And then they stopped that. And then it was the turn of a black cow. They left humans and now offered a cow. The era of the cow passed. It was the turn of a white sheep. Now it is a white cock that the people of Mùregi bring as an offering to us. So what is left is that we pray for them.

Saidu Musa: Herbalist-Diviner-Medicine Man

I do fortune telling for people. If a person has a problem I let them know. I use cowries. (Do you have any other instruments?) If a woman is getting ready to deliver a baby, I help deliver it. (Did you learn it?) Midwifery is something I inherited from my father. It was passed down from my paternal grandmother to my father, who passed it on to me after his death. (Didn't she have a daughter

before she died?) She did, but she died young. At the time that my grandmother died, she had only my father to pass the practice to. (Didn't your father have a daughter?) He had. (So why didn't he pass it on to her?) She did not have the ability to carry out that responsibility. He had only one daughter and she didn't live long. And the one that survived did not qualify to inherit the practice. (Do you have a daughter?) Yes, I do. So if you're going to pass on the practice. Would you pass it on to a woman?) I'll not pass it on to a woman. Since my father did not pass it on to a woman, I'll teach it to a man.

(Other than cowries, do you use any other instruments for divination, like sand?) No, I use only cowries. (Are you a hunter?) No, I'm not. It is not all the time that I use cowries. If a person is bound by witches, if I go there I can see them, and speak to them so that they will release the person, by God's grace. If someone is ill, there is some help I can give to relieve the person. There is an incense that I can give the person that will bring relief. If someone is without child, I can help in such a way that God will grant her offspring/children. (What is this?) Return. Well, this borders on the vulgar. When a man has sex with his wife, the sperm/discharge will not stay inside the woman but instead sips out to the bed. I can use this so that it doesn't happen again. I can prepare this and the man mixes it with porridge to drink. The reason for the problem is that a male jinn/spirit would have slept with the man's wife without his knowledge. So when it comes time for the man to sleep with her, her body would reject/return his sperm. This is the cure for that and it is taken with corn porridge. I inherited divination from my paternal grandfather. (Did you know him?) No, I didn't know him, but my father

was able to divine too. (So your father divines too?) Yes, I took this from my father.

(Can we see the chain and anchor?) No we can't, all that is in the water. The scooping bowl, paddle, and anchor are all underwater. (What is used to keep the canoe in place?) It is just there; it is iron. Even those of us who claim it is iron, when the canoe is being paddled, we hear it at night. It is then we know that it is iron. Again it is a place where we cast nets for fishing. When the nets get near there and people try to retrieve it, they touch it and know that it is Tsòèdè's canoe and feel that it is iron. That is why it is still there. Since he left it there it has remained there.

(What was used to fight when the people here defended Tsòèdè?) They used arrows/spears. (Do we still have them?) Yes, we do. Its type is till here. (Not new ones, but the ones that were used during Tsòèdè's time. Yes, it is what we're still using today. We're still using its kind till today. (Can we see that now?) Not really, it is in water, and however low the water is, they are not visible. Even during the time of Gàlàdima Pátígi and Mákàmá Bida, they brought white men/Europeans here and they went there and used some instrument (binoculars/telescope) to view it and they said they would come back. But they never did. They saw that it was there. He used something to look at it and confirmed that it was there. (How about the staff?) It was not a wooden staff; it was all iron. Zàákì, are you able to show her the staff? (No, those things can't be seen now.) (How about the chains? (Well, those do not seem to be in good shape anymore. I don't even know where they are now.) Even if you have a little bit of

it, can you let them see it? (We can't let them take it away.) No they aren't taking it away. We just want to provide evidence. Even if it is just a piece to validate our story.

(Where do the Nupe descend from? The Yoruba and the Igbo have stories about the origins of the world and their people. Do the Nupe have such a story?) Here is the staff that Tsòèdè gave to the chief of Lèmfá. There is also the chain. It is known as Tsòèdè's staff. And these are the chains. Any day that they would celebrate Tsòèdè.

The King's Council:

Shàábà: The chief's envoy to Mùregi

Kpòtun: In charge of the chief's fishing ponds

Ndèéji: He receives foreign visitors that come to see the chief. People like the Hausa who come to see the chief; that is his work.

Nákodí: He takes care of people from other lands that come here.

Màákun: He is the custodian of the titled chiefs (chief kingmaker). Even when the chief is no more, he is the one that heads the council to select another chief. He is the one who bestows chieftaincy on the chief. He is the custodian of Tsòèdè's pen. He is in charge of the Edòmi people.

Látsé:

Rúgbà: He is the chief's messenger. He'll go to wherever the chief sends him.

Màyàáki: If there is conflict with another community, he is the one that defends the community.

Tswá Tsòèdè: He is the custodian of Tsòèdè's relics. He is the one that takes care of the grave of Tsòèdè's son. The grave is where you have the big tree in the center of town. That was where Tsòèdè's house was built earlier. Yes, that tree area, that was Tsòèdè's home. That's where he had lived.

(All members of the council are men. Don't women have titles here?) Not at all. They are all men. (Before Tsòèdè arrived here were there kings before him?) Umaru was the chief before the arrival of Tsòèdè. We know the names of some of the chiefs. (You should ask your educated children to write down this information: how the town was established and subsequent history, including significant events, so that when people strangers/researchers come seeking information, it would be readily available. There should be things that only the natives should know and things that visitors/strangers/foreigners should be told. This is important so that everyone would know the history of the town/people. Information should include important events, succession of chiefs, and their accomplishments/legacy. There should be a special room in the chief's palace where all the relics are displayed. So when there are visitors/foreigners, they don't have to be moved around, they would just be shown these things in the room and they can take whatever pictures they want. After we leave you should try to do these things. You need to record the history of the town as you know it; from when the town was first established, the first chief and the later chiefs to the time of Tsòèdè and those after Tsòèdè, and all events that took place.) Even what we've told you is what we've been told since we were not present when those

things happened. (Well, they couldn't have lied to you since people of the past never lied. So tell us the history of the town, who established/founded it?).

Záákì, it is your turn to speak. It is what you said that we're now experiencing. The people of the past did some things they never told us. They kept some things from us. Like they could have told us that this is how the town was established, this was the person that Tsòèdè met. There were kings in the past, earlier than Tsòèdè, but we don't know them. They were just chiefs until Tsòèdè gave them this staff and confirmed them as chiefs. But there were earlier chiefs. As to the origins of these chiefs, that has been kept from us. That is why I told you earlier that some things have been kept from us. (Was Tsòèdè ever the chief of this place?) Not really. He was a stranger/visitor and he moved on. He was on the move and he only settled here for a while. The only reason he stayed long here. Since he left Idah, he didn't spend as much time as did here anywhere else. Because the people here helped him fight off his pursuers, that is the reason he stayed long here. And when he was all done here, he said goodbye and left.

(What you know about Tsòèdè is that his father and mother were from Nupekó and Nkù.) Yes, that I know. (What was the mother tongue of his father and mother?) Nupe, both his father and mother were Nupe. If you go to Nkù or Nupekó they would tell you about his parents' origins. (So, why did he leave for Idah?) It is like I told you earlier. Earlier in the history of Nupeland, Idah was the sovereign power/ruler over Nupeland. They would send people here to collect royalties. And Nupe would send people to work there. It was then that Tsòèdè was sent there to work for the chief of Idah. (It is like the current practice with the

Etsu Pátígi having authority over Làde. So if Etsu Pátígi has some work to do in Pátígi he can send to Làde to have them send some people over to work there. It is like we do now, when we pack grass and take to Bida and roof houses there. We would carry grass for thatching all the way to Bida. (You walk?) Yes we walk all the way to Bida. It is how it used to be then. At that time Bida had not even been established. It was there that it happened that Tsòèdè was sent to Idah where God gave him these powers. (And that is why ancient people were strong because of long-living). That is true, what God blessed us with, he didn't bless them with. (Because they used to walk a lot, but now we travel by motorcycles and cars.)

If you ask the people of Nupekó, they would tell you that. Tell them that Lèmfá people told you that if you wanted their story you should ask them. (Where did he go when he left here, Nupekó?) No he did not go to Nupekó from here, he went to Gbara. On his way here he passed through Nupekó and he gathered some stones from there. Till now those stones are still there. He came downstream from Idah, which is on the down side of Onitsa. When he was being pursued, he stopped at Nupekó and left the stones for them. He then took to the river again toward here, to our settlement. (After the enemies were fought back, did they return to Idah?) Right, they went back to Idah because they didn't have the strength to continue the battle. (Of the people that took part in the battle, are there some still alive?) Not at all, but they have descendants, they are all the ones here. These are their great grandchildren. These are the weapons that were used to hunt animals when the river is flooded. They are the weapons used to fight the battle. Since we only hunt in the water, not on land, this is the only thing we use. And we

don't have guns. However large an animal is, once we stick this into it, it won't be able to escape. It can't go under water any longer.

When the chief leaves for Bida, he would be accompanied by the Määkun. But Määkun would return before him. While the chief stays on the other side of the river, Määkun would come to the village and gather these instruments. Once the boat carrying the chief comes ashore, as the chief tries to step out of the boat, Määkun would stop him and take his hands and present the instrument and the relics to him. He would pick up the staff and say "Tsòèdè said I should present this to you. This is Tsòèdè's blessing. You've become the chief of Lèmfá today." Residents would stay at the bank of the river to welcome the chief. The chief of Lèmfá's authority extends to Gbàtsì, Gùgá. They would come together with the residents of Lèmfá and wait for the chief of Lèmfá.

(Are there annual festivals here?) The only festival was the one that I mentioned earlier concerning Tsòèdè's legacy. As I said we don't do that anymore. Because there are things that are not liked in modern times, and so we don't have those practices anymore. (If you try to resume those things, would other villages agree to join you?). They would call us disbelievers. This is so because it has aspects of associating partners with God. It is like worshipping idols. (Was there ever the Ndákógbòyá masquerade here?) There was never Gbòyá here. (Was there any masquerade here?) Before the coming of Tsòèdè there was Ndáyàsù. There was also Gunnun. (Isn't the origin of Gunnun Yoruba?) Well, Gunnun was common in Nupeland. Hardly was there a village that did not practice Gunnun.

