Society of Young Nigerian Writer

Yoruba Fact-Finder

Compilations of Yoruba History, culture and tradition

Compiled by: Wole Adedoyin
Yoruba people

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Yoruba

Kwara State drummers

Total population

Over 30 million (est.)[1]

Regions with significant populations

- Nigeria 29,039,480[2]
Benin 1,009,207+ [3]

Ghana 350,000 [4]

Togo 85,000 [4]

Canada 3,315+ (2006) [5][6]

Brazil Unknown

Dominican Republic Unknown

Jamaica Unknown

Cuba Unknown

Trinidad and Tobago 500,000+ <[1]</ref>

Languages

Yoruba, Yoruboid languages

Religion

Islam 40% (12 million)

Christianity 45% (15 million)

Traditional beliefs 15% (3 million)[7]

Related ethnic groups
Bini, Nupe, Igala, Itsekiri, Ebira

The **Yoruba people** (*Yorùbá* in Yoruba orthography) are one of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa. The majority of the Yoruba speak the Yoruba language (*Yoruba: èdèe Yorùbá; èdè*). The Yoruba constitute between 30 and 50 million individuals[^1] throughout West Africa and are found predominantly in Nigeria and make up around 21% of its population.[^2]

The Yoruba share borders with the Borgu (variously called "Baruba" and "Borgawa") in the northwest; the Nupe (whom they often call "Tapa") and Ebira in the north; and the Edo, the Èsan, and the Afemai to the southeast. The Igala and other related groups are found in the northeast, and the Egun, Fon, and others in the southwest. The Itsekiri who live in the north-west Niger delta, are closely related to the Yoruba but maintain a distinct cultural identity. While the majority of the Yoruba live in western Nigeria, there are also substantial indigenous Yoruba communities in the Republic of Benin and Togo, plus large groups of Yoruba migrants living in the United States and the United Kingdom. The Yoruba population was also involved in slavery and were taken to the Americas, where they form a large diaspora.

Yoruba settlements are often described as primarily one or more of the main social groupings called "generations":

- The "first generation" includes towns and cities known as original capitals of founding Yoruba states/kingdoms.
- The "second generation" consists of settlements created by conquest.
- The "third generation" consists of villages and municipalities that emerged following the Yoruba wars.
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[edit] History
[edit] General history

The African peoples who lived in the lower western Niger area, at least by the 4th century BC, were not initially known as the Yoruba, although they shared a common ethnicity and language group. Both archeology and traditional Yoruba oral historians confirm the existence of people in this region for several millennia.
Between 1100 AD and 1700 AD, the Yoruba Kingdom of Ife experienced a golden age. It was then surpassed by the Yoruba Oyo Empire as the dominant Yoruba military and political power between AD 1700 and 1900.\(^8\) The oba or ruler of Ife is referred to as the Ooni of Ife.,\(^9\) while the oba or ruler of Oyo is referred to as the Alaafin of Oyo. Ife is considered as the home of Yorubas because it is where they originated; however, it remained and continues to be viewed as the spiritual homeland of the Yoruba.

Further information: Kingdom of Ife

Most of the city states were controlled by Obas (or royal sovereigns with various individual titles) and councils made up of Oloyes, recognised leaders of royal, noble and, often, even common descent, who joined them in ruling over the kingdoms through a series of guilds and cults. Different states saw differing ratios of power between the kingships and the chiefs' councils. Some such as Oyo had powerful, autocratic monarchs with almost total control, while in others such as the Ijebu city-states, the senatorial councils held more influence and the power of the ruler or Oba, referred to as the Awujale of Ijebuland, was more limited.
Cosmogonic origin

Ife bronze casting of a king dated around the 12th Century

Main article: Yoruba religion

Orisa'nla (The great divinity) also known as Ṭbatala was the arch-divinity chosen by Olodumare, the Supreme, to create solid land out of the primordial water that constituted the earth and populating the land with human beings. Ṭbatala descended from heaven on a 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.
[edit] Philosophy

See also: Itan

Yoruba culture consists of folk/cultural philosophy, religion and folktales. They are embodied in Ifa-Ife Divination, known as the tripartite Book of Enlightenment in Yorubaland and in Diaspora.

Yoruba philosophy is a witness of two epochs. The first epoch is an epoch-making history in cosmogony and cosmology. This is also an epoch-making history in oral philosophy in oral culture during which time Oduduwa was the philosopher, the head, the Bringer of Light, and a prominent diviner. He theorized about the visible and invisible worlds, reminiscing about cosmogony, cosmology, and the mythological creatures in the visible and invisible worlds.