The festival in memory of Tsòèdè used to take place on the 21st day of the seventh month, that is when it starts, and ends on the 29th. As it is, once the chief enters the room, he is secluded and won't come out till the 29th when it is all over. And everyday they would prepare seven large bowls of food till it is over. The food would be consumed by the youth of the village. There were other villages that took part in the festival: Mùregi, Gírági, Nupekó, Nkù, Gbódífù, Gàrikó, and Dàágí in honor of the chief of Lèmfá celebrating Tsòèdè. Of all the places that Tsòèdè went, there was no place that he left a legacy greater than the one here. When the festival starts everyone would gather on the first day at the chief's house. It is the day that they would pour libation, but they would never take wine to Tsòèdè's room. Those making the offering would consume the wine because Tsòèdè never drank wine. It is only the celebrants that drink the wine. However much they bought and drank wine, only the celebrants drink it because Tsòèdè never drank wine. Then they would invoke some people's names/spirits and the spirits would appear. And when they called them, they would appear. Even as we are sit here now, if we hold the instrument and invoke the spirits, they would appear. If they called them they would appear. If we hold the calabash bowl and invoke the spirits, they would appear. Once they put wine in the bowl and invoke the spirits this way. Well, let us leave it at that for now. And every evening the elders, council members would attend council, and when all was done, they would go back to their residences. It is after everybody was back home that the spirits/masquerades would appear. And no one comes out and the spirits could not be seen. So no one can describe how they look. And if someone

committed an offence, they wouldn't make any noise, no coughing, or any such. There would be no fishing during the period until the chief of Lèmfá emerged from seclusion. That is how that is.

These are things that happened all the seven days. So the council would gather everyday for these seven days. They would also prepare the meal, one bowl which five people would not be able to finish eating. Every morning seven bowls of food would be prepared and five people would be able to finish eating one bowl. That was how big each bowl of food would be. This would continue for the seven days. (Were you growing up during Tsòèdè's time?) No, but we met the traditions that Tsòèdè left behind. But we met/witnessed the period when they stopped worshipping idols/celebrating the spirits/masquerade. We grew up to witness the traditions. And it was also in our time that they stopped these practices. (Are there things used for this that you still have?) There is nothing in particular that they used for the celebration. (How about the calabash bowl that was used back then?) Well, even if you want calabash bowls now you would get them. The only things we are using are the invocations that they used when pouring the libations. If we have those invocations we can summon the spirits and they would appear. We don't see them or have them because they are jinns. We know they are there, but we don't see them. They don't have any tangible representatives/objects/fetish. It is the masquerade of this town that doesn't have those. (What is the wine made from?) It is made from guinea corn. It was the people of Gírági that brewed the wine and brought it to this place. But they don't do that anymore. These people were brought by Tsòèdè to settle where they are

now. The people in charge of pouring the libations were called “ègátso” (owner of the pen), and there was also Nákodí. Back then, my father was actually the one who invoked the spirits. But I did not inherit that from him. Nobody could come out at night. But when they came out there would be drumming throughout the night as the spirits moved round the town. Even when it rained, you wouldn’t see their footprints. People would not come out at night even to relieve themselves or dry clothes. They kept bowls inside the house to relieve themselves in. Anyone who had committed an offence would be visited and given a beating, and such people would be afraid as the spirits approached their houses. And if any child committed an offence, the spirits would beat the drums to that child that had committed an offence. It is only in this town that there is a drum that beat to “the child that has committed an offence/that has looked for trouble.” It was the spirits that beat the drum around the town till dawn. They didn’t have any guide or followers. They are jinns/spirits and nobody sees them and their bodies do not touch those of humans. They take the drums of the town’s drummers and we hear the sounds. But they don’t talk. They have other instruments that made clanging noises. We don’t have these anymore. We have no names for the spirits, but some people call them the masquerade of Tsòèdè. The drums are the drums used all over Nupeland. When they started the celebrations, Tsòèdè was himself still alive. They had the celebrations during him till he left for Gbara. When he said goodbye to them, he let them know that each year this is how you should celebrate this. When the 21st of the seventh month arrives, here is what to do, here are the invocations to use to summon the spirits. And even if the spirits are not

summoned and the days arrive, the spirits themselves would show signs that they are coming out. Because it happens if we gathered in some place in town at night something would be thrown into the crowd and nobody would see where the object came from. It was then we knew that the spirits were around, and people would disperse, and people know it was the time for the spirits' outing. Only much earlier generations lived at the time of Tsòèdè and no one that we know lived at the time of Tsòèdè. The celebration/festival is known as Tsòèdè, Kútí Tsòèdè, or Kútí Kata (room) because for those seven days the chief of Lèmfá was secluded in the room.

Tsòèdè got his name from the split mouth. If you want his given name, you would get that from Nupekó and Nkù. (If you know, tell us.) Well, lying is forbidden, it is what you know that you can talk about, You cannot say what you do not know. It is what we were told that we are able to repeat.

The Gunnun spirit doesn't come out then. That is a different masquerade entirely.

Nupekó⁶⁷³

Interview with Usman, Dèfjàn Nupekó on August 20, 2009 in Nupeko, Niger State, Nigeria

Tsòèdè's History

He was born in this village. His given name was Màmman Sábá. That was Tsòèdè's name. The father that gave birth to him was called Màmman Sábá. He was called Màmman Sábá when he was born here. He grew up and spent his youth here for a while. While he was still young, an event occurred that made him to go to a town called Idah. He lived there and became a grown man. When he became mature and older, the person that he stayed with died. When the person died, he left the place and came back home. When he returned he settled down in his father's town. He would travel to places and return. If he travelled somewhere he returned home. Then he became old, very old.

He then built a wall around town and gathered people around him. Tsòèdè was the one who built the wall of all Nupe land. After he did that he became like the ruler of the whole world. If they brought anyone with a problem he took care of it. If anyone had a problem he took care of it for the person. If someone was being pursued and he held Tsòèdè's hands, he would be left alone. If someone committed an offense/crime and he swore by Tsòèdè that it wasn't him, he would be left alone. Even if he lied that by Tsòèdè, it wasn't him, people would believe him. Whatever Tsòèdè said was what God would do. That was how it was with Tsòèdè.

⁶⁷³ Translation: Ahmadu Kawu Ndanusa.

Tsòèdè was neither an idol worshipper nor a diviner. But he had people around him always. When he walked, he walked in the midst of people. When he sat down, he sat down right in the midst of people. When he slept, he slept right in the midst of people. So Tsòèdè never lacked for anything and he did not suffer any hardship. But before he went to Idah he experienced some hardship. But after he got out of that he lived freely without any further hardship. Do you understand that?

When he left here he went to a town called Esán. (Was that after he returned from Idah?) Yes, after he returned from Idah. He came back home and started gathering people together again. From East to the West, he was the only one exercising authority. If anyone asked after anything they said it was Tsòèdè, and this was how it was with Tsòèdè. If anyone was looking for something and came to him, he would supplicate for the person and he would get what he wanted. If something was chasing a person and the person begged in the name of Tsòèdè he would be left alone, whatever/whoever was chasing him would leave him alone. So he was doing that for a very long time. He became very strong, courageous, and powerful.

Tsòèdè did not stay in one place, but he was born right here, he wasn't born anywhere else. His mother was born in Nkù. And since the father's house is greater than the mother's that is why they say Nkù, Nkù. Here in Nupekó his house was in this compound. Tsòèdè's house was right here. The house he built was of seven rooms. Do you know? He built it round this way, in a circle, this way up to seven times. And the rooms had only one thatched roof. And it had one

entrance. That was Tsòèdè's house. Whichever room people went looking for Tsòèdè, they would find him there. For that reason some people looked up to him as God. Because whatever a person wanted from him would be granted. Whatever a person did not want and Tsòèdè asked it to leave the person, it would leave him alone. If you wanted something he would make that thing come to you. That is Tsòèdè's origins/story.

And now as for those following him, he would go here and there, moving from one place to another, but this was his father's land. He did not have two places. And we also revere him here in Nupekó. If a child here in Nupekó swears by Tsòèdè, it would be said that he spoke the truth. For that reason we thank God for what He did for the Nupe people. Other Nupe people came here asking for things from Tsòèdè and returned to their lands/homes. They would come looking for something from Tsòèdè and return to their lands. They would come looking for things from him and return to their lands. And after some time he left for another place. I think I told you that already. So he went there. He did settle here, but his grave is not here. I would be lying if I told you his grave was here. But this was his home. Everything he did, he did here. He did it here, so this was his home. Tsòèdè did not have two homes, he did not have two homes, Nupekó was his home. Every other place that he went to, he went as a guest, he would ask to be accommodated. He would go to this place today; he would go to another place tomorrow. Today's rulers imitate Tsòèdè, if they go to one place today, they would go to another place tomorrow. Wherever they called upon him he would go

and do whatever they wanted for them. And whatever he did God would accept it and bless it. Tsòèdè was a very strong and powerful man. That is how it was.

If Tsòèdè carried anything, he wouldn't feel the weight. Whatever load he carried he wouldn't feel the weight of the load, not even a little, at all. That is why they called him Tsòèdè. If anything happened to anyone, they would ask him to go to Tsòèdè. Whatever it was, Tsòèdè would take care of it. If it was this they would say go to Tsòèdè and it would be taken care of. If it was that, they would say go to Tsòèdè and it would be taken care of. But now that our eyes are open to the religion of Islam, we cannot invoke Tsòèdè any longer. That is what it was. Thank you very much.

(What kind of suffering did Tsòèdè experience that made him leave for Idah?)

The suffering that he experienced was this. Maybe this person (investigator) has such a thing in her country. It is what they call apprenticeship. Like I have N100.00 and gave it to you and tell you here is my child, I want him to go and be working for you. Do you know what tax is. (Yes, tax). It was tax that made Tsòèdè go to Idah. He wasn't born in Idah. But when he settled in Idah, he became superior to all the people of Idah. (And people who don't know would say that his father was Igarra (Igala) or a person from Idah.) No, not all, he was Nupe. But the king of Idah whom they gave him to trusted him more than he did his own biological children. If you take a look at some history (books) you would see that somebody had climbed a palm tree. Did you see that? Well, the king became very ill. And it was said that until someone climbed a palm tree cut it down, and

someone on the ground stretched out their hands to catch it, the king would not be cured/healed. None of the dwellers of the town agreed to do this (catch the falling palm tree). Tsòèdè said he would be able to do it. Otherwise Tsòèdè was just like you as you are sitting now. He was asked if he could do it, and he said he could. If they did that, the king that was struck with illness would regain his health. So they cut the palm tree from high up. They told him (Tsòèdè) that it was coming. He then stretched out his hands to receive the palm tree and the thorns of the palm tree cut him from here down and his mouth split apart this way. Well that is Tsòèdè's origin/story. Otherwise he wasn't named Tsòèdè. It was because of his split mouth that he was called Tsòèdè. His mouth that split and never came back together was the reason that they called him Tsòèdè. That is Tsòèdè's origin. Otherwise he was not named Tsòèdè; he was named Màmman Sábá.

(How long have you been on the throne?) About twenty-two years. (Are there any relics from Tsòèdè's time?) We don't have, and we have. There is the chain, but we've lost track of those things. Those looking for cultural relics came and took all those things away from us. They bought them from us and we sold them a long time ago. (But I understand that there are some stones (statues) that he left here.) Yes, indeed we have some stones. (Are those stones left with other things like the canoe he used?) That is another story. And you have not asked me about that so that I could tell you. What made Tsòèdè return from Idah. And you've not asked me.

When he climbed the palm tree. (Who climbed the palm tree? Was he (Tsòèdè) the one who climbed the palm tree?) It wasn't him who climbed the

palm tree, someone else did. When they cut the palm and it split his mouth, the king recovered from his illness. The body recovered. When the king recovered Tsòèdè ran away and said he would leave. When he was going to leave, he returned with the canoe of the king of that town, the king of Idah, he returned with it (canoe). So the people where Tsòèdè was, but they could not find him. They asked where he was and they were told that he had gone upriver. They decided to go after him. So they took a canoe and went after him. They chased after him in the canoe. If he got some distance from his pursuers, he would put down the paddle and the sand would come up, and those chasing him would not be able to pass. Once he got further from them water would begin to flow again. That went on for a while. And then he entered Mùregi. When he entered Mùregi, he met someone there. Then those going after him asked whether he had passed that way, they said he had not passed them. Everywhere he had passed they would ask the people if he had passed by and they would say no. But when he went through Mùregi they said that someone in a red wooden canoe had passed through the town and they pointed out that there. Before he got to Lèmfá they almost caught up with him. And that is where the canoe is. Till now the canoe is still at Lèmfá. That canoe is at Lèmfá, but it cannot be seen by ordinary eyes. But since there are things like mirrors (binoculars?) it can be seen. But before you can see it at Lèmfá they would take something from you first before they take you to the spot. So like I am talking to you, if it were elsewhere I would take what I can from you before saying anything/tell whatever you want. Tell her that.

(When he left Idah didn't the king die yet?) He had died. It was only after he died that he left. (So it was after the king died?) Yes after he died and they had buried him that he (Tsòèdè) left, like someone who ran away. (How about the canoe?) Well, before he died the king told him (Tsòèdè) what to do. This is what you should do. This is what you should do. This is what you should do. Because when the king came to, he asked him (Tsòèdè) how he came to look like he was. They told him that when he was ill, they cut the palm tree that split his mouth this way. So he gave him his secrets (magical powers). The chain was kept somewhere but the buildings are ruined. It was just right here. (Is the place still there where Tsòèdè built his house?) No the whole place has been ruined and they have built houses on the ruins. (Does he have surviving relatives?) Not at all. It is a long time ago. (Other than the stones/statues, are there any other signs/relics?) There are no other relics. But if you want to see the stones (statues), I can take you there. It is not in the bush. Some are now in the bush. But if you want to go there it would be a lot of trouble. Some are over there at Bàdefù. Some statues are here. (What is the reason for the statues?) That was where they made sacrifices/worship idols. (That was before the advent of religion.) If you want to see them now you could. (We can do that when we're done here.) OK. (At the time people were worshipping idols. Do you know the names of the idols?) Well, the idols in this town, you know I told you that since the advent of religion (Islam) we have done away with all those things. And they have not been written down (recorded) because if they had we might be tempted to follow them. We would follow. Why won't we follow them? (Do you know their names?) Well,

they have first Jigazi, they have Ndáyàsù. Because it is getting dark we should go and see the stones (statues) and come back. (How about Gbòya (some kind of masquerade)?) Well they had Gbòya then. (Because they were doing Gbòya in Bida when we went to there.) Even here too they were doing it. (Tsòèdè was indeed a powerful man.) Well Tsòèdè really had magical powers. He really had magical powers. Like I told you if he took one step he would be at the spot of the stones. If you get to the stones you would be surprised. There were no vehicles/cars then, you would be surprised at how the stones got to that spot. And they cannot be removed whatever the number of people.

(When Tsòèdè went to Idah were the Nupe ruling then or was it after he had returned from Idah?) Well, there was some authority. Like if they collected taxes, someone would take them to the authorities. (When they collected taxes, where did they take them, Idah?) Yes, Idah. (What she is saying, these Europeans they all know the story of Tsòèdè, but they don't know it fully. So what they see now is that if not for Tsòèdè the Nupe would not have been free from the authority of Idah before they established their own authority.) Yes that is how it was. (So taxes were not longer going to Idah?) Right, the taxes were going to Tafjan. They were the one collecting taxes for us. (That was after Tsòèdè returned?) Yes they were the ones collecting taxes for us. That is what it was. (What people were in Tafjan?) It was Nupe. It was Nupe. The reason I mentioned Tafjan is that it is not part of Tsòèdè's story, but it is also a town of tradition. But all of them branched out from this Nupekó. (People who do not know the story of Nupe, if they asked about the origin of Nupe they would say Bida. It was the

government that gave them that status.) Indeed Nupekó here is the origin of Nupe. All the Nupe, even the Bida people Nupe gave birth to them. The Bida people came after us. It is not the case that we came after them. Of all the surrounding people, Pátígi is the oldest leader. But we are older than Pátígi. After us, then came Pátígi. That is the way it is.

(Whenever new kings are turbaned, is Tsòèdè's name invoked at all?

During your installation was there any reference to Tsòèdè. When you were going to be turbaned religion had not become this well established. Then Tsòèdè was not longer present.) Whose installation, my installation? (Laughs) Tsòèdè was such a long time ago. Even the father that gave birth to me did not live during Tsòèdè's time. But the first Nupe king was Etsu Usman in this very town. He was succeeded by Etsu Ali. (You mean the first Nupe king?) Yes, the very first Nupe king. If not because the place has been cultivated (turned to farmland) I would have taken you to the house of the first king to take a look. The place is still there but is cornfield now. (So he stayed there for a long time?) Yes, he stayed there for a long time before leaving for Gbara, and then Pátígi. Etsu Ali left here for Gbara. He left from Gbara and settled at Pátígi. (So he left Gbara and ruled over Pátígi?) Yes, he did that. (Was he the one that established/founded Pátígi?) Yes, he was the one that founded Pátígi. And there have been 108 kings since Pátígi's establishment/founding. (Discussion on coughing child) (We thank you for your time. We know that if we go elsewhere now, they would not be told this story this well.) That is because they would not know it. And we did not tell them. That is how it is. But before you leave you have to take a look at the stones/statues. (Does

he have the iron bangles?) Well those bangles were destroyed during the reign of the previous king in a fire in the house in which they were kept. Houses had not zinc roofs then. So they were destroyed in a fire. Also relics of Tsòèdè were also lost in the fire by God's decree/authority.

(During the installation of the king, is there any mention of Tsòèdè?)

There is usually some reference to Tsòèdè in the form of prayer/supplication. They will ask for blessings for the prophet (Muhammad). But to put this here and this there we do not do that. And it is the request for blessings on the prophet that persists till today. (So there is nothing that is said by way of invoking Tsòèdè, as in the way that Tsòèdè did it?) Well, if we were to do it that way, it would be going back to innovation (in the Islamic religion) Earlier on they would say this should be given to God and God said this should be given to the land (earth). And they would pour libation (using wine) here and there. But we do not do that anymore. They should give this to God and God said they should give this to the land (earth) and everything would eventually return to the land (earth). As God made the lives of the earlier people good, God should make ours better. That is ours. That is our installation prayer. (Is there a staff of Tsòèdè that is given to the king here?) That staff like I said was destroyed in a fire. Tsòèdè's staff is not longer available; it was burnt. I told you that earlier. (Did you witness the fire that destroyed the relics?) Yes. I witnessed it. I wasn't the ruler yet then. It has been about 50 years that happened. (Was there any time that Tsòèdè sat in council?) Yes, he was young then. He was going and coming from his mother's place.

(She wants to go to the stones/statues) (Introductory remarks)

Introductions:

Name	Title
1. Màmàn Sábá	Kpòtun
(You bear Tsòèdè's name. Or are you Tsòèdè's relation? Well, everyone is Tsòèdè's descendant.	
2. Muhammadu Magaji	Nda
3. Usman Dèfjàn	Dèfjàn
4. Usman Tsònfadà	Nda
5. Mallam Muhammadu Tsàádú	Man (Member of the clergy)

Kingslists and Chronicles

1. The Igala Kinglist

[Akpoto Dynasty in Idah]

c. 1477-1507 Ate Ogu

(1495)

c. 1507-1537 Δ Egarrah Eri

c. 1537-1567

c. 1567-1597

c. 1597-1627

c. 1637-1657 ○ Ebele Jonu

c. 1657-1687

Δ Abutu Eje



Δ Agenopoje



Δ Idoko

[Kwararafa Dynasty in Idah]

1687-1717

1717-1765

1765-1813

1813-1870

1870-1911

1911-1956

1956-2013

Δ Atiele

1 Δ Ayegba

2 Δ Akumabi ○ Ennobi ○ Enikpi 3 Δ Akogu 4. Δ Agadu 5. Δ Ayi 6. Δ Ocholi Oheme

7 Δ Ameh Achor

8. Δ Itodo Aduga

9. Δ Ogala

10. Δ Idoko Adeba

11. Δ Onuche

13. Δ Ameh Ocheje

12. Δ Ekalaga

14. Δ Aku Odiba

15. Δ Okoliko

17. Δ Ocheje Onokpa

16. Δ Amaga

18. Δ Oboni

19. Δ Oguche Akpa

21. Δ Obaje Ocheje

20. Δ Atabo-Ijomi

22. Δ Ameh Oboni

23. Δ Aliyu Obaje

23. Δ Aliyu Obaje

20. Δ Atabo-Ijomi

24. Δ Idakwo Ameh Oboni

(1870-1876)

(1901-1903)

(1876-1900)

(1905-1911)

(1911-1919)

(1926-1945)

(1919-1926)

(1946-1956)

(1835) (1841)

(1830)

(1854-1870)

[Bini Dynasty in Idah]

1. Δ Aji-Attah

(1516)

2. Δ Olema I

3. Δ Anogens

4. Δ Agbo

5. Δ Agoshi

6. Δ Olema II

Interpretative Keys:⁶⁷⁴

Δ – Male # by side of Name- 23- Succession Number

o- Female [Bini Dynasty in Idah]- Dynastic Name

c. 1909-1957- Approximated Dates

(1956) or (1909-1919)- Fixed Date(s)

| - Known relationship

↓ - Direct Descent

⁶⁷⁴ Preliminary kinglist based on John S. Boston, *The Igala Kingdom*, p. 57; R. A. Sargent. "On the Methodology of Chronology: The Igala Core Dating Progression." *History in Africa* 2 (1984): 269-289. Tom Miachi, Genealogy of Attah Kingship in "Igala Traditional Chieftaincy Investiture Ceremony of Mr. (Chief); Moses Abu Braimah as Ochai Amana Attah (Confidant to the Attah) on December 26th and 27th, 1992".