The second epoch is the epoch of metaphysical philosophy. This commenced in the 19th century in terms of the academic prowess of Dr. Bishop Ajayi Crowther, the first African Anglican Bishop.

Although religion is often considered first in Yoruba culture, nonetheless, it is philosophy, the thought of man and the reasoning of the mind that actually leads the faculty (ori) to the creation and the practice of religion. Thus philosophy is antecedent to religion.

Today, the academic and the nonacademic community are becoming more and more interested in Yoruba philosophy. Thus more and more researches are being carried out on Yoruba philosophy, as more and more books are being written on it—embossing its mark and advancing its research amongst non-African thinkers and political scientists who are beginning to open their doors to other cultures, widening their views.
One thing to remember is that Yoruba philosophy is mainly a narrative philosophy, explicating and pointing to the knowledge of the causes and the nature of things, affecting the corporeal and the spiritual universe and its wellness. Yoruba people regale in hundreds of philosophical aphorisms and lore, and they believe that any lore that widens people's horizons and presents pabulum for thought is the beginning of philosophy.

[edit] Oduduwa

Main article: Oduduwa

Oral history of the Oyo-Yoruba recounts Odùduwà to be the Progenitor of the Yoruba and the reigning ancestor of their crowned kings.

His coming from the east, sometimes understood by some sources as the "vicinity" true East on the Cardinal points, but more likely signifying the region of Ekiti and Okun sub-communities in northeastern Yorubaland/central Nigeria. Ekiti is near the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers, and is where the Yoruba language is presumed to have separated from related ethno-linguistic groups like Igala, Igbo, and Edo.[11]

[edit] After Oduduwa

Upon the disappearance of Oduduwa, there was a dispersal of his children from Ife to found other kingdoms. Each making their mark in the subsequent urbanization and consolidation of Yoruba confederacy of kingdoms, with each kingdom tracing its origin to Ile-Ife.

After the dispersal, the aborigines became difficult, and constituted a serious threat to the survival of Ife. Thought to be survivors of the old occupants of the land before the arrival of Oduduwa, these people now turned themselves into marauders. They would come to town in
costumes made of raffia with terrible and fearsome appearances, and burn down houses and loot the markets. Then came Moremi on the scene; she was said to have played a significant role in the quelling of the marauders advancements. But this was at a great price; having to give up her only son Oluorogbo. The reward for her patriotism and selflessness was not to be reaped in one life time as she later passed on and was thereafter immortalized. The Edi festival celebrates this feat till date.[12]

[edit] Pre-colonial government of Yoruba society

Main article: Yorubaland

See also: Oyo Empire#Political Structure

[edit] Government

Oyo Empire and surrounding states.

Monarchies were a common form of government in Yorubaland, but they were not the only approach to government and social organization. The numerous Ijebu city-states to the west of Oyo and the Ògbà communities, found in the forests below Oyo's savanna region, were notable exceptions. These independent polities often elected an Oba, though real political, legislative,
and judicial powers resided with the *Ogboni*, a council of notable elders. The notion of the divine king was so important to the Yoruba, that it has been part of their organization in its various forms from their antiquity to the contemporary era.

During the internecine wars of the 19th century, the Ijebu forced citizens of more than 150 Ègba and Owu communities to migrate to the fortified city of Abeokuta. Each quarter retained its own *Ogboni* council of civilian leaders, along with an *Olorogun*, or council of military leaders, and in some cases its own elected *Obas* or *Baales*. These independent councils elected their most capable members to join a federal civilian and military council that represented the city as a whole.

Commander Frederick Forbes, a representative of the British Crown writing an account of his visit to the city in the *Church Military Intelligencer* (1853),[^13] described Abẹokuta as having "four presidents", and the system of government as having "840 principal rulers or 'House of Lords,' 2800 secondary chiefs or 'House of Commons,' 140 principal military ones and 280 secondary ones."[^citation needed] He described Abẹokuta and its system of government as "the most extraordinary republic in the world."[^citation needed]

[edit] Leadership

Gerontocratic leadership councils that guarded against the monopolization of power by a monarch were a trait of the Ègba, according to the eminent Ọyọ historian Reverend Samuel Johnson. Such councils were also well-developed among the northern Okun groups, the eastern Ekiti, and other groups falling under the Yoruba ethnic umbrella. In Ọyọ, the most centralized of the precolonial kingdoms, the *Alaafin* consulted on all political decisions with the chief/prime
elector or president of the House of Lords (the Basorun) and the council of leading nobles known as the Oyo Mesi.