Appendix II

Lexicostatistic Data

99- Word lists of Core Vocabulary

English	I	you	we	this	that	who
Nupe Lokoja	mi	ewe	yi	nna	wuncin	ziyo
Nupe Egan	mi	ewe	eye	nan	wuncin	zhiyo
Nupe Tako	emi	ewe	eyi	nnano	lebeno	yaye
Dibo	emi	ewun	eye	la	lede	kyaye
(Abawa) Gupa	Kemi	ife	keye	na'ale	kya	elise
Abawa Abugi	emi	eko	eye	nene	nimoa	eleyi
Abawa Saka	emi	eko	eye	nene	nimoa	eleyi
Abawa Etsu	emi	eko	eye	nene	nimoa	eleyi
Kami	emiku	woku	yeyi	ine	woyi	ele
Kupa	emi	kou	eyi	yehi	gani	owuna
Kakanda (M)	emi	evo	eyi	echini	nachi	ayi
Kakanda (B)	emi		eye	echini	nachi	ayi
Asu	ma	va	ya	dea	dimanya	nzoyi
Gbari Kwali	midye		yi	hni	hna	za
Gbagyi Shaita	miyi	ama	wiyi	da ae	da shi	nyika
Gbagyi, GK	omi		oyi	nyaye	nyayi	nyika
Ebira KK	emi	ewu	eyi	noni	nabo	ane
Eb. Etuno	emi	ewu	eyi	oneni	ono	enovi
Eb. Okene	emi	ewu	eyi	osoni	oso	eni ovi
Eb. Ihima	emi	ewu	eyi	osoni	oso	enovi
Gade	nam	ndey	nie	umie	uye	ngo

English	what	all	many
Nupe Lokoja	kiwunyi	kpata	dokun
Nupe Egan	kinyo	kpata	dokun
Nupe Tako	kinyo	gagai	dokun
Dibo	kichie	gbogbo	ekwu
(Abawa) Gupa	akue	tsaka	bolobolo
Abawa Abugi	akiyi	wowo	kakana
Abawa Saka	akiyi	wowo	kakana
Abawa Etsu	akiyi	wowo	bwola
Kami	nya	tsaka	kakana
Kupa	yin	gbogbo	gurah
Kakanda (M)	nyan	kere	kankana
Kakanda (B)	nyan	kere	egama
Asu	ngeyi	kpatawa	gedudu
Gbari Kwali	nya	kikiri	bere
Gbagyi Shaita	keya	dudu	boye
Gbagyi, GK	kinya	ofe vinya	muabegye
Ebira KK	sane	dudu	kyenwu
Eb. Etuno	senovi	ongbo	oruru
Eb. Okene	sovi	avabani	oruru
Eb. Ihima	sovi	avabani	oruru
Gade	ngye	kere	eregadu

English	one	two	big	long	small
Nupe Lokoja	nini	guba	woncinkon	wunkpa	tetengi
Nupe Egan	nini	guba	wanciko	wunkpa	tetengi
Nupe Tako	nini	guba	yedonci	gu	kingi
Dibo	gbani	aba	rukochi	ekpani	mokaji
(Abawa) Gupa	igyanyi	aba	ruhotsi	ikpanyi	mwaka
Abawa Abugi	naka	aba	ruhotse	gbara	moaka
Abawa Saka	naka	aba	ruhotse	gbara	moaka
Abawa Etsu	gbayin	aba	roha	ekpayi	moaka
Kami	gbani	aba	rukotsi	ekpani	mwaka
Kupa	echo	aba	gbochi	gburo	kinyin
Kakanda (M)	yere	aba	rukochi	gbara	kyokyo
Kakanda (B)	yere	aba	rukochi	gbara	kyokyo
Asu	wemu	aba	gegbo	gekpa	kichimu
Gbari Kwali	gbamari	mba	mwa	dololo	byiri
Gbagyi Shaita	gbain kata	wan aba	nagbain	kpamain	na wiyi
Gbagyi, GK	gbanyi	ngwaba	mua	kpamuayi	bibiyi
Ebira KK	onya	eba	oyiza	iburu	keke
Eb. Etuno	oyan	eva	ogbanyi	ogodo	oweyi
Eb. Okene	onya	eva	obanyi	oyodo	oweyi
Eb. Ihima	ikonya	tava	obanyi	ogodo	oweyi
Gade	udede	eva	nukpukpu	kyekyerikpa	bibie

English	woman	man	person	fish
Nupe Lokoja	nyizagi	bagi	eza	nyikan
Nupe Egan	nyinzagi	bagi	eza	yinkan
Nupe Tako	nzagi	bagi	aza	nyiko
Dibo	ejaji	esami	eza	ekan
(Abawa) Gupa	emiravi	ekobiya	era	nyika
Abawa Abugi	emravi	akobiya	era	enca
Abawa Saka	emravi	akobiya	era	enca
Abawa Etsu	emravi	enumisa	era	enca
Kami	emirai	emisatsi	era	nyika
Kupa	angbachi eyinviza	angbachi enuavi	ezawangi	yinkan
Kakanda (M)	emiya	enzoabi	aya	inka
Kakanda (B)	emir	enzobi	aya	nkan
Asu	nyinkaza	nukuza	zawuriza	eban
Gbari Kwali	nigoza	minsa	eza	nikna
Gbagyi Shaita	nyikoza	zanugbaye	lankochi	evian
Gbagyi, GK	nyikwosa	zanugbayi	oza	obnya
Ebira KK	oniye	onoru	ozorihi	unyi
Eb. Etuno	oyene	onoru	oza	iseyin
Eb. Okene	onyene	onoru	oza	ivovo
Eb. Ihima	onyene	onoru	oza	ivovo
Gade	nyineni	roroni	uniyapu	rugbetu

English	bird	dog	louse	tree	seed
Nupe Lokoja	elu	eshigi	kwakwata	cigban	enyajochi
Nupe Egan	elugi	eshigi	asomo	cigban	sunsun
Nupe Tako	alu	ishi	asomo	chigbo	susu
Dibo	elu	ayun	korukota	chigban	eje
(Abawa) Gupa	ilu	nyakpa	aruyah	tsigbahuhu	nyasusu
Abawa Abugi	elu	yankpa	korukota	tsigba	asusu
Abawa Saka	elu	yankpa	korukota	tsigba	asusu
Abawa Etsu	elu	amusa	korukota	tsigba	asusu
Kami	ilu	amu	ara	tsigba	nyasusu
Kupa	alu	amun	api	chigban	ave
Kakanda (M)	alu	amu	asumo	tsugbo	asusu
Kakanda (B)	alu	amu	asuma	tsugban	ibe
Asu	elu	emiya	akukuta	tugban	enya she
Gbari Kwali	elu	emwi	konkota	chinwa	ebe
Gbagyi Shaita	elu	omue	kwakwata	chinwon	nabye
Gbagyi, GK	olu	omu	piwa	shenwa	byegye
Ebira KK	inomi	abiya	ihana	oki	iruhu
Eb. Etuno	unomi	irezi	ishana	ochi	ifine
Eb. Okene	inomi	irezi	ihana	ochi	uhu
Eb. Ihima	inomi	irezi	ihama	ochi	uhu
Gade	gunakya	gabiki	ikparikpata	ukya	ebekwo

English	root	bark	skin	flesh/meat
Nupe Lokoja	gbere	kpara	epa	nankan
Nupe Egan	gbere	kpara	epa	nankan
Nupe Tako	agbere	kpara	ipa	noko
Dibo	agbere	akpara	epa	nakan choka
(Abawa) Gupa	agbere	tufura	epa	naka
Abawa Abugi	agbere	akpara	epa	naka
Abawa Saka	agbere	akpara	epa	naka
Abawa Etsu	agbere	akpara	epa	naka
Kami	agbere	atufura	ipa	naka
Kupa	egbere	ezun	epa	nakan susu
Kakanda (M)	agbere	eiwo	ipa	nakan
Kakanda (B)	agbere	agbara tsugban	epa	nakan
Asu	gbere	tugban buru	adapa	echi
Gbari Kwali	gbere	gulu	pata	byineje/byida
Gbagyi Shaita	gbeye	shinwan pata	pata	buda
Gbagyi, GK	gbeyye	gulu	opa	abu
Ebira KK	okpu	iguha	ipkeha	uye
Eb. Etuno	epochi	igusha	upewun	uye
Eb. Okene	epodi	irema	upengu	uye
Eb. Ihima	epochi	uguha	upengu	uye
Gade	ezu	ga	guputa	fuye

English	blood	bone	grease/oil/fat	egg
Nupe Lokoja	egya	chikun	emi	ezi
Nupe Egan	egya	tsukun	emi	ezhi
Nupe Tako	agia	achuku	ajo	azhi
Dibo	ara	akyokun	aje	aizhe
(Abawa) Gupa	aria	atsuku	ajwe	azhi
Abawa Abugi	ara	asuku	aswa	ashi
Abawa Saka	ara	asuku	aswa	ashi
Abawa Etsu	agha	asuku	ajwa	ashi
Kami	ara	akyukyu	atse	azhi
Kupa	ara	atsokun	ave	azhin
Kakanda (M)	ara	atuku	abea	azhi
Kakanda (B)	ara	atuku	imi	ashi
Asu	anyi	tsukupun	ami	ashi
Gbari Kwali	edya	tsnuwnu ** !	emyi/ebe	ezhi
Gbagyi Shaita	egia	shukun	zankotibe	nyazi
Gbagyi, GK	ame	shukwu	agbe	ozhe
Ebira KK	anya	ayuku	uhi	agye
Eb. Etuno	ayan	ochiku	ushi	aje
Eb. Okene	anya	eduku	uhi	age
Eb. Ihima	anya	echuku	uhi	aje
Gade	bayi	ankeku	tizhi	rizhe

English	horn	tail	feather	hair	head
Nupe Lokoja	guru	cintara	gwampa	etin	eti
Nupe Egan	guru	cintara	gwapa	tihin	eti
Nupe Tako	aguru	chater	akalu	atin	eti
Dibo	guru	achepa	adidi	teyin	eti
(Abawa) Gupa	eguru	atsepa	ajiji	inyiti	iti
Abawa Abugi	eguru	etsepa	ajiji	eyi	eti
Abawa Saka	eguru	etsepa	ajiji	eyi	eti
Abawa Etsu	eguru	atsepa	ajiji	eyi	eti
Kami	eguru	atsepa	adidi	inyiti	ititi
Kupa	guru	achipa	ampa	ehin	ikpi
Kakanda (M)	eguru	egbe	igbapa	enye	eikpi
Kakanda (B)	emadu	egbe	idan	ikpinchi	ikpi
Asu	asi	runche	elu adun	tuturu	eti
Gbari Kwali	mwari	tsentsi	bmina **	eyi	tugo
Gbagyi Shaita	moanyi	sansi	osayi	tukoyi	tuko
Gbagyi, GK	muayi	sesi	bniya **	oyi	tuko
Ebira KK	ekpani	omu	abaka	eyyi	iresu
Eb. Etuno	opani	ochumu	asise	eyi	iresu
Eb. Okene	opanyi	omu	asise	eyi	iresu
Eb. Ihima	opanyi	omuta	asise	eyi	iresu
Gade	atutu	upoa	egie	titi	rutu

English	eye	nose	mouth	tooth	tongue
Nupe Lokoja	eye	eye	misun	nyinkan	gintara
Nupe Egan	eye	eye	munsun	yinka	gintara
Nupe Tako	aye	iye	am	anyuko	ayintara
Dibo	ece	ayibon	amin	ayikan	aminta
(Abawa) Gupa	awe	anyiva	ami	anyiga	amita
Abawa Abugi	awe	anva	ama	anga	amita
Abawa Saka	awe	anva	ama	anga	amita
Abawa Etsu	awere	anva	ama	ayiga	amita
Kami	iye	anfa	ami	anyiga	amita
Kupa	iye	yinvun	amichu	ayingan	azhan
Kakanda (M)	iye	anvoa	amwu	angam	aro
Kakanda (B)	iye	anuva	amu	angan	arrou
Asu	eye	binban	ami	anyi	azan
Gbari Kwali	ewye	ebwa	egbe	ymigna **	myinta
Gbagyi Shaita	eyuwe	enva	ogbe	nyika	muntala
Gbagyi, GK	owe	obwa	ogbe	nyikna	nyitala
Ebira KK	eyi	ahi	irenu	anyi	ilare
Eb. Etuno	iri	ahishi	irenu	ayin	irare
Eb. Okene	eyi	ahi	irenu	anyi	irare
Eb. Ihima	eyi	ahi	irenu	anyi	irare
Gade	iapu	gurufu	ganu	riyi	gakore

English	foot	knee	hand/arm	belly
Nupe Lokoja	bichun	rugbo	egwa	gbako
Nupe Egan	bici	vokpa	egwa	gbako
Nupe Tako	bici	amkpa	ago	gbako
Dibo	bita, kpechimmin	abokpa	wataka	nukun
(Abawa) Gupa	bida kpetsi	agbolo	ibwatsigba	eshikpe
Abawa Abugi	betata	agbolo	ebwa/ebwa tsa	esa
Abawa Saka	betata	agbolo	ebwa/ebwa tsa	esa
Abawa Etsu	betata	agbolo	ebwa/ebwa tsa	eja
Kami	bita kpetsi	agbolo	iba tsugba	nuku
Kupa	bita	avukupi	eva	nukun
Kakanda (M)	wachikpenti	agboloa	igba	ini
Kakanda (B)	watchi	agbolo	ema	ini
Asu	bichi timpe	ran	wari/wari ku	ebu
Gbari Kwali	pyita	kuku	ebwa/bwaka	nubo
Gbagyi Shaita	puta bwata	nyikutuko	ogwa	nubo
Gbagyi, GK	peta	nyikutuko	obwa	nubo
Ebira KK	ahutata	iduruku	ubo	ine
Eb. Etuno	ufu	uduku	uvo	ine
Eb. Okene	ipete alu	idunku	uro	ireka
Eb. Ihima	ipetahu	idunku	uro	ireka
Gade	geneda	genepo	gubo	ginye

English	neck	women's breast	heart	liver
Nupe Lokoja	kworo	ebe	kodagi	anta
Nupe Egan	koro	ebe	rayi	anta
Nupe Tako	kpatsu	ebe	gugwo	anaye
Dibo	bere	egbe miyijaji	ayegban	aiye
(Abawa) Gupa	ebere	ibemi emiravi	yegba	aye
Abawa Abugi	ebere	ebemi emiravi	ayegba	aye
Abawa Saka	ebere	ebemi emiravi	ayegba	aye
Abawa Etsu	ebere	ebemi emiravi	ayegba	aye
Kami	ebere	ibe mi emiratsi	yegba	aye
Kupa	atsakpa	ibe	eko	anta
Kakanda (M)	atukpa	eibe	aiye	anta
Kakanda (B)	atukpa	ime	atsukpara	anta
Asu	tugbata	ave nkazadi	akofo	ave ** aye?
Gbari Kwali	echa	bebe	egnu	edu
Gbagyi Shaita	bage	ba'ebe	efin	shinco
Gbagyi, GK	bogye	bebe	odu	aye
Ebira KK	ogbe	ireba	ayi	ebaka
Eb. Etuno	ogbe	ireva	ayi	otuturuma
Eb. Okene	oroko	ireva	ayi	otuturuma
Eb. Ihima	oroko	ireva	ayi	ahuhu
Gade	utor	lubatu	ruku	afofoko

English	drink	eat	bite	see	hear
Nupe Lokoja	enyafi	enyagi	sagi	lebaye	eganwo
Nupe Egan	fin	gi	bayinkan	leye	ganwo
Nupe Tako	fi	ci	bagi	leye	wo
Dibo	fin	ri	kuayikan	kie	wo
(Abawa) Gupa	ihwuhwu	ri	danga	tsi	wo
Abawa Abugi	hu	ri	danga	tse	wo
Abawa Saka	hu	ri	danga	tse	wo
Abawa Etsu	hu	ri	danga	tse	wo
Kami	ifi	ri	kanyiga	ki	wo
Kupa	unun	gi	kinyingan	chiye	wo
Kakanda (M)	fun	rie	angadan	kye	iwuwo
Kakanda (B)	fun	iri	danga	iki	iyuwo
Asu	fin	ri	dangiani	chiye	wo
Gbari Kwali	sni	dya	ku	dye	wo
Gbagyi Shaita	sin	gi	kunyinkan	uebaje	wo lo
Gbagyi, GK	sni	ayi	sa	gye	wo
Ebira KK	hu	ri	gyaru	zama	wu
Eb. Etuno	hu	ri	ireru	re	wu
Eb. Okene	hu	ri	da	re	wu
Eb. Ihima	hu	ri	gireru	re	wu
Gade	ewu	alu	gari	pa	wu

English	sleep	die	kill	swim	fly
Nupe Lokoja	elele	tsutsu	wu	nuwan gbi	fuafu
Nupe Egan	elele	tsu	wu	nuwan gbin	fufu
Nupe Tako	lile	tsu	wu	nuwan ya	fu
Dibo	lele	kyu	klu **	gben	fu
(Abawa) Gupa	lele	ichu	ywu	iwanpa	fu
Abawa Abugi	elele	chu	wuwu	pawa	fu
Abawa Saka	elele	chu	wuwu	pawa	fu
Abawa Etsu	elele	chu	wuwu	pawa	fu
Kami	lolo	kyu	wu	ewari	fu
Kupa	lile	atsu	whi	peyin	fu
Kakanda (M)	eil	ikyu	iwu	iripi	agbi
Kakanda (B)	ilou	ikyu	ayu	piri	ifun
Asu	lile	chichi	gbenya	paku	ro
Gbari Kwali	re	tsu	wu	ya	efnu
Gbagyi Shaita	nwange	efi	wu	nuwan she	lokogwahun
Gbagyi, GK	nwagye	fi	wu	abi	gyiafu
Ebira KK	sara	su	wu	wu rewa	hira
Eb. Etuno	suara	su	wo	foyin	shira
Eb. Okene	sa	su	wu	weri enyi	hira
Eb. Ihima	sa	su	wu	meri	hira
Gade	bara	gyichi	gawu	putu uzur	furu

English	go	come	lie down	sit	stand
Nupe Lokoja	felo	be	lelechi	fedun	nakin
Nupe Egan	felo	be	lele cici	fedun	nakin
Nupe Tako	lo	be		fedu	gini
Dibo	zo, gan	gbe	lele	da, dun	she
(Abawa) Gupa	minyi	be	leletiti	hwachu	sheshadi
Abawa Abugi	miyi	be	lele	huadu	shadi
Abawa Saka	miyi	be	lele	huadu	shadi
Abawa Etsu	miyi	be	lele	huadu	shadi
Kami	kpdani	be	lolo titi	fadu	sadu
Kupa	magan	be	lile	fikin	shegin
Kakanda (M)	yashi	gbei	yilo dati	fadun	shadi
Kakanda (B)	igan/yashi	mpay	yilo dati	fadu	shadi
Asu	kandu	ewu	wa lile	fedun	didin
Gbari Kwali	zhi	be	yachi	zashi	laga
Gbagyi Shaita	lo	be	yashi	la sase	laka
Gbagyi, GK	lo	bebe	yashi	sase	gyiagyi
Ebira KK	na	be	hutu	hatu	dine
Eb. Etuno	na	ve	sutete	yatu	dine
Eb. Okene	na	ve	hutu	yaite	je
Eb. Ihima	na	ve	sutu	yatu	kwuete
Gade	gay	be	nene	dande	gyengye