[edit] City-states

A Muslim Yoruba trader, 1890-1893

The monarchy of any city-state was usually limited to a number of royal lineages. A family could be excluded from kingship and chieftaincy if any family member, servant, or slave belonging to the family committed a crime, such as theft, fraud, murder or rape. In other city-states, the monarchy was open to the election of any free-born male citizen. In Ilesa, Ondo, and other Yoruba communities, there were several, but comparatively rare, traditions of female Obas. The kings were traditionally almost always polygamous and often married royal family members from other domains.\[14\]

Ibadan, a city-state and proto-empire founded in the 18th century by a polyglot group of refugees, soldiers, and itinerant traders from Oyo and the other Yoruba sub-groups largely
dispensed with the concept of monarchism, preferring to elect both military and civil councils from a pool of eminent citizens. The city became a military republic, with distinguished soldiers wielding political powers through their election by popular acclaim and the respect of their peers. Similar practices were adopted by the jesu and other groups, which saw a corresponding rise in the social influence of military adventurers and successful entrepreneurs.

Groups organizations and leagues in Yorubaland

Occupational guilds, social clubs, secret or initiatory societies, and religious units, commonly known as Ègbé in Yoruba, included the Parakoyi (or league of traders) and Ègbẹ Odẹ (hunter's guild), and maintained an important role in commerce, social control, and vocational education in Yoruba polities.

There are also examples of other peer organizations in the region. When the Ègba resisted the imperial domination of the Òyọ Empire, a figure named Lisabi is credited with either creating or reviving a covert traditional organization named Ègbẹ Aro. This group, originally a farmers' union, was converted to a network of secret militias throughout the Ègba forests, and each lodge plotted to overthrow Òyọ's Ajeles (appointed administrators) in the late 18th century.

Similarly, covert military resistance leagues like the Ekiti Parapo and the Ogidi alliance were organized during the 19th century wars by often-decentralized communities of the Ekiti, Ijësa, Ìgbóminà and Okun Yoruba in order to resist various imperial expansionist plans of Ibadan, Nupe, and the Sokoto Caliphate.

Yoruba society today
[edit] Traditional Yoruba religion

Main article: Yoruba religion

The Yoruba faith, variously known as Aborisha, Orisha-Ifa or simply (and erroneously) Ifa, is commonly seen as one of the principal components of the syncretic pool known as the African traditional religions. It largely survived the so-called middle passage, and is seen in a variety of forms in the New World as a result.

[edit] Islam and Christianity

Traditional Yoruba religious practices such as the Eyo and Osun Oshogbo festivals are witnessing a resurgence in popularity in contemporary Yorubaland. They are largely seen by the adherents of the modern faiths, especially the Muslims and Christians, as cultural rather than religious events. They participate in them as a means to boost tourist industries in their local economies.

[edit] Culture

In the city-states and many of their neighbors, a reserved way of life remains, with the school of thought of their people serving as a major influence in West Africa and elsewhere.

[edit] Diversity

Today, most contemporary Yoruba are Muslims and Christians. Islam found its way into the Yoruba kingdoms long before the Christianity of the European/American evangelists, coming as it did with itinerant merchants from the medieval empire of Mali. Be that as it may, many of the principles of the traditional faith of their ancestors are either knowingly or unknowingly upheld by a significant proportion of the populations of Nigeria, Benin and Togo.\[citation needed\]
[edit] Twins in Yoruba society

Main article: Ibeji

The Yoruba present the highest dizygotic twinning rate in the world (4.4% of all maternities).\[15\] Twins are very important for the Yoruba and they usually tend to give special names to each twin.\[16\] The first of the twins to be born is traditionally named Taiyewo or Tayewo, which means 'the first to taste the world', this is often shortened to Taiwo, Taiye or Taye. Kehinde, or Kehin for short, is the name of the last born twin. Kehinde is sometimes also referred to as Kehindegbegbon which is short for Omokehindegbegbon and means, 'the child that came last gets the rights of the eldest'.
[edit] Calendar

Main article: Yoruba calendar

Time is measured in isheju or iseju (minutes), wakati (hours), ojo (days), ose (weeks), oshu or osu (months) and odun (years). There are 60 isheju in 1 wakati; 24 wakati in 1 ojo; 7 ojo in 1 ose; 4 ose in 1 oshu and 52 ose in 1 odun. There are 12 oshu in 1 odun. [17]

Months in Yoruba calendar: Months in Gregorian calendar[18]:

Sere January
Erele February
Erena March
Igbe April
Obibi May
Okudu June
Agemo July
Ogun August
Owere (Owewe) September
Owara (Owawa) October
Belu November
The Yoruba calendar (Kojoda) year starts from 3 June to 2 June of the following year.[19] According to this calendar, the Gregorian year 2008 A. D. is the 10050th year of Yoruba culture.[20] To reconcile with the Gregorian calendar, Yoruba people also often measure time in seven days a week and four weeks a month:

**Modified days in Yoruba calendar** Days in Gregorian calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ojo-Aiku</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ojo-Aje</td>
<td>Monday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ojo-Ishegun</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ojo-'Ru</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ojo-Bo</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although most Yoruba speakers share a common history, it was only in the second half of the 19th century that they began to share one common name, *Yoruba*. Under the influence of the Yoruba Samuel Ajayi Crowther (first Lord Bishop of West Africa and first African lord bishop of the Church of England) and subsequent missionaries, the term *Yoruba* was at that time extended to include all speakers of related dialects.

Linguistic means including, for example, historical-comparative linguistics, glottochronology, and dialectology used along with both traditional (oral) historical sources and archaeological finds, have shed some light on the history of the Yorubas and their language before this point. The North-West Yoruba dialects, for example, show more linguistic innovations. According to some, this, combined with the fact that Southeast and Central Yoruba areas generally have older settlements, suggests a later date of immigration for Northwest Yoruba.

[edit] Location in Nigeria

![Map of Nigeria with Yoruba regions highlighted]
Yoruba area in Nigeria.

The Yoruba are the main ethnic group in the Nigerian federal states of Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo; they also constitute a sizable proportion of Kwara, Kogi and Edo states south west states.

[edit] Location in Benin

The Yoruba are the main group in the Benin department of Ouémé, all Subprefectures; Collines Province, all subprefectures; Plateau Province, all Subprefectures; Borgou Province, Tchaourou Subprefecture; Zou Province, Ouïhi and Zogbodome Subprefecture; Donga Province, Bassila Subprefecture and Alibori, Kandi Subprefecture.

[edit] Location in Togo

The Yoruba are the main group in the Togo department of Plateau Region, Ogou and Est-Mono prefectures; Centrale Region and Tchamba Prefecture.

[edit] Yoruba towns

Traditionally kingship and chieftainship were not determined by simple primogeniture, as in most monarchic systems of government. An electoral college of lineage heads was and still is usually charged with selecting a member of one of the royal families from any given realm, and the selection is then confirmed by an Ifá oracular request. The Obas live in palaces that are usually in the center of the town. Opposite the king's palace is the Oja Oba, or the king's market. These markets form an inherent part of Yoruba life. Traditionally their traders are well organized, have various guilds, officers, and an elected speaker. They also often have at least one Iyaloja, or Lady of the Market, who is expected to represent their interests in the aristocratic council of oloyes at the palace.

[edit] Yoruba diaspora

The language spread of Kru, Igbo and Yoruba in the United States according to US Census 2000[24]

See also: Nigerian American
[edit] Other names

During the 19th century, the term *Yoruba* or *Yariba* came into wider use, first confined to the Ọyọ. The term is often believed to be derived from a Hausa ethnonym for the populous people to their south, but this has not been substantiated by historians.

As an ethnic description, the word 'Yoruba' first appeared in a treatise written by the Songhai scholar Ahmed Baba (16th century) and is likely to derive from the indigenous ethnonyms Ọyọ or Yagba, two Yoruba-speaking groups along the northern borders of their territory. However, it is likely that the ethnonym was popularized by Hausa usage and ethnography written in Arabic and Ajami.

[edit] See also

- Oduduwa
- Samuel Ajayi Crowther
- Egba
- Ijebu
- Oyo Empire
- Samuel Johnson (Nigerian historian)
- Professor Robert Sidney Smith (historian, University of Ibadan)
- Yoruba language
• Yorubaland
• Yoruba Medicine
• Yoruba mythology

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2. ^ a b Nigeria at CIA World Factbook

3. ^ Benin at CIA World Factbook

4. ^ a b Joshuaproject.net

   Retrieved 2010-04-04.

6. ^ 19,520 identify as Nigerian, 61,430 identify as Canadians.


8. ^ Oyo Empire at Britannica.com

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11. ^Article: Oduduwa, The Ancestor Of The Crowned Yoruba Kings

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20. ^Yorùbá Kalenda

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22. ^(1994:13)


[edit] Bibliography


[edit] External links

- [2] The Osun Osogbo Festival of Nigeria

- The Lost Truth of the Yoruba