English	say	sun	moon	star	water
Nupe Lokoja	gan	igidi	etswa	twangi	nuwon
Nupe Egan	gan	yisidi	etsoa	etsoangi	nuwan
Nupe Tako	go	igidi	atsuro	enyo gbangi	nuwan
Dibo	gani	egoko	echa	azhe, zun	yunwan
(Abawa) Gupa	gama	ewu	echwa	avivi	iwan
Abawa Abugi	ga	ewu	echua	avivi	ewa
Abawa Saka	ga	ewu	echua	avivi	ewa
Abawa Etsu	ngama	ewutsaka	echua	avivi	ewa
Kami	gani	ewu	etswa	avivi	ivan
Kupa	bowo	ehi	epa	tsoangi	iyin
Kakanda (M)	bwo	ewu	epa	akurami	irrie
Kakanda (B)	imo	ayu	epa	akurami	iri
Asu	shedumi	wutete	etsa	adederi	eku
Gbari Kwali	da	yango	epya	kudu	nuwna
Gbagyi Shaita	da	mpyekane	epya	pyanbiyi	nuwon
Gbagyi, GK	da	nyipyee	opya	kpasu	nuwa
Ebira KK	ka	oyi	uhwe	zomzom	enyi
Eb. Etuno	kosue	oyi	ufe	uzomi	eyin
Eb. Okene	ka	oyi	uhwe	uzomi	enyi
Eb. Ihima	ka	oyi	uhue	uzomi	enyi
Gade	gae	uzu	upya	ritsche	uzor

English	rain	stone	sand	earth	cloud
Nupe Lokoja	ele	takun	jikana	nze	sama shin
Nupe Egan	ele	takun	gikana	kin	sama shin
Nupe Tako	ale	taku	ankono	yinze	wutu wutu
Dibo	egban	takun	ajikana	echinm	ara
(Abawa) Gupa	eshe	tahun	amusa	inzhe	wutu wutu
Abawa Abugi	eshe	tahu	amusa	enzhe	shi
Abawa Saka	eshe	tahu	amusa	enzhe	shiehu
Abawa Etsu	eshe	tahu	amusa	enzhe	shi
Kami	soruko	taku	amusa	inzhe	vutuvutu
Kupa	egban	takun	amashi	ekinbara	egbahin
Kakanda (M)	ayea	takun	ashiye	itie	
Kakanda (B)	allay	takun	ashiye	itshe	abura
Asu	are	takun	amusu	nze kaman	areshi
Gbari Kwali	shego	kuta	munsna	ekni	eshebwire
Gbagyi Shaita	eyban nuwon	kuta	muzana	nyizhe	gbanjesa
Gbagyi, GK	ogba	akuta	amu	anyi	onyi
Ebira KK	orihi	irata	ezi	ete gaki	akpa
Eb. Etuno	orishi	ireta	eyere	eshe	ovurubutu
Eb. Okene	orihi	ireta	eiare	ete	eguhi
Eb. Ihima	orihi	ireta	kwuete	ete	eguhi
Gade	ugbo	uku	tize	gase	abanbare

English	smoke	fire	ash	burn	path
Nupe Lokoja	enawu	ena	tutunpere	enadi	yeko
Nupe Egan	enawu	ena	tutunpere	dina	yeko
Nupe Tako	inowu	ino	tutunpere	inodi	yekosa
Dibo	arawu	era	arachikuru	die	kpe, chin mi
(Abawa) Gupa	arawu	irah	arah tsuwu	iradi	ehodukpatemi
Abawa Abugi	arawi	era	arasuwi	jira	chudu moaka
Abawa Saka	arawi	era	arasuwi	jira	chudu moaka
Abawa Etsu	arawi	era	aratsuwi	jira	ehodu moaka
Kami	aravi	era	aratsuva	iradi	ekodu
Kupa	arawu	ira	atsutsuru	agbenra	ekaraba
Kakanda (M)	arawu	eiera	aratea	iyira	eyigbo
Kakanda (B)	arayu	eran	arate	adara	ebudu
Asu	auchichi	eran	tsubuta	diran	udi
Gbari Kwali	sni ewu	ena	tung	nadyi/dyina	zogo
Gbagyi Shaita	awusu	ana	naloko	kwani gini	zhako
Gbagyi, GK	awu	ona	otnu	gyina	zokwo
Ebira KK	ireyi	ira	atito	rira	oze
Eb. Etuno	areyi	ira	atito	rira	oze
Eb. Okene	areyi	ira	atito	rira	oze
Eb. Ihima	areyi	ira	atito	rira	oze
Gade	amu	giwa	nte	gukyiku	guko

English	mountain	red	white	black	night
Nupe Lokoja	pati	guru	bokun	zhiko	yeshin
Nupe Egan	pati	dzuru	bakun	zhiko	yeshin
Nupe Tako	pati	juru	boku	zhiko	yeshin
Dibo	pati	juju	bubu	zhiko	ayishin
(Abawa) Gupa	epayi	bwabwa	vuvu	zhizhi	erozu
Abawa Abugi	epayi	bwabwa	vuvu	zhizhi	erozu
Abawa Saka	epayi	bwabwa	vuvu	zhizhi	erozu
Abawa Etsu	epayi	bwabwa	vuvu	zhizhi	erozu
Kami	epayi	bwabwa	vuvu	zhizhi	edozu
Kupa	epashi	yaya	invun	inshin	etoko
Kakanda (M)	epayi	ibie	ivuvun	ijie	etukoa
Kakanda (B)	epayi	ibi	ivun	iji	etuko
Asu	epan	shishin	bubu	didi	uchika
Gbari Kwali	kunkun	tenyari	bwibwi	jiji	tsongo
Gbagyi Shaita	wunkun	biyebure	bwibwi	zhizhi	suko
Gbagyi, GK	ope	byebyeyi	bubuyi	zhizhigi	suko
Ebira KK	iresuhwa	ozanya	obobu	ogyogi	irahu
Eb. Etuno	ufa	orivi	ovuovu	ojoji	irafu
Eb. Okene	ataba	ovivi	ovuovu	ogiogi	irahu
Eb. Ihima	ataba	ovivi	ovuovu	ogiogi	irahu
Gade	rugu	zhizhingiwa	zure	punu	gane

English	hot	cold	full	new	good
Nupe Lokoja	yipa	yeko	nyashishe	woro	wangi
Nupe Egan	wana	yekwo	shisheci	wuro	unge
Nupe Tako	wona	fiyeko	she	woro	abe
Dibo	rara	yeko	shishae	wiwo	jjjan
(Abawa) Gupa	rara	huhu	ashe	wuwo	nyakatsi
Abawa Abugi	ratua	huhu	shishea	wuwo	ketse
Abawa Saka	ratua	huhu	shishea	wuwo	ketse
Abawa Etsu	ratua	huhu	shishea	wewa	ketse
Kami	tsitse	fifi	shishe	wuwo	mwakegu
Kupa	inkpe	inshu	yinyin	inwou	wugi
Kakanda (M)	ipepe	ifufun	ishe	iwo	iyiba
Kakanda (B)	ipepe	ifufu	ashay	iwo	ayimo
Asu	tsutsu wona	suyo	run	iya	ieye
Gbari Kwali	nagnu	wyowyo	nu	wowe	mari
Gbagyi Shaita	banagun	bahuhu	lakonnu	woiwoi	binyato
Gbagyi, GK	ngina	nfufuyi	nunuyi	wowoyi	byabyayi
Ebira KK	wunra	hohuru	oyihi	owowa	iwuza
Eb. Etuno	onyura	ohunene	oshivi	owowa	ozoza
Eb. Okene	onyura	ohunene	ohihi	owowa	ozoza
Eb. Ihima	ongwura	ohunene	ohihi	owowa	ozoza
Gade	unyagiwa	tetene	rere	pupa	uyeye

English	round	dry	name	three	navel
Nupe Lokoja	kuru	kangana	sunu	guta	koro
Nupe Egan	kurugi	wo	sunu	guta	koro
Nupe Tako	kuru	wo	sunu	guta	koro
Dibo	kuru	wuklo	aye	acha	koro
(Abawa) Gupa	mwatsegu	awo	aye	atsa	akoro
Abawa Abugi	huru	wo	aye	atsa	ejjie
Abawa Saka	huru	wo	aye	atsa	ejjie
Abawa Etsu	huru	wo	aye	atsa	ejjie
Kami	awo	aye	aye	atsa	ekoro
Kupa	kuru	awo	sunu	ata	ekoro
Kakanda (M)	kpeyikale	iworie	abo	atsa	ekoro
Kakanda (B)	kuru	awori	sunan	atsa	akuro
Asu	kuru	wuwa	ayi	ata	kochi
Gbari Kwali	kululu	kawe	eye	gwancha	kapwa
Gbagyi Shaita	bashe	kawi	eye	wunata	kakuri
Gbagyi, GK	kululu	wakau	oye	ngwata	kopu
Ebira KK	gyenkara	wenyi	ireha	eta	iraje
Eb. Etuno	ovarakara	owerewani	iresha	eta	ireje
Eb. Okene	oyivura	oyiwu	ireha	eta	irage
Eb. Ihima	okvoro **	oyiwu	ireha	ochi	iraje
Gade	kururu	kakaere	riye	ita	uponpo

Comparative Method Evidence: Lexical and Phonological Innovations
Sample Volta-Congo consonant correspondences

(PNC, Proto-Niger-Congo, PGb, proto-Gbaya; PB, proto-Bantu; PYIG, proto-Yoruba-Igala; PENupoid, proto-Ebira-Nupoid)⁶⁷⁵

PNC	PGb	PB	Igbo	PYIG	PENupoid
*b	*b	*b	*b	*b	*w
*ɸ	*ɸ	*b	*b	*ɸ	*b
*p	*p	*p	*p	*b	*p
*p ^h	*f	*p	*f	*f	*p ^h
*gb	*gb	*b	*gb	*gb	*gb
*kp	*kp	*p	*kp	*kp	*kp
*d	*d	*d	*d	*d	*d
*ɪ̂	*ɪ̂	*d	*d	*ɪ̂	*d
*t	*d/*r	*t	*d	*d	*t
*t ^h	*t	*t	*t	*t	*t ^h
*l	*l	*d	*l	*l	*l
*l'	*lɕ	*d	*l	*l'	*r
*r	*d	*d	?	*r	?
*g	*g	*g	*g	*g	*g
*ɸ	*k	*g	*g	*g'	*g
*k	*k	*k	*k	*k	*k
*k ^h	*h	*k	*k	*k	*k ^h
*s	*s	*c	*s	*s	*s

⁶⁷⁵ Yves Moñino, *Le Proto-Gbaya: essai de linguistique comparative historique sur vingt-et-une langues d'Afrique centrale* (Paris; Louvain: Peeters, 1995. Guthrie, Malcolm (1948) *The classification of the Bantu languages*. London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute; -, *Comparative Bantu: an introduction to the comparative linguistics and prehistory of the Bantu languages*. 4 vols. Farnborough: Gregg Press, 1967-7; F. Akinkugbe, *A comparative phonology of Yoruba dialects, Itsekiri aand Igala*, PhD, University of Ibadan, Ibadan 1978

*z	*z	*j	?	?	*z
*s	*s	*c	*s	*c	*s
*c	?	*c	?	?	*c
*y	*y	*y	?	*j	*y
*j	*y	*j	?	*y	*j
*m	*m	*m	*m	*m	*m
*n	*n	*n	*n	*n	*n
*ɲ	*ɲ	?	*N	*ɲ	*ɲ (*ny)

General proto-West Benue-Congo sound laws:

The correspondences in this table pertain to the first stem consonant of a root in the West Benue-Congo sub-branch and its Ebira-Nupoid subgroup. The reason that this tabling is sufficient is that all second stem consonants were deleted by the operation of a series of sound laws. Two sound laws began the sequence of changes:

1. *NC > *N, after which:
2. *CVCV# > *#CVC#, *CVNV > *CVN

This law was followed by a succession of two further sound changes:

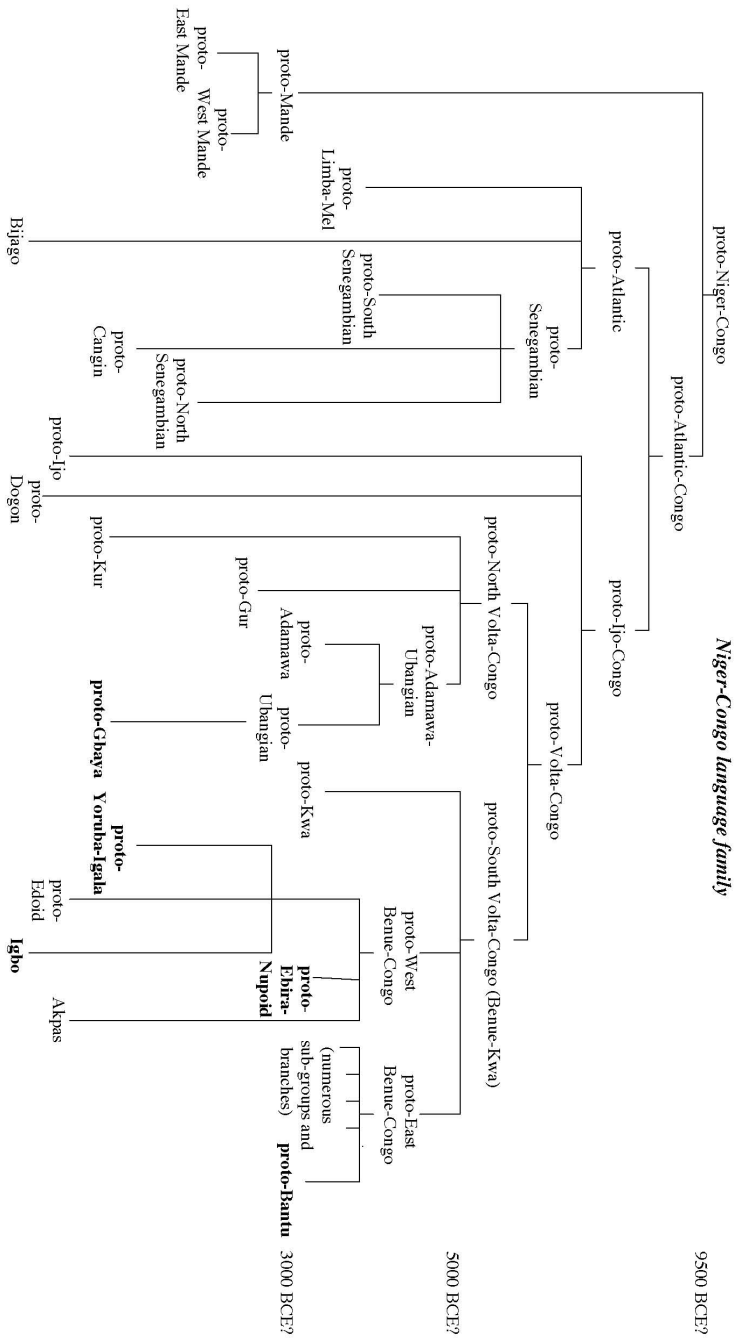
3. *N > vowel nasalization, /#CV_#;
4. remaining C > Ø /_#

These sound laws reduced all stems in proto-West Benue-Congo to the structure CV; V was nasalized if the deleted original second consonant had been any nasal.

In the Yoruba-Igala subgroups of West Benue-Congo, the nasal vowels were preserved. In both Igbo and proto-Ebira-Nupoid, in contrast, the nasal feature was lost. Each subgroup had a rule of this form:

*CV~ (where V~ is a nasal vowel) > *CV

This sequence of changes thus, for example, caused the proto-Benue-Congo root word *-kumo ‘priest-chief,’ as noted in the text, to become *-ku in pre-proto-Ebira-Nupoid and, by a further sound change, *-cu in proto-Ebira-Nupoid.



Cultural Lexical Data

	Proto-Ehira-Nupoid	Nupe	Dibo	Gupa	Abawa	Kami	Kupa	Kakanda	Asu	Gbari	Gbagyi	Ehira
	*awi 'sorghum'		ayi			awi		awu			owi	ayi
	*ak ^h u 'Vigna sp.' (proto-West-Benue Congo *k ^h u~'cowpea')											eku (<i>V. subter- ranea</i>)
	*eci 'yam' (proto-Gbari-Nupoid)	echin	achin	etsi	etsi				echi	etsi		
	*wan 'to fish' (proto-Nupoid)	-wan		wan-	wan-	wan-		won-				
	*esa 'fishnet'	esa,asa	esa	asa	asa	esa	esa	esa	asa			asha/eha
	*-gi 'fish basket'									gji		ngi
	*eje 'fish fence' (proto-Gbari-Nupoid)	eshe			eshe				eshe			
	*oko 'canoe' (proto-West-Benue Congo *oko)											oko
	*eya 'canoe' proto-Gbari-Nupoid)	eya,iya	eya	iya	eya,iya	iya			eya	eya	oya	
	*oce 'paddle' (proto-West-Benue- Congo)											ose,oshi
	*ete 'paddle'	ete		ete	ete	ete			ete			

Proto-Ebira-Nupoid	Nupe	Dibo	Gupa	Abawa	Kami	Kupa	Kakanda	Asu	Ghari	Gbagyi	Ebira
*gbe 'to hunt'	gbigbe	gbegebe	gbegebe	gbegebe	gbegebe	egbe	igbegebe				zu-gbe,zu-be
*taki 'bow' (PNS *ta 'bow')	tachi	tase	tasi	tase	tasi		tachi				utaki
*-kpa 'arrow'	ekpa, akpa					ekpan					opa
*-kwa 'spear' (proto-West-Benue- Congo *VKwa)	ekwa		akwa					ahnua			
*agba 'ax' (proto-Nupoid)	egba, agba	agba	agba	agba	agba	agban	agba	agba			
*ebaye 'knife' (proto-Ghari-Nupoid)	ebi		ebeye	ebeye		eba			obe	ebaie	
*p ^h ue 'razor'	efinfe, afife,efin		afe	afe	ife		afe		afin		ahuehue

Proto-Ebira-Nupoid	Nupe	Dibo	Gupa	Abawa	Kami	Kupa	Kakanda	Asu	Gbari	Gbagyi	Ebira
*eku 'chief' (Proto-Benue- Congo *-kumo 'clan priest- chief')	etsu etsu cigbe 'priest'	etsu etsu-mi- ahutsi 'priest'	etsu etsu-mi- aruvu 'priest'	etsu etsu 'priest'	etsu etsu 'priest'	etsu etsu 'priest'	etsu etsu 'priest'	etsu etsu 'priest'	etsu tsu 'a 'priest'	etsu etsu-bi 'priestess'	etsu tsu 'a 'priest'
*aba 'to pray' (proto-Nupoid)	-aba	eba									
*ga 'to bewitch' (proto-Gbagyi-Nupoid)	iga	ega	cia	-dza		egya	egya				ga
*egafi 'witch' (proto-Nupoid)	egashie	ejashi		edzashi	egyashi	egyashi	egyashi	egyashi			
*boci 'diviner- doctor' (proto-Nupoid)	boci		ebwoci	ebwoci	ebosi	ebwoci	ebwoci	ebwoci	bociza		
*eba 'divination; to divine' (proto-West-Benue- Congo *-eba)	eba 'divining implements' iba- 'to divine'	iba- shati shatsi	iba- iba- shatsi								eva 'implements of divining' ovao 'doctor- diviner'
*cigbe 'medicine' (proto-Gbari-Nupoid)	cigbe	cigbe	cigbe	tsigbe	tsigbe	cigbe	cigbe		sligbe	sligbe	
*lawa 'amulet' (proto-Gbari-Nupoid)	lawa			lawa		layaya	lawa				alaya

Proto-Ebira-Nupoid	Nupe	Dibo	Gupa	Abawa	Kami	Kupa	Kakanda	Asu	Gbari	Gbagyi	Ebira
*nyankpa 'iron' (early Nupoid)	nyankpa		ayankpa nyankpere			nyankpa	ankpere	nyankpere			
*era 'copper' (proto-Nupoid?)	era 'lead'		ira		ira			era-ndi			
*konkou 'tin' (proto-Dibo-Kupa)					konko		konkow				
*kua 'to forge' (proto-Nupoid?)	tswa		chwɛ		tswa	chwa		tsutso			
*-ku 'smith's hammer'	etsu										usu
*gudu 'bellows' (proto-Nupoid?)	guru						egudu				

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I. List of Interviews

During my fieldwork I conducted interviews to collect 100-wordlists, 1500 lists of cultural vocabulary, ethnographic data and oral histories. IRB restrictions prevent me from listing the names of informants, but below is a list of the interviews conducted. The original recordings, transcriptions and translations (where applicable) are in my possession.

a) Nupoid – Speaking Groups

Abewa

AB-ETH-MUJ-M-1-8/4/2009
AB-LIN-1-MUJ-M-1-8/4/2009
AB-LIN-15-MUJ-M-1-8/6/2009
AB-LIN-15-MUJ-M-1-8/6/2009

Asu

AS-ETH-MAZ-M-1-7/22/2009
AS-ETH-MAZ-M-2-7/22/2009
AS-ETH-MAZ-M-3-7/23/2009
AS-LIN-1-MAZ-M-1-7/23/2009
AS-LIN-15-MAZ-M-1-7/23/2009

Dibo

DIB-LIN-1-EVU-M-1-8/7/2009
DIB-LIN-15-EVU-M-1-8/7/2009

Ebira

EB-ETH-OK-M-1-4/26/2009
EB-ETH-OK-M-2-4/26/2009
EB-ETH-OK-M-3-4/28/2009
EB-ETH-OK-M-4-5/20/2009
EB-ETH-OK-F-5-4/20/2009
EB-ETH-OK-M-6-5/21/2009
EB-ETH-OK-M-7-5/24/2009
EB-ETH-OK-M-8-5/24/2009
EB-ETH-OK-M-9-7/2/2009
EB-ETH-OK-M-10-7/2/2009
EB-ETH-OK-M-11-7/2/2009
EB-ETH-OK-M-12-7/3/2009
EB-ETH-KTK-M-1-6/1/2009
EB-ETH-KTK-M-2-6/1/2009

EB-ETH-ET-M-1-5/24/2009
EB-ETH-ET-M-2-5/24/2009
EB-ETH-ET-M-3-5/24/2009
EB-LIN-OK-1-LOK-M-1-5/27/2009
EB-LIN-OK-15-LOK-M-1-5/28/2009
EB-LIN-KK-1-KOT-M-1-7/28/2009
EB-LIN-KK-15-KOT-M-1-7/28/2009
EB-LIN-ET-1-ETU-M-1-9/10/2009
EB-LIN-ET-15-ETU-M-1-9/10/2009

Gade

GAD-LIN-1-KUJ-M-1-8/12/2009
GAD-LIN-15-KUJ-M-1-8/12/2009

Gupa

GUP-LIN-1-PAI-M-1-8/7/2009
GUP-LIN-15-PAI-M-1-8/7/2009

Gwari/Gbagyi

GB-LIN-1-GUD-M-1-8/13/2009
GB-LIN-15-GUD-M-1-8/13/2009
GW-LIN-1-KWAL-M-1-7/22/2009
GW-LIN-15-KWAL-M-1-7/22/2009

Kakanda

KAK-ETH-BUD-M-1-3/5/2009
KAK-ETH-BUD-M-2-3/5/2009
KAK-ETH-BUD-M-3-3/5/2009
KAK-ETH-BUD-M-4-3/5/2009
KAK-ETH-BUD-M-5-3/15/2009
KAK-ETH-BUD-M-6-3/15/2009
KAK-ETH-BUD-M-7-3/15/2009
KAK-ETH-BUD-M-8-3/15/2009
KAK-LIN-1-MUJ-M-1-8/6/2009
KAK-LIN-15-MUJ-M-1-8/6/2009

Kami

KAM-LIN-1-PAI-M-1-8/8/2009
KAM-LIN-15-PAI-M-1-8/8/2009

Kupa

KUP-LIN-1-LOK-M-1-5/9/2010
KUP-LIN-15-LOK-M-1-5/9/2010

Nupe

NUP-ETH-EMI-M-07/28/2000
NUP-ETH-GBD-M-06/3/2000
NUP-ETH-GBD-1-F-06/29/2000
NUP-ETH-GBD-2-F-06/29/2000
NUP-ETH-GBD-1-F-6/30/2000
NUP-ETH-GBD-2-F-6/30/2000
NUP-ETH-KUSC-M-4/22/2000
NUP-ETH-KUSD-M-5/6/2000
NUP-ETH-KUSD-M-5/15/2000
NUP-ETH-KUSD-M-6/3/2000
NUP-ETH-KUSD-M-6/18/2000
NUP-ETH-KUSD-M-9/3/2000
NUP-ETH-KUSD-F-9/3/2000
NUP-ETH-KUT-M-1-7/30/2000
NUP-ETH-KUT-M-2-7/30/2000
NUP-ETH-LAD-M-1-7/1/2000
NUP-ETH-LAD-M-2-7/2/2000
NUP-ETH-MOK-M-1-9/6/2000
NUP-ETH-MOK-M-2-9/6/2000
NUP-ETH-MOK-M-3-9/7/2000
NUP-ETH-MOK-M-4-9/7/2000
NUP-ETH-ZUG-M-1-9/7/2000
NUP-ETH-ZUG-M-2-9/7/2000
NUP-ETH-ZUG-M-3-9/7/2000
NUP-ETH-ZUG-M-4-9/7/2000
NUP-ETH-PAT-M-1-6/29/2000
NUP-ETH-PAT-M-2-6/29/2000
NUP-ETH-PAT-M-3-6/29/2000
NUP-ETH-PAT-M-4-6/29/2000
NUP-ETH-PAT-M-5-6/29/2000
NUP-ETH-PAT-M-6-6/29/2000
NUP-ETH-PAT-M-7-6/29/2000
NUP-ETH-PAT-M-8-6/29/2000
NUP-ETH-GBL-M-9-6/29/2000
NUP-ETH-GBL-M-1-3/12/2009
NUP-ETH-GBL-M-2-3/12/2009
NUP-ETH-GBL-M-3-6/28/2009
NUP-ETH-GBL-M-4-6/28/2009
NUP-ETH-LOK-M-1-3/3/2009
NUP-ETH-LOK-M-2-4/12/2009
NUP-ETH-LOK-M-3-4/12/2009
NUP-ETH-LOK-M-4-4/12/2009
NUP-ETH-LKS-M-3-6/28/2009
NUP-ETH-LKS-M-3-8/20/2009

NUP-ETH-LKS-M-3-8/20/2009
NUP-ETH-LKS-M-3-8/20/2009
NUP-ETH-NKU-M-3-8/20/2009
NUP-LIN-1-LOK-M-1-5/27/2009
NUP-LIN-15-LOK-M-1-5/27/2009

b) Igala

IGL-ETH-IDA-M-1-06/17/2009
IGL-ETH-IDA-M-2-06/27/2009
IGL-ETH-IDA-M-1-08/18/2010
IGL-ETH-IBAJ-M-2-08/24/2010
IGL-ETH-IBAJ-M-3-08/25/2010
IGL-ETH-IBAJ-M-4-08/27/2010
IGL-ETH-ABOC-M-1-8/31/2010
IGL-ETH-ABOC-M-2-8/21/2010
IGL-LIN-1-LOK-M-1-4/7/2009
IGL-LIN-15-LOK-M-1-4/10/2009
IGL-LIN-15-LOK-M-1-4/16/2009

c) Yoruba

BUNY- LIN-1-LOK-M-1-9/5/2010
BUNY-LIN-15-LOK-M-1-9/5/2010
IGB-ETH-ILA-M-1-3/31/2009
IGB-ETH-ILA-M-2-3/31/2009
IGB-ETH-ILA-F-1-3/31/2009
IGB-ETH-ILA-F-2-3/31/2009
IGB-ETH-ILA-M-3-4/1/2009
IGB-ETH-ILA-M-4-4/1/2009
IGB-ETH-ILA-M-5-4/1/2009

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11/1902	Resident, Bida Province to High Commissioner
17/2/22301/1944 B	Reorganisation in Patigi Emirate
17/2/22301 A	Patigi Emirate
17/8	Historical and Anthropological Reports Zugarma District
17/25355	Notes on Nupe
17/3957/6/7	Genealogical Trees of Ruling Families in Northern Nigeria: Patigi Emirate
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266 P/1918	Assessment Report: Eggan, Kakanda and Kupe Districts
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1212/1922	Reassessment Report, Egbako District
24330	A Short History of People of Mishitiawagi, Katcha and Bakoma Districts
17/2 25355	Notes on the Nupe by Malam Aliyu Bida and Mr. P.G. Harris
7/ 2749/1910	Notes on Kabba Province
17	Secretariat Northern Province
31,199/1939	Overpopulation the Eastern Provinces and Migration of Ibos to the North

BIDDIV (Bida Division)

B.655	Nupe History from 1505
B 10	Northern Provinces Annual Report, Bida Division
B 97/1934	Native Administration Policy; Pagan Administration
B 118	Witchcraft
B 157	Instructions promulgated by the Emir of Bida Muhammadu Ndayako
B 297/1936	Spelling of Place Names
B 314	Badeggi District
B 357/1934	Agaie Village Administration
B 375	Introduction to certain notes collected from various Native Authorities
B 655	Nupe History since 1800, Part I
B 655	Nupe History since 1800, Part II
B 801	Magiro

B 916 A Nupe Pagan Marriage Customs
B 916 B Native Law and Custom: Muslim Law

BIDDIST (Bida District)

Box 19 Kede District Note Book
Box 19 Katcha District Note Book
Box 20 Kutigi District Note Book

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7/1225/1912 Historical Notes on Bida
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7/2 M 1030 Pagan Administration, Kontagora Division 1930
7/13/Acc12/4080 Zugurma District
8/20 Customs of People of Niger Province
223/1912 Report on Nupe
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5314/1907 Kontagora Law and Custom Notes
1489 Conference on District Heads Kontagora Division, 1934
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M 1030 Pagan Administration, Kontagora Division
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IDAHDIV (Idah Division)

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4/S.2/-	Notes on Procedure Igala Division

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26/2	Niger Province Annual Reports 1938
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CO 147/	Lagos, 1862-97 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 13, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 27, 28, 29, 30, 61, 64, 68, 70, 124
446/	Northern Nigeria, 1899-1901 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14

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Other materials:

